

HUNDREDS OF POUNDS IN PRIZES FOR READERS **Important Notice**  
in this Issue.

EVERY WEDNESDAY.

# The GEM 2<sup>D</sup>

**LIBRARY**  
OF  
**SCHOOL AND SPORTING STORIES**

No. 817.  
Vol. XXIV.  
Oct. 6th, 1923.



*Figgins & Co. of the New House, make merry at the expense of the stranded holidaymakers—but the tables are turned when Monty Lotherer drops from the tree like a bolt from the blue!*





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,—You know how it is when you want to pack a whole crowd of interesting particulars in a telegram. The space runs out almost before you have got going. I am in a like case. I want to let you into the big secret for next Wednesday. By this time our Grand Football Competition is anybody's secret, but, what is more, it contains the secret of success for heaps of readers of the GEM.

#### THAT MAGNIFICENT COMPETITION!

You will find all about the matter in next week's copy of the GEM. I know jolly well that there are lots of illustrations, as it were, one might trot gaily forward so as to give you all a correct impression of the generosity and the magnitude of the superlative offer. One might refer to the argosies, those fabulous treasure-ships which used to come gliding into port as if on air—bringing wealth and happiness to all concerned. But these are hardly days for argosies. Let that pass. What we can have is the golden opportunity to win scores of valuable prizes just at the cost of a little ingenuity and hard thinking.

#### NEXT WEEK'S "GEM."

Be sure you get it! It will tell you how you can get into the running to win, say, the First Prize (£100), or the Second Prize (£50), or a motor-bike of the best pattern, of which thirty are offered. There are 100 Comet cycles as well, likewise billiard-tables, fishing-rods, wireless sets, football outfits, and "spheres" of the Match pattern, as well as gramophones, and roller skates, and model locomotives, with, in addition, a record number of consolation prizes, all of the finest kind.

#### FOOTBALLERS' NAMES!

That's the biggest news yet. Look out for the complete programme next week. It will be found out-and-out fascinating by everybody.

There is one hint I must give you. There is bound to be a pretty baffling rush for next week's number of the GEM, so, order early. I have unfortunately left my megaphone on the piano, or I would murmur this valuable bit of advice so that all might hear!

#### "JUST LIKE GUSSY!"

By Martin Clifford.

Urgent requests are to hand for more stories about D'Arcy. See the GEM next Wednesday. The yarn in which Gussy figures prominently, fills the bill. The elegant dress expert of St. Jim's is to the fore most of the time, playing a part for which his special talents well suit him. He is ultra-conversational, of course, but there is a lot more in it all than that! Gussy feels he has cause for indignation at the treatment he receives from his fellow-travellers on that hilarious journey up the river. Blake is to blame for the crisis which terminates in D'Arcy deciding to leave his comrades, and seek further adventures all on his own. Anyhow, he has done with the boisterous Blake. A crowd of amusing episodes come in for treatment in this laughable story. You will be tickled to death, by the sporting actions of the brave fellows of Study No. 9, whom Gussy runs into in the course of his wanderings. And Cardew has a role which fits him like a glove. Cardew is a born diplomat!

#### THE "HOLIDAY ANNUAL."

A splendid letter about the new "Holiday Annual" reaches me from a reader in the North. "I got my issue of the 1924 'Holiday Annual,'" says this correspondent, "the day it came out. I was very pleased with it. The model railway card that was fine, also 'Scott's Sister,' 'The Tenderfoot's Triumph,' 'Grundy's Merry Christmas,' the plans of Rookwood, 'A Race Against Time,' and the coloured plates. All the things in it I like. The Greyfriars yarn is ripping."

#### A REAL SERIOUS HERO.

A Lancaster reader asks me for a story showing Gussy playing a hero's part. But D'Arcy always does do that! "We all know D'Arcy's sterling qualities," runs the letter, THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 817.

"but I am sure many readers would like to see him as a real hero. He is often in the limelight with Jack Blake & Co., but not often as a real hero." I shall pass this suggestion, which is friendly enough, on to Mr. Martin Clifford, and see what he says about it. It might be pointed out, however, that Gussy is always serious; it's others who think him so irresistibly funny.

#### "THE WRECKERS!"

Next week, too, the GEM will contain another of those strikingly fine yarns of the river estuary which have caused such a stir. The coming story deals with a new type of aeromotor yacht, which is sunk by a gang of criminals. River-wise Ned and his two staunch chums get on the track of the rogues. The latter will stop at nothing to gain their ends, but even the little band of scoundrels, primed though they are, do not understand the river as thoroughly as Ned and his friends. This is a fine tale, with plenty of big sensations in it.

#### A STRAIGHT TIP!

While waiting for the great Footballers' Names Competition, the best thing to do to keep your hand in is to pay attention to the Tuck Hamper Competition, details of which are on another page.

#### THE "HOLIDAY ANNUAL."

Hurry up for the new volume. It is going like wildfire, but you have still time to secure a copy if you make tracks right away for the newsagent's place of business, and inform the courtly personage behind the counter that you absolutely must have the "H. A."

#### "A SPORTSMAN TO THE CORE!"

By Jack Crichton.

One of the special features in next Wednesday's notable GEM programme is this fine story, showing the grit of young Jack Hunter, who holds his tongue in connection with something he knows respecting the nephew of his employer. An individual less discerning than Jack would have blurted out the facts as they appeared on the surface. Had young Hunter done this, matters would have proved very difficult for a certain person who was discovered searching through a lot of private papers under very suspicious circumstances. But, somehow, Jack did not think things were quite as they seemed to be. He was right. The suspected thief was no thief. He was engaged in the most legitimate investigation, and the results of the quest were highly satisfactory to certain wronged parties. This sounds a bit mysterious, and so it is; but the real charm of next week's superb yarn of a true sportsman lies in its very simplicity. It just shows what a mistake it is to jump to conclusions. Weigh things up! Think first! That's what Jack Hunter did!

#### THIS IS IMPORTANT!

Our Companion Papers are full of good things. Be sure you read "A Brother's Loyalty," a magnificent Rookwood tale in the "Popular," for next week!

The "Boys' Friend," next Monday, will contain a long instalment of John W. Wheway's fine serial, "Fed Up with Football!" The "Magnet" will score again with its grand Greyfriars story, "Disgraced by his Father!"

#### CARDEW AS CAPTAIN!

My chum, Fred Ingham, of Bradford, says that for his part he does not think it would be popular for Cardew to become junior captain of St. Jim's. "Cardew is well known as a slacker, and I do not think he would take the interest in the job he should do. Also, you can never know what he will do next. He may start playing the giddy goat, like Mornington of Rookwood did a few weeks ago when he got the captain's job. I think you would have to go a long way to find another to come up to Tom Merry."

#### A GRAND FOOTBALL SERIAL!

Look out for a big treat in our new serial by Jack Crichton, which will be starting very shortly. This is a really great story, marked by intensity of feeling, tons of sympathy, and plenty of sport. The yarn opens with a bang. Just when the smart young fellow who is the central figure thinks success is his, a certain tragic event puts an end to all his hopes. He has burnt his boats, given up a good berth because of what seems a fine chance. Then all is swept away. What does he do then? You will be keen about this story. It is gripping.

Your Editor.

# RUCTIONS ON THE RIVER!



## CHAPTER 1. Hats Off!

"AMAZIN'!"

Really, it was more than amazing.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy wondered for a moment or two whether he was actually dreaming.

But it was no dream, though Arthur Augustus had been nearly nodding off in the drowsy afternoon. He was seated on the grassy bank, leaning back against a big, shady tree, with a ground-sheet carefully laid under him to preserve his beautiful trousers from damage, and a cushion behind his noble head.

Further up the bank the Old Bus was moored by green willows, and a savoury smell of frying fish pervaded the summer air from that direction. The oil-stove was going strong in the Old Bus, and Blake was cooking kippers on it, with a red face and a forehead bedewed with perspiration. Herries, seated on the gunwale of the boat, was scraping potatoes with a pocket-knife. Dig was washing lettuce, Tom Merry and Manners and Lowther were not in sight, having gone for a stroll towards Abingdon.

The summer sunset glowed on the Thames, and on cheery faces and pretty frocks and gay parasols in passing boats, canoes, and punts. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was resting, taking his noble ease under the tree, when the amazing happening happened.

Arthur Augustus had taken off his Panama hat to cool his noble brow, and laid it beside him.

All of a sudden, without warning, the Panama hat rose from the ground and floated away in the air, as if endowed with sudden and miraculous powers of locomotion.

Arthur Augustus started from his drowse, to see it going. He watched it blankly.

