

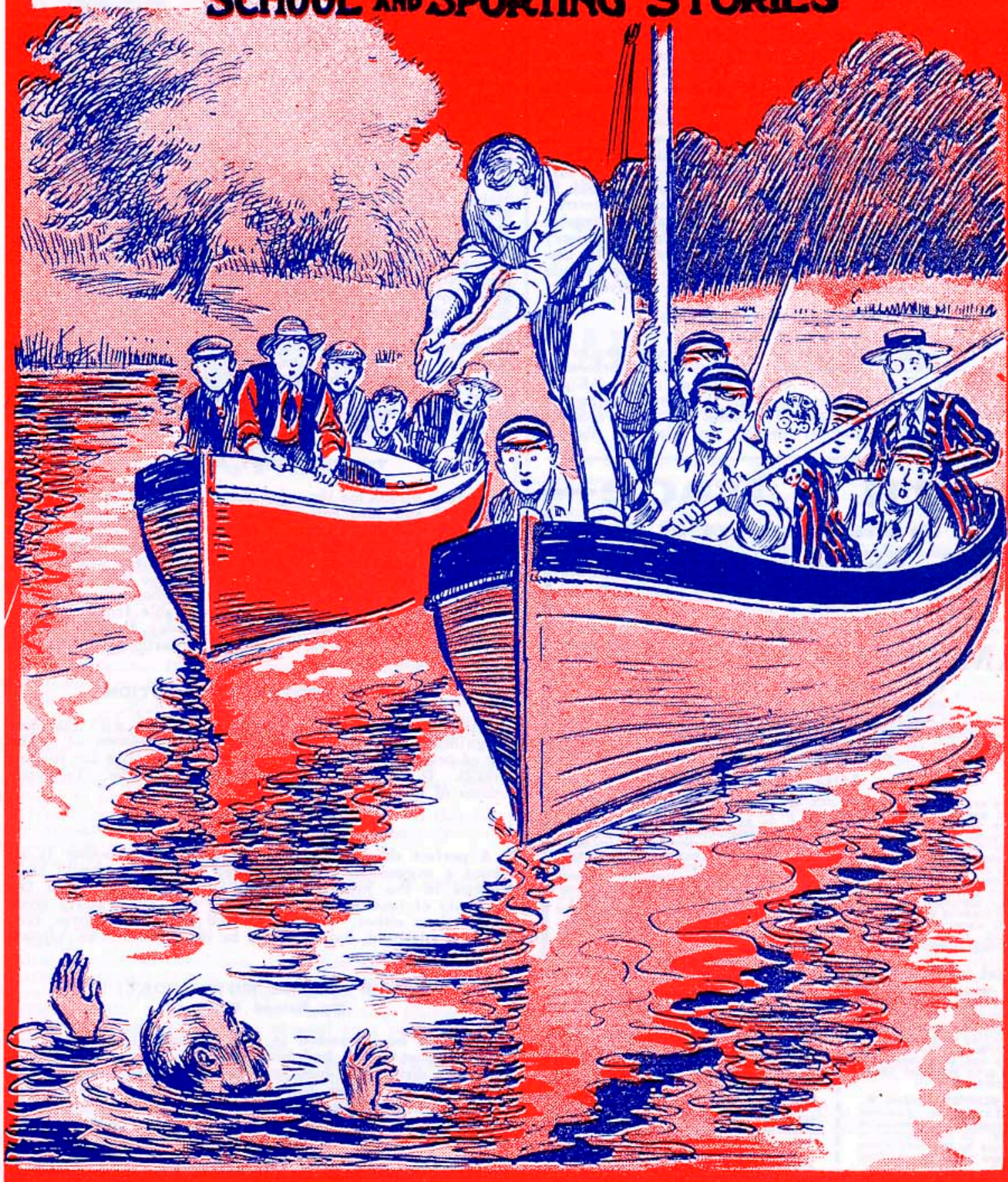
30 MOTOR-CYCLES GIVEN AWAY in our Simple New Competition, starting in three week's time! Hundreds of prizes!

EVERY WEDNESDAY.

The GEM 2^D

No. 816.
Vol. XXIV.
Sept. 29th, 1923.

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A DIVE TO THE RESCUE!

Heedless of his own danger, Tom Merry plunges in to the rescue of his angry pursuer.



Your Editor Chats With His Readers.

Address all letters: The Editor, The "Gem" Library, The Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C. 4. Write me, you can be sure of an answer in return.

My Dear Chums,—In all the varied annals of St. Jim's there have been few meetings more productive of mirth and merriment than that narrated in next week's yarn.

"RUCTIONS ON THE RIVER!" By Martin Clifford.

There are bound to be differences of opinion when Tom Merry & Co. encounter Figgins and the doughty men of the New House up the river. In next Wednesday's laughable story we get a deeper insight than ever into the fierce rivalry which exists between the School House, and the New House. There never has been peace in the ordinary acceptance of the term between the two houses. The events described in this spirited and rollicking yarn are pretty sure proof that there never will be anything more substantial than a truce. The two parties come into touch in a remote part of the country. There is a scrap, of course. Figgins has the reputation of the New House to maintain. Tom Merry and his party may feel the utmost despisery for Figgins, but they cannot permit minor people like Figgins & Co. to have things their own way. The episode will rank as memorable in the history of the up-river tour.

ST. JIM'S ON THE BOARDS!

In a recent number of the GEM a photograph was given showing the amateur theatrical company which performed in a play at Graaf Reinet, South Africa, called "Eight Little Maids." Mr. Julius Herman, the clever author of the play, has been good enough to send me a full account of the piece. He apologises for the fact that Mr. Banks,

the bookmaker, wore a beard, but that is a small matter. The play's the thing, and this can be said for it, namely that all the most popular characters in the grand yarns by Martin Clifford, were represented, and had very efficient interpreters. Ethel Cleveland took a leading part; in this she impersonated Doris Levison. We have Peter Hazeldene, covered with confusion, and heavily in debt; dainty Marjorie, good old Gussy, Tom Merry, of course, and Ernest Levison. The piece went with splendid swing, with honours strewn thickly, but the chief credit certainly belongs to cousin Ethel, who showed herself brilliant, capable, and gifted with the power of getting her own way, which proved to be the best way for extricating her friends out of difficulty.

"THE BOY BACK!" By Jack Crichton.

A thrilling and exciting footer yarn will be found in next week's GEM. It gives the facts concerning one stage in the career of a barge boy who becomes a League player. This youngster had played for a village team, and when his great chance came of taking his place in a big match, he fairly jumped to it, as may be imagined. But thereby hangs a tale. Genuine merit always has evoked meanness and jealousy, and that is the case here. The swift advance of the young barge boy was not viewed with any satisfaction by a certain individual. There is consternation when at the very time the young back is to play in an important match, he is found to be missing. He seems to have been swept clean off the face of the earth. Who is responsible? Does a rival player know anything? All that you will discover when you devour next week's admirable story. It reveals this author at his sprightliest, and also shows real insight and first hand knowledge of the game. You know how strung-up fellows get when anything goes wrong just on the eve of a big match, of which great things are anticipated. It is perfectly maddening to feel that, owing to some utterly unlooked for happening, everything is queered. But it is tons worse to be the victim of a kink, so to speak, and to feel powerless to avert disaster. What about the plucked youngster from the barge? Does he take defeat? He would not be where he is if he did knuckle under. He is not that sort at all.

THE "HOLIDAY ANNUAL."

There is a rush for the splendid new issue of the "Holiday Annual," and late comers must not be surprised to find the stock sold out. There is an easy way to avoid trouble of this kind. Don't be late, but make up your mind to get a copy right away. Expectation ran high over this season's "Holiday Annual," and there has been no shadow of disappointment. Crowds wait for it at the bookshops; this is one of those queue-rious things inseparable from the publication of a grand book like the "Holiday Annual." That 50,000 word St. Jim's yarn alone—Mr. Martin Clifford at his best—is worth the money.

GRAND FOOTER COMPETITION.

The GEM will celebrate this football season with the most magnificent Football Competition ever dreamed of. The list of prizes is stupendous. Just watch the GEM for further details. It will be more than worth your while. Tell your chums of this unrivalled offer.

NO CHANGE!

A perfect shoal of letters this time! The bother is all about a suggestion from a reader that there should be a change in the junior captaincy of St. Jim's. But the majority of readers are against any such idea, and I don't blame them either. Cardew is "all right" of course, that much is admitted, but evidently he is not wanted as skipper. That settles it!

"THE MISSING MOTOR-BOAT!" By Roland Spencer.

You will be interested in the amazing disappearance of a motor-boat which had been entered for a race. There had been dirty work here, and River-wise Ned, and his two staunch chums, Long Jim and Tony Parr, of the Thames barge, Estuary Belle, have their own opinions about the matter. It does not stop short at opinions, either. They take action, for there are big events at stake, and only prompt measures could serve. This story will achieve as marked a success as its forerunners, or I am much mistaken. It is one of the "just in time" stories which one always likes.

YOUR EDITOR.

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range—Piano repairs—To make an ottoman chair from an old cask—To fit a hood to a mailcart or to a perambulator—How to join two pieces of iron—To repair plaster—To make a barometer—To make a rack for brooms—All kinds of rustic furniture for the garden—A brickwork pedestal for a sundial—To cure a smoky chimney—Varnishing and staining—Scene painting for theatricals—To make an overdoor shelf—To mount maps

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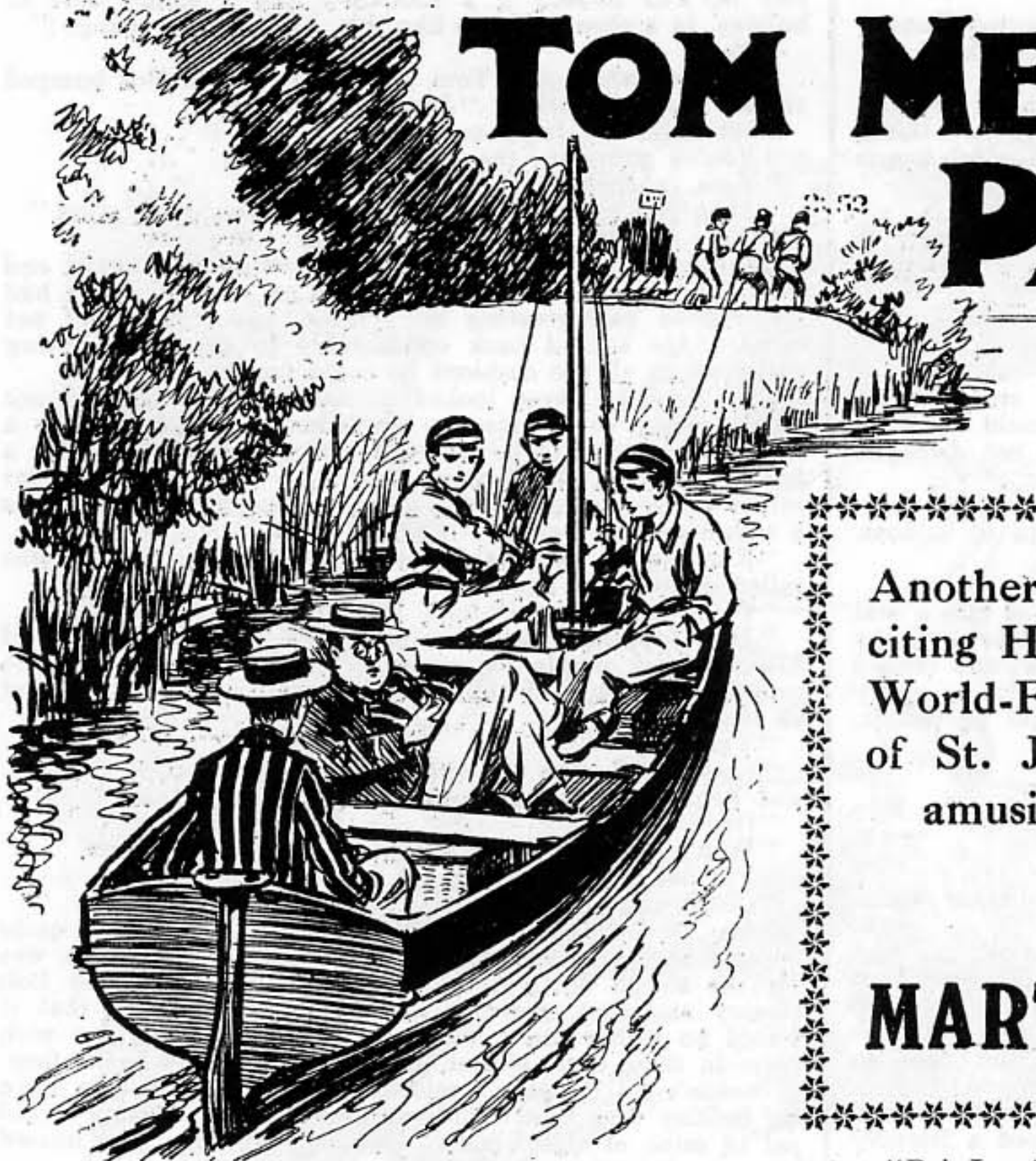
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Gem B., 1923.....

A YARN YOU CANNOT FAIL TO ENJOY!

BILLY BUNTER TURNS UP!

TOM MERRY'S PASSENGER



CHAPTER 1.

Picking up a Passenger!

"I SAY, you fellows!"

Tom Merry, who was steering the Old Bus, looked round, as a fat voice reached his ears across the shining, rippling water.

Blake and Herries and Digby were towing, on the Berkshire bank, up the river from Goring towards Cleeve Lock. Along the bank spread green, sunny meadows, while on the right of the Old Bus willow-clad islets dotted the silvery Thames. And it was from one of those little green islets that the shout came.

"I say, hold on!"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy adjusted his eyeglass in his eye, and stared towards the island.

"Bai Jove!" he remarked. "That fellow's hailin' us!"

"Sounds like it," said Monty Lowther. "Keep moving."

"In fact, buck up!" said Manners. "Put some beef into it, Blake."

The three juniors at the towing-rope did not heed. They were putting into the towing all the "beef" that they intended to put into it that warm afternoon.

"Weally, you fellows," said Arthur Augustus, "if that fat chap yondah wants to speak to us, it would be only civil to give him a chance."

"Bow-wow!" said Lowther.

"I say, you fellows!" roared the "fat chap" in question. "Hold on! Stop! Are you deaf? Blow you!"

Tom Merry laughed.

"It's Bunter," he said.

"Buntah?"

"Billy Bunter, of Greyfriars. Don't you know him?"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy fixed his eyeglass upon the fat figure on the island. The youth who was standing there, waving excitedly to the boat, was undoubtedly plump, not to say podgy. His fat face was adorned by a pair of large spectacles that glittered in the sun.

"Yaas, bai Jove!" said Arthur Augustus. "It's Buntah! I recognise him now. Weally, it seems to wain Gweyfwhahs fellows on this wivah—the othah day it was Cokah, and now it is Buntah. I am not vevy anxious to meet Buntah."

"Passed unanimously!" said Monty Lowther. "Let's give him a miss in baulk!"

"Might shy a sardine-tin at him as we go by!" suggested Manners.

"Weally, Mannahs——"

"I say, you fellows!" roared Billy Bunter. "Come and take me off! I'm stranded on this rotten island!"

Another Topping Tale of the Exciting Holiday Adventures of the World-Famous Tom Merry & Co. of St. Jim's. One of the most amusing yarns ever written.

BY

MARTIN CLIFFORD.

"Bai Jove!"

Blake and Herries and Digby were looking across at the island now. They recognised Billy Bunter; but, like the fellows in the boat, they were not anxious to push the acquaintance. They had met Billy Bunter, of the Greyfriars Remove, before; and it was invariably the case that fellows who had met Billy Bunter once were not anxious to meet him twice.

But Tom Merry was not insensible to the fat junior's appeal. He signed to the towing party to halt.

"Do you hear me?" roared Bunter. "Are you deaf?"

"We're deaf on that side!" called back Monty Lowther.

"What?"

"Good-bye, Bunter!"

"You silly ass! Come and take me off!"

"With a face like that, and a figure like that, I should think almost anybody would take you off, old scout!"

"Weally, Lowthah, you should not make wotten puns at a chap who is w'ecked on a desert island. Let's go and wescue Buntah. We can land him in Berkshire in a few minutes."

"Let's!" said Tom Merry.

"Better get on!" called out Blake, from the bank.

"Much better!" said Dig.

"What about noblesse oblige, you fellows?" asked Arthur Augustus D'Arcy severely.

"Blow noblesse oblige!"

"Weally, Blake——"

"Oh, let's ferry him over!" said Tom Merry. "You chaps can take a rest for a bit."

Arthur Augustus cast loose the tow-rope, and Manners and Lowther took the oars, a little reluctantly. Tom Merry steered for the willowy island in the middle of the Thames.

Billy Bunter blinked at the Old Bus through his big spectacles as it approached. The Owl of Greyfriars had not recognised the St. Jim's party yet—his vision was limited, and his spectacles, big as they were, did not seem to assist it much. But although he supposed the boating party to be strangers to him, William George Bunter proceeded to address them without ceremony.

"For goodness' sake buck up! I've been hours on this rotten island. I can tell you I'm fed up! Don't you fellows know how to row?"

Manners gave a snort.

"Let's leave the fat bounder there!" he grunted. "What the thump are we taking any trouble over him for?"

"Oh, go ahead!" said Tom Merry. "It won't take more

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than a few minutes. Bunter never was polished in his manners!"

"Don't stop to catch crabs, you chaps!" shouted Bunter. "When I get in I'll show you how to row, if you like!"

"My hat!" murmured Lowther.

"Oh, come on, and don't dawdle!" continued Bunter. "I've been stranded here for goodness knows how long. I've asked a dozen boats to take me off, and the selfish beasts just pulled on and left me!"

Arthur Augustus chuckled.

"Pewwaps Buntah asked the othah parties as politely as he's askin' us," he remarked. "That would account for their leavin' him stwanded."

"Are you ever coming?" roared Bunter.

"We're coming!" sang out Tom Merry cheerily.

"Then for goodness' sake get moving!"

"How the mewwy thump did Buntah get stwanded on that island?" asked Arthur Augustus. "He could not have got there without a boat. I suppose he was not dwooped fwom an aewoplane."

It was really rather mysterious. But certainly there Bunter was—stranded; and there was no sign of a boat. The Old Bus ran under the willows at last.

"Jump in!" called out Tom Merry.

Billy Bunter rolled into the boat. He dropped into a seat with a fat grunt. And the Old Bus pulled back towards the Berkshire bank, and William George Bunter sat and fanned himself with his straw hat, too busy, apparently, to worry over such a trifling detail as expressing thanks to the St. Jim's party for bothering about him.

CHAPTER 2.

Bunter on Board!

"Gussy!"

Billy Bunter uttered that ejaculation quite suddenly.

Having grunted, and fanned himself, he had turned his spectacles on the boat's crew, and he recognised Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. The St. Jim's juniors had nourished a faint hope that the short-sighted Owl of Greyfriars would not recognise them, as he had not done so already. Now that hope was dashed to the ground.

Bunter recognised them—in spite of their sun-browned faces, and his own limited vision. He bestowed a friendly grin on Arthur Augustus.

"Old Gussy!" he said. "Fancy meeting you fellows on the river! What a happy meeting!"

"Hem!" said Tom Merry.

"How do you do, Buntah?" said Arthur Augustus feebly.

Billy Bunter rolled over to the swell of St. Jim's and held out a fat paw cordially. It was a very fat paw, and it was very warm and sticky, and seriously in need of a wash. But there is was; and Arthur Augustus, who never could bear to hurt a fellow's feelings, took it and shook it. He let it go as soon as he could; and then, as it were carelessly, allowed his own noble hand to trail in the water over the side of the boat.

"How jolly to meet you!" said Bunter, blinking at Tom Merry & Co. "You fellows remember the time I came to St. Jim's?"

"Hem! Yes."

"And the hospitable way I've treated you at Greyfriars when you've come over to play cricket?" said Bunter.

"Hem!"

"It's a real pleasure to see an old pal like Gussy again!" said Bunter. "We were great pals at St. Jim's, weren't we, Gussy?"