There was hardly a breath of air on the river, only just enough to bring the whiff of the kippers from the Old Bus to the spot where Gussy sat. Certainly the wind could not have lifted the Panama and floated it away.

Like a fellow in a dream, Arthur Augustus D'Arcy watched his hat float up into the air and vanish over the trees.

He sat quite still, watching it till it was gone.

Then the swell of St. Jim's stirred. He jumped up. He looked round him, jamming his celebrated eyeglass into his eye to assist his vision. But he was quite alone. No one was at hand; no one could have touched the hat, unless it had been touched by the invisible hand of some riverside phantom that haunted the reaches of the Thames above Abingdon. And, really, that was not probable.

"But Jove," said Arthur Augustus, "this is vewy remarkable! It is weally enough to make a fellow believe in spooks! Where the mewy dooce is my hat?"

He stared round him blankly, and then made his way along the bank to the moored boat. Jack Blake turned a ruddy face towards him.

"Nearly ready, Gussy! You can chop up the loaf if you're tired of slacking."

Another Great Story of the Holiday Adventures of Tom Merry & Co. of St. Jim's, bringing Figgins & Co., their New House rivals, into the picture. An exciting and thrilling school yarn.

By Martin Clifford.

"Lost your hat?" asked Digby.

"Yaas."

"Just like Cussy to bring a five-guinea Panama up the river and lose it," remarked Herries.

"It has been filched away somehow, Hewwies. A vewy remarkable thing has occurred," said Arthur Augustus impressively. "My hat was lyin' in the gwass near at hand, and all of a sudden it wose in the air and floated away."

Blake and Herries and Digby looked at the swell of the Fourth Form. His statement surprised them.

"Is that a joke?" asked Blake after a pause.

"Not at all, deah boy."

"Potty?" asked Herries.

"I twust, Hewwies, that I am not pottay," said Arthur Augustus, with dignity. "I know it sounds vewy remarkable, but it happened just as I have stated."

"Well, as it couldn't, it didn't," said Herries. "Go to sleep and dream again, old top."

"I was not dweamin', Hewwies."

"But where's the hat?" demanded Blake.

"Floated away ovah the twyes."

"You image!" said Blake. "What are you trying to pull our legs for?"

"I am not twyin' to pull your legs, Blake. My hat wose from the gwound of its own accord in a vewy remarkable way, and floated ovah the twyes and disappeahed."

"Fathead!"

"Weally, Blake—"

"It's sunstroke," said Blake.

"Can't be anything else. Perhaps you'll feel better when you've had a kipper, Gussy."

"It was not sunstroke, Blake. My hat has vanished frowm sight in a most amazin' way, and I want you fellows to help me find it."

"Better borrow an aeroplane and go after it," said Herries, with a grin. "We can't follow it over the tree-tops."

"It is weally vewy stwange," said Arthur Augustus. "I suppose this beastly wivah cannot be haunted by beastly ghosts playin' twicks on a fellow's beastly hat?"

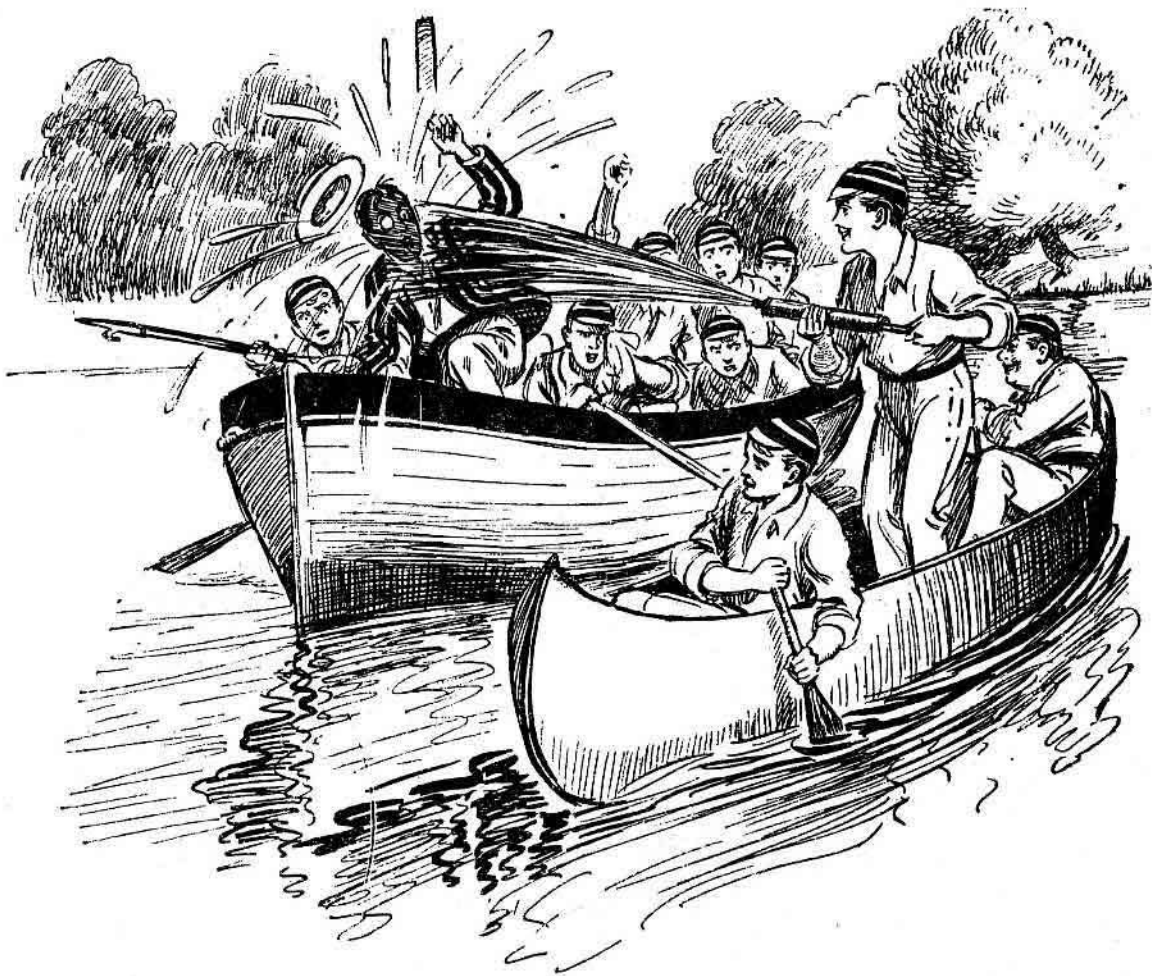
"Buck up with those spuds, Herries!"

"But about my hat, you fellows—"









Squish! "Oh, my hat! Oooocch!" Figgins sent the final contents of his ink-filled squirt full into the midst of Tom Merry & Co. as the canoe began to move away. Tom Merry & Co. shook furious fists after it. Arthur Augustus caught most of the volley from the squirt, and his noble face resembled that of a Red Indian. (See page 6.)

tea? If my Panamah is not damaged we can let these New House wottahs cwawl off."

"Let them come to tea instead," said Tom Merry, laughing. "Of course, the New House is a mouldy old casual ward, and New House fellows are no good at games or anything else; but, after all, they're St. Jim's chaps. Let's make it pax and stand them tea."

"Done!" said Figgins. "The School House is a silly old home for idiots, and the dummies in it are only fit for a lunatic asylum, but we'll overlook that and come to tea, if you like."

And the knees were removed from the chests of Figgins & Co. and they were allowed to rise. And ten juniors of St. Jim's walked together to the Old Bus for a high tea in great amity.

### CHAPTER 3.

#### A "House" Row!

**T**OM MERRY & Co. were quite pleased with the meeting, and so were the three chums of the New House. They sat round on the gunwale of the Old Bus and enjoyed a substantial and prolonged tea together, and exchanged notes about the holidays. The School House fellows told of their voyage up the Thames and their adventures on the way, and Figgins & Co. told of a cycling tour in the southern counties. Just now, it seemed, Figgins & Co. were staying at Abingdon, with a relation of Kerr's, and getting plenty of boating on the Thames. Kerr's relation had a Canadian canoe, which he placed at the disposal of the three juniors, and in it they explored the reaches of the Thames and the backwaters—especially the forbidden ones where trespassers were liable to be prosecuted. Figgins & Co. had happened on the St. Jim's Bus, quite by chance, in a stroll up the river, and as Fatty Wynn had his fishing-rod

with him they had proceeded to jape the School House fellows with rod and line—almost succeeding in making Arthur Augustus D'Arcy believe that the river-bank above Abingdon was haunted by a frolicsome phantom with a taste for collecting hats. Figgins & Co. seemed to consider that an excellent jape; but Arthur Augustus, who found traces of the fish-hook in the band of his Panamah, failed to see the joke.

However, tea went off well, in cheery conversation, and even Fatty Wynn, who knew all about cooking, admitted that Blake's kippers were a masterpiece. The kippers and the fried potatoes were finished, and a big cake that followed vanished to the last crumb. All was calm and bright, and any spectator would have supposed that, at St. Jim's, School House and New House were on almost brotherly terms. But after tea, the subject of cricket came up, which brought on an argument with regard to the House matches of the previous term.

Now, as it happened, victories and defeats had been equally divided in the junior matches between the two Houses at St. Jim's. But the School House fellows took the view that the New House wins were a series of remarkable flukes, while Figgins & Co. were convinced that the School House victories were a string of amazing accidents. On this subject the rivals of St. Jim's waxed so eloquent that Tom Merry & Co. forgot that they were hosts, and Figgins & Co. forgot that they were guests.

"Take the last match," said Blake. "Look at the way you batted, Figgins!"

"Fifty runs!" snorted Figgins.

"Yes, that's so. But look at the flukes! You were practically out fifteen times. I counted," said Blake.

"You mean the School House fielding was rotten?" asked Figgins.

"No, I don't!" roared Blake.

"You mean your bowling was trash?" asked Kerr.

"No, you cheeky ass."  
"Well," grinned Fatty Wynn, "if the bowling and the fielding were good, the batsman must have been a good man to knock up fifty runs."

"Bai Jove, that sounds quite reasonable!" said Arthur Augustus, with an air of wise deflection.

"Fathead!"

"Weally, Blake—"

"What I mean is—"

"Dear man, you don't mean anything when you're talking cricket," said Figgins. "Keep to subjects you know."

"That's a really good idea," agreed Kerr. "Let Blake tell us something about marbles."

"Marbles!" howled Blake.

"Yes. Isn't that your game?" asked Kerr innocently.

Jack Blake jumped to his feet.

"Look here, you cheeky New House fathead—"

"Go easy, old chap," said Tom Merry. "After all, we won the last House match—no getting away from that."

"But what a fluke!" said Figgins.

"Where did the fluke come in?" demanded Herries hotly.

Figgins looked astonished.

"You don't mean to say you think you won on your cricket?" he asked.

"Yaas, wathah, you cheeky ass!"

"It was a sort of win," remarked Kerr; "but—"

"Will you step on the bank, Kerr?" asked Blake, with forced politeness.

"Eh? Why?"

"On the boat you're a guest," explained Blake. "On the bank you're only a measly New House bouncer, and I can punch your nose."

"I'm your man!" said Kerr promptly, and he jumped ashore. Blake jumped after him. Tom Merry promptly jumped after both of them, and ran between.

"Hold on!" he exclaimed. "No scrapping here! Cheese it!"

"Well, that cheeky ass—"

"That silly chump—"

"Pway keep the peace, deah boys," said Arthur Augustus. "You New House boundahs ought to learn to behave yourselves on a holiday, you know. At school we can lick you and teach you mannahs; but on vac you ought to try to behave."

"What about ducking them?" asked Digby. "As the New House chaps never wash, it would do them good."

"Good egg!" said Lowther.

Figgins and Fatty Wynn jumped ashore. Figgins burst into a laugh.

"Pax!" he exclaimed. "We're not going to lick you after you've stood us such a jolly tea!"

"Lick us!" roared Manners. "You're three, and we're seven—and you're not going to lick us, you cheeky chump!"

"Three of the New House can lick seven of the School House any time," Figgins assured him. "But we'll let you off!"

"Bai Jove! I considah—"

"Bump them!" roared Herries.

"Peace, my infants," said Tom Merry. "Cut off, you New House bouncers. If we run across you again, we'll make an example of you."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Well, you're likely enough to run across anybody the way you sail a boat!" remarked Kerr.

And with that Partibian shot the New House trio retreated up the bank, and departed. Blake gave a snort.

"Much better have licked them," he said.

"Much!" granted Herries.

"Yaas, wathah. I weally think that a feahful thwashin' would do those cheeky wathahs good, you know."

Tom Merry laughed.

"We'll see them again," he said. "They're hanging on at Abingdon, and we're not in a hurry to get up to Oxford. They've japed us once. Next time we'll give them the kybosh."

And—House rivalry having been roused once more to a keen pitch—Tom Merry & Co. determined to "hang on" at their present stopping-place until they had given Figgins & Co. the necessary "kybosh." It would, as Tom Merry explained, help to keep them in their place when the next term started at St. Jim's, and the Co. agreed that it would.

## CHAPTER 4. A Naval Combat!

"**B**AI Jove!"  
"What?"  
"There they are!"  
It was morning—a fresh and sunny morning on the Thames.

Tom Merry & Co. had camped in the boat, no camp on shore being available at that spot. In the sunny morning they turned out and breakfasted on board, and washing-up was going on, when Arthur Augustus gave the alarm.

A slender canoe was paddling up the river—Kerr and Fatty Wynn using the paddles with great skill. George Figgins stood up in the canoe, balancing himself there with still greater skill. The canoe, moving with great swiftness, approached the moored boat on the shining, rippling waters.

"Here they come—looking for trouble!" remarked Monty Lowther.

Blake groped for an empty tin.

Figgins put his hands to his mouth, and bawled across the intervening water.

"Hallo, you School House rotters!"

"Hallo, you New House freaks!" called back Blake.

"We've come along to lick you!"

"Go ahead!" said Tom Merry, laughing.

"Yaas, wathah!"

The canoe glided nearer. Figgins produced a pea-shooter, and started. Whiz, whiz, whiz!

Blake hurled the sardine-tin, but it fell short. But the peas did not fall short.

They whizzed and stung, Figgins shooting tiny missile after tiny missile with unerring aim. As the canoe glided by, he raked the Old Bus fore and aft.

"Bai Jove, I think— Yawwooooh!" howled Arthur Augustus, as a whizzing pea shot into his mouth. "Gwooooh! Ooooooh! Gug!"

"Let's get at them!" roared Blake, in great wrath. "Cast off, there!"

"Yes, rather!"

The Old Bus cast off her moorings, and the oars were put out. The St. Jim's boat glided out into the river to meet the enemy.

But the School House party were at a disadvantage. The Old Bus was a good boat, a roomy boat, just the boat a party required for camping up the river. But she was not designed for rapid evolutions. She was fairly heavy in build, and she carried a good crew and cargo. The light canoe, skilfully paddled, fairly danced round her. It was a good deal like a contest between an elephant and a gazelle.

Figgins seemed to have an inexhaustible supply of ammunition and of energy. Again and again the Old Bus rushed down on the canoe, and the light little craft danced out of reach. And all the time Figgins kept up his fire without slacking.

But at last the Old Bus succeeded in getting close—or the paddlers allowed her to get close. Tom Merry & Co. looked for a chance to jump aboard, quite confident of dealing successfully with Figgins & Co. at close quarters.

And then George Figgins dropped his pea-shooter and picked up a huge garden-squirt from the bottom of the canoe.

The squirt was full—not only of water. Figgins had thoughtfully added red ink to its contents.

Squish!

"Oh, my hat!"

"Ooooooooh!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" came in a yell from the canoe as it danced away again.

Tom Merry & Co. shook furious fists after it. Arthur Augustus had caught most of the volley from the squirt, and his noble face was like unto that of a Red Indian. But all the St. Jim's crew were splashed with inky water.

"After them!" panted Blake.

"Oh cwumbs! Look at me!" moaned Arthur Augustus "Oh deah!"

"After the rotters!" yelled Herries.

The Old Bus swung round in pursuit. And then the St. Jim's crew were apprised of the fact that they were not the only users of the river, as they nearly collided with a punt. The language that was addressed to them from the narrowly missed punt was almost potent enough to turn the air blue.

Heedless of the punters, the infuriated crew of the Old Bus laboured after their elusive enemy.

Again they came within range; and by that time Figgins had refilled the squirt from the Thames.

It was only Thames water that swooshed over the St. Jim's crew this time, but it was not nice.

"Have some more?" roared Figgins.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The canoe danced away.

"Oh cwumbs! I am feahfully inkay!" groaned Arthur Augustus. "Look at my shirt! Look at my blazah!"







The Old Bus shot down on the rocking canoe before the New House party had time to escape. There was a crash, and the next moment Figgins & Co. were struggling wildly in the water. (See this page.)

"I—I—I'll scrag those beasts!" panted Blake. "I—I—I—I—I'll—" Words failed Blake.  
 "We're getting the worst of this!" said Tom. "We can't get near the brutes in this old tub unless they choose!"