"Oh deah! I mean—hem!"

"Boating on the river, what?" asked Bunter.

"Yes."

"Camping out, and all that?" asked Bunter, blinkin' up and down the roomy old boat. "I see you've got a tent and things."

"That's it."

"Bit of an old tub, isn't it?"

"Think so?" murmured Tom Merry.

"No wonder you row like—like—blessed if I know what you row like," said Bunter. "Bit of a job to yank an old tub like this about, I should think. Why didn't you get a decent boat?"

"Bai Jove!"

"My idea for a holiday up the Thames would be to have an electric launch, you know," remarked Bunter.

"This comes cheaper," said Tom.

Billy Bunter nodded sympathetically.

"Yes, I suppose so; horrid to be short of money. That's where I'm lucky—I can always run a holiday regardless of expense."

"That's very lucky," said Monty Lowther sarcastically.

"Yes; but a fellow gets used to it, you know," said Bunter carelessly. "I find that wealth palls in the long run like everything else. A fellow gets bored with big country

houses, electric launches, Rolls-Royce cars, and so on. The fact is, I'm blessed if I shouldn't like a simple sort of holiday, in a cheap old tub like this, by way of a change!"

"Oh!"

"Here we are!" said Tom Merry, as the Old Bus bumped on the Berkshire bank. "Jump out, Bunter!"

Bunter did not jump out.

"You're going up the river?" he asked.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Then you can land me farther up, if you don't mind."

"Oh! All right!"

Manners tied on the tow-rope to the towing-mast again, and Blake and Herries and Digby walked on with it. They had not wasted any greeting on Bunter, but Bunter did not mind. He settled back comfortably in the boat, having gathered up all the cushions he could find.

The Terrible Three looked at one another, but did not speak. They could raise no objection to giving Bunter a lift, if he wanted to be landed farther up the river. But a horrid suspicion was coming into their minds that the fat junior of Greyfriars did not mean to land at all. That was a rather serious matter.

"Keeping on very far?" asked Bunter, as the Old Bus rolled on its way again.

"We're goin' past Oxford, Buntah."

"How topping!" said Bunter. "I believe there's a lot of fun in these simple pleasures. A fellow can overdo the grand-hotel bizney, I think. Doing your own cooking, and all that?"

"Yaas!"

"Good! I'll have tea with you this afternoon, if you like, and help you with the cooking. I'm a dab at it."

"Oh!"

"Won't that make you late home?" asked Manners.

"I'm not going home."

"Oh!"

"I'm on holiday, you know," said Bunter. "It's quite curious how it happened. You see, the original idea was for me to go down to Cornwall with Wharton and Bob Cherry and that crowd. But on reflection I felt that it would be rather too tame for me. They begged me with tears in their eyes, almost, to come, but I had to be firm. I couldn't do it, and I said so. Then I decided to have my holiday with Lord Mauleverer—you know, Mauly, an old pal of mine at Greyfriars. Curiously enough, I've missed him somehow!"

"Lucky man!" murmured Lowther.

"Eh? What did you say?"

"How did you miss him?" asked Lowther.

"Well, I found that he was with a river party at Wallingford, but when I got there, he had left for Switzerland," said Bunter.

"Heard you were coming, perhaps?" suggested Lowther.

"Eh?"

"How did you get stwanded on the island, Buntah?" asked Arthur Augustus hastily.

"A cheeky boatman," said Bunter, frowning. "I hired him for an afternoon on the river. How he found out that I wasn't going to pay him I don't know—"

"What?"

"I—I mean—"

"You weren't goin' to pay the boatman?" ejaculated Arthur Augustus.

"Yes, of course I was," said Bunter irritably. "I hope you don't think I'd bilk a person of the lower classes."

"I twust not!" said Arthur Augustus.

"As it happens, I'd left my purse at the—the Grand Hotel at Wallingford," explained Bunter. "I asked the boatman to lend me a shilling to get some ginger-beer, and from that, the low fellow seemed to think that I hadn't any money. So, instead of lending me a shilling, he asked me to pay him for the trip. Seemed to distrust me."

"How extraordinary!" murmured Lowther.

"Oh, it's this Bolshevism!" said Bunter. "What the lower classes are coming to in these days I really don't know. Respect for a gentleman seems to be entirely gone. Of course, I couldn't pay the fellow, as I'd left my purse, with all my banknotes in it, at the George Hotel at Goring—"

"Where?" ejaculated Arthur Augustus.

"I—I mean, Shillingford," said Bunter hastily. "But the fellow was utterly low and suspicious. He called me a bilk. Me, you know."

"Bai Jove!"

"Then he said that if I wasn't going to pay him I could swim back," said Bunter, in a deeply-injured tone. "He shoved me on shore on the island, and left me there. I'd have thrashed the cad, but—but I felt that it was beneath my dignity to soil my hands on him. That was two or three hours ago, and ever since then I've been hailing boats to take me off. And they wouldn't, though I called 'em every name I could think of."



"Now get out of it!" roared the angry colonel, as the tent came down with a crash. The St. Jim's juniors struggled furiously under the flapping canvas. Tom Merry was the first to emerge, flushed and furious. He found himself face to face with a tall, thin gentleman, who was more flushed and furious than he was himself. (See page 9.)

"Ha, ha, ha!"
 "Blessed if I see anything to cackle at. It was jolly lucky you fellows came along in this old tub. I took you for a party of Bank Holiday bounders at first."
 "Bai Jove! Did you?"
 "I did, old chap. I hardly expected to see friends of mine in an old tub like this. But, bless you, I don't mind!"
 "You—you don't mind!" gasped Manners.
 "Not at all. I hope I'm not a snob," said Bunter cheerily. "Of course, it would be a bit rotten if any of my titled relations happened to pass us in their electric-launches or—or superb house-boats. But it isn't very likely to happen."
 "Very unlikely, I think," observed Monty Lowther.
 "Well, yes; anyhow, I'm chancing it," said Bunter.
 "Do you think you ought to take the risk?" asked Manners gravely.
 Bunter did not seem to hear that question.
 "Do you fellows know I have missed my lunch," he said: "Anything to eat on this boat?"
 Monty Lowther silently opened a hamper. After that, William George Bunter did not waste time in conversation; his jaws were too busily occupied in another way.
 Jack Blake called from the bank.
 "We're close on Cleeve. Is Bunter going past the lock?"
 "Yes, old chap," called back Bunter. "I'm not getting out this side of Wallingford."
 "Oh!"
 Blake & Co. towed on.

CHAPTER 3. Sticking On!

WILLIAM GEORGE BUNTER finished eating. Having cleared out the hamper of all its contents, he had to finish. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy supplied him with ginger-beer.
 "Of course, you wouldn't have claret-cup handy," remarked Bunter.

"I am sowwy, Bunter—no," said Arthur Augustus politely.
 "On our house-boat we generally have claret-cup," said Bunter.
 "I am sowwy you are not on your houseboat now, deah boy."
 Monty Lowther chuckled, and Bunter gave Arthur Augustus a suspicious blink. He dropped the subject, and consumed the ginger-beer.
 "After all, it's not bad," said Bunter. "Humble pleasures—simple fare—cheap drinks—they do a chap good, when he gets fed up with rolling in the lap of luxury. When I'm on a holiday I'm liable to over-do the champagne."
 "Bai Jove!"
 "Ginger-beer is really better for a chap," said Bunter firmly. "I never was an exacting fellow; and I don't expect you fellows to have the same expensive fittings on this old tub as we have on our house-boat at Henley. I'll have some more ginger-beer."
 Arthur Augustus supplied more ginger-beer.
 "Not at all bad," said Bunter. "If you'll hand me that cushion, Gussy, I'll stretch out a bit."
 Bunter had all the cushions but one. Arthur Augustus handed him the last one.
 In the midst of cushions, Bunter stretched out, evidently with the intention of going to sleep. Apparently it was his habit, like a boa-constrictor, to lie comatose after devouring his prey.
 "Do you fellows ever put up an awning on this boat?" he asked.
 "Oh, yes!"
 "Put it up now, then. I like a shade from the sun when I'm taking a nap."
 The four juniors in the boat seemed deaf. Even Arthur Augustus turned a deaf ear. Bunter waited for a reply, but it did not come.
 "Got an umbrella on board?" he asked, at last.
 "My umbwellah blew away the othah day, Buntah."
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"Haven't you another?"

"Nunno."

"Don't think I'm grumbling," said Bunter. "I know your fellows would do a guest as well as you could with your limited means. I can shade my face with my hat. Don't let me give you a lot of trouble."

"We won't," said Manners grimly.

"You might keep a bit quiet, though—I hate fellows jawing when I'm taking a nap."

Bunter closed his eyes and slumbered. The St. Jim's juniors looked at him. Bunter evidently had taken possession of the Old Bus, and its crew were there only to minister unto him. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy breathed long and hard. Arthur Augustus was the perfection of politeness, but he was beginning to feel the strain.

Snorrrrrre!

"Bai Jove! What's that feahful wow?" exclaimed Arthur Augustus, jumping.

"Only the 'Sleeping Beauty!'" grinned Lowther.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Bunter ceased to snore, and opened his eyes.

"I say, you fellows, you might shut up when a chap's trying to get a nap. Don't be selfish."

"Bai Jove!"

Bunter slept again. Monty Lowther picked up the boat-hook and eyed the fat junior of Greyfriars.

"Shall I?" he asked.

"Do!" said Manners.

"Don't!" said Tom Merry, laughing. "He's a bit of a coughdrop, but we sha'n't have him for long. Let him rip!"

"Yaas, wathah! Aftah all, he is a guest, in a way," said Arthur Augustus. "Let him snore till we get to Wallingford."

"That's miles yet," grunted Lowther.

"Pway be patient, deah boy."

Tom Merry & Co. decided to be patient. The Old Bus rolled on its way through the golden afternoon, and after a time the Terrible Three went ashore to tow, and Blake and Herries and Digby came on the boat. They eyed the Sleeping Beauty with great disfavour. But Bunter was allowed to snore in peace till Wallingford was reached.

Then Jack Blake shook him by a fat shoulder.

"Ow! Grooogh! Leggo!" mumbled Bunter.

"Wallingford!" shouted Blake.

"Eh?"

"Wallingford."

Bunter blinked at him.

"What the thump do you mean—Wallingford?" he demanded.

"We've reached Wallingford, where you're going ashore."

"Oh! Ah! I'm not going ashore at Wallingford."

"Weally, Buntah, as you left your purse at the hotel at Wallingford, you had bettah go and wecovah it."

Bunter shook his head.

"That's all right—my name's in it," he said. "They'll send it on to Bunter Court."

"You are wiskin' losin' your money, Buntah."

"There's not much in it—only twenty or twenty-five pounds or so," said Bunter carelessly.

"Oh, gweat Scott!"

"Look here," said Blake grimly; "you wanted a lift to Wallingford, Bunter, and here we are at Wallingford."

"Weally, Blake—" murmured Arthur Augustus.

Bunter sat up.

"If I'm not welcome in this boat," he said, with dignity, "I'll step ashore at once."

"Well, we're not looking for passengers," said Herries.

"Weally, Hewwies—"

"Well—are we?" demanded Dig.

"Nunno—but—weally, you know—"

"I understand," said Bunter haughtily. "You don't want to give me a lift in your old boat as far as I'm going. Well, I can walk. I suppose this the St. Jim's brand of politeness. We shouldn't think much of it at Greyfriars. I can tell you."

"Oh, blow Greyfriars!" said Herries. "We've had too much Greyfriars lately. You said you were going to Wallingford."

"So I am, on the way to—to Staines."

"Staines is down the river, fathead. You'll have to take a train back."

"I mean Shillingford."

"Oh, you mean Shillingford, do you?" growled Blake, eyeing the Owl of Greyfriars rather morosely.

"Yes, I do—but I'll walk. Don't trouble to give a fellow a lift in your boat," said Bunter sarcastically.

"If you're going to Shillingford, we don't mind giving you a lift there," said Blake, a little remorsefully. "But are you really going to Shillingford?"

"My friends are there in the house-boat, expecting me," said Bunter, with dignity.

"Gammon!" said Herries.

"Oh, really, Herries—"

"Weally, you fellows, this is wathah wotten," said Arthur Augustus. "Buntah is vewy welcome to stay on the boat as fah as Shillin'ford."

"Oh, all right!" said Blake resignedly.

"I won't trouble you," said Bunter loftily. "Just shove me ashore, and I'll manage to walk it somehow. I'm tired, but that doesn't matter."

"Pway wemain where you are, Buntah."

"Well, if you make a point of it, Gussy, I won't refuse," said Bunter. "When are you fellows having tea?"

"Oh, soon, deah boy!"

The Old Bus rolled on by the straight reaches after Wallingford in the summer sunset. The juniors wanted to pass Bensington Lock before stopping, so there was no sign of tea yet. Billy Bunter consoled himself with ginger-beer, and possessed his fat soul in patience.

Tom Merry called from the bank after a time.

"Didn't you want to get out at Wallingford, Bunter?"

"That's all right."

"Buntah is goin' on as fah as Shillin'ford, Tom Mewwy."

"We sha'n't reach Shillingford to-night," called back Tom.

"Bai Jove! That will be wathah awkward for Buntah! I nevah thought of that. Are your fwiends expectin' you to-night, Buntah?"

"Well, as a matter of fact, they are," said Bunter calmly. "But that's all right—I'll join them in the morning. I don't mind camping out with you fellows for the night."

"It means wuffin' it a little, Buntah."

"I can rough it," said Bunter cheerily. "So long as there's plenty of grub, and a good bed, you won't find me grumbling."

"Oh!"

Blake and Co. said nothing. They were quite well aware that William George Bunter, finding himself at a loose end, as it were, had resolved to attach himself to the St. Jim's party, whether they liked it or not. They had had some experience of Billy Bunter's little ways on previous occasions. But they did not see how it was to be helped. Even Herries did not suggest pitching the Owl of Greyfriars into the river.

Bunter was landed on the party till the following day at least; but Blake and Co. inwardly determined that the next morning they would say good-bye to Bunter—gently, if possible, but, at all events, firmly. It was possible to have too much even of a good thing; and by no stretch of the imagination could Billy Bunter be considered a good thing. So seven juniors of St. Jim's were determined upon an early parting, and one junior of Greyfriars was determined upon exactly the reverse. The majority were

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The tall gentleman struggled violently. But he was not very useful in a scrap with seven angry juniors. Seven pairs of hands grasped him, and he was rushed down to the river. A few moments later, and he was wallowing in the Thames mud, with the silvery waters flowing round him. (See page 9.)

against Bunter; but William George was a stickler; and it remained to be seen whether he would take his departure at Shillingford, or whether he would remain glued to the St. Jim's party like the Old Man of the Sea to Sindbad the Sailor.

CHAPTER 4. Bunter's Way!

"LEAVE it to me!" said Bunter. The Old Bus had stopped among the osiers. Bensington Lock was left behind, and the sun had almost disappeared. It was high time for camping—and higher time for tea, as Lowther remarked. Tea and supper were to be a combined meal—and the juniors were ready for both—especially Bunter.

"Leave it to me," repeated Billy Bunter. "We can camp in that field all right. No good keeping cramped on the boat, when there's room to stretch our legs ashore. I'll go up to the house and ask permission. They won't refuse me."

"More likely than not," said Herries.

Bunter shook his head.

"I have a way of doing these things," he said. "It's all right. You see, riverside people are quite right in refusing permission to camp, as they generally do. People naturally don't like parties of bounders camping on their land. It's too thick. We don't allow it on the river at Bunter Court, I can tell you. But they treat a gentleman very differently. That's why I'd better go."

"Oh!" gasped Blake.

"You see, you might be turned off," explained Bunter. "But it will be all right if I ask. When a fellow plainly belongs to the upper classes, they treat him very differently. See?"

Bunter rolled ashore without waiting for a reply. The St. Jim's juniors gazed at him almost speechlessly.

"There's one thing, though," said Bunter. "A fellow must expect to pay for permission to camp on a man's land. That's only fair."

"That's is vewy just, Buntah."

"Well, how high shall I go?" asked Bunter. "As you fellows are paying, you had better fix the figure."

"Five bob," said Blake.

"Not higher than ten, what?" asked Bunter.

"Yes, if you like."

"Right-ho! Hand me the ten bob, and I'll see you through. I'd stand it myself, only I left my purse in the hotel at Shillingford."

Arthur Augustus handed a ten-shilling note to Bunter, and the Owl of Greyfriars disappeared by a path up the bank. Tom Merry and Co. looked at one another, and Tom laughed.

"Isn't he the jolly old limit?" said Monty Lowther. "No wonder he's at a loose end in the vac. I can't imagine the other Greyfriars fellows yearning for his society."

"Wathah not."

"What about pushing on another mile and leaving him here?" asked Herries.

"Weally, Hewwies—"

"Well, if he gets permission for us to camp it's all right," said Tom Merry. "If he doesn't—"

"If he doesn't, we'll duck him," growled Herries. "I can tell you, I'm getting fed up."

Meanwhile, Billy Bunter was progressing along the shady path from the river. Arthur Augustus' ten-shilling note was crumpled in his fat hand, and there was a grin on his face. Bunter was hungry—decidedly hungry; and a short distance back, in the boat, Bunter had caught sight of an inn on shore. As soon as he was out of sight of the St. Jim's party, Bunter headed for that inn.

By the time he reached it, Billy Bunter had quite forgotten about the party in the boat. He had no time to think of them, in fact, when he was busily engaged upon disposing of a supper to the precise value of ten shillings.

Tom Merry and Co. waited.

Bunter did not reappear; and until the ambassador returned, they did not feel entitled to camp in a field that was private property—tempting as it looked to tired voyagers.

"Where can the fat duffer have got to?" exclaimed Blake at last. "I can't see the house from here, but it can't be far away."

"Lost his way, pewwaps!" suggested Arthur Augustus.

"We'd better have supper in the boat," said Tom. "He's bound to be back by then, and then we shall know whether we can camp ashore or not."

"Yaas, wathah! I'm feahfully hungwy."

The St. Jim's party prepared supper, and disposed of it with keen appetites, on board the Old Bus as the boat lay moored. They were surprised by Bunter's failure to return; unreliable as he was in most matters, they knew that he was always to be relied upon to turn up at meal times. But he did not turn up, and the St. Jim's party supped without him. The moon came up over the trees, shining on the silvery river that rippled and murmured past the boat.

"I say, you fellows!"

"Hallo! Here he is."

Billy Bunter came down to the bank. The moonlight glistened on his big spectacles as he blinked into the boat, giving him a curious owl-like look.

"Here you are at last!" grunted Herries. "Where the dickens have you been all this time?"

"Well, I like that, when I've been taking all this trouble for you fellows," said Bunter. "I've had to go a long way. The fact is—"

Bunter hesitated. He had spent the ten shillings, and he had had quite a good supper, although he was ready for another. But he felt that it would not do to tell the St. Jim's party so. He had not even looked for the house to which the field appertained; but that was another circumstance he felt that it would not be judicious to mention.

"Well, are we camping here or not?" demanded Manners.

"Oh, yes! Certainly."

"You've paid the people?"

Bunter hesitated a moment. But he had to account for the disappearance of the ten shillings somehow.

"Exactly."

"Well, that's all right," said Manners. "Did they ask you ten bob?"

"Fifteen shillings," said Bunter. "I had five in my pockets, as it happened—a couple of half-crowns I'd overlooked. That's all right. I'm standing that myself. It's my whack."

"I don't believe—" began Herries.

"It's all wight," interrupted Arthur Augustus hurriedly.

"So long as we have permission to camp, it's all wight, Hewwies."

Herries grunted, and said no more.

"Well, let's get the tent up," said Tom.

"What about supper?" asked Bunter.

"We've had supper," said Tom.

"Well, I like that! You couldn't wait for me, while I was tramping about getting permission for you to camp—"

"There's plenty left."

"Oh! All right, then."

Foodstuffs to the value of ten shillings were already stacked inside Bunter. But the fat junior proceeded to deal with supper as if he had not broken his fast for two or three days.