"Hallo! Look at them!" shouted Blake.  
 Figgins & Co., rather too intent on persecuting the School House party, had got in the way of a launch coming swiftly upstream. They paddled rapidly to safety, but the wash of the launch made the light canoe dance like a cork, and it very nearly capsized. Figgins was seen to sit down very suddenly, and the canoe jumped and bounded under the shock. For some minutes Kerr and Wynn were too busy in saving their craft from shipwreck to have any attention to bestow upon the enemy.

"Quick, Manners!" panted Tom.  
 Manners was steering. The Old Bus shot down on the rocking canoe, and this time the New House party had no time to escape. There was a crash as the Old Bus collided with the canoe.

The next moment Figgins & Co. were in the water, and Blake had secured the canoe with a boathook.

Three dismayed New House juniors had to swim for it. They caught hold of the canoe, which was held fast by the boathook, and blinked up at Tom Merry & Co. with dripping faces.

"Our win!" chuckled Tom Merry.  
 "Yaas, wathah!"  
 "Our canoe, too!" said Blake cheerily. "Prize of war! You fellows think you can swim to the bank?"  
 "Ha, ha, ha!"  
 "Oh crumbs! You're not going to bag our canoe!" gasped Figgins. "It belongs to Kerr's uncle, you know!"  
 "Tell Kerr's uncle we'll leave it for him at Oxford."  
 "Ha, ha, ha!"

Two or three of the School House juniors grasped the canoe and righted it. They collected the floating paddles and lifted them into the boat. Figgins & Co. were allowed to crawl into the canoe, where they sat, dripping and dismayed. The tables had been turned on the New House party with a vengeance.

"Look here—" began Figgins.

Tom Merry waved his hand.  
 "Ring off!" he said. "You're prisoners of war, and the canoe is a prize. We're going to tow you."

"Look here—"  
 "You can swim for it any time you like!" chuckled Tom.

"Ha, ha, ha!"  
 A rope was tied on the canoe's nose, and the little craft dropped a few yards behind the Old Bus. There was a keen wind up the river that morning, and Tom Merry & Co., instead of towing as usual, hoisted out the sail! The Old Bus glided up the river gaily, the canoe towing behind, with three disconsolate juniors sitting in it.

CHAPTER 5.  
 Trouble!

ARTHUR AUGUSTUS D'ARCY finished washing the last traces of red ink from his aristocratic countenance and grinned back at the towed canoe. Tom Merry was handling the sail, and handling it well. Manners steered the Old Bus. The rest of the juniors watched Figgins & Co. with great enjoyment.

Figgins & Co. had had the best of the naval battle at the start. But undoubtedly they had had the worst of it at the finish.

The paddles were on board the Old Bus, and without the paddles the canoers were helpless.

Certainly they could have plunged into the Thames and swum ashore; but that meant abandoning the canoe, and leaving it as a prize in the hands of the victors.

Figgins & Co. wrung the water out of their clothes, and the blazing sun soon dried them. They sat in the canoe and glared back at the grinning crew of the Old Bus.

They felt their position keenly.  
 "They've done us!" said George Figgins at last in a low voice. "They'd never have done it but for that dashed launch, of course! But they have! We shall have to make terms!"

"We can cut loose!" said Kerr.  
 "They've got the paddles."

"We can manage somehow."

Figgins stood up.

"Look here, you School House rotters—" he called out.

"It's all wight, Figgins!" answered Arthur Augustus D'Arcy cheerily. "You fellows look awfully funny, sittin' here like a lot of moultin' fowls, you know! This is weally as funny as fishin' for a fellow's hat with a wad and line, you know!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"We want our paddles!" roared Figgins.

"Go on wantin', deah boy!"

"We're not going to follow you all the way up this chumping river!" howled Fatty Wynn.

"Swim for it!" suggested Hervees.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Will you chuck us our paddles, you rotters?"

"No jolly fear!"

"We'll make terms if you like!" said Blake. "Own up that you're licked—"

"We're not licked!" roared Figgins. "That dashed launch—"

"Own up that you're licked, and say, 'Please give us our paddles, and we'll be good little boys—'"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Go and eat coke!" bawled Figgins.

"Then you don't get the paddles!"

The School House crew chortled gleefully as the Old Bus sailed on, towing the canoe behind. Figgins & Co. consulted in low tones.

"We shall have to cut loose, and blow the paddles!" said Kerr. "We'll manage to steer downstream somehow without them."

"And leave 'em with those rotters to swank over!" growled Figgins morosely.

"Well, what else can we do, old chap?"

"We'll get them back another time," said Fatty Wynn.

"We can get some more paddles, and follow those bounders up the river. We'll rush them when they're camping to-night."

"Anyhow, we can't let them tow us for miles like this," said Kerr. "I'm tired of hearing them chortle."

"Blow that launch!"

"Well, what's to be done, Figgy?"

Figgins grunted. It was evident that there was nothing to be done but to follow Kerr's suggestion.

"Cut loose!" he said at last.

Kerr opened his pocket-knife and sawed through the tow-rope.

"Don't you want your paddles?" called out Blake with a chuckle.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, go and eat coke!" retorted Figgins.

The canoe floated free. The Old Bus sailed cheerily on, and Tom Merry & Co. waved their hands in farewell. Cat-calls and loud laughter floated back from the Old Bus, to cheer the ears of Figgins & Co., as they strove to paddle with their hands towards the bank.

"I wathah think those New House boundahs are sowwy they spoke, you know," grinned Arthur Augustus. "But what are we goin' to do with those old paddles?"

"Keep 'em, and stick them up in the study at St. Jim's next term," said Monty Lowther. "Trophies of victory."

"Good! They'll stick up all right in No. 6 in the Fourth," said Blake with a nod.

"In No. 10 in the Shell, you mean," said Lowther pleasantly.

"Look here, you Shell duffer—"

"Look here, you Fourth-Form chump—"

"Shut up!" roared Tom Merry. "We've started the day with a House row, and we don't want to carry on with a Form row. We're not at St. Jim's now, but on the river."

"Yaas, wathah! I am quite surprisid at you, Lowthah!"

"Why, you ass—"

"Weally, Lowthah—"

"Look out!" came a roar across the waters. The wind was strong behind the Old Bus, and the sail pulled splendidly, and the Bus was travelling up the river at a quite unaccustomed pace. A large, brightly-painted boat, with half a dozen people in it, was pulling athwart the course, rather recklessly, and looked, for a moment or two, in danger of being run down.

A volley of yells came from the rowing-boat.

"Sheer off!"

"Want all the river?"

"Blow you, keep clear!"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy turned his eyeglass upon the other craft. The crew were not a pleasant-looking crew. There were six of them, young men between twenty and thirty, and they did not look nice young men. They were loudly dressed, they wore brilliant jewellery in the way of tie-pins and shirt-studs and sleeve-links—flashing stones that would have been worth a fortune, collectively, if worth anything

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at all. Their faces were pimply, they were all smoking cigarettes, and early as the hour was, it was clear that some of them had been drinking. They looked, indeed, like a gang of racing roughs, as probably they were—about the flashiest and toughest-looking crew that the St. Jim's fellows had encountered on the river so far.

"Bai Jove!" said Arthur Augustus. "What a crew!"

"Real river roughs, that lot!" said Blake.

A torrent of abuse came from the rough crew, and an empty bottle, that had contained beer, came whizzing, and it dropped into the Old Bus and smashed into pieces.

"Mind what you're up to, you rotters!" shouted Blake wrathfully.

Whiz, whiz!

Another bottle came sailing, and it smashed on the mast of the Old Bus. Dig gave a howl as a fragment struck his cheek.

Tom Merry's eyes flashed.

"That's too thick!" he said. "Stand ready, and give them jip as we go by—I'll shave them jolly close."

"Yaas, wathah!" breathed Arthur Augustus.

Tom Merry handled the sheet well. The Old Bus stood away, as if giving the enemy a wide berth, and a chorus of hoots and yells followed from the pimpled crew. Then suddenly the Old Bus came back into the wind, and shot by the enemy so closely that a couple of oars were carried away.

The St. Jim's crew stood ready, and as they glided by a volley of various missiles shot into the rowing-boat. Cabbage stalks and potatoes, squashy apples and empty tins, came in a showering volley, and furious yells answered from the enemy.

The Old Bus was by in a few moments more, careering gaily up the river before the wind, leaving the enemy shaking furious fists and yelling out threats.

Monty Lowther waved his hand to them.

"Good-bye, pimples!" he shouted.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"We'll come arter you and smash you!" roared one of the pimpled band, jumping up and brandishing a boat-hook.

"Yes, we have no bananas!" answered Lowther.