While he was busy on the boat, Tom Merry & Co. hauled the camping impedimenta ashore. Most nights, on their voyage up the Thames, they found it necessary to camp in the boat; but on all possible occasions, of course, they preferred a night on land under less cramped conditions. They had really not expected Bunter to be successful as an ambassador, and so his success pleased them, and they felt unusually genial towards the fat junior in consequence.

The tent was put up, and ground sheets and blankets and rugs taken ashore. When all was ready for turning in, Billy Bunter was still busy with his Gargantuan supper. Tom Merry looked into the boat.

"What about you, Bunter?" he asked.

"I'm getting on all right," said Bunter cheerily. "Of course, this isn't quite the kind of grub we get on our house-boat. But I'm a fellow that can rough it."

Tom Merry coughed.

"I mean, about turning in," he said. "If you'd like to bunk in the tent, one or two of us will turn in in the boat. It's a bit of a crowd in the tent, perhaps."

Tom Merry wanted to be polite and hospitable; but inwardly he fervently hoped that Bunter would not choose the tent. Billy Bunter blinked at him thoughtfully, with a well-laden fork half-way to his capacious mouth.

It occurred to Bunter that, as no permission had been obtained for camping ashore, it was quite possible that the owner of the property might cut up rusty. Indeed, if the camp was discovered by the proprietor, it was fairly certain that that unknown gentleman would cut up very rusty indeed. Bunter was not a very bright youth; but he was bright enough to realise that, in the circumstances, it would be wise to sleep on the boat.

"Oh, I dare say you fellows would rather have the tent," he said. "I can rough it in the boat."

"Well, if you'd rather—"

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"It's not a case of rather," said Bunter. "I always sacrifice myself to others—it's my way. But really, as I spent last night in a big bed in a palatial hotel, it's only fair that I should rough it in the boat to-night and let you fellows have the tent. Just leave me plenty of rugs and blankets and things, and that will be all right."

"You'll find everything you want on board," said Tom. "Well, we're turning in now. Good-night."

"Oh, good-night," said Bunter carelessly.

Tom Merry returned to the tent.

"Bunter's bunking on the boat," he said.


"Oh, good!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"For this relief, much thanks," yawned Monty Lowther.

"I dare say we sha'n't even hear his snore from here."

And the St. Jim's party turned in contentedly. And

FULL OF JOY! 

about half an hour later William George Bunter, having finished his second supper, and feeling slightly uncomfortable in consequence in the region of his ample waist, turned in, in the Old Bus, and slept the sleep of the just.

CHAPTER 5.

An Unexpected Attack!

"SCANDALOUS!"

Tom Merry heard, without heeding, that ejaculation. He was still half asleep.

"Scandalous! Impudent! Rascally!"

This series of emphatic adjectives had the effect of fully awakening the Shell fellow of St. Jim's. Tom sat up in the tent, and rubbed his eyes. Dawn was stealing over the river, and lighting the tops of the hills in the distance; but it was not the hour for rising yet. The hour was very early; and the campers had not intended to turn out till seven o'clock.

"Scandalous! Unheard-of! The impertinence of it!"

It was a powerful, deep voice outside the tent. Someone, seemingly, had wandered along to the St. Jim's camp, and was expressing his opinion thereof.

"Bai Jove!" Arthur Augustus awoke. "Is that somebody talkin'? Or is it Buntah snowin'?"

"Come out of that!" roared the voice.

"Gweat Scott!"

"It's somebody," said Tom Merry sleepily. "Hallo, out there! Go away!"

"What?"

"Go away!"

"Go away?" roared the voice. "Did you say go away?"

"Yes, I did say go away!" retorted Tom. "What the thump do you mean by rooting about our tent and waking us up at five in the morning?"

"Gad! Oh gad! The impudence!"

"Oh, go away, whoever you are!" said Arthur Augustus. "You are wuinin' our night's west with your vevy disagreeable voice!"


"Oh gad!"

"Clear off!" shouted Blake. All the seven campers were awake now, and indignant. "Do you want me to come out there with a boathook?"

"Eh—what?"

"If we come out to you, you'll know it!" snorted Herries.

"If you fellows had had the sense to let me bring Towser, he'd have kept off these dashed tramps!"

FOR GIRL or BOY! 

"Tramps!" came the voice, in choking tones. "Tramps! Oh gad!"

"Go away!"

"Blow away, you noisy ass!" exclaimed Monty Lowther.

"Do you hear? You're too numerous! You're superfluous! You're the Thing-too-Much! Blow away before we come out and blow you!"

"Are you addressing me?" roared the voice of the unknown.

"You silly ass, whom else should I be addressing?"

"You're the only silly owl there, aren't you?"

"Oh gad! You impertinent rascal—"
 "Bai Jove! The fellow is gettin' weally abusive!"
 "You scoundrels—"
 "We shall have to go out to him," said Dig. "Got the boathook?"
 "I've got it," said Blake, in concentrated tones, "and he will get it, if I have to go out. Some blighter coming home with the milk in the morning, I suppose!"
 "Yaas, wathah!"
 The tent shook. It shook and heaved as if an earthquake were going on. It wasn't an earthquake—but the tent was in the grasp of an angry gentleman who was trying to drag it down.
 "Get at him!" shouted Manners.
 "Wush the wottah, deah boys!"

Tom Merry & Co. scrambled up wrathfully. The tent threatened to fall on their heads every moment.
 But the crash came before they could escape. With a terrific heave, the tent came over, and the campers sprawled and yelled under wallowing canvas.

"Now get out of it!" roared the angry voice.
 "Oh cwumbs!"
 "Oh, my hat!"

The juniors struggled furiously under the flapping canvas. Tom Merry was the first to emerge, flushed and furious. He found himself face to face with a tall, thin gentleman, who was more flushed and more furious than Tom. The tall gentleman had a stick in his hand. Immediately Tom appeared he seized the junior by the shoulder and laid on the stick. There was a terrific roar from Tom Merry. It was a heavy stick, in a powerful hand, and pyjamas were a very poor defence against it.

"Take that, you young rascal—"
 "Whoop!"
 "And that—and that—"
 "Rescue!" yelled Tom Merry.

Blake scrambled out next, and he rushed into the fray. He tackled the tall gentleman Rigger fashion, and the stranger came down on the grass with a crash.

He lay there and roared, while the rest of the juniors emerged breathless from the collapsed tent.
 Tom Merry wriggled with pain. Three hefty whacks had been dealt with the stick before rescue arrived.
 "Bai Jove, wag the wuffian, deah boys!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus. "He must be dwunk, I think, to attack stwangahs in this wuffianly mannah!"
 "Collar the cad!" exclaimed Tom.
 The tall gentleman struggled into a sitting posture. Monty Lowther jerked away his stick and flung it over the trees.
 "Collar him!"
 "You young scoundrels—"
 "What do you mean by dragging over our tent, and pitching into me with that stick?" roared Tom Merry, in great wrath.

"You young rascal—"
 "The wottah is abusive!" said Arthur Augustus. "I wefuse to listen to him. Duck the wottah in the wivah. It will sobah him!"
 "Hands off! I—I—I— Oh gad!"
 The tall gentleman struggled violently. But he was not very useful in a scrap with seven angry juniors.
 Seven pairs of hands grasped the tall gentleman, and he was rushed down to the river. A few moments more, and he was sitting in the Thames mud, with the silvery Thames flowing round his neck.
 "There, you dashed ruffian!" exclaimed Blake. "Perhaps that will cool your temper a bit!"
 "Ooooooooooch! Gug-gug! Ooooooooooch!"

There was quite a waterspout as the offensive stranger struggled up and scrambled to his feet. He squelched in mud, as he scrambled wildly up the bank.

"Give him another ducking!" exclaimed Herries.
 "Yaas, wathah!"
 "I—I—I—" panted the tall gentleman. "You—you—you— Oh gad, I'll bring the police— I—I—I'll—"

He broke off, and fled, as the juniors advanced on him. His long legs covered the ground in great style, and he vanished through the trees that bordered the meadow, leaving a trail of Thames water and mud behind him.

"Good riddance!" said Manners. "I suppose he must have been drinking—unless he's potty!"
 "Yaas, wathah!"
 "Anyhow, he's got his lesson!" said Blake. "The cheek of it—bunging our tent down and laying into us with a stick! I should think he was loose in the crumplet."

Tom Merry rubbed his shoulders ruefully.
 "I'm jolly glad we ducked him!" he said. "He won't come back, I fancy. It's only five o'clock—we'd better turn in again."
 "Hallo, here comes somebody!"
 A man who looked like a gardener came through the trees.

He stopped at a little distance, and surveyed the camp and the schoolboys. Then he came on, with a very wary expression on his face. Tom Merry & Co. looked at him, waiting for him to come up.
 "Ands off, you know," said the man, coming nearer.
 "We don't bite!" snapped Blake. "What the thump are you afraid of?"
 "You young fellows camping 'ere?"
 "Yes."
 "My eye!" The gardener whistled. "And you've 'andled the colonel like that when he caught you?"
 "The—the what?"
 "He's death on campers, is Colonel Griggs," said the gardener. "Well, you've got a neck, I must say. Camping

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on his land, and ducking him when he orders you off!" The gardener grinned. "Don't think that I mind—I ain't larfed so much for ten years, as I did when I saw you duckin' him. But my eye—won't he be in a wax?"

Tom Merry stared at the man.

"Do you mean to say that that ill-tempered old johnny is the owner of this land?" he demanded.

"Course he is. Didn't you know?"

"How the thump could we know? But why should he kick up a fuss?" demanded Tom. "We've paid for permission to camp here."

"What?" howled the gardener.

"We've paid for permission—fifteen shillings—at least, ten shillings," added Tom.

"Dror it mild," suggested the gardener. "The colonel wouldn't let trippers camp on his land for fifteen pounds, nor yet fifteen hundred. Think he'd take your money? Dror it mild!"

"Bai Jove! If you doubt our word, you wottah—"

"Dror it mild!" advised the gardener. "You're trespassing, and you know it. My tip to you is, get out of it afore the colonel comes back and makes mincemeat of you!"

And the man, grinning, disappeared through the trees.

Tom Merry & Co. looked at one another. They were not thinking of turning in again now. They had more serious matters to think of. Faintly, through the fresh morning air, came the sound of a resonant snore from the boat. Billy Bunter was still in the happy land of dreams.

CHAPTER 6.

Early Rising!

TOM MERRY drew a deep breath. A dreadful suspicion of the truth was dawning upon his mind. Colonel Griggs was a very unpleasant sort of gentleman undoubtedly; but his conduct could only be explained, now that the juniors knew who he was, on the assumption that permission had never been obtained to camp on his land. Indeed, it was hardly probable that the colonel would be amenable to such a consideration as ten shillings, or even fifteen. It was fairly certain that he would have either given free leave to camp or refused it, and would not have looked at the ten shillings. Billy Bunter had not, after all, been a success as an ambassador. He had spent the ten shillings, and cheerfully pulled the legs of the St. Jim's party; and Tom understood now why Bunter preferred to sleep in the boat. He had realised that it was probable that slumbers in tents were liable to interruption.

"That fat rotter!" said Tom Merry at last. "He never saw the owner of the land at all last night!"

"Pretty clear now," growled Blake, "if that skinny old johnny is the owner, he never gave us leave to camp, that's clear. We're trespassing here—and we've ducked the jolly old property-owner!"

"Bai Jove!"

"Well, that's so much to the good," remarked Monty Lowther. "There are lots of property-owners along the Thames who want ducking."

"Weally, Lowthah, I object vevy stwongly to invadin' the wights of pwopahty. We owe that skinny old gentleman an apology."

"You can go and offer him one, then," said Blake. "I'm jolly well keeping out of his reach!"

"Yes, rather!" said Tom Merry, laughing. "I fancy we'd better take that gardener chap's tip, and sheer off as quick as we can."

"And what about Bunter?" snorted Herries. "He's pinched our ten bob, and left us to face the music."

"I can scarcely ccredit that, Hewwies. Buntah told us plainly that he had paid for permission to camp heah."

"He would tell anybody anything!"

"He's spoofed us, of course!" growled Manners. "We might have known it, too. We know Bunter."

"We'll jolly well land him here, and leave him to interview the giddy old colonel when he comes back!" exclaimed Herries.

"Good egg!"

"Making the punishment fit the crime," said Lowther. "First-class wheeze!"

"Give the fellow a chance," said Arthur Augustus. "He is wathah an ass, and he may have handed the money to the w'ong man. Evewybody is liable to make mistakes. I have made mistakes myself. Not vevy often, of course; but still, I have done it."

"I suppose it's possible," said Tom Merry thoughtfully. "But my belief is that he scoffed a feed with our ten bob, and pulled our legs, and camped in the boat to keep out of trouble. Anyhow, Bunter can wait—let's get out of this before the Griggs man comes back with the local police force."

"Yaas, wathah!"

It was evident that it would not be wise to spend much time in discussion. Tom Merry & Co. proceeded to follow

the example of the gentleman in Macbeth, who stood not upon the order of their going, but went at once.

They dressed hurriedly—even Arthur Augustus did not stay for a morning dip on this occasion—and they bundled the tent and rugs and blankets and ground-sheets headlong into the Old Bus. Billy Bunter, who was not liable to awaken for anything short of an earthquake, was still sleeping soundly in the boat. But he opened his eyes when flapping canvas descended upon him, and a tent-pole followed, and then a stack of ground-sheets.

"Grooogh! Wharrer marrer?" mumbled Bunter. "'Tain't rising-bell."

"Shove off!" said Tom.

"I say, you fellows—"

"Wake up, Bunter, you fat duffer!"

"Oh, really, Bob Cherry—"

The Owl of Greyfriars apparently imagined that he was back in the Remove dormitory. Blake, however, kindly shoved a boot into contact with his plump ribs, and Bunter was fully awakened.

He sat up, and blinked, and groped for his spectacles. Having found them, he jammed them on his fat little nose and blinked indignantly at the St. Jim's juniors. The Old Bus was unmoored, and the juniors were shoving her out into the river.

"I say, you fellows, what are you starting for?" demanded Bunter. "Waking a fellow up in the middle of the night! What's the time?"

"A quarter past five."

Bunter gave a howl.

"Do you think I'm going to get up at a quarter past five? I don't get up till eleven on a holiday."

"You can stay there," said Blake. "You're liable to get trodden on a bit. If you don't mind that—"

"Yaroooh!"

"Bai Jove! What's the mattah, Buntah?"

"Some beast trod on my leg! Yooooop! Gerroff my back! Oh crumbs!"

Billy Bunter decided to rise, early as the hour was. He had not undressed before turning in, and the thought of ablutions did not seem to cross his mind when he got up. Bunter's idea of a holiday included a minimum of washing.

Tom Merry & Co. pushed the Old Bus out into the stream, putting a safe width of water between them and their old anchorage. They had camped on the Berkshire side, and at this point, fortunately, the tow-path was on the Oxfordshire side, so they were able to cross into safety. But they did not mean to proceed on their journey until William George Bunter had been dealt with according to his deserts. They pulled the boat to the Oxfordshire bank, and tied on.

"Now for Bunter!" said Herries.

Bunter blinked indignantly and morosely at the juniors. He was good for six hours or more of sleep yet, and it did not look as if he would get it. But if he could not sleep, he was prepared to eat; so his fat thoughts turned to breakfast.

"Brekker in the boat?" he asked.

"Never mind brekker yet," said Tom Merry.

"I'm hungry—"

"Never mind that."

"But I do mind!" roared Bunter. "I mind very much."

"Weally, Buntah—"

"Oh, don't you jaw, D'Arcy! Blessed if you wouldn't jaw the hind leg off a mule!" said Bunter crossly.

"Bai Jove!"

"We've been turned out of our camp, Bunter," said Tom Merry. "It seems that we didn't get leave after all."

"What rot!" said Bunter.

"The place belongs to a Colonel Griggs—"

"That's the man," said Bunter. "I paid him the pound."

"The what?"

"The pound—ten bob D'Arcy gave me, and ten of my own, as I told you fellows."

"You told us fifteen shillings."

"Oh, did I? I meant a pound. That is, twenty-five shillings," said Bunter. "Ten bob of yours, and fifteen of my own. That's what I really meant to say. If you insist upon handing back the fifteen shillings to me, I sha'n't refuse it, as I happen to be short of money."

The St. Jim's juniors gazed at Bunter.

"Did you pay anybody for permission to camp?" asked Blake.

"Certainly. If you fellows think I spent the money on supper at an inn, I can only say you're suspicious. I hate suspicious people. I think they're low."

"Bai Jove!"

"So you spent the money on supper at an inn, and told us a string of whoppers when you came back?" said Manners.

"Certainly not! I've just told you that I didn't. If you can't take a fellow's word, Manners—"



"These are the trespassing young scoundrels!" roared the infuriated colonel. "Take them in charge, constables!" The two men in blue looked at the boat, and then at one another. They realised that taking the boat's crew in charge was a somewhat difficult task, across twenty feet of water. (See this page.)

"It's clear enough," said Tom Merry. "The fat bounder's made us commit trespass, and we've ducked the old johnny whose land we trespassed on. It's a bit too thick."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Land him on the other side," said Herries. "He can deal with the colonel, and argue it out with him about the ten bob—or fifteen bob—or twenty-five bob."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Bunter jumped up in alarm.

"I say, you fellows—"

"Pull across!" said Tom Merry.

The Old Bus was pulled across again, opposite the meadow where the party had camped. Billy Bunter blinked at the juniors in great alarm. But before the boat reached the Berkshire bank three or four figures appeared in sight there. Prominent among them was Colonel Griggs, in a state of great excitement, with a horsewhip in his hand. Two of the figures were in uniform.

"Bobbies!" said Blake, with a whistle.

"Bai Jove! We appeah to have twansgessed the law, you fellows. We had bettah land and explain."

"Fathead! Chuck Bunter ashore, and let's mizzle!"

"I say, you fellows," roared Bunter, "I'm not going ashore. Why, they might run me in. Very likely the man will deny being paid the thirty-five shillings."

"Very likely, I think," said Tom Merry, laughing. "Extremely likely."

"That old johnny looks awfully waxy," said Bunter.

"I don't like the look of that horsewhip, either. He might lay it on before a fellow had time to explain that it was all a mistake."

Colonel Griggs sighted the boat at that moment. He rushed down to the water's edge, brandishing the horsewhip.

"There are the trespassing scoundrels, constables!" he shouted. "Take them in charge."

The two rural constables looked at the boat, and looked at one another. Taking the boat's crew in charge was a somewhat difficult task, across twenty feet of water. They did not look inclined for a swim.

"Come ashore, you young scoundrels!" shouted the colonel.

"Weally, sir, I object vevy stwongly to bein' chawac-tewised as a young scoundwel," exclaimed Arthur Augustus indignantly. "I beg you to modewate your language, sir. You are displayin' an excitement and want of wepose, Colonel Gwiggs, that is vevy unbecomin' in a man of your yeahs."

The colonel seemed to be on the verge of an apoplectic fit. He brandished the horsewhip and gurgled.

"Chuck Bunter at him," said Monty Lowther. "Then we'll get off. He can take off the edge of his temper on Bunter. Like throwing things to the wolves when they're after you, you know."

There was a yell from Bunter.

"I say, you fellows, look here—I—"

Tom Merry pulled the line.

"Let's get going," he said. "We can't throw even Bunter to that savage old johnny. He deserves it, but—"

"I order you to come ashore!" roared the colonel, finding his voice at last, as the boat's nose turned up the river.

Monty Lowther stood up and took off his straw-hat politely to the excited gentleman.

"Did you speak, sir?" he inquired.

"Come ashore!"

"Yes, sir, we have no bananas!" said Lowther.

"What—what?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Four oarsmen pulled hard, and the Old Bus rolled away. A bend of the river hid the colonel from sight. Tom Merry & Co. were pleased to see the last of him.

CHAPTER 7.

Coals of Fire!

TOM MERRY & CO. moored the boat a mile farther up the river, and breakfasted on board. It was still early; but a pull on the river before breakfast gave them a good appetite. Billy Bunter did not need a pull on the river to make his appetite good; that, with Bunter, was always in a state of the highest efficiency. But the Owl of Greyfriars did not, for once, devote his whole attention to a meal. He realised that

he had made himself unpopular on board the Old Bus; the St. Jim's juniors did not take the trouble to conceal what they thought of him.

Bunter would have been quite indifferent to that, but for the fact that he planned to remain with the boating-party. He had cheek enough to plant himself anywhere; but he realised that if the St. Jim's fellows cut up rusty and insisted upon putting him ashore at Shillingford, at Shillingford he would have to go. And that did not suit William George at all. As a matter of fact, he intended to remain "planted" on the St. Jim's crew till the end of the vacation, if he could. Somehow or other nobody yearned for Bunter's society; so it had to be bestowed upon people who did not yearn for it.

So Bunter blinked suspiciously at the juniors during breakfast, and even went so far as to lend a hand in getting the meal, and did not refer to the fact that the grub was inferior to what he was accustomed to at Bunter Court and on the Bunter houseboat.

After breakfast he even helped with the washing-up. But it was impossible for Bunter to ingratiate himself with his reluctant hosts. The trick he had played the previous evening was not to be forgiven. It was, as all the juniors agreed, altogether "too thick." Indeed, Tom Merry felt by no means certain that the trouble was over yet; the old colonel had looked so extremely infuriated, and, naturally, he could not be expected to pardon his ducking. The juniors watched the river as they ate a rather hurried breakfast, and they got under way again as soon as the meal was finished. They did not want any more trouble with the irascible Griggs, and certainly not with the rural policemen.

Blake and D'Arcy towed on towards Shillingford Bridge, Manners steered, and Tom Merry watched the river, wondering whether there might be any pursuit. The Old Bus was not a fast traveller, and pursuit would be easy enough. And Tom Merry uttered an exclamation as the panting of a launch sounded behind the Old Bus on the river.

He caught sight of a tall, thin figure standing on the launch, and recognised the gentleman who had dragged over the tent.

"They're after us!" said Tom.

"The jolly old colonel!" said Monty Lowther. "Playing Chingachgook, and tracking us down! I wonder what he wants?"

"I—I say, you fellows, do you think he's going to have us run in?" exclaimed Bunter, in alarm.

"Fathead! You can't run people in for landing in your jolly old meadow," said Lowther. "Blessed if I know what the old johnny wants, but, by the look on his face, it isn't anything nice."

"They're coming up hand over fist," said Tom. "No good trying to get away. I say, he's got that horsewhip in his paw!"

"Then I'm jolly well going to get a boathook in mine!" said Lowther. "If he gives us horsewhip, I'll give him boathook!"

Tom Merry hailed the towers, and Blake and D'Arcy jumped on board. No escape was possible from the pursuing launch, which moved a dozen lengths to the Old Bus' one; and the St. Jim's party prepared to resist boarders. Apparently Colonel Griggs had followed them to administer chastisement with his own hands; the horsewhip looked like it. And the St. Jim's crew had no intention whatever of taking any.

Bunter blinked in great alarm at the approaching launch. Only a few minutes before Bunter had been cogitating on the subject of attaching himself to the party for weeks to come. The sight of the colonel and the horsewhip changed his views.

"I say, you fellows——"

"Get hold of something, Bunter, and stand by to repel boarders!" said Lowther. "We're all in this if that old johnny tries on any hanky-panky with his jolly old whip."

"Look here, you fellows, I don't belong to this party," exclaimed Bunter. "You're not going to drag me into your rows, I can tell you."

"Wha-a-at?"

"I want to be put ashore," said Bunter. "Land me at once! I refuse to be mixed up with low rows on the river!"

"Oh cwumbs!" murmured Arthur Augustus. "Weally, Buntah——"

"Pull in and put me ashore," shouted Bunter. "I tell you I won't have a hand in it."

Manners took a little pull on the line, and the Old Bus surged a little further from the bank.

"You're pulling the wrong line, fathead!" howled Bunter.

Manners grinned, but did not answer.

"You're booked, old fat top," said Blake. "You're the cause of all the trouble, you know: swindling us out of ten bob, and telling lies. If the old johnny yonder will be satisfied with horse-whipping you, he can go ahead. I wouldn't stop him for anything."

"Wathah not!" said Arthur Augustus emphatically.

"Look here, you beasts——"

"Hallo, he's hailing us!"

Colonel Griggs was shouting from the launch, which was quite near now.

"Stop! Do you hear? Stop!"

"Dear man!" said Lowther.

"I order you to stop!"

"How they must have loved him in his regiment," said Lowther, "and how lucky we ain't recruits in it. Port. Manners."

Four of the juniors were at the oars, and Manners steered. The Old Bus was facing the enemy now, to dodge any attempt to get alongside. They could see half a dozen men on the launch, most of them grinning; apparently retainers of the irascible old gentleman, who had been brought along to see that the trespassers received the chastisement that was their due. Colonel Griggs was taking the law into his own hands.

The Old Bus dodged quite actively, and the launch shot past. It came round almost in its own length—and almost ran into a skiff that was pulling up the river with two young men in it. The skiff danced and rocked, and the two young men stood up in it, and addressed remarks to the launch that almost turned the atmosphere blue.

Colonel Griggs did not heed, even if he heard. His fiery eye was fixed on the Old Bus. The launch was well-handled, and it had every advantage over the boat, and the Old Bus was run down at last, and the launch ranged alongside.

Then the Colonel jumped.

As he jumped Blake and Herries shoved at the launch with their oars, and the Old Bus rocked away.

It left a couple of yards of water for the colonel to jump into.

There was a gasping howl from the old gentleman, and he disappeared feet first into the river.

Two or three of his servants, who were preparing to follow him, held back. They were not looking for a ducking.

"Come on," called out Monty Lowther, brandishing the boathook. "Come on, you giddy river pirates!"

"Yaas, wathah! We're weady."

"I say, where's the old gent?" exclaimed Tom Merry.

"There he is!"

"Oh, my hat! He can't swim!"

The colonel had come up a dozen yards down the current. His hands were clutching at the empty air, and he went down again.

"Gweat Scott! He will be ddowned!" ejaculated Arthur Augustus. The junior realised the old gentleman's danger.

"Bai jove!"

Tom Merry flung off his straw hat and ran along the boat. In a second more he had dived into the river.

"Bwavo, deah boy!"

"Go it, Tommy!" panted Lowther.

The crew of the launch had realised that the old gentleman was in danger now. The threatened conflict was suspended. All eyes were on Tom Merry.

Tom cleft the water like an arrow. He was under it now, and the watching eyes grew keen and anxious. He came up—not alone. A red face, with a beaky nose and a white moustache, came up with him.

"He's got him!"

"Hurrah!"

"Pull, you beggars, pull!" shouted Lowther.

The boat glided alongside the struggling swimmer. The colonel was unconscious now, and Tom Merry was keeping his head above water. Monty Lowther leaned over and grasped the insensible man's collar.

"Got him, Tommy."

"Yaas, wathah, and I've got you, deah boy," panted Arthur Augustus, catching Tom Merry by the hair.

"Yaroooh!"

"It's all wight, deah boy, I've got you."

"Ow, wow! Leggo!"

Lowther and Dig hauled the colonel into the boat. Arthur Augustus was doing his best to haul Tom Merry in, with both hands firmly fixed in Tom's rather thick curly locks. Tom Merry got one hand on the gunwale and



held on, while he delivered a hefty punch with the other. Arthur Augustus sat down in the boat with startling suddenness and a loud yell.

Then Tom Merry clambered in.

"Bai Jove! You punched my nose, Tom Mewwy!" yelled Arthur Augustus. "If that is how you treat a chap who is savin' your life—"

"You silly image!" bawled Tom Merry. "I've a jolly good mind to punch it again for yanking my hair out by the roots."

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—"

"Fathead!" roared Tom.

"Bai Jove! I shall wefuse to save your life again, Tom Mewwy, in any circumstances whatèvah," exclaimed Arthur Augustus indignantly.

"You'd better, unless you want your silly nose flattened," growled Tom Merry, rubbing his head.

Colonel Griggs sat up in the boat in a pool of water and spluttered.

"Groogh! What—what—what—"

"All serene, sir," said Monty Lowther cheerily. "You're not dead yet."

"Grooogh! Oooooch!"

The colonel blinked round him. For some moments he did not seem to understand what had happened, but it dawned on him at last. Tom Merry was wringing the water out of his clothes.

"I—I fell into the river!" spluttered the colonel.

"You stepped in, sir," said Lowther. "It was quite a neat dive, but you started wrong end first."

"Who got me out?" The colonel blinked at Tom Merry. "You, I suppose?"

Tom Merry nodded.

"By gad! I might have been drowned," said the colonel soberly.

"You jolly well would have been if Tommy hadn't gone in for you," said Manners. "You'd sunk twice."

"Ah! Hem! Gad! Hum!"

The colonel seemed rather at a loss.

CHAPTER 8.

Bunter Tows!

"THAT'S Shillingford Bridge."

"Any sign of Bunter's giddy house-boat?"

"Where's the jolly old house-boat, Bunter?"

Billy Bunter blinked at the bridge, and at the bank, and at the St. Jim's juniors.

"The fact is, you fellows—" he began.

"Yes, let's hear the facts," said Monty Lowther. "Bunter's the fellow who knows about facts—all about facts. He never deals in anything else. Trot out the facts, Bunter."

"The—the fact is—"

"Lord Bunter has lent the house-boat to one of his titled relations?" suggested Monty. "Is that it?"

"Oh, really, Lowther—"

"Or has he sold it to get his Waterbury watch down the spout?"

"Look here, you cheeky rotter—"

"Anyhow, it's not here," said Monty. "But perhaps the Rolls-Royce car is waiting, with a dozen or two liveried menials. Anyhow, Bunter goes on shore here."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"The fact is, you fellows—I—I—I don't really want to get out at Shillingford, you know."

"Yes, we know!" grunted Herries.

"When I said Shillingford, I really meant Oxford," explained Bunter.

"You generally say Shillingford when you mean Oxford?" asked Lowther. "Do you say Peckham Rye when you mean Cambridge?"

"Oh, really, you know—"

"Good-bye, Bunter."

"I think you fellows might take me on as far as Day's Lock, as my friends are waiting for me there," said Bunter.

ANOTHER GRAND HOLIDAY YARN NEXT WEEK—

"RUCTIONS ON THE RIVER!"

By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

BE SURE YOU READ IT!

"Sorry you've lost your horsewhip, sir," said Monty Lowther, with satirical politeness. "It's somewhere in the river. Perhaps we might be able to find it for you."

"Never mind the horsewhip," said the colonel hastily.

"I—I— You're a mob of cheeky young rascals, but—but—"

"We're sorry we camped on your land last night," said Tom Merry. "It was a mistake—we were taken in by a fat rotter who told us he had got us permission to camp. We didn't know you were the owner when we ducked you."

"We apologise for havin' inadvertently twansgessed, sir," said Arthur Augustus, with dignity.

The colonel stood up.

"You've saved my life," he said. "I think I owe you an apology, too. You're welcome to camp on my land any time you like, and I'll always be glad to see you. Give me your fist, young 'un."

Tom Merry smiled and shook hands with the colonel. Then the old gentleman was helped back on the launch, which throbbed away down the river.

"All's well that ends well," said Monty Lowther, with a grin. "It was thoughtful of you to weigh in with an heroic stunt just then, Tommy. The colonel seems more pleased with this ducking than with the other one."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I say, you fellows, I was just going in for him," said Bunter. "There was really no need for you to butt in like that, Tom Merry."

Arthur Augustus turned on Bunter.

"Dwy up, Buntah."

"Oh, really, D'Arcy—"

"Dwy up!"

"Look here—"

"If you uttah nothah word, Buntah, I shall punch your nose!" said Arthur Augustus, and he clenched his noble fist for the purpose.

Billy Bunter did not utter the other word.

"Your friends are so jolly elusive," said Lowther, shaking his head. "At Day's Lock it may turn out that they've shifted further up the river to Abingdon."

"Well, they might have," said Bunter cautiously. "But I don't mind keeping on the boat as far as Abingdon."

"Oh! You don't mind?" ejaculated Lowther.

"Not at all, old chap. It's not the kind of craft I'm accustomed to on a holiday; but I can rough it."

"We can't let you," said Lowther. "An elegant, expensive and estimable young aristocrat like you, Bunter, ought not to rough it among common people."

"Wathah not," chuckled Arthur Augustus.

"And the fact is—as you're so fond of facts—we're fed up," added Lowther. "I put that to the meeting. Those who are fed up with Bunter will please signify the same in the usual way."

"Fed up!" chorused the crew of the Old Bus.

"He, he, he!"

"What are you cackling at, you fat image?"

"Your little joke," chuckled Bunter. "He, he, he! I don't mind a joke. I say, you fellows, it's getting very sunny. You might put up the awning for me."

"Chuck him out!" said Herries.

"If I'm not welcome here, I'm prepared to go," said Bunter, with dignity. "I shall expect the return of my fifteen shillings first."

"Your what?" roared Herries.

"My fifteen shillings," said Bunter firmly. "You can't expect me to pay old Griggs fifteen shillings for your camping if you're not going to give me a lift as far as Day's."

"You never paid old Griggs anything!" raved Herries. "You embezzled the ten bob we trusted you with."

"Oh, really, Herries—"

"Bai Jove, I weally think that Buntah is the limit," said Arthur Augustus, gazing in wonder at the Owl of Greyfriars. "But if the fat boundah weally wants to

land at Day's, it's only a couple of miles. Let it go at that."

"If you put it like that, D'Arcy, I decline to remain on the boat another minute."

"Well, I do put it like that, Buntah."

"He, he, he! What a chap you are for little jokes, Gussy?"

"If that fat blighter is sticking with us as far as Day's, he's going to do his share of the towing," said Herries determinedly.

"Yaas, that's only failh."

"I'd tow you with pleasure," said Bunter. "But the fact is, owing to my night's rest being spoiled, I feel a bit tired. I think I'll take a nap while you fellows tow."

"I think not," said George Herries, taking up the boat-hook. "I think you're going to tow, or you're going to take your hook."

"Or our hook," said Monty. "Your own hook, Bunter, or the boat-hook."

"Of course, I'll tow you fellows with pleasure. I was just going to offer, when Herries mentioned the matter so rudely. One thing I never could stand was slacking."

"Well, here's the rope!" growled Herries.

Bunter went ashore with the rope, his little round eyes gleaming behind his big spectacles. He was not keen on towing. It was not really hard work; but it bore a resemblance to work, and Bunter hated anything that even looked like work. His plans for spending the remainder of the vacation on the Old Bus did not include towing.

"Well, even that fat bounder may be useful," remarked Manners, as the Old Bus moved on again.

"Yaas, wathah!"

But even yet the St. Jim's juniors did not quite know their Bunter. The Owl of Greyfriars marched on with the tow-rope, Manners steering the Old Bus. It was easy enough to steer the boat clear of the bank, allowing for the pull of the tow-rope, in ordinary circumstances. It was not easy when Bunter was towing.

"Look out!" shouted Tom Merry suddenly.

Bunter blinked round.

"What's the matter now?"

"You're dragging us into the bank!"

"That's Manners' rotten steering."

"I'll give you rotten steering, you cheeky frog!" roared Manners wrathfully.

"You're giving it now," retorted Bunter. "For goodness' sake, if you can't steer straighter than that, get out and let somebody else steer! I'll come and steer if you like!"

"You'll tow!" roared Herries. "And if you don't tow right, I'll come out to you with the boat-hook!"

"Yah!"

With that elegant rejoinder, Bunter towed on. Manners steered with a set, grim face, and Tom Merry fended off with an oar. But Billy Bunter was not to be beaten. He got the rope round a tree, and pulled on, in apparent ignorance of the fact. The boat's nose shot shoreward, and tried to climb into the rushes.

"Stop!" roared Tom Merry.

"Oh cwumbs!" gasped Arthur Augustus, as he sat down suddenly in the boat. "Look out, you fellows! Ow! I've struck my elbow against somethin'!"

"You burbling ass!" said Dig sulphurously. "It's my nose!"

"Bunter, you fat villain!" yelled Tom Merry. "You've got the rope round a tree, you thundering ass!"

"You fellows seem to be doing a lot of grousing," said Bunter. "If you don't like my towing, come and tow yourselves!"

"I'm going to lick him!" howled Herries.

Herries clambered ashore with the boat-hook, and a deadly look on his face. There was a shout from a boat towing down. Bunter freed his rope and bolted on, not liking Herries' look, and still less the look of the boat-hook. Frantic yells came from the other boat, as the lines were entangled.

A still more frantic yell rose from Bunter, as Herries reached him with a boat-hook. He let go the rope and jumped away.

"Can't you kids look where you're going?" came in a roar from the other party. "Never been on a river before? Never towed anything bigger than a tub on Hampstead Ponds?"

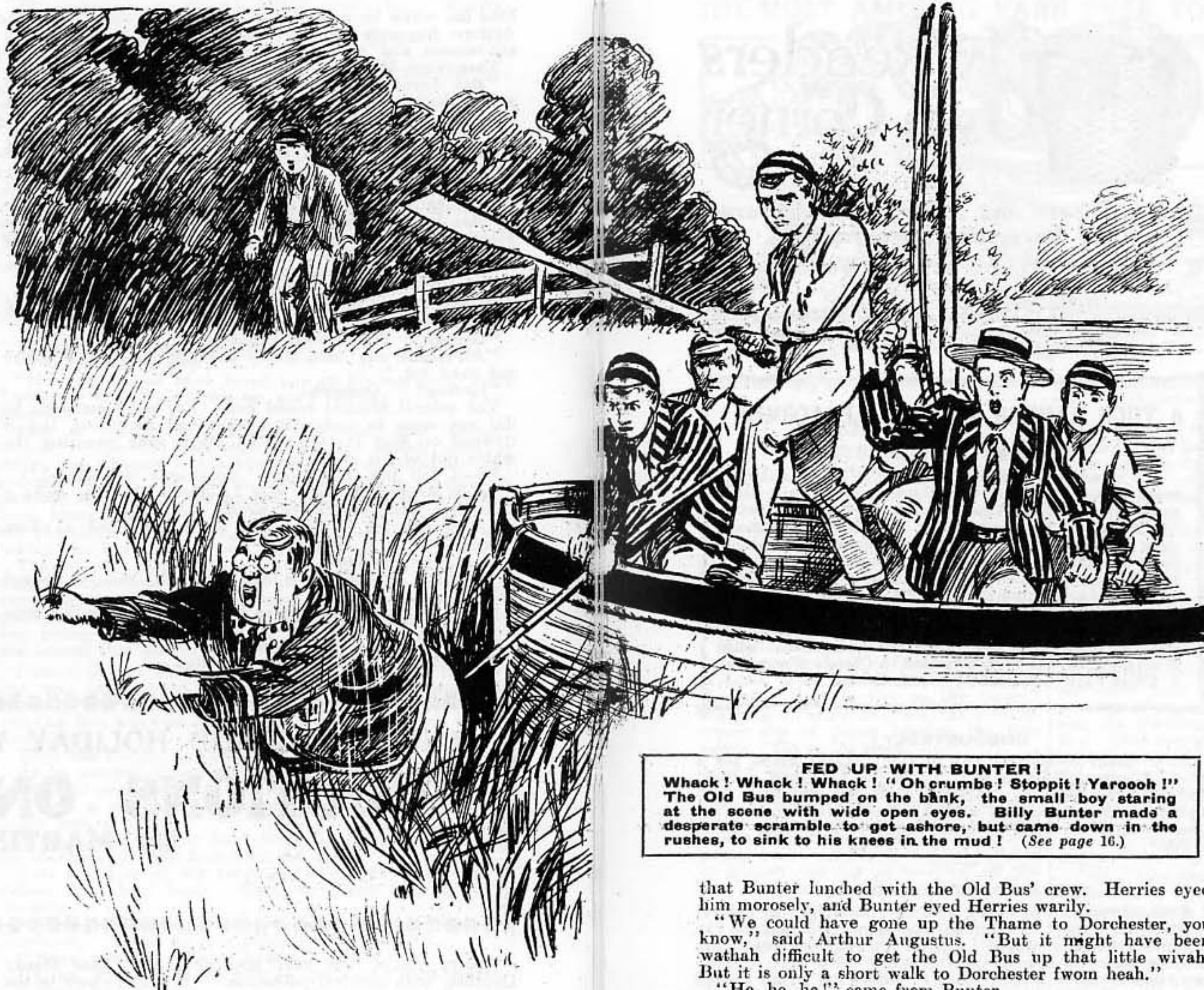
"Weally, my good man—"

"Get that rope away!"