"I'll give you bananas! I'll—I'll—"

"Chuck the hook at 'em, Albert!"

The boat-hook whizzed through the air. It was a dangerous missile, but Albert was evidently infuriated and reckless, and had indulged in intoxicants too early in the day. Fortunately, it dropped half-way to the Old Bus and disappeared in the Thames. And the Old Bus sailed on, and Albert & Co. dropped out of sight behind.

## CHAPTER 6.

### The Order of the Boot!

"THIS," said Monty Lowther, "is a remarkable spot." The sunset was glowing on the Thames, a fine close to a fine day. The wind had carried the Old

Bus well on her way in the morning, but a dead calm followed, and the juniors had been towing again. Now the St. Jim's boat had stopped, and Tom Merry, holding on to the branch of a willow, scanned the shore.

"Wemarkable, Lowthah?" said Arthur Augustus, turning his eyeglass inquiringly towards the bank.

"Extremely so. One of the most remarkable spots in the whole valley of the Thames," answered Lowther.

Arthur Augustus looked puzzled. Shoreward, he could see a grassy bank, with pasture-land stretching away from it, and a few trees. There was certainly nothing very remarkable in the aspect of the bank at that particular point between Abingdon and Iffley.

"I weally do not see it, Lowthah," said Arthur Augustus at last.

"It's what you do not see that is remarkable," explained Lowther.

"Weally, you know—"

"As far as the eye can reach," said Lowther impressively, "there is no notice-board announcing that trespassers will be prosecuted."

"Bai Jove!"

"And if that doesn't make this spot the most remarkable in the Thames Valley, nothing will," said Lowther.

Tom Merry laughed.

"Well, we can camp here," he said.

"Without any danger of forty bob or a month," said Monty. "We ought to write to the papers about this when we get home. A spot along the Thames where nobody wants to prosecute anybody else is really a find. Let's camp on it while we've got the chance; most likely somebody will come along to-morrow and put up a notice-board."

And the Old Bus was moored up to the bank, and the St. Jim's crew landed. It was quite a pleasant spot for camping, and though probably the land was somebody's property, the juniors hoped that it would be all right. It would be, as Lowther remarked, the owner's fault for forgetting to put up a notice-board, especially as he was perhaps the only dweller in the Thames Valley who had forgotten to do so.



In the cool of the evening Tom Merry & Co. enjoyed their supper on the grassy bank among the willows.

"Hallo, look!" exclaimed Blake suddenly, pointing with his fork to the glowing river.

A canoe came in sight. It was not uncommon to see a canoe on the Thames, of course. But this particular canoe was the canoe of Figgins & Co., and the three New House juniors were in it.

Tom Merry & Co. jumped up at once.

"This way, you New House bounders!" shouted Blake.

"Come along and have another licking!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Here's your paddles!" bawled Herries.

He waved one in either hand.

Figgins & Co. did not deign to reply. The canoe paddled on, George Figgins watching the St. Jim's camp with a keen eye as he passed. Then Figgins & Co. disappeared round a bend of the river.

"Not looking for trouble this time," said Tom Merry, laughing.

"Looking for a chance to sneak their paddles back, very likely," said Blake. "We'll keep them ashore with us, in case they come nosing about the Old Bus."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"'Ear, 'ear!"

Tom Merry & Co. exchanged glances. The willows screened the boat's crew from their sight; but they knew who were the new arrivals. They were the pimpled crew with whom trouble had occurred that morning.

"The dear men are camping up the river like us," murmured Monty Lowther. "Looks to me as if there's going to be trouble."

"Bai Jove! They are wathah wuffianly wottahs, Lowthah, but they will hardly venchah to interfere with us."

"You'll see."

Albert and 'Enry tied up their boat, and the pimpled gentlemen came scrambling ashore. They came quite suddenly on the St. Jim's camp.

They stopped and stared at Tom Merry & Co.

"Them blokes!" ejaculated Albert. Evidently he recognised the crew of the Old Bus.

"The same lot!" said 'Enry.

"Well, this 'ere is luck," grinned Albert. "We'll give 'em running down a cove's boat and pelting 'im with taters."

"Wot to!" said 'Enry.

**HURRY, If You Want—**

# THE HOLIDAY ANNUAL

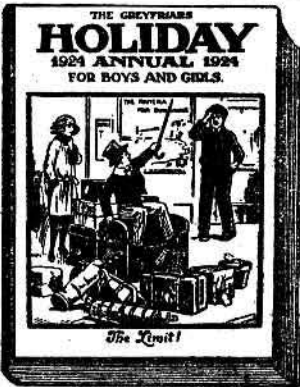
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"Looks as if they've gone on to Ifley," said Tom. The School House juniors watched the river, but there was no sign of Figgins & Co. returning. They concluded that the New House trio had gone on for good.

For an hour after supper, Tom Merry & Co. enjoyed the luxury of a "laze" on the grassy bank, while the sun sank lower and lower, and shadows gathered on the Thames. Tom Merry rose at last, and yawned.

"Better get the tent ashore, and turn in," he remarked. Boats were still passing on the river. A brightly-painted boat pulled in to the willows near the Old Bus, and a voice the juniors had heard before, floated to their ears.

"This 'ere will suit us!"

"Orlright, Albert. There ain't any blooming notice-board up, that's one comfort."

"Blow the notice-boards, 'Enry. If there was a blinking notice-board 'ere, I'd jolly well 'ave it down and make a camp-fire of it."

"I believe you, Albert."

"Hallo! There's another boat."

"Blow the other boat! We're going to camp 'ere, and if the place is took up, we'll tork to 'em."

The half-dozen roughs advanced on the camp. Seven juniors rose to meet them, with rather grim faces.

"Pway keep your distance, you fellows," said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, with dignity.

"Ark at 'im!" said Albert.

"Pway keep your distance," mimicked 'Enry, with a delightful rendering of Arthur Augustus' accent. "Oh, my eye! Pway do, you know! He, he, he!"

"Eaving taters at a bloke!" said Albert.

"You thwow bottles at us befoah we thwew potatoes at you, my good fellow," said Arthur Augustus mildly.

"Serve you right, too," said Albert. "Think the 'ole river belongs to you, you blooming toff?"

"I wufuse to be called a bloomin' toff!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus. "I wegard you as a howwid boundah!"

"Look here, you chaps, there's no need for us to row," said Tom Merry. "Lots of room here for both parties to camp, if you want to camp."

Albert sneered.

"You know what you're goin' to get, what?" he asked.

"Oh, rats!"

"Rats, eh?" said Albert. "I'll give you rats! Walk into em, mates, and wipe 'em up."

There was an aroma about Albert & Co., as well as a flush in their faces, which indicated that they had not forgotten strong drinks when provisioning their boat. It was evident that they were ripe for trouble, and would probably have "rowed" with the other campers, even if there had been no previous trouble. The spot was rather a solitary one, and just suited the methods of Albert & Co.

They came on to the camp, grinning, and Albert began operations by kicking over the stove and kettle.

Blake promptly hit out; and though Albert was a hefty fellow, the junior's punch sent him sprawling in the grass.

"Good for you, deah boy!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus. Albert sat up rather dazedly.

"Go for 'em!" he roared.

He scrambled up and led the charge.

It was trouble now, with a vengeance. There were seven juniors, against six of the riverside roughs; but in age and weight, the enemy had an overwhelming advantage on their side. But Tom Merry & Co. stood up pluckily to the enemy.

In a minute more a wild and whirling combat was in progress.

Kettle and stove and crockery were trampled underfoot, and reduced to a state of hopeless wreckage.

Worse than that, Tom Merry & Co. were getting rather severely wrecked.

Tom stood up to Albert, and engaged him hand to hand; and the best junior boxer of St. Jim's held his own against the big rough—large and heavy as he was.

But Arthur Augustus went down under 'Enry's charge, in a dazed state, and Digby joined him in the grass. Blake and Lowther and Manners struggled fiercely as they were grasped, but in spite of their resistance, they were dragged to the water's edge, and tossed into the Thames. Muddy and drenched and exhausted, they clambered into the Old Bus.

Herries was still fighting hard, but he was floored at last. Tom Merry was getting rather the better of Albert when he was taken from behind by 'Enry, and dragged over with a rough arm around his neck.

"Got 'im!" chortled 'Enry.

"Duck 'im!"

"Chuck 'im in!"

Tom Merry went with a heavy splash into muddy water. Herries followed him in, and then Arthur Augustus. Digby just dodged in time and jumped into the boat.

Albert & Co. stood lined up on the bank, roaring with laughter. Albert dabbed a nose that was streaming crimson.

"Coming back?" hooted 'Enry. "Do!"