The lines were disentangled at last. After that, Tom Merry & Co. decided that they would not rely upon Bunter to tow the Old Bus any more. His assistance was really more trouble than it was worth. Billy Bunter, eyeing Herries warily, edged towards the Old Bus. Tom Merry and Lowther took the tow-rope. Herries took the boat-hook again, and eyed Bunter.

"Coming on board?" he asked.

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FED UP WITH BUNTER!
Whack! Whack! Whack! "Oh crumbs! Stoppit! Yaroooh!" The Old Bus bumped on the bank, the small boy staring at the scene with wide open eyes. Billy Bunter made a desperate scramble to get ashore, but came down in the rushes, to sink to his knees in the mud! (See page 16.)

"Yes, old chap!"
"Do!" said Herries. "I'm waiting for you."
"I—I say, you fellows—"
"Come on!" said Herries invitingly.
Bunter did not accept the invitation. It was only too evident that George Herries was longing to exercise the boat-hook upon his fat person. The Owl of Greyfriars decided to keep on the towpath.
"Good-bye, Bunter!" called out Tom Merry cheerily, as the Old Bus moved on.
"I'll trot with you fellows as far as Day's!" said Bunter.
"Don't trouble!" said Lowther.
"No trouble at all, old chap!"
And Bunter trotted on.

**CHAPTER 9.
Bunter's Farewell!**

"WE ought to have a look at the Woman wuins!"
"The which?"
"The Woman wuins, deah boys!"
"Oh, the Roman ruins!" said Tom Merry.
"I'd rather have a look at lunch."
"Yaas, but aifah lunch, you know. There are the remains of a thungummy and a huge what-do-you-call-it," said Arthur Augustus impressively. "We weally ought not to miss those, and it is not fah."
The Old Bus had stopped under wide-spreading trees at Day's Lock, and their thoughts were chiefly centred on lunch. Billy Bunter had arrived with the party. His friends did not seem to be in sight; but he had told Tom Merry that he was going to look for them after lunch. By that time Bunter's rascality of the night before had almost faded from Tom's mind, and somehow it was understood

the towpath to the spot where the boat had been left moored, with William George Bunter in it. They were inclined to rub their eyes when they looked for the Old Bus. For the Old Bus was conspicuous by its absence—and so was William George Bunter.

"That silly ass has moved the boat!" growled Herries.

"Well, he can't have moved it far," said Tom Merry, puzzled. "Blessed if I know why the thump he's moved it at all. He can't have taken it through the lock."

"Hullo, who's this merchant?"

The "merchant" was a riverside lounge, who came up to the juniors and touched a rugged cap.

"One of you young gents Mr. Merry?" he asked.

"Yes," said Tom. "What—"

"Then I've got a letter for you. The young gent said you'd give me 'arf-a-crown for delivering it. I've waited 'ere more'n hour."

"What on earth does it mean?" said Tom, in wonder.

"Was it a fat chap in specs that gave you the letter?"

"That's it, afore he started."

"Started!" exclaimed Tom. "Give me the letter."

"The young gent said 'arf-a-crown—"

Tom Merry handed over half-a-crown, and received the letter. It was scrawled in pencil on a page torn out of a pocket-book, and folded. The seven juniors read it together. It was an interesting document.

"You rotters! You treated me rottenly, and I refuse to have anything more to do with you. I regard you all with contempt. I'm going to borrow your boat for a time. I think I am entitled to borrow it after all I've done for you. I never expect grattitude, but this is too thick, and I'm disgusted with you. I'll send the boat back sunbaw after the vac.—Yores with kontempt and skorn."
"W. G. BUNTER."

Tom Merry & Co. stared at that precious document blankly. It almost took their breath away.

"Borrowed our boat!" stuttered Tom, at last.

"To be returned at the end of the vac!" said Blake.

"Why, I'll—I'll burst him!"

"Bai Jove! This weally is the mewwy limit!"

"I'll squash him!" roared Herries. "That's why he offered to mind the boat—he meant to sneak it all the time!"

Tom Merry crumpled the letter in his hand. He ran after the man who had delivered it.

"How long ago did he start—the chap who gave you that letter?" he asked breathlessly.

"About an hour and a narf."

"Down the river?"

"Yes."

"Thanks!"

Tom Merry lost no time. There were plenty of boats for hire; and in a very short space of time a four-oar was out on the Thames, with Tom Merry, and Manners, Lowther and Blake pulling, and Digby steering. Arthur Augustus and Herries watched the river for the Old Bus.

Bunter had had a good start, but it was pretty certain that he would rely chiefly on the current; he was not given to exertion. The juniors had little doubt of overtaking him.

Four oars flashed rythmically, and the pursuing skiff fairly flew. Down the river went the seven juniors at a spanking pace, and keen eyes watched for the Old Bus.

Seven juniors boiled with wrath, and promised William George Bunter all kinds of things when they caught him. And they had no doubt of catching him, being prepared to trail him as far as London Bridge or Canvey Island if they did not catch him sooner. Fortunately, the chase was not likely to be so long as that.

"Bai Jove! There's the Old Bus!" shouted Arthur Augustus suddenly, waving his eyeglass in his excitement.

"There she is!" roared Herries.

"Hurrah!"

"Pull away, you chaps! Put your beef into it!"

The four oarsmen tugged at the oars. Ahead, floating at a very leisurely pace down the Thames, was the familiar Old Bus. William George Bunter could be seen sitting at the lines. On the shore a small boy walked with the tow-rope. Tom Merry & Co. came on behind with a rush.

Bunter's voice was heard as they came within range.

"Get a move on, there!" he was shouting to his small tower. "If you want that shilling you'll have to put in some work! Do you think I'm going to give you a shilling to loaf about on a towpath?"

The St. Jim's juniors ceased to row, and the skiff shot alongside the Old Bus with its own impetus. Monty Lowther caught on with a boat-hook, and Blake and Herries with their hands. Billy Bunter turned an angry blink upon them.

Another Long Laugh
Next Week—
"Ructions on the River!"
By Martin Clifford.
Don't Miss It!

"Keep clear, can't you! What do you mean by— Oh crumbs! You—you—you fellows! Oh!"

Bunter's round eyes grew rounder with alarm behind his big spectacles as he recognised the St. Jim's party.

"I—I say, you fellows—" he gasped.

"Caught you!" roared Herries.

"I—I say—I—I—I— Keep off, you beasts!" roared Bunter. "The—the boat drifted away, you know, and—and I came in it, you know—"

"We got your letter!" howled Herries.

"Oh, that—that was only a joke!" gasped Bunter. "I—I never meant to bag your boat, of course. I—I wouldn't! I—I haven't finished up the grub—it—it got lost overboard, in a—a storm. I—I give you my word that I wasn't going to sell anything out of the boat to raise the wind—I never even thought of it. I—I— Yarooop!"

Whack! Whack! Whack!

"Yow-ow-ow! Help! Murder! Police! Fire! Whoop!" Whack! Whack! Whack!

"Oh crumbs! Stoppit! Yaroooh!"

The Old Bus bumped on the bank, the small boy staring at the scene with wide eyes. Billy Bunter made a desperate scramble to get ashore. He came down in rushes and shallows, and sunk to his knees in mud, and yelled wildly.

"Yow-ow-ow! Help a fellow out! Oh crumbs!"

"Let me get at him with this boathook!" gasped Herries. "Yaroooh!"

Bunter found that he could scramble out without help. With the boathook jabbing behind, he scrambled up the bank roaring.

"Good-bye, Bunter!" chortled Monty Lowther.

"Yaroooh!"

The Terrible Three jumped ashore and took the tow-ropes from the small boy. Arthur Augustus tossed the youth half-a-crown; it was exceedingly doubtful whether the small tower would ever have succeeded in extracting his promised shilling from Bunter. Then the hired boat was tied on behind the Old Bus, and Tom Merry & Co. started up the river again.

Bunter sat on the towpath, in a pool of mud and water, and watched them.

"I say, you fellows," he howled. "You're not going to leave me behind, are you? I say, I'm wet."

"We'll make you wetter!" snorted Herries. "Duck him."

"Yaas, wathah!"

Billy Bunter jumped up.

"I—I say, you fellows— Oh crumbs! Keep off!" The Owl of Greyfriars fled down the towpath at a wonderful speed, considering the weight he had to carry. His thudding footsteps died away in the distance, and William George Bunter vanished from the sight of Tom Merry & Co.—gone from their gaze like an unbeautiful dream!

What became of Billy Bunter, Tom Merry & Co. did not know—and did not care. They were done with him, they knew that; and that was all they cared about. The Old Bus floated through Day's Lock, and resumed her voyage up the river—minus Bunter.

THE END.

(Another screamingly funny story of Tom Merry & Co. in next week's bumper issue of the GEM, entitled "RUCTIONS ON THE RIVER!" By Martin Clifford. Make sure you order your copy well in advance.)

THINK OF IT!

First Prize £100	100 Footballs
Second Prize £50	100 Fishing Rods
30 Motor Cycles	6 Billiard Tables
10 Wireless Sets	20 Steam Engines
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20 Gramophones	100 Pairs Roller Skates

MUST BE WON

in our new and easy Football Competition which will appear shortly in the "GEM."

This offers

THE CHANCE OF A LIFETIME!

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Tuck Hampers and Money Prizes Awarded for Interesting Paragraphs.

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All Efforts in this Competition should be Addressed to: The GEM LIBRARY, "My Readers' Own Corner," Gough House, Gough Square, London, E.C.4.

A TUCK HAMPER GOES TO ILFRACOMBE!

MONEY BANNED!

The street was the football ground; the goals were marked with old tins; and the teams were six little ragamuffins a side. One boy was much smarter with the ball than his companions, and in a very short time had succeeded in kicking a goal between the place marked by the two tins. A gentleman, wishing to reward him, called him and asked if he would like a box of sweets or a sixpence. "Let's have the sweets, mister, please," was the reply, "cos if I takes the tanner I shall be a pro, and I don't want to be one of them yet!"—A Tuck Hamper filled with delicious tuck has been awarded to Claude Slocombe, 6, Cross Park, Ilfracombe, North Devon.

UNDOUBTEDLY!

At a recent by-election one of the speakers asked for a glass of water. "To drink?" asked the chairman. "Oh, no," said the speaker. "After I have been speaking half-an-hour I shall be taking a high dive!"—Half-a-crown has been awarded to R. Fraser, 8, James Street, Long Road, Leeds.

NOT SO DENSE AFTER ALL!

A school-master was angry with his class. He had not yet received an answer to his many questions. "If anyone can ask me a question which I cannot answer," he announced after a time, "I'll give him sixpence." Up rose a small boy, and asked in a shrill voice: "Why am I like a dead horse?" The master confessed himself beaten. "Because I'm waiting for the 'tanner'!" smiled the youth, holding out his hand.—Half-a-crown has been awarded to H. Hughes, 41, Arnold Street, Mountain Ash.

A QUICK RETORT!

A Yorkshireman and an Irishman were looking for work, and eventually struck lucky in a timber-yard. Soon they were busy moving some planks of wood from one hut to another some distance away. The Yorkshireman was taking two planks every journey, while the Irishman was only taking one. The foreman, noticing this, asked Pat why he was not taking two planks at a time. "Begorra," said Pat, "can't you see that yon chap is too lazy to make two journeys, so he takes 'em both at once!"—Half-a-crown has been awarded to W. A. Grainger, 154, Falsgrave Road, Scarborough.

DISAPPOINTED!

"Football again!" exclaimed Tommy's mother, shaking her hand in the lad's face. "Didn't I tell you I wouldn't have you playing again? Now off with those boots and off to bed this minute! There's no supper for you to-night!" Tommy glanced at the table. "Do you mean to say you did not see me waving my arms and calling you at the back gate an hour ago?" continued the irate mother. "You rascal!" Poor Tommy crept up to bed, trying to forget that he had felt hungry. "If that ain't 'ard luck!" he muttered, as he pulled the bedclothes over him. "Blowed if I didn't think she was applauding that great goal I scored!"—Half-a-crown has been awarded to M. Lowson, 95, Gilmour Street, Thornaby-on-Tees.

(Continued on page 27.)

THE MOST AMUSING YARN EVER TOLD!

IT'S TOPPING!



A screamingly Funny Story describing how the resourceful young Billy Burton, with the aid of his staunch chum, Michael McAndrew, constructs a boat.

CHAPTER 1.

In Difficulties!

BILLY BURTON had found a book on how to build a boat. It appeared to be quite an easy task. In fact, the book assured him that anyone who could saw a piece of wood or hit a nail with a hammer could build a boat good enough for sea or stream, provided—this is where the catch came in—the sum of five shillings was sent for the detailed plans.

Billy hesitated. You see, Billy had once been tempted to send sixpence in response to an advertisement which was headed, "How to Get on the Stage." All he got for his sixpence was a badly-typed slip of paper bearing the four words, "Go up the steps."

Five shillings is a lot of money to a boy of twelve, but his imagination was fired by the thought of owning a boat. There was an excellent river within a mile of his home, where a number of sailing-boats were kept, and he pictured to himself the joy of carrying off the Cup at the annual regatta.

Billy's special chum, Michael McAndrew, lived next door, and he was very handy with tools. Between them Billy was sure they could build a boat. There was plenty of wood at the bottom of the garden. Billy's father had recently taken down a house to build a new workshop, and the floor-boards would make splendid planking.

At first Michael—or Mike, as he was called—was doubtful whether they could do all Billy thought. Mike's little brother, Marmaduke, was sure that Billy's boat could be made in a week. Still Mike looked wise and uncertain.

"All you've got to do," said Billy enthusiastically, turning to a particular page in his book, "is to make a few frames like this, and then bend the planks round them and knock in the nails."

"What colour shall we paint it?" asked Marmaduke excitedly.

"White!" replied the prospective skipper.

"Black with a gold line is how the pirates were painted," said Mike.

"Will it be a lugger, Billy?" asked Marmaduke.

"No, a sloop!"

"Gee! Three masts!"

"No; one mast, you noodle!"

"Sloops of war had three masts!"

And in similar strains the boys discussed the ship that was to be.

That night they sent five shillings by post. Of this amount Billy contributed three-and-sixpence, Mike one shilling, and Marmaduke sixpence.

In due course the plans arrived—rolls of blue prints that were disappointing to

the boys, who thought that samples of wallpaper had been sent in mistake.

No room in the house was big enough to permit the prints to be laid out, so the budding boat-builders carried them out on to the lawn. A high wind was blowing, and little Marmaduke got mixed up in the whirling sheet which the two elder boys were struggling to lay flat on the ground.

Billy took one of the planks which was to form part of the gallant ship and laid it over one end of the giant plan, and Mike did the same at the other end.

Little Marmaduke was underneath, but the other boys did not know that the moving bulge in the centre of the plan was the crawling form of the younger boy. They thought it was the wind, and so they promptly fell upon it to flatten it out. A howl quickly told them that they had made a mistake, especially as Marmaduke's head came through the torn paper.

"What are you doing there, you clown?" exclaimed Mike, somewhat angry.

"He's torn the plan!" shrieked Billy in alarm.

Between them they pulled the troublesome child out of the plan, which was then caught by the wind and carried upwards, to sail over their heads and into the next-door garden. Unfortunately Mike's garden was not on that side of Billy's home. Billy's other neighbour was a fussy old gentleman, who took exception to a sheet of paper wrapping itself round him. He was weeding his garden when the precious plan descended upon him. He struck at it with his little fork; then he stepped backwards, tipped over his watering-can, and fell heavily upon his favourite seedlings.

Billy and Mike clambered over the wall and went to the rescue, but by the time they had separated the excited old gentleman and their plan, the latter appeared to be in a very dilapidated condition, especially after both boys had aspired to the honour of taking it back over the wall, with their irate neighbour in chase. The plan arrived back in two portions, both badly creased.

"Never mind, Billy," said Mike, as they stood looking at the damaged sheets. "We'll soon mend it."

"You young rascals!" spluttered the gentleman next door, his head looking like a bladder on the top of the wall. "If you come into my garden again I'll fetch the police to you!"

The boys were pretending to study the plan.

"Silly old josser!" growled Billy beneath his breath.

"Drat the wind!" muttered Mike.

There was much sawing of wood that day; in fact, too much, as Billy found

when he discovered that he had sawn one of the kitchen chairs, which he had been using as a bench. It took him quite a long time to fill the gap with putty and to paint it so that the saw-cut did not show.

By the time night fell several of the frames were made, and, while they were not quite in accordance with the plans, the committee of three decided that they were near enough, although they realised that perhaps the boat would be a little lopsided.

Then came the making of the tapered stem-post and the transom stern. The boat was now actually commenced, and better workmanship was demanded.

Billy sawed and sawed again, until his arms ached and his shirt was wet through with perspiration.

Mike planed and still planed until he was in a similar condition.

Marmaduke did a great deal of fetching and carrying, until his white suit was black and his face and hands matched it.

Three tired boys went to bed that night aching in every limb, and next morning they were so stiff in the joints that work for the day was suspended.

They discussed the name of the ship that was to be, and they went into details as to how they would take it to the water; then they sketched out its sail plan and rigging.

The next day they resumed their labour with renewed vigour.

Building a boat is a serious business, as will be agreed by anyone who has tried to bend floor-boards to describe a part of a circle. It was an easy matter to nail the boards on to the edge of the transom stern, but to make them follow the frames and to meet at the stern was quite another question.

Backwards and forwards the two boys staggered with the planks and the frames, Marmaduke giving assistance sometimes to Billy and sometimes to Mike. There was Mike pressing against a creaking board in one direction, and Billy, with the end of the other plank against his stomach, struggling to reach his chum. By concerted action they approached each other slowly, and soon Billy could reach out his hands and grasp Mike's outstretched fists. It looked as if they would do it this time, but—

"Oh, I say!" cried Marmaduke. "Look at the lawn!"

They did look, relaxing their efforts for a moment to do so; and away from each other they slithered, to sink exhausted on to the grass.

"Look at the lawn!" repeated Marmaduke.

"What's the matter with it?" gasped

Billy. Then he saw what was disconcerting Mike's little brother.

Several pieces of the smooth green turf were missing, and all around there were ruts and marks as if a tractor had been over it.

EXTRA SPECIAL

For Next Week—

"Gee!" exclaimed Billy, glancing round to see if his father or mother were in sight.

"Now what we want to do—" commenced Mike.

"What we want to do is to put the lawn straight," said Billy, with an anxious expression on his freckled face. "Let's take the boat down to the bottom of the garden."

"Your pa will be cross!" piped Marmaduke.

"Go and lose yourself!" snapped the prospective captain.

Between them they speedily transferred the good ship to the new ship-building yard behind the bean-sticks, then they hurriedly returned to the lawn to carry out much-needed repairs.

This new work was very like fitting together a jigsaw puzzle against time. Each boy took a piece of loose lawn and went round, carefully examining each bare patch to see if it fitted. This proved quite an interesting game until Marmaduke found a hole to fit his particular piece of lawn, which Billy maintained belonged to the turf for which he was endeavouring to find a home. Some argument resulted and little Marmaduke, like boys of his tender years, went crying to his mother, who promptly sent for Mike.

That was the last Billy saw of his two friends for that day. Mike had been ordered to take his little sister out for a walk as a punishment for something he had not done. These things happen in most young families, but it was particularly annoying to Billy to have the important work held up by domestic matters of this kind, especially as he had to finish patching the lawn without help.

CHAPTER 2.

The Principle of the Spring Board!

AFTER a brief consultation the next morning work was resumed with increased feverishness. It was decided to lay the plank on the ground with the frames, and to press the other plank towards the ground. This permitted all hands to give their weight in springing the board down to the stern post.

The plan worked excellently. With surprising ease the end of the plank was made to meet the member to which it had to be fastened; and, having got everything ready for nailing, Billy called out for the hammer and nails.

"Fetch them, Marmaduke," ordered Mike, both the elder boys keeping their full weight on the plank.

Marmaduke scuttled away, and stayed away for a very long time. At least, it seemed a long time to the two boys left hanging on to the springboard.

Billy asserts that he was away hours, but this is probably an exaggeration. However, he returned at last.

The waiting shipwrights sighed with relief and groped behind them for the hammer and nails.

"I couldn't find them," squeaked Marmaduke.

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"Aren't you just a blind owl!" growled his brother.

"Here!" snapped Billy. "Grab this and hold on while I go for the beastly things."

Marmaduke threw his whole weight on to the plank in the place of Billy, who disappeared to hunt up the missing requisites. Then from out of the bushes appeared the grisly head of the next-door dog.

Mike didn't like the dog next door. They had never been friends since the day the ferocious-looking animal kept Mike up an apple-tree in the old major's garden. Mike saw him coming, then heard him growl. He considered that was sufficient to justify him taking shelter on the rain-water tub.

Before he sprang for this elevated sanctuary, he forgot what might happen if he suddenly withdrew his weight from the bent plank. He did not see poor Marmaduke fly into the air over the garden wall and land in the same apple-tree that had taken Mike's fancy twelve months before.

There was a shower of small branches, leaves, and fruit, and from his position on the water-tub, Mike now saw his brother upside down among several pounds of codlins.

The dog, too, saw the rapid change in the enemy's position, and with a savage bark, leapt the wall and took up his guard below the unintentional aviator.

When Billy returned with the hammer and nails, he saw a vacant shipyard. From behind him came a whisper that

"THE BOY BACK!"

sounded as if it came from someone being strangled. Then, turning on his heel, he saw Mike on the water-tub, looking terrified, and pointing to the scene in the next-door garden.

"Look at Marmaduke!" gasped Mike.

Billy followed the direction of the trembling hand, and espied Marmaduke struggling in the apple-tree, a branch of which had inserted itself down the back of his breeches.

Billy ran to the wall, looked over, and retreated.

"Oh, lor!" he gasped, his eyes wandering from Marmaduke's red face to the pale countenance of his brother. "What's happened?"

With a savage growl the dog next door answered a more important question—what might happen?

Billy was quick to act. Motioning to Mike, he grasped one of the loose planks and raised it to the wall.

"Push it," he ordered Mike. "Push it into the tree!"

They pushed, and for a moment the plank swayed over the major's snapdragons, then caught in a fork of the branches, adding to the agitation of the dog, which was doing its best to advise its owner that there were trespassers abroad.

Clambering on to the wall, Billy started a hazardous journey along the plank, which he nearly completed. Unfortunately, he was in too much of a hurry, and half-way across the narrow springing bridge he slipped, made a grab at the air, and fell among the flowers.

The dog quickly decided that a boy on the ground was worth two in the air. Billy had no time to regain the wall. At the bottom of the garden he saw an open door leading into the back lane. It seemed easier to reach than the top of the

wall. He led off with less than a yard's start of the dog, and reached the doorway with the dog hanging on to his jacket. As he went down the lane the dog was sometimes in front, sometimes at the rear, and when it was neither at the front nor at the rear, it was swinging round at the sides. At the end of the lane a friendly chauffeur came to his assistance.

In the meantime, Mike had taken advantage of the absence of the enemy to crawl along the plank to his brother. At last he was able to rescue Marmaduke by detaching him from his breeches. Leaving the boy standing howling in his shirt, he returned to retrieve his garment.

Billy returned, examining his torn coat.

"Good job the major wasn't in the garden," was all he said, when he saw that Marmaduke was safe.

"At this rate we shall have the boat ready for Christmas—I don't think!" grumbled Mike.

"It was your fault," whimpered Marmaduke, fastening the last of his buttons. The struggle with the floor-boards was renewed, and finally, after Billy had hit his thumb, and Mike had torn his trousers on an unseen nail, the two top planks were made to meet, and their efforts resulted in something that really did look like a boat.

"Turn her over and let's have a look at her lines," ordered the chief boat builder. "Marmy, stand away from the bows—"

"I can't; you've nailed my tunic." "Drat the child!" exclaimed Mike. "You are always doing something silly."

"You told me to sit on it!" snivelled Marmaduke.

"Oh, don't cry; we've had enough of that!" snapped Billy, in disgust.

"We shall have to undo the boat to get him loose," murmured Mike, examining one piece of Marmaduke's tunic that had been trapped.

"Tear it," suggested the callous Billy. "No; ma will be cross!" shrieked the younger boy.

Billy, too, closely examined the cause of the trouble.

"If we got a chisel we might get it open enough," he said.

So they procured a chisel and proceeded to prise open the joint that held Marmaduke a prisoner. They succeeded so well that the board came clean away from the stem-post, and again demonstrated the principle of the spring board. Marmaduke shot into the air again; the plank caught Mike in the stomach, and sent him right among the beansticks.

Fortunately, Marmaduke did not go over the garden wall this time. In falling, he fell on Billy, knocked him over, and bounced on his waistline.

Marmaduke started his usual howl, and Billy opened his mouth to reproach him, but he found he could not speak. With open mouth he worked his jaws,

—GRAND FOOTER YARN

You Must Read it!

his eyes staring with surprise. He was winded.

Mike crawled out of the wreckage of a row of beans. He was making similar grimaces. He, too, had been winded when the plank struck him.

Looking first at one and then another, little Marmaduke forgot his own troubles in his surprise at the antics of the others.

"What's the matter with you two?" he asked.

Mike worked his face like a goldfish. Billy's facial contortions were more like those of a gudgeon.

"What's the matter?" Marmaduke asked again, just as Billy's mother called from the house.

"Billy!" she called softly.

No answer, although Billy did his best.

"Billy!" The voice was a little louder this time.

Still no answer.

Again the smaller boy motioned a negative; and without more ado Mrs. Burton caught Mike by the shoulder, and her own son by the arm, and hurried them to the house.

"Whoo!" gasped Mike, under pressure of the enforced exercise.

"G-g-g-g!" came from Billy.

In the kitchen, the two boys sat and struggled for words; and finally they came—and another day's work on the boat was done.

CHAPTER 3.

The Boat is Finished and Named!

THE boys had many adventures before the tortured wood really became a boat. Unfortunately, the weather changed, and it became necessary to transfer the planks and frames to an old coach-house before work could be resumed.

When they started all over again they had the advantage of their past experiences; and, as Mike said, if Marmaduke wanted to aviate he could not go very far with the roof being so low.

Slowly the boat took shape—it really did look like a boat! It was a boat, and the time came to paint it.

There was quite a lot of paint in various places. There was a big tin of white in the greenhouse, some red in

Unfortunately, they could not find any turpentine—and it's such expensive stuff to buy—but in the garage there were several tins of petrol, and a bottle of liquid that was supposed to be paraffin.

With the aid of these thinning media quite a lot of paint was made, and the boys started in with enthusiasm to get the work done. There was only one brush that would work; but Mike found a scrubbing-brush that offered possibilities, while Marmaduke discovered quite a nice shaving-brush in his father's dressing-room.

The boys worked hard, and quite a lot of the paint got on to the sides of the boat; but as much helped to brighten up the bricks on the floor, and not a little found its way on to the workers' hands, faces, and clothes.

"I like this biscuit colour," said Billy.

"It isn't biscuit; it's like the outside of bread," argued Mike.

Marmaduke thought it looked like toffee.

Now, each was right, for his particular part of the boat, because the paint had not been mixed properly; but, as Billy said when this was discovered, it did not matter much, because it would have to have several coats of paint before it was finished, and he thought his father might provide enough of one colour for the final coat.



As Mike withdrew his weight from the bent plank up shot poor Marmaduke into the air to land in the apple tree next door.

"Billy!" More sharply this time—and she hurried down the path. "Billy, why did you not answer?" she cried angrily.

Billy again imitated a hungry fish. "What is the matter with you? What is it, Mike?" She turned to her son's silent friend.

Mike did his level best to force words from his mouth.

"What ever is it, Marmy?"

Marmaduke shook his head. He had never before seen a boy who had been rendered speechless by a blow below the belt.

"Have they been fighting?" Billy's mother asked.

the garage, and several tins of brown in the kitchen, because Billy's father had intended repainting the woodwork, but changed his mind and had it dis-tempered.

With so many colours of varying quantities it was not an easy matter to decide how the boat was to be painted. Mike solved the problem by suggesting that they mixed them all together.

But mixing paint is one of the arts of a house decorator. As the boys emptied first one and then another of the paints into a borrowed bucket, and vigorously stirred it with a stick, the paint changed from one colour to another.

While they worked they discussed the name. The naming ceremony, to be performed by Billy's sister, was to be on the morrow, and the name had not been finally decided upon.

"I think Fishy is a good name for a yacht," murmured Mike.

"Fishy! Rats!" snorted Billy.

"I mean when it's spelt with a 'P,'" explained the young Greek scholar.

"What? P-h-i-s-h-y!" spelled the yacht owner.

"No. P-h— No. I know there's a 'c' in it," mumbled Mike. "I remember seeing it on a boat and also on a picture."

"You mean Pysche!" growled Billy. "Well, neither of us can spell it, so that won't do."

"Call her the Pussy Cat," suggested Marmaduke, pausing in his work to wipe the dripping paint from his elbow.

"No; it ought to be a girl's name," said Billy decidedly.

"Why not Muriel?" muttered Mike, his head bending closer over his work, as he named Billy's sister.

"Rats! She's conceited enough as it is! Supposing we make it Peggy?"

"What, that red-headed cat?" almost screamed Mike, who had no respect for his cousin.

"She's not a red-headed cat! Your cousin is a jolly nice girl when you don't tease her."

And so they argued, arriving at no decision until the day was done; and then it was settled that the good ship should be named Wendy, after the little girl in "Peter Pan."

It was the outside of the boat that was treated with the paint, but, owing to the seams being a little open, the interior got its full share. Although the paint refused to set immediately all the mixture had been used up, it was decided to hold the christening ceremony.

Several chairs were fetched from the kitchen and conservatory and arranged in front of the boat. A bottle containing water for the christening was hung from the rafters. It was intended that Billy's sister should swing the bottle against the vessel's bows, and so break it, to splash the liquid where the name was to be.

Quite a distinguished company attended the ceremony. There was Billy's mother, and Billy's aunt, in addition to Billy's sister; Mike's mother and cousin also consented to attend, and all were accommodated with chairs, while at their backs stood the maids and the cook, and the McAndrew chauffeur.

Billy's sister had been instructed in the art of christening ships, so, without any of the usual preliminary speeches, she proceeded to do her duty.

"I name you Wendy, and may good luck attend you," she said, in a shrill voice, throwing the bottle with all her strength towards the boat.

"Missed!" yelled Billy, as the bottle came hurtling across the coach-house, to be pulled up with a jerk at the end of the string.

Mike ducked just in time to avoid a collision with the swinging bottle, as it made its return trip. As it swung by, the distinguished company also ducked, and with such good effect that Mrs. Burton and Mrs. McAndrew toppled over.

It was the chauffeur who caught the truant bottle and replaced it in Muriel's hand; and the chauffeur also assisted the ladies to their seats again, and presently order was restored.

"Do I say it again?" asked Billy's sister.

"Of course you do!" snapped the chief boat-builder. "And aim straight this time."

Muriel giggled and wriggled and fiddled with her hair.

Billy's sister showed her tongue between her teeth, she closed one eye, and raised the bottle again.

"Don't chuck it!" shrieked Billy. "Just swing it!"

Muriel swung it with full force, as if it were a ball, and she were aiming at a coconut. This time the bottle did not miss. With a heavy thud it struck the boat, removing paint, and shattering one of the mouldings that had been nailed there with such care by the young boat-builders, but the bottle remained intact, and not a drop of water was spilled.

"I forgot to say it," shrieked Muriel, as Billy dived forward to see what damage was done.

The ladies seemed to think it was a good game, and laughed heartily at the result. Unfortunately, Mrs. McAndrew was sitting on the chair that Billy had damaged and so cleverly mended; her laugh came to a sudden stop as the legs gave way and she sat down among the wreckage.

"Oh!" was the word that was jolted out by Mike's and Marmaduke's mother, and there was some delay in the christening proceedings while the maids and the chauffeur helped her to her feet.

Mrs. McAndrew, very red in the face, protested that she was not hurt the "tiniest weeniest bit," and seemed glad

that Billy and Muriel were having an argument.

"You'll break the boat with that bottle," he was saying, and Mike handed him another bottle, this time of the kind in which medicine is supplied.

"If you don't do it this time, Muriel, I'll do it myself," grumbled Billy.

At this attempt Muriel managed to break the bottle—against the rafters; but, as two or three spots of water reached the boat, Billy quickly announced that the deed was done.

Mike was rubbing his head and endeavouring to restrain his tears; for the greater part of the bottle had caught him on the crown. Mrs. Burton was busily engaged in dabbing the drops that had sprinkled her face, while Mrs. McAndrew was protesting that the water was not water at all, but some scent she had stored in the medicine bottle.

The boys were very glad to relieve themselves of their guests, who, to celebrate the occasion, adjourned to the house for cakes and tea. Billy suddenly thought of this when the boys had started to hold a committee meeting to decide what was to be done next, so it was unanimously decided that the next job was to do their share in the refreshment room.

It was the next day that the boat-builders started to remove the good ship Wendy from the shed. The weight was surprising for a boat so small, and the amount of paint on it, too, seemed superfluous, since fully half of it was still wet, and was transferred to the boys' clothes.

They puffed and panted as they pushed and pulled, but each boy had his own ideas as to what to do and when to do it. It took fully half an hour before they discovered that the door was narrower than the boat.

Billy looked at Mike with dismay written on his freckled face.

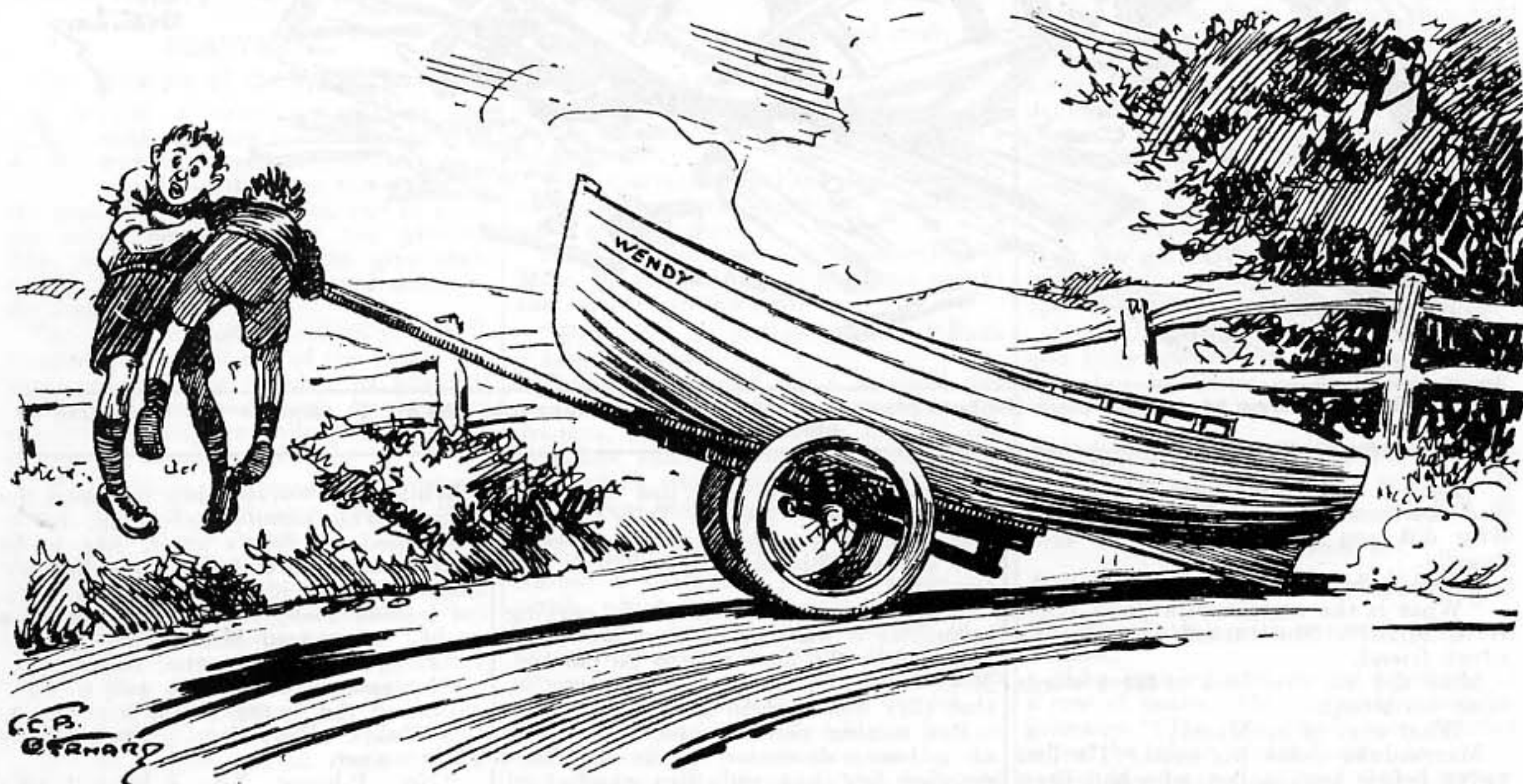
"What are you two making faces at?" squeaked Marmaduke.

Billy gulped. Mike gasped.

"We've got to take it to pieces again," groaned the chief boat-builder.

"Can't we knock the wall down?" whispered Mike huskily.

"The roof would fall in," murmured Billy.



Like fish at the end of a line, Billy and Marmaduke struggled in the air, while "Wendy" continued its mad career down the hill.

"We should have to prop it up, knock down the bricks, remove the door frame, take out the boat, stick up the bricks again, and there you are!"

"I don't think!" sneered Billy.

For another hour they struggled with the boat in the doorway, then in disgust they went for a bathe, to enjoy the water which it seemed would be denied the boat.

Judge of their surprise when they returned to find the boat outside the shed. The gardener was standing nearby, rubbing the paint from his apron.

"Drat the stuff!" he was saying.

"How did you do it?" queried Billy.

"I wanted to get that potting soil, Master Billy; I'll put the boat back when I've got it."

"You needn't trouble, thanks, Jenks," gasped Billy, covering his surprise with his lordly air.

"How did you get her outside?" asked Mike.

"I lifts her up and carries her out," answered the old man. He did not explain that all he had found necessary was to turn the boat on its side.

"Now we'll get it down to the river," said Billy.

"How?" asked Mike.

"There's four wheels belonging to that old car," suggested the shipwright. "All we've got to do is to fit them on a kind of hand-cart."

"With a long pole," added Mike.

"Like Boy Scouts," whispered Marmaduke excitedly.

But the boat did not go down to the river that day. Nearly a week was occupied in making a hand-cart and mending the punctures in the old tyres.

There is an end to everything, so finally the hand-cart and the boat were ready. The great day for the launching had arrived. The first task was to lift the boat on to the cart, which stood ready, with little Marmaduke at the pole.

"We'll hold up one end, and Marmy can push the cart under it," suggested Mike.

So, panting and wheezing, the two elder directors of the shipbuilding company raised the bow of the Wendy, and, on instructions, Marmaduke wheeled the cart under it. It was as much as the boys could do to hold the boat up while the cart was manoeuvred into position.

They placed it on the cart with rather more force than was intended, with the result that Marmaduke went sailing into the air at the end of the pole.

"Let me down!" he cried plaintively from the air.

"I've never met such a child," commented Billy, gazing up at the wriggling youngster.

Just then the weight of the boat started to push the cart. Mike threw his weight against it, but to no purpose; the cart continued to move until the boat fell off the end, and down came Marmaduke with a yell.

Fortunately for him, and unfortunately for Billy, the master boat-builder was underneath.

The next time, they fixed the pole to the garden roller. They could not get the boat right on to the cart without a great struggle, but their struggles were rewarded at last, and the yacht Wendy was on wheels, ready to be transported to its proper element.