"Do come back!" yelled the whole gang.

"We're waitin' for you!" howled Albert, dabbing his nose. "Oh, my beak! Ow! Come and 'ave some more!"

Arthur Augustus scrambled into the Old Bus. He dabbed mud from his noble face, and gasped.

"Back up, deah boys! Go for the cads!"

"Come on!" roared Albert & Co. "Waiting for yer!"

"Wush the wottahs, deah boys!"

Arthur Augustus was about to leap ashore, when Blake caught him by the arm.

"Chuck it!" he growled.

"Weally, Blake—"

"They're too many for us. Chuck it!"

"I wofuse to give in!"

"Fathead!"

"Sheer off!" said Tom Merry quietly.

There was no help for it. The St. Jim's juniors were hopelessly out-matched by the gang of roughs; and it was useless to recommence a combat in which they had no chance of success. With feelings that were really too deep for words, the St. Jim's crew, unmoored the Old Bus. It went against the grain to retreat before a despised enemy; but they were soon aware that even retreat was not easy. Albert & Co. began to pelt the boat, with fragments of broken crockery and turfs, and it was under a whizzing volleying that the juniors pushed off, and succeeded in getting the Old Bus out into the river.

Followed by raucous yells and taunts from Albert & Co., the defeated juniors pulled away up the river in the falling darkness. And as they pulled, every member of the party rubbed or dabbed at some injury, and mumbled. It was not Tom Merry & Co.'s lucky day.

## CHAPTER 7.

### Done in the Dark!

"EASY as falling off a log!" said George Figgins.

"Quite!" agreed Kerr.

"Anyhow, we're trying it on!" said Fatty Wynn emphatically.

Figgins & Co. were fully agreed upon that. New House had been beaten by School House, and that was a state of affairs that could not possibly be tolerated by Figgins & Co.

The canoe rocked on the water, under shadowy trees. Figgins & Co. had waited long and patiently. They were "camping out" that night, but the night was not to be spent in balmily slumber.

"You see," said Figgins, "they're too many for us in a scrap—seven chaps. One or two too many."

"Only one or two?" said Kerr, with a grin.

"Well, yes. We could lick any four or five of the School House, I hope," said Figgins; "but we can't lick seven."

"No mistake about that," agreed Kerr.

"But if we take them by surprise, and rush them when they're in their jolly little bunks, that alters the state of the case," said Figgins.

"It does."

"They've got our paddles," said Figgins wrathfully. "It doesn't matter about the paddles. Blow 'em! But they're not going to bag trophies from the New House, to swank over us next term."

"Perish the thought!" said Kerr gravely.

"Look here, Kerr—"

"My dear chap, I'm with you all the way," said the Scottish junior. "We're going to recapture those paddles, for the honour of the House. Incidentally, we're going to wreck the camp, just to show those bounders that New House is cock-house at St. Jim's."

"Just that," said Figgins.

"Easy enough," declared Fatty Wynn. "They'll be fast asleep, and not looking for anything of the kind. Before they know what's happening to them we'll have their tent over, wallop them, bag the paddles, and scoot. Easy enough!"

To Figgins and Fatty Wynn it seemed easy enough. Perhaps Kerr, the canny Scottish junior, had some slight doubts. But Kerr was prepared to back up his leader loyally, and hope for the best.

Figgins looked at his watch by the light of a little electric torch.

"Half-past ten!" he said. "They've turned in long ago."

"Fast asleep long before this," said Fatty Wynn.

"I suppose we shall be able to spot their camp in the dark?" remarked Kerr.

"Easily! I made a special note of it. I know just how they're fixed. Besides, it's not very dark. There's the stars."

"True, O king!"

Figgins rose from the grassy knoll upon which he was seated.

"Let's get off," he said. "It's late enough."

"Let's!" assented Kerr.

The three heroes of the St. Jim's New House stepped into the canoe, and pushed off from the shadowy bank. It was dark on the rolling river, save for the gleam of the stars. The

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"Oh crumbs!" gasped Kerr, as a chorus of threats came from under the flapping, wriggling canvas. "We've woken up the wrong passengers! Listen to their giddy language!" "Come on, then!" cried Figgins. "We'd better hook it!" The three juniors ran for the bank just as Albert wriggled from under the flapping canvas, raving and shaking his fist. (See page 12.)

canoe had gone on a mile or more past the St. Jim's camp, and the three juniors dropped down with the current, paddling gently.

Kerr and Wynn paddled, while George Figgins watched the bank anxiously. It was not so easy as he had expected, to distinguish landmarks at night, and he did not want to overshoot the spot. But Figgins had a keen eye, and he had very specially scanned the camp in passing up the river in the daylight.

"We're close on them now," he murmured presently. "I know that bunch of willows. Quiet, now!"

Kerr and Fatty Wynn paddled with redoubled caution.

The canoe glided into the bank.

Dimly, rocking to the water under the willows, they made out the form of a moored boat.

They could make it out only dimly, but they had no doubt that it was the Old Bus, for Figgins had reached the right spot. Of what had happened since Tom Merry & Co. had camped there the New House trio had, of course, no knowledge.

"This is the place," whispered Figgins. "That's the boat. The camp's on the bank quite close."

"Good!" murmured Kerr.

The canoe, almost without a sound, glided round the stern of the swinging boat, and bumped softly on rushes and reeds. From the gloom ashore there came a sound that told of a sleeper.

Snore!

Figgins started a little.

"Which of them is making that thumping row?" he murmured. "I didn't know they snored like that in the School House."

"It isn't Gussy," grinned Kerr. "He would scorn the giddy action. Herries, perhaps."

Figgins chuckled.

"Well, we'll soon stop their snoring," he said.

The canoe was tied on to a willow branch, and the three juniors crept cautiously ashore.

The sound of the snore grew louder as they advanced, and they heard several other snores, forming a kind of chorus. As Figgins & Co. occupied a different House at St. Jim's, they did not know whether Tom Merry & Co. snored or not. But certainly they would never have suspected the School House fellows of kicking up a shindy like this when they slept. But the snores, at all events, guided them, and it was upon this spot that Tom Merry & Co. had camped.

"There's the tent!" breathed Figgins.

There was the tent, right enough, dim in the starlight. It was not, as a matter of fact, Tom Merry & Co.'s tent, but Figgins & Co. had no reason for suspecting that little circumstance. Of Albert and his merry men they knew nothing at all.

"Go it!" breathed Figgins.

The New House trio suppressed their chuckles, and set to work. Their work was to draw the tent-pegs.

The tent had been pegged in a rather slovenly manner—not at all the style of Tom Merry & Co., who were efficient Boy Scouts, and knew all about camping. The tent was, in fact, already sagging, and if there had been a wind it would have come down on Albert & Co. Figgins & Co. supplied the place of the wind.

"It's going!" murmured Fatty Wynn.

"Going—going!" chuckled Kerr.

"Gone!" gasped Figgins.

Crash!

Walloping canvas came down on half a dozen sleepers, walloping and flapping, and from half a dozen sleepers, suddenly awake, there arose a Babel of voices.

"What the thunder—"

"Ow the thump—"

"That blinking tent—"

"Gerroff my neck, you blinking idjit!"  
 "You never fastened them pegs proper, Albert."  
 "Old yer row!"

Figgins and Co. stood petrified. They had been about to rush on Tom Merry & Co. and tangle them further in the flapping canvas, and generally make a wreck of them and their camp. But at the sound of those raucous and excited voices Figgins & Co. stopped still, amazed and dismayed. For not by the wildest stretch of imagination could they suppose those raucous voices to belong to Tom Merry & Co. of St. Jim's. George Figgins fairly stuttered.

"We—we—we've got the wrong camp!"  
 "Oh crumbs!" gasped Kerr. "We've woke up the wrong passengers, and no mistake! Listen to the giddy language!"  
 "Better hook it!" breathed Fatty Wynn.

From under the flapping, wriggling canvas the voices came in a furious chorus, with many words—emphatic words—that were really scarcely suitable for youthful ears to hear. It was obviously advisable for Figgins & Co. to "hook" it without stopping to apologise for their mistake. The gentlemen in the tent did not sound like gentlemen who would listen courteously to a graceful apology for such an unfortunate error.

"Come on!" gasped Figgins.  
 The three juniors ran for the bank. But as they started Albert wriggled from under the flapping canvas with a blood-thirsty eye. He caught sight of the three flitting figures.

"It's some of them kids ag'in!" he roared. "Arter them!"  
 Albert dashed in pursuit. His comrades, struggling out from the wrecked tents rushed after them. Figgins & Co. bounded into their canoe.

"Arter 'em!" shrieked 'Enry.  
 "Smash 'em!"  
 "Wrang their blinking necks!"  
 "Oh, my hat!" gasped Figgins. "What a gang! Shove off, for goodness' sake."

The canoe rocked away over startlit water as Albert & Co. reached the river. Albert rushed in knee deep and made a clutch at the canoe and caught hold. A smart rap from a paddle made Albert withdraw his clutch with a yell.

"We're off!" gasped Kerr.  
 Albert, splashing in water and mud, roared with pain and wrath. He stumbled over a root, and sat down—in a foot of water. And the remarks that proceeded from Albert after that mishap were simply sulphurous.

Figgins & Co., panting, glided out into the middle of the river, leaving the pimply party raging on the bank. And they realised that they were very fortunate in getting clear.

## CHAPTER 8.

### Albert & Co. on the War-path!

"**W**ERE goin' to thwash those wottabs."

"Br-r-r-r-r!"

"Weally, Blake—"

"Go to sleep!"

"Yaas; but we are goin' to thwash those wottabs," said Arthur Augustus firmly. "I wefuse to wesome the voyage until we have given those wottabs a tewwific thwashin'."

"Good!" said Monty Lowther. "Go to sleep and dream of a way of doing it. And give your chin a rest, old bean."

"Weally, Lowthah—"

"And give us a rest!" grunted Blake.

"Wats!"

Arthur Augustus settled down to sleep in the Old Bus. Tom Merry & Co. were not feeling in their usual spirits that night.

It was a pleasant, fine night, and the ripple of the water and the murmur of the wind in thick foliage lulled them.

But sleep did not come easily to the School House juniors of St. Jim's.

They had gone a mile in the Old Bus after being turned off by Albert & Co., and they were now camping in the boat. They were all more or less damaged by combat; but they felt sorer in mind than in body. It was a bitter pill for the heroes of St. Jim's to swallow—that crushing defeat at the hands of a gang of river roughs. But there was no help for it, in spite of Arthur Augustus' vengeful determination to thrash the enemy. Six full-grown roughs, who were reckless of what damage they might do, were more than a match for seven schoolboys, and there was no getting out of that undoubted fact.

But the crew of the Old Bus were by no means satisfied to leave matters where they were. They were not going to take it "lying down" if they could help it. Only they did not see what was to be done.

Obviously, the first thing was to get a night's sleep; Albert & Co. could be left till the morrow—if anything could be done then. So the juniors turned in in the boat.

They slept at last.

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Their slumber was uneasy, and every now and then one of them would wake and rub a bruise or a bump, and grunt, and go to sleep again. The Old Bus, tied to a branch that overhung the water, rocked on the current, and the hours of darkness wore away.

If a canoe glided by on the shadowy river, the campers in the Old Bus were, naturally, unaware of it. And the Old Bus itself was invisible from the river in the deep shadow of the overhanging trees.

Dawn came at last on the Thames, and the twittering of awakening birds filled the trees and thickets. Tom Merry & Co. slept on as the sun rose higher over the river, and the Berkshire hills, and the wide, green woods of Oxfordshire. There was a dash of oars on the river, and a boat came pulling up with four pimply-complexioned young men at the oars, and another pimply young man steering, and the redoubtable Albert standing up, scanning the river and the banks.

"We'll rout 'em out," Albert was saying in vengeful tones. "We'll give 'em yanking hover a bloke's tent in the middle of the blinking night."

"I believe you," said 'Enry, who was steering. "We'll rout 'em out and 'andle 'em, if we 'ave to foller 'em all the way to Hoxford."

"Oh, they'll be 'anging around 'ere somewhere," said Albert. "I dessay they camped quite near at 'and."

He scanned the river with fiery eyes. The rising sunlight glinted on the Old Bus swinging under the trees.

Albert's fiery eye lighted up at the sight of it. He knew Tom Merry's boat again.

The pimply party were on the war-path. The disturbance of their night's rest—all the more irritating because an overdose of beer had made them very sleepy—had to be avenged. And Albert & Co. had no doubt that it was to the ejected campers that they owed the attack. Albert had caught only a glimpse of Figgins & Co. in uncertain light, but he had seen that they were boys of about the same age and size as Tom Merry's party. As he had never seen or heard of Figgins & Co., and knew nothing of their feud with the School House fellows, he naturally supposed that his camp had been raided by the party of schoolboys whom the roughs had turned out of camp.

Had that been the case, Albert ought really to have regarded it as a just retribution for his ruffianism. But he didn't. He boiled with wrath and indignation.

At early dawn the pimply party started to search for the enemy, hoping to catch them before they broke camp. And now they had caught them—or supposed they had.

"There they are!" grinned Albert. "That's the blinking boat, anyhow, and I fancy the coves are in it, wot!"

"We've got 'em!" said 'Enry.

"And we'll make 'em sit up, and no error."

'Enry steered for the Old Bus. The boat ranged alongside, and Albert caught hold. The pimply gentlemen drew in their oars, and all laid hands on the Old Bus.

They grinned at the sleepers there. Tom Merry & Co. had not yet awakened.

"Fair in our 'ands!" chuckled Albert.

"Wotto!"

"Foller on."

Albert jumped into the Old Bus. His comrades followed him. They trod recklessly on sleepers in the boat, and those sleepers woke up suddenly.

"Bai Jove!" ejaculated Arthur Augustus. "What—"

"Those roughs!" yelled Blake.

"Back up!" exclaimed Tom Merry.

But the hapless St. Jim's party had no chance of backing up. At the best of times Albert & Co. were rather too hefty for them. And now all the advantage was on the side of the river roughs.

Tom Merry sprang up, only to fall again under a powerful drive on the chest from Albert. 'Enry planted a heavy boot on Arthur Augustus, and jammed a boathook on Blake's chest.

"Knock 'em down if they get up!" said Albert.

"Yarcooh!" roared Herries as one of the gang carried out that order.

Albert & Co. were masters of the situation. The juniors glared at them. Arthur Augustus regarded them with eyes that burned with scorn and indignation; but he had to realise that the task of thrashing the river gang was too large an order.

"Will you wemove your howwid boot from my chest?" asked Arthur Augustus in a voice trembling with rage.

"He, he, he!" was 'Enry's reply. "Like it on your nose?"

"You howwid wuffian—"

"Stow it!"

"What the thump have you come here for?" demanded Tom Merry, breathing hard with wrath.

"What the blinking thump did you come to our camp for?" jeered Albert. "Yanking a tent down on a bloke's 'cad."

"Eh, what?" exclaimed Tom, in amazement.

"You didn't think we should get arter you, ch?" grinned



Albert. "You come in the middle of the night and muck up our camp—"

"We haven't been near your camp, you silly owl."

"Dror it mild," said Albert. "You tell me you didn't come and yank our tent hover on our 'eads in the middle of the night?"

"No, you ass."

"Liar!" said Albert. "I jolly near ketched you at it. Now you're going to pay for your little joke."

"We haven't been near your silly camp!" roared Manners.

"Stow it! Think you can git out of it by telling lies?" sneered Albert. "I can tell you you're going through it 'ard!"

"'Ard as nails!" said 'Enry.

"I tell you—" said Tom Merry.

"Oh, chuck it! Bung 'em out of this 'ere boat," said Albert. "It don't matter if you 'urt 'em!"

"Bai Jove! I— Whoooo!"

"Back up!" gasped Tom.

He leaped up again, dodging a drive from Albert, and closed with the ruffian. They came down together in the bottom of the boat, struggling fiercely. And then the rest of the St. Jim's party piled in gallantly, striving hard against an overpowering enemy.

**CHAPTER 9.  
Stranded!**

"YAWOOOOP!"

Thus Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, as he went whirling out of the Old Bus into shallow water.

Splash, splash!

Herries and Digby followed him.

Tom Merry & Co. were fighting hard in the rocking,

of the law. They did not intend to steal the boat or its contents. They did not want to finish their river trip with the police hunting them up and down the Thames. They intended to strand the boat on the wrong side of the river, and leave the hapless voyagers to get out of their difficulty as best they could. That was an adequate punishment, in Albert's opinion, for the night attack on his camp; added to the severe handling that Tom Merry & Co. had already received.

"Bai Jove! We can't stop the beasts, you know!" gasped Arthur Augustus, rubbing his noble chest where an oar had shoved, and sitting breathlessly in the grass. "We're weally done, you know."

"Looks like it!" growled Blake.

"We'll get the boat back later," said Tom Merry, as cheerfully as he could. "Those silly asses seem to think that we raided their camp last night, somehow."

"I suppose they got squiffy, and their silly tent tumbled down on their boozy heads!" growled Blake.