Eager to see the boat afloat, they set off at once, the two elder boys hanging on to the cross-bar at the end of the pole in a manner suggesting that very little extra weight would be necessary to lift them into the air.

By way of the garden path and the back gate they reached the street, where a horse promptly took fright at the unusual sight. But that was not the worst;



As the hand-cart struck the parapet with a loud crash, Wendy shot off, scraped across the stonework and dived nose first into the water. Mike and Billy followed, turned a somersault, in the air, and then fell into the soft mud of the bank.

Mike's mother saw her two boys, in paint-stained clothes, struggling along the highway. As she was accompanied by the vicar's wife, she was indignant.

"Michael!" she exclaimed, with uplifted hands. "You cannot go out like that! Go in at once and change your clothes!"

"I can't, mother." Mike tried to explain that his weight was necessary on the pole.

"You naughty boy!" Mrs. McAndrew went on, catching him by the arm. "Go at once!" She shook Mike clear of the pole, and up into the air went Billy, with Marmaduke hanging on to his leg.

The ladies screamed as Mike made a spring at the pole. He missed, and as the wheeled Wendy was on a hill, she began to make the journey without assistance, her stern scraping along the smooth road.

Like fish at the end of a line Billy and Marmaduke continued to struggle in the air while Wendy gathered speed.

One tyre was flat, so the course of the hand-cart was not straight. Had there been nothing in the road no doubt Billy and Marmaduke would have finished up on the front lawn of the church. As it was, a wedding was in progress, and the two boys went to it—dangling in mid-air.

The chief actors in the ceremony had entered their carriage, when Wendy wedged itself between the two white horses. The bride's father, a portly gentleman in a white waistcoat, was standing at the church gate with an inane smile on his face and a thin lady in grey silk on his arm. The gentleman's smile had become so fixed during the proceedings that it was still there when Billy came sailing over the horses and dropped on to the white waistcoat. Marmaduke was less fortunate, and landed on the line of girls who were throwing rice and confetti. Marmaduke's fall was broken, and so was his head, otherwise little harm was done. Billy's human cushion staggered back two paces and sat down. Billy went rolling among the feet of the guests.

In the meantime, the white horses had resented the intrusion of the strange

vehicle that had darted across the road. It may have been disdain, but more probably was fright, that caused them to wheel round so suddenly.

The coachman, complete with button-hole and decorated whip, fell into the highway; the carriage balanced for a moment on two wheels and followed. The bride and bridegroom shrieked and shouted.

What followed no one remembers exactly. The day ended with Billy going hat in hand from house to house apologising, the while Mike was in disgrace and Marmaduke in bandages. And the good ship Wendy was dragged back into the Burtons' garden to await another attempt to launch it.

CHAPTER 4.

Launched at Last!

SINCE Mr. Burton had threatened to burn Billy's boat, the boys hurriedly decided to get up very early next morning to take the boat to the water.

Day had scarcely dawned when Billy and Mike, sleep still in their eyes, crept cautiously downstairs to finish their yawns in their gardens. They re-distributed the weight of the Wendy on the hand-cart, so that there was no danger of it lifting its builders off their feet, then opened the gate and dragged it outside.

The journey down the hill was started at a slow march; before they had gone many yards the boys were at the trot; a little farther on they were galloping, and towards the bottom of the hill they were flying for several yards at a time.

How they missed the plate-glass window of a shop on the corner no one will ever be able to explain; it suffices that they did miss it. In any case, they had no time to think about it as they exceeded the speed limit across the main street and charged up the little hill that took them out of the town.

Then came another hill to descend—one with a narrow river bridge at the bottom. This time the Wendy really

(Continued on page 27.)

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ANOTHER GRAND ADVENTURE YARN!

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THE SHARA PEARLS

AN ADVENTURE OF RIVER-WISE NED.



A Grand Story of the River Thames, telling how that plucky young fellow, River-wise Ned, unravels another mystery. A yarn packed with thrills and tense situations.

By **ROLAND SPENCER.**

CHAPTER 1.

A Liner in Difficulties!

IF there is one thing which worries the masters and mates of large steamships it is fog. Gales, tides, and currents make little difference to the routine aboard liner steamships, but fog is another matter."

Thus River-wise Ned, as the Estuary Belle, London sea-going sailing-berge, blanketed by a thick Channel fog, drifted idly at the tail end of the Goodwin Sands. She was bound for Calais with a cargo of bullocks' horns.

Ned, skipper and owner of the Belle, was laying down the law to his two mates, Tony Parr, the dark and stocky, and Jim Cartwright, the lean and lanky. As in duty bound, Ned's chums listened attentively to their young skipper's lecture, throwing in sarcastic remarks here and there.

"Listen to the sirens' hoots of dread now!" continued Ned, taking one hand from the wheel and throwing his arm out dramatically to the westward.

"You've been reading Kipling, Steve," said Tony Parr. "I remember that bit myself: 'Oh, the murmur over-side as the port-fog holds us tied, and the sirens hoot their dread!' See? You're not the only one who's read Kipling."

"H'm! Well, in fog we barge people, though, of course, not to be classed with common steamship masters and mates, get worried, too. We obey to the letter the golden rule of the river—keep out of the way of anything bigger than yourself. That's why I'm putting the helm up now—to miss that lump of a ship ahead somewhere in the pea-soup, though what she's doing there on the edge of the Goodwins is a mystery to me. Honk up that wheezy old foghorn, Jim."

Long Jim pumped away at the foghorn, and the Belle rah-rahed her slow passage through the thick mists.

"Now the questing lead, Tony. 'Questing's' borrowed from Kipling, too. We don't want to grind our lee-board on the Goodwins; but still, I want to pass inside that steamer. Tell me the depth of the water just here."

Tony got busy with the sounding-

lead, and Ned peered anxiously into the fog towards the place from where the steady drone of the big steamship's siren was vibrating the fog-laden atmosphere. The Belle's own foghorn blared out now and again: Rah-rah-rah! Rah-rah-rah!

"Stop that wheezy old bellows' love-chant, Jim, just for a minute or two. That ship's bellowing out some message now."

Tony forgot to work the lead, and Jim rose to his full height. Then, heads cocked to one side, and the intrepid ship's company of the Belle listened anxiously.

Boo-boo-boo-boo-o-o-o-o!

The chums could feel the vibrant blare in the fog. The sound was loud and near, and Ned looked worried, for sounds in fog seem farther off than they really are.

"The letter V in Morse," he said. "That means: 'I want assistance. Remain by me.' That message was sounded out to us. We're the only other craft about, and they've heard our wheezy fog-organ. We'll edge closer and then drop anchor, for the ship's aground, I expect. Tony, sound away with the lead. I want to draw into two fathoms of water."

"Ay, ay!" replied Tony, punctuating his words with a plonk of the lead. "Four fathoms now."

The Belle drifted for a hundred yards or so, and then Ned almost dispelled the fog with a Limehouse Reach shout:

"Hellum's down! We'll crash! Fender a-starboard, Jim!"

Jim, conscious of a towering mass of a ship alongside, hauled a rope fend-off to the side and jammed it over the lee-board. Then the Belle ground up against the side of the ship just as the great vessel quivered under a fresh bellow from her siren.

The tide held the barge jammed against the steamer's side, for the ship was at anchor, and the face of a brass-bound officer looked over from a lower deck.

"Barge ahoy!" he bawled. "Know our position to a pin-point?"

"Ay, ay!" returned Ned. "I heard your signal to stand by. We're on the rail of the Goodwin Sands."

The ship's officer spluttered an exclamation.

"Can you come up and point to the spot on the chart?"

"Ay, ay! I've sounded all the way from S.-W. Goodwin Buoy. Take over the barge, Jim. I'll take the end of a warp aboard the steamer so's you won't drift clear. Sha'n't be more than a few minutes."

Ned shinned up the iron rungs of a ladder riveted to the liner's side, and the officer who met him piloted him between the rows of scared passengers to the chart-house and navigating bridge. There Ned saw the captain, his neatly-trimmed white beard stuck out in perplexity, bending over a large-scale chart of the Downs.

"Young bargee, sir, says he can give you a pin-point as to our position."

The captain flashed round on Ned with a sharp inquiry.

"Yes, sir," replied Ned, pointing on the chart with a pencil the captain handed him. "On the tail of the Goodwins. Just there."

The captain was tugging at his beard.

"If you're right, lad, and I go ahead, I'll draw out of it. Your information can be relied on?"

"I wouldn't dare to give any position at all, sir, unless I was sure of it. What happened to you is what has happened to many another fine ship. After you had passed the South Goodwin Lightship the kick of the tide from the South Foreland set you between the light-vessel and South Sand Head. Your pilot should have been up to that."

"My pilot is lying helpless in an apoplectic fit, which came on just after we'd cleared the Varne. Give me your name, lad, and I'll report you to the company, who will reward you suitably if your information gets us clear. It'll save them a cool thousand if we just don't go aground. I've only about two feet of water under the heel even now."

"My name's Ned Derry, sir, skipper of the Estuary Belle, care of Edgar Brunt, Sidwell Row, Shadwell. Give your ship a starboard instead of a port sheer when I'm aboard my barge, sir, and it'll enable me to drift clear of you. As it is now, I'm jammed in by the current. Once I'm clear, you can go ahead

with your engines. I'd like to hear an all-well blast when you've drawn ahead into deeper water, sir."

"You shall have it, lad, and thank you. Waste no time now, but get your barge clear as quickly as you can. Jacobs, go down to the lower deck and give the word when to alter the ship's sheer."

"Right-ho, sir!" replied the officer.

CHAPTER 2.
Sea Fright?

NED and the officer left the navigating bridge and passed through the knots of whispering and anxious passengers to where the Belle was riding alongside.

A crowd had gathered here, and the people made way for Ned to get down to his barge. The officer was smiling and telling everyone it was all right. Then he shouted to Ned, already aboard the barge, that he'd give the order to alter the ship's sheer from the boat-deck, and disappeared from view.

Ned and his chums felt rather important people as they waited to drift clear. The passengers were waving to them and smiling, and one man threw down a shilling. But Ned frowned, so further contributions were held back. Then a little lady threw a rose on to the deck of the barge, with a merry laugh. Ned picked up the flower and swept off his greasy pilot cap as he bowed.

"I'll keep that rose for evuah, chums," he said. "I'll press its delicate petals between the pages of the Pilot's Guide. You know that lady?"

"What a romance," said Tony, sighing. Then he and Long Jim looked up again at the passengers crowding at the rail. The fresh, happy face of the girl who had thrown the rose was still smiling down.

"Crumbs!" said Long Jim. "It's Dolly Farne, the film star!"

"It am," said Ned. "Look out, now, the liner feels her port hellum."

The great ship towering above them began to sugg sideways in the water, swinging from her anchor, and Ned and his chums poled off with the quanting pole and sweeps. But before they were well clear of the liner the form of a man came hurriedly down the ship's side, and, with a mighty leap, he landed on the tarpaulins covering the barge's cargo.

He let out a yell as one of the bullocks' horns prodded him in the small of the back, and Long Jim muttered with a chuckle:

"Jingo, he's on the horns of a dilemma of some sort, that chap!"

But the Belle required immediate attention, for the suction at the side of the ship was drawing her inwards as the great vessel moved sideways in response to her rudder. Ned saw the film actress give them a final wave as the ship was swallowed up in the fog. Then he bawled out to Tony Parr to let go the anchor, and Long Jim to brail up the mainsail and lower the topsail.

Soon they heard the clank of the ship's cables and the hiss of steam from her winches as the anchor was weighed. Then the steady stamp of her engines came out of the fog. Before long a long

drawn out blast from her siren came to the ears of the chums.

"The captain's drawn out into deeper water," said Ned. "She'll be all right now. Let's see what this frightened ass of a passenger means by working a dock-head jumping stunt on the Belle. Hi, sir! Why did you jump aboard my barge?"

The man had risen, but was standing bent over with his hands pressing the small of his back.

"Every picture tells a story!" murmured Tony Parr.

"Ay!" said Ned. "But we'll see what story our new hand himself has to tell. Why did you board me, sir?"

The man was dressed in a light tweed suit and had a light macintosh on. His big-peaked tweed cap was pulled down over his eyes, but the lads saw that his face was a strong one, square-jawed, keen-eyed, the features well formed but rather ferrety-looking. A contemptible fear showed in his face.

"So awfully sorry," he said. "But I really could not stick it on that liner any longer, you know. So awfully dangerous—nearly runnin' aground. Oh, I was so frightened. But I feel better here, on a boat whose skipper does know how to avoid wreck and disaster."

Here the young man looked admiringly at Ned. But Ned only grunted.

"The captain of a liner hasn't got much room to manoeuvre about in the Downs," he said. "The kick of a cross current on the bulk of a big ship sets her out of the channel quite easily. Sometimes ships take the ground amongst these shoals even when there's



While Mr. Slim tugged at his bonds, Ned Derry and Long Jim turned out the contents of his pockets, examining every article thoroughly and carefully. Suddenly Ned emitted an exclamation of amazement as he drew from Slim's pocket a string of dazzling pearls. "Crumbs, Jim!" he cried. "Just look at these. They're worth something, I'll bet!"

no fog. Nothing dangerous in it. There's no question of wreck and disaster."

"Really, now?" replied the young man. And Ned's eyes narrowed, for he felt that the fellow was acting. "Is that so? Anyhow, I'm glad to be with someone who does know the river and its ways, even if it is a smelly barge. Where are you bound?"

"Calais," replied Ned shortly. But the young barge skipper felt another wave of suspicion as he noted the eager look sweep across the man's eyes. Then, as a further test: "But I'll land you at Deal, since we're so near there."

At that a look of genuine fear came into the man's eyes.

"Please don't—don't go out of your way for me. I'll go to Calais with you."

"I'll land you at Deal. There'll be an inquiry about your jumping the barge like this, and I shall be dragged into it."

"But I want to get to Calais. I'm bound there. I shall have to go over by steamer if you do land me in England. Such a waste of time, you know. Look here, I'll give you fifteen quid to land me at Calais. Just slip me ashore before the Customs come to board you, don't you know."

Ned pretended to be eager, and Tony Parr and Long Jim stood by, taking it all in with great interest.

"Fifteen quid!" cried Ned. "Right-ho, I'll land you at Calais."

"Good!" replied the young man with relief. "Now I could do with a nip. Have you any good spirit aboard?"

"Ay, ay! Plenty of good spirits. In fact, we're bubbling over with 'em," said Ned. "Collar that beggar, Tony and Jim. I'm going to take full advantage of my powers as a ship-master, and arrest this person as a suspicious character. He's a steamship crook, if ever I've seen one."

CHAPTER 3.

A Slippery Crook!

TONY and Jim were a trifle surprised, but their surprise gave way to anger as they saw the young man walk backwards over the tarpaulin covering the cargo, a blue-glinting little automatic pistol in his fist and an evil light shining in his eyes.

"Hold off, you young rats!" he grated. "Hang you! I'll shoot if you come near!"

The chums held back, for the man looked as if he meant what he said. But the crook—for he looked every inch a steamship crook now, with this new expression on his face—reckoned without the uneven nature of the top layer of a cargo of bullocks' horns. There had been no room for the wooden hatch-

covers to go on, so tarpaulins had been spread over the cargo and lashed down to the hatch coamings. The consequence was that the steamship crook tripped and fell back with a howl.

"He'll find those horns pretty hard before he's finished," chuckled Long Jim, as Ned, Tony, and he made a rush and grappled with the crook.

"Ay, and so shall we," gritted out Tony, as he rolled over from a kick in the ribs by the struggling man.

Ned had pinned the crook down by the shoulders, but the young bargee let out a shout as he felt the muzzle of the automatic press against his ribs. Long Jim, however, luckily, had seen the crook's move, and with a kick he sent the pistol flying. The chums soon had their man prisoner.

"Fall of the topsail halliard, chums," gasped Ned. "We'll lash him to the mast."

This was soon accomplished, and, with their prisoner fuming with fury, the chums weighed the Belle's anchor, drew out the topsail, unbraided the mainsail, and got the barge moving once more.

"We'll let the rest of the flood tide carry us across to the outer Ruytingen banks," said Ned. "Then, on the following ebb, we can slip into Calais. Our passenger will have cooled down a bit by then."

On the way over to the Continent the chums discussed the situation. Here was a man, passenger from America, who had transferred himself from the liner to their barge. They had arrested and secured him on suspicion of his being a crook. They must prove their suspicions.

They had done nothing illegal they knew, for the man's passports were for England, and Ned had taken the advantage of the authority of a ship-master. Ned decided to go a step further, and search the man's pockets for papers which might reveal who and what he was.

The fog was now lifting, or rather, the Belle was sailing out of it, and the land could be seen ahead—a faint, blue line, stretching from Cape Gris Nez to Gravelines. A light breeze wafted them on, and Tony Parr, staying aft at the wheel, watched his chums as they went through the pockets of the gnashing and fuming young man.

The passports for England were all in order. The man's name was Slim—Samuel Slim—and he was bound for England for a fortnight's stay on business. There seemed nothing suspicious about all that, and Ned conferred with his chums.

"Look here, you two," said the young skipper. "Shall we go to the length of examining his pocket book and other things in his pockets?"

"Well," said Tony, "we've gone pretty far already, and I vote we go the whole hog. We have the defence that he drew a pistol on us, if there's a row on account of our having made a mistake."

"You've said it, Tony," said Ned. "We'll make a thorough search, Jim. Anyway, he's going to be handed over to the French Customs when we get in. I'm responsible for him now he's left the Albion, so here goes!"

While Slim tugged and strained at the stout topsail halliard which held him to the tabernacle of the mast, Ned and Long Jim examined the contents of his pockets. At last Ned made an exclamation of amazement, and Mr. Slim seemed suddenly to go mad.

"Crumbs, chums, look at this!" he cried. "Gee, that's worth something. I'll bet!"

Ned held up a glorious string of pearls to the light, while Mr. Slim gnashed his teeth.

"Come back to the wheel, Jim," went on Ned. "I've something to say about this."

The two lads went aft to where Tony was bobbing about in his excitement at the wheel.

"I'll bet he pinched them!" Tony cried, when Ned and Jim drew near. "What are they—pearls?"

"Ay. And no flapper's three-and-six-penny string, neither," said Ned. "Gosh, chums, even we can see that they're worth a bit of money. Wonder whose they are?"

Long Jim suddenly brought the fist of his right hand down into the palm of his left.

"Gee, Ned, don't you remember my reading out of the paper one evening about three weeks ago that Miss Dolly Farne had purchased last year the famous Shara pearls from the Princess Dolores, of Platonía? Three thousand quid she paid for them. I'll bet that's the Shara pearls. It's just like the photo of them that was printed—about that length and big pearls in the middle, with smaller ones at the ends."

"By jingo, if Jim's right," said Ned, "we've made a capture."

"We have, old chump! There's probably a hue and cry after Slim now, with cablegrams going over to Calais to catch the Belle the moment she gets in. That's why that beggar Slim wanted us to slip him ashore before the customs board us."

"Looks like it, I'm blessed if it doesn't. Well, I'll pocket these," said Ned, "and we'll hand Slim over to the gendarmerie when we get in. They can make inquiries while detaining Slim and the pearls."

He let the famous string of pearls slip into his pocket.

"We've disarmed that swab," he said. "Now let's set him free. He can't hurt us without his shooter, and perhaps we'd better give him some grub."

The chums all agreed that there would be no harm in giving Slim the freedom of his arms and legs, so they threw off the bindings of the end of the topsail halliard. Slim, without a word, but looking daggers at the chums, sat down on the fore-hatch, rubbing his wrists where the rope had chafed them.

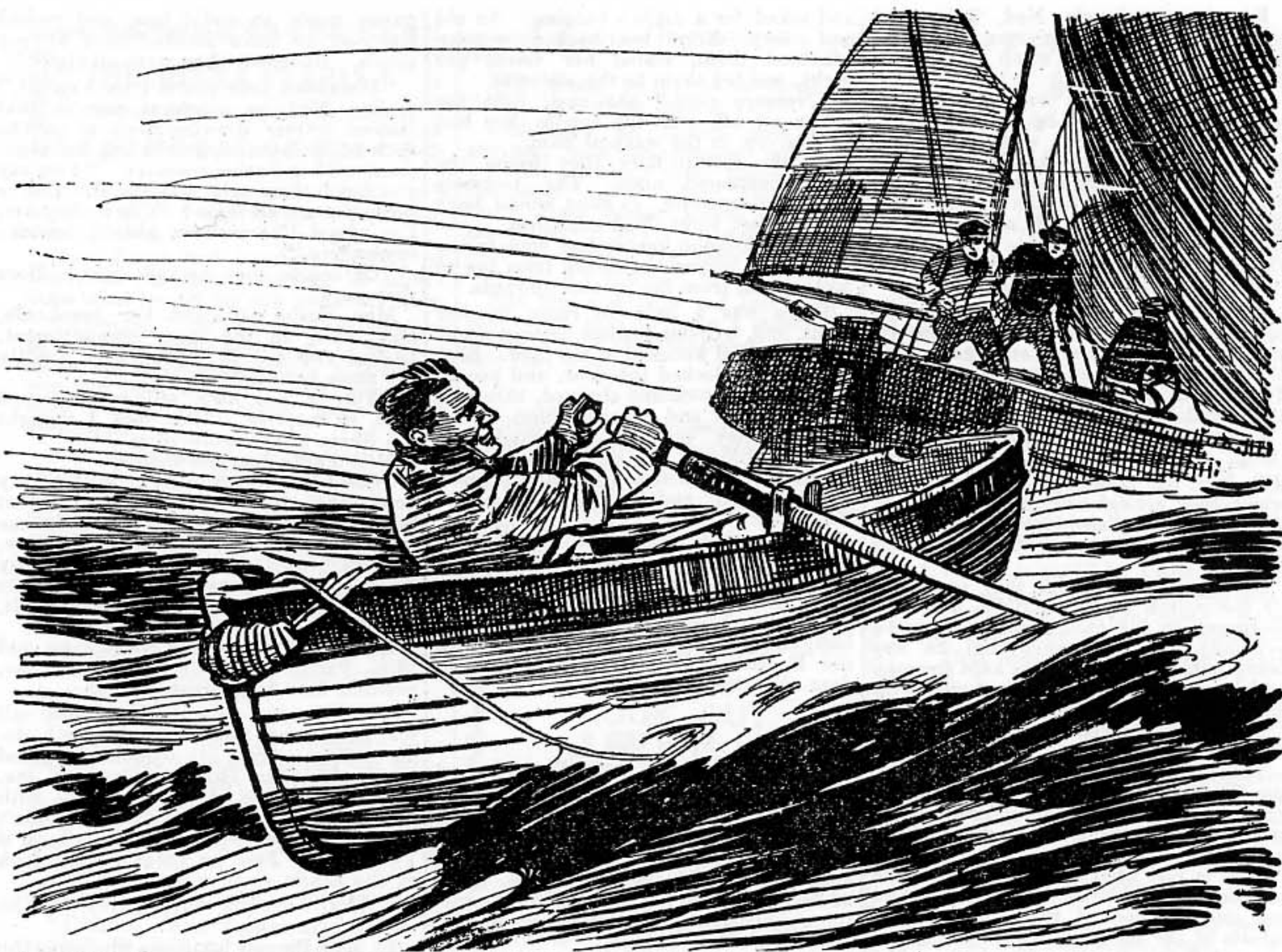
As luck would have it, the Belle ran into a blanket of fog again just after the chums had opened up the narrow entrance to Calais harbour. They had to sound frequently, and grope carefully as they made their way towards the entrance to the port. It was rather an anxious time for them, and, it is to be feared, the lads did not pay a great deal of attention to Slim, who seemed resigned to his fate.

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At the sound of a laugh astern, the chums of the Estuary Belle jumped towards the mizzen-mast just in time to see Slim rowing away in the barge boat, to be swallowed up in the fog.

However, a sudden laugh astern made them all jump towards the mizzen-mast. There was Slim in the barge-boat, the painter snaking in the water, having been cast off from the barge. Slim had put out the oars, and began to row, and then he was swallowed up in the fog. But his laugh came out of the white mists once more to the ears of the astounded chums.

"Hang it all, what a shipful of prize chumps we are! He's gone for good now, and we'll be up for helping him!" yelled Ned. "They'll think he bribed us to let him go like that."

"Can't we catch him?" faltered Tony Parr stupidly.

"Catch him, you black-mopped dummy! Catch him—with what? We've no wind to give the barge way; we've no other boat—and we haven't an ounce of brains among the three of us. We ought to have thought of that when we put the boat over to tow her as soon as we spotted the pier-heads of the harbour. Here's a pretty pickle now!"

"I don't see why you want to worry. You can give up the pearls," said Long Jim. "The crook's gone, that's all. We'll find our boat on the beach somewhere."

"You six feet of stupidity, Jim! Don't you realise that we shall be suspected of being accessories, that we'll be collared the moment we get into the harbour, before even we have a chance of saying, 'Please, here are the pearls'? When we give 'em up they'll think we did it because we found the game was up. Crumbs, we're in the soup now!"

"Gee whiz! I never thought of that," said Jim. "But it's just what will happen—"

"Ay, and those newspaper johnnies in Fleet Street will say that one of the thieves swept off his hat and bowed in mockery to the robbed lady just as the barge moved away from the ship."

"And they'll hint that we're sheltering Slim, our chief, somewhere. Oh, my aunt, that thing our chief! Crumbs, boys, I've half a mind to slip overboard, swim ashore, dodge the customs, and go straight to the harbour and present the pearls to show them that we are in good faith."

"They'd think that a put-up job to avert suspicion."

"What's to be done, then? Can't you dummies make a suggestion, instead of finding fault with my schemes?"

"My suggestion is that we put the helm to port, to prevent a smash with that tidal light. It's close to us now, from the sound of the foghorn."

CHAPTER 4.

Captured Again!

IT was; and the chums were in Calais harbour before they could turn round, almost. They worked the barge to their usual berth in the outer port near the lock gates leading into the Basin Carnot. There the customs boarded the barge, and Ned and his chums stood by for squalls.

"Avez vous quelque chose a declarer?" demanded the douanier who had boarded.

"Nong," answered Ned. "Bullocks' horns. Les horns de tirau, cargo. Papers in cabin—dans la cabine, papiers. Tell you all about it. Compree that?"

"Oui, monsieur, I compree. Speak English, me. You no speak francais, monsieur le capitaine."

"You're right," agreed Ned. "I no speak French. Heard anything about pearls in your travels?"

"Pearls, monsieur le capitaine? Mais non, but what you mean?"

"Well, heard tell of anyone who has lost a string of pearls—good ones. Worth plenty francs. Eh?"

"Monsieur l'admiral, he joke." The jolly old custom's officer gave Ned a dig in the ribs, glanced through the papers of the barge, kept in an old biscuit-tin, stamped them, then handed them back.

"All c'rect," he said. "You go to quai de Beauregarde, n'est-ce pas? An' you report at the office to-morrow?"

As Ned answered in the affirmative the customs officer climbed up on to the quay and disappeared into the fog.

"By jingo, there's been no hue and cry raised about those pearls, chums. Is it possible Miss Farne hasn't discovered that she has lost them? Golly, we're in luck's way, anyway, if there's to be no nasty court business for us. Let's get off and hand the pearls over to the gendarmes."

Now free to go ashore, the chums locked up and clambered up on to the quay. The fog was very thick, and they could not even see the railway-station hard by. They knew their way about Calais; however, so proceeded over the lock bridges without hesitation. They had no sooner cleared the bridges than they were rushed by a bunch of Calais roughs, headed by Samuel Slim himself. The man had wasted no time in getting ashore in the boat and collecting a party to attack the chums as soon as they should be free from the customs officials.

Forming a triangle, Ned, Tony, and Long Jim threw up their arms in defence, and a lively little scrap was soon proceeding.

Besides Slim, there were five roughs, but Long Jim, helped by his long reach, registered a knock-out with one of the roughs, and this made another turn and flee. Then Ned sent one of the men on his side crashing into the railing hard by, this man slinking off as soon as he had picked himself up. Thus, the numbers became even, and Samuel Slim could see that his attack had failed.

The chums of the Belle were smiling confidently as they guarded cautiously, and hit out savagely now and again. One of the other French roughs was sent flying, and at that Slim himself turned and dived for the shelter of the fog.

Leaving the remaining rough, the chums set off in pursuit of Slim. They still had on their rubber-soled shoes, which they always used on the decks of the Belle, so their footfalls made no sound as they "hared" after the fleeing crook.

Slim's pace slackened, they could tell by the sounds of his footfalls, and Ned motioned to his chums that the crook evidently was not aware that he was being pursued. So the lads kept the man within sound, thus being in touch with him, though lost to view in the fog.

Soon Slim reduced his pace to a quick walk.

"He's led us right past Notre Dame, the Place d'Armes, and so on to the front again," whispered Ned. "Listen, he's stopping and looking at the doors of the houses."

That is just what Slim was doing. He had described a circle in his flight, and was now in one of the dirty, narrow streets of the harbour, where the fishermen of Calais lived. The houses, the lads remembered, were nearly all let out in tenements, entrance being made in the basement floor by broad steps leading downwards and through a wide doorway. They had often walked along there in clear weather, and watched the cobblers, tailors, tinkers, and what not at work in the basement rooms of the tenement houses. Now Slim was looking for one of these houses!

At last the chums heard the man's footsteps descending into one of the basements. They heard the knock at the door, the voices as Slim spoke in good French and was answered, then they walked rapidly and silently forward.

They were just in time to see the big door closing. Then the chums looked at each other inquiringly. As usual, Ned was prompt with a scheme of action.

"Round to the back," the young bargee whispered. "Through that passage-way. I happen to know that the staircase of these houses is at the back. We'll see Slim mount, if he does so with a light. It's always the topmost rooms that are let first to chance lodgers. I know, because I've lodged here myself."

The chums were soon in the bare, squalid backyards of the houses, and there, sure enough, they saw a light ascending the staircase of the house Slim had entered. At the first floor window, the chums, who were close up, saw in the fog the face of Slim appear, and peer out into the thick atmosphere. The light shone on his ferrety features, but the chums, of course, could not be seen in the murkiness below.

Right to the fourth floor mounted Slim. Then Ned and his chums went round to the front door of the basement; knocked,

and asked for a night's lodging. An old and very dirty bent-backed woman admitted them, stated her terms per night, and led them to the staircase.

"Numero neuf," she said. So the chums set off, with the candle they had been given, in the wake of Slim.

On the fourth floor they found the room numbered nine. The numbers worked downwards, so Slim would have had number eight, Ned explained, if the old lodging-house keeper had kept to the usual rule, letting the rooms from top to bottom, not from the bottom upwards.

There was a light in room number eight, and, without further beating about the bush, Ned knocked at the door. Slim advanced, unlocked the door, and peered out. Then the chums charged, throwing open the door and collaring Slim by the braces. They bundled the crook into his coat, dragged him down the deserted stairs, gave the alarmed old lady below a five-franc note, and so struggled out into the street.

It was a short step across the quay and the lock-bridges to the Belle. There they bound Slim hand and foot—he being such a slippery customer—imprisoned him in the fo'c'sle of the barge, gagged him, and promised him an interview with the English police on their return to dear old England.

CHAPTER 5.

A Surprise for Dolly Farne!

A WEEK later River-wise Ned was waiting in the inquiry office of the hotel where Miss Dolly Farne was staying. He was there by appointment with the film actress, since, as he had said in his letter, he had something important, with reference to her pearls, to communicate.

Word came down for Ned to go up to Miss Farne's suite of rooms, and our young barge skipper, dressed now in a well-fitting suit of Norfolk type, presented himself to the actress.

"How do you do?" said Miss Farne, as she shook hands with Ned. "I hope you didn't mind my throwing that rose down to you on the barge from the Albion. But I—I rather admire you and your chums for the way you grope about those awful shoals in thick fogs. And that man who jumped aboard! The

purser made an awful fuss, and rushed right off to have another look at my pearls. However, they were all right."

"It's about your pearls I have called," replied Ned, as much at ease in that famous actress' drawing-room as on the deck of his own barge, having an argument with a harbour-master. "You say you have them safe and sound. You're sure they are all right? 'Cos if they are, I'm afraid I've made a ghastly mistake somewhere."

"Of course they are all right! Here they are!"

Miss Farne unlocked her jewel-case, and there, in the lower compartment, nestled two sets of pearls, both exactly the same seemingly.

"You've got two strings!" gasped Ned, in surprise. "But—but I thought the Shara pearls were—that is—"

Miss Farne laughed merrily.

"One's a fake," she said, "and a very good fake, too. Brendstein's, in Regent Street, made the imitation pearls for me last time I was in England. You see, Mr. Sailor, I don't wear the costly Shara pearls wherever I go. I mostly wear the imitation ones—for fear of theft, you see."

A new light came into Ned's eyes, and Miss Farne looked at his handsome, bronzed face with great interest.

"Miss Farne," said the lad, "they call me River-wise Ned—the water-folk do. Er—will you trust my wisdom now, and come round to Brendstein's with me, taking those two strings of pearls with you? Don't ask questions, because I don't want you to see what a fool I've been if I'm wrong. Just let them have a look at the pearls at Brendstein's."

"Why, certainly, Mr. Derry. Who can resist a sailor?"

In Miss Farne's luxurious limousine the pair were sped round to Brendstein's in record time. There, in the private office of Brendstein himself, Ned and Miss Farne watched as the big jeweller examined the pearls critically.

"This," he said, holding out one set, "is the set I faked up for you, Miss Farne. This other set is another fake, quite as clever a one as I made. May I ask what firm did it for you?"

Miss Farne had gone as white as a sheet, and had sprung to her feet. But Ned was up, too.

"It's all right, Miss Farne. Here, sir, are these the Shara pearls?"

In surprise, Brendstein took the string Ned pulled out of his pocket.

"Yes; these are the real Shara pearls."

Miss Farne seized them, her eyes wide and puzzled. Then she turned inquiringly to Ned, her lips tremulous.

"It's all right," laughed Ned. "That man who jumped on to my barge from the liner—Slim—I've got trussed up in my fo'c'sle. I found the pearls on him and guessed they were yours. He, of course, somehow got these faked pearls into the purser's hands instead of the real ones when you gave them over to the purser's care for the voyage. He thought it'd sure to be spotted, so tried to make a get-away by jumping my ship. But he jumped the wrong boat."

Miss Farne was profuse in her thanks, tearful at the nearness of her losing the Shara pearls for ever. She made a great fuss of Ned, and asked him, haltingly, if he would accept a cheque from her.

"Well, I've lost a barge-boat over the business, Miss Farne. Slim gave me the slip in another fog off Calais, and I never got the boat back. Twenty pounds will

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"THE SHARA PEARLS!"

(Continued from previous page.)

buy me a new one, and, if you don't mind—well, it would save me from being out of pocket, you know."

Miss Farne had laughed heartily at this; but Ned protested that he hadn't done what he did for any pecuniary gain.

"All right," the young actress laughed as she shook hands with Ned. "Will you allow me to consider myself a friend of you and your chums? You have been very clever and brave and perfect gentlemen."

Ned made his escape as soon as he could, and three days later, just as he and Tony and Jim were seriously considering refitting the old Belle, for her canvas and gear were rather the worse for wear, a boat bumped alongside.

"Harper & Retson, sailmakers," said the man who came aboard. "This 'ere the Estuary Belle—master, Ned Derry?"

"It are," said Ned. "Funny, we were just talking about giving your firm a call about some new gear."

"That's what I've come about, guv'nor," said the man, referring to a paper. "Got to measure you up for a new suit of sails an' any cordage that's needed. Bill to be sent to Miss Farne, bless er, the film actress, you know. Many's the time I've seen 'er on the pictures."

Ned fell back a pace in surprise.

"Crumbs, Miss Farne's got a bit of sense," he said to his gasping chums. "She could see we wanted new sails when she looked over from the Albion!"

"Who couldn't?" said Tony Parr, now recovered from the shock, and grinning broadly. "Well, Ned, lad, we sha'n't have to put over a hundred and fifty

pounds down on the debit side now—what!"

"By jingo, no!" put in Long Jim. "Ned, lad, we're getting rich!"

"An' it's all money well earned, guv'nor," said the sailmaker with a grin. "I read all about them Shara pearls in the paper. Trust Miss Farne to give them Fleet Street blokes full details. Good luck to you! I'll put some extra beef into makin' of these sails meself, blow me if I won't!"

And Ned and Tony and Jim knew that they were sure to have a super-suit of sails when the chief sailmaker of Retson's said they would.

THE END.

(Next week's exciting adventures of River-wise Ned and his staunch chums are more thrilling than ever, so make sure you read: "THE MISSING MOTOR-BOAT!" You are bound to enjoy it.)

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"BILLY BUILDS A BOAT!"

(Continued from page 21.)

did get out of control, but when they struck the parapet it was only the hand-cart that was smashed to smithereens. The Wendy shot off the cart, scraped across the stonework and dived nose first into the water.

Billy and Mike went farther and dropped on to the soft mud on the other side of the narrow stream. When they got the mud out of their mouths and came to look round for the Wendy, the good ship was nowhere to be seen, it was lying full of water at the bottom of the stream.

For long they sat on the bank gazing moodily into the brown waters which had swallowed their beautiful boat, and there Marmaduke found them.

"Where is she?" he asked eagerly.

Two pointing hands answered him.

"We'll turn salvage men!" grunted Mike after a while. "We'll raise her!"

"That will be fun!" piped Marmaduke.

"Yes, won't it!" snapped Billy. "And you can't swim!"

The Wendy has not yet been salvaged. You see, a rather fierce bull is kept in the field on one side of the river, and on the other there is a private estate where trespassers are really prosecuted.

THE END.

(There will be a ripping football yarn for you next week, boys: "THE BOY BACK!" Just imagine a boy who had never kicked a football in his life stepping into fame as a League player! This will go down as one of the finest footer yarns ever written, and all followers of the great game should make sure of reading it.)

"MY READERS' OWN CORNER!"

(Continued from page 16.)

(Further Winning Efforts for which Half-Crowns Have Been Awarded.)

ANNOYING!

"Now, suppose," said the teacher, "a man working on the river bank suddenly fell in. He could not swim, and would be in danger of drowning. Picture the scene. The man's sudden fall, the cry for help. His wife knows his peril, and, hearing his screams, rushes immediately to the bank. Why does she rush to the bank?" Whereupon a boy exclaimed: "To draw his insurance money!"—Half-a-crown has been awarded to T. B. Newby, 39, Dulverton Road, Leicester.

MYSTERIOUS!

A Londoner looking over a country estate was startled by a peculiar screeching noise. "I say, old chap," he said to the agent, "what was that?" "An owl," replied the agent. "My word, my dear man, I know that; but what is 'owling'?"—Half-a-crown has been awarded to Theodore Stuart, 347½, Broadway, Cambridge, Mass, U.S.A.

MOST PROBABLY!

Motorist: "Hang it, I've been stuck on this beastly hill for half an hour, and the maker of my car told me that it was a splendid hill for cars!" Native: "Mebbe, 'e meant comin' down, sir!"—Half-a-crown has been awarded to Pete Stokes, Granville, 150, Lennox Street, West Richmond, Victoria, Australia.

MISTRANSLATED!

How easy it is to mistranslate an overheard remark is shown clearly here. Said Mrs. A., one of the overhearers: "They must have been at the Zoo, because I heard her mention 'a trained deer.'" Said Mrs. B.: "No, no. They were talking about going away, and she said to him, 'find out the train, dear.'" Said Mrs. C.: "I think you are both wrong. It seemed to me they were both discussing music, for she said, 'a trained ear' very distinctly." A few moments later the lady herself appeared, and they told her of their disagreement. "Well," she laughed, "that's certainly funny. You are poor guessers, all of you. The fact is, I'd been to the country overnight, and I was asking my husband if it 'rained here' last evening!"—Half-a-crown has been awarded to Kamdin A. Bharucha, 10, Sholapur Road, Poona, India.

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