"Or perhaps—"

"Figgins & Co.," said Tom, a light breaking on his mind. "You remember they passed our camp there in their canoe. They never knew that those ruffians had driven us out. They may have come along to raid us, and raided that gang instead."

"Just like New House fatheads!" said Blake. "I shouldn't wonder."

"Vewy likely," said Arthur Augustus, "and those wotien wuffians think it was us. Of course, we might have waided them—in fact, we weally ought to have done so, you know."

"We'll raid them yet!" said Herries savagely.

"There they go!" said Manners.

Albert & Co., having pushed the Old Bus close to the

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swaying boat, and they gave a good deal of punishment, as well as receiving it.

But they were over-matched, and defeat loomed up before them. One by one the struggling, panting juniors were hurled out of the boat.

Some of them landed in shallow water, some in the rushes; all of them exhausted and breathless.

Tom Merry was the last to go.

He splashed into water and mud, and Monty Lowther grasped him and dragged him on the bank.

In a muddy, drenched, and dismayed band, the St. Jim's juniors stood on the bank, panting for breath, glaring furiously at the enemy in possession of their boat.

Albert proceeded to cast loose the Old Bus. Tom Merry shouted to him breathlessly.

"You rascal—"

"Hallo! You want some more?" jeered Albert.

"If you steal our boat, you'll jolly soon have the police after you!" shouted Tom Merry.

"Who's stealing your old boat?" chuckled Albert. "We're taking this 'ere boat across the river. You can swim for it if you want it."

The roughs roared with laughter.

"Bai Jove!" gasped Arthur Augustus. "We're goin' to stop the wottahs somehow, deah boys! Come on!"

"Back up!" gasped Lowther.

The juniors gathered together and made a rush for the boat. Two or three oars were shoved at them, knocking them backwards.

Then the Old Bus was pushed off.

Albert & Co. crowded back into their own boat, and took the Old Bus in tow. Tom Merry & Co., who were stranded on the Berkshire side, stared after their boat as it was towed away to the Oxfordshire bank.

Albert & Co. were reckless ruffians, but they were not thieves; and doubtless they had a due regard for the terrors

Oxfordshire bank, tied it to a stump there. Then they waved their hands mockingly to the St. Jim's crowd, and pulled away in their own boat up the river. They disappeared from view round a bend of the winding Thames.

"Well, we've got to get our boat back," said Tom Merry. "I can swim for it, I suppose."

"Hold on," said Lowther. "There'll be plenty of craft by before long, and we can get somebody to tow it across."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"I dare say those New House rotters are still hanging about," growled Blake. "If they raided the wrong camp last night, very likely they're looking for the right one. They want those paddles back. By the way, what became of those paddles?"

"Ask Albert!" grinned Lowther. "They were left behind when they turned us out of camp."

"Talk of angels!" exclaimed Manners suddenly. "Look!" A canoe glided along the shining river in the early morning sunlight. Two juniors were paddling in it, and a third was scanning the banks.

"Figgins & Co.!" said Tom. "Looking for us, very likely."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Perhaps they expect to spot us, and tackle us before we wake up, same as that gang did!" grinned Lowther.

"So they would have if Albert hadn't come along," said Tom. "Better give them a hail. Never mind House rows now. They can tow our boat back with that twopenny canoe."

"We towed them yesterday, and one good turn deserves another," chuckled Monty Lowther.

Tom Merry put his hands to his mouth by way of a trumpet, and shouted:

"Ahoy, Figgins!"



Figgins stared round from the canoe. He had not yet sighted the Old Bus tied up on the opposite bank.

"Hallo! Where—"

"This way, Figgins!"

The canoe paddled in. Tom Merry & Co. were standing under a big tree on the bank, whose wide-sprading branches reached far over the water. Figgins & Co., as they paddled in, came under the shade of a great low branch; but they kept at a wary distance from the bank.

Figgins stood up.

"Hallo, you School House cripples! Where's your boat?"

"It's been bagged," said Tom. "A gang of roughs walked it off, and they've tied it up across the river."

"And you let them?" inquired Figgins.

"You New House ass—"

"You cheeky chump—"

"Poor little kids!" said Figgins commiseratingly. "You School House chaps shouldn't go about alone. If you haven't a New House fellow to look after you, you should get a nurse."

"Bai Jove! Weally, Figgins—"

"It was all your fault, you New House fathead!" growled Tom Merry. "I suppose it was you raided that gang of roughs last night in our old camp, and they thought it was us!"

"That gang!" exclaimed Kerr.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Figgins. "You kids do rake up some bad luck!"

"Don't jaw, old man. Go and tow our boat over like a good kid!"

Figgins glanced across the river. He could make out the Old Bus tied up on the Oxfordshire side.

"Never mind House rags now," said Tom. "Remember you're a St. Jim's chap, and play up."

"Hear, hear!" said Figgins, with a grin. "Of course, we know it's up to the New House to take care of the School House. We know that!"

"Yes, rather!" grinned Fatty Wynn.

"Only you kids have got to learn your place," said Figgins seriously.

"We'll look after you, and protect you, and all that—"

"You cheeky ass!" roared Blake.

"Shush! But you've got to hand back our old paddles—"

"Ask that gang for them," said Tom Merry. "I believe they chucked them at us, along with a lot of other things. They've probably floated down as far as Reading by this time."

"Oh!" said Figgins. "Well, if you've not got them, never mind. We're not letting you keep any giddy trophies. Well, own up you're licked—"



A rope was tied on the canoe's nose, and the little craft dropped a few yards behind the Old Bus. There was a keen wind up the canoe towing behind, with Figgins & Co. as passengers.



“Rats!”  
 “And own up that New House is cock-house at St. Jim's—”  
 “Rubbish!”  
 “Otherwise,” said Figgins calmly, “we'll tow your old boat off, but we shall tow it back to Abingdon.”  
 “You rotter!”  
 “Bai Jove! What is Lowthah up to?” murmured Arthur Augustus.  
 During the talk with the New House trio, Monty Lowther had climbed into the big tree, on the landward side, out of sight of Figgins & Co. Then, with great caution, he made his way along the great bough that hung over the water, and at the present moment he was directly above the canoe that floated beneath the branch. As Figgins & Co. did not think of looking up into the great tree, they had no idea of Monty Lowther's remarkable manœuvres.  
 Arthur Augustus turned his eyeglass on Lowther in amazement, as he spotted him on the overhanging branch.  
 “Shurrup, you ass!” whispered Manners.  
 “Weally, Mannahs—”  
 Figgins glanced up, following the direction of Gussy's eyeglass.  
 “Look out!” he ejaculated.  
 But the New House trio looked out too late. Monty.

Lowther dropped from the branch, and came with a crash into the canoe. The next instant the canoe was under water, and Lowther and three New House juniors were splashing in the Thames.

CHAPTER 10.

Shoulder to Shoulder!

“HURRAH!”  
 “Bwavo, Lowthah!” roared Arthur Augustus, comprehending at last.  
 The canoe floated, bottom up, with four fellows clinging to it. The water was shallow by the bank, and the four juniors were soon treading in mud, still holding to the canoe. Figgins & Co. made a desperate attempt to right it, and drag it away from Lowther; but they had no time. Heedless of water and of mud, Tom Merry & Co. rushed in. With the water flowing round their necks, the School House juniors laid hold of the canoe.  
 In spite of Figgins & Co. it was dragged ashore, and landed in triumph. Seven of the School House made short work of three of the New House.  
 Blake clapped Monty Lowther on the shoulder in great glee.  
 “Well done, old bean!” he chortled.



... and Tom Merry & Co., instead of towing as usual, hoisted out the sail. The Old Bus glided up the river gaily, with the squares of war sitting in it. (See page 7.)



"Yaas, wathah!" chirruped Arthur Augustus. Figgins & Co. dragged themselves out of the water dolorously. They were drenched and dripping, and their canoe was captured. It was "one up" to the School House, after all.

"All sewene now," chuckled Arthur Augustus. "We can ferry across in our canoe and get to the Bus."

"Our canoe!" roared Figgins.  
"Your mistake—ours!" chuckled Tom Merry, wiping the water from his face. "You were going to tow the Old Bus to Abingdon, I think. We'll tow your canoe to Oxford instead."

"Ha, ha, ha!"  
Figgins & Co. simply glared, while the School House juniors launched the captured canoe. Tom Merry & Co. proceeded to pack themselves into it. It was an extremely close fit for seven, but the canoe just sufficed to float them across, with great care.

"Look here!" bawled Figgins.

"Good-bye, New House!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"We're not standing this!" gasped Figgins. "Come on!"  
The New House trio made a desperate rush. They were driven back with their own paddles, and Tom Merry & Co. pushed off. Figgins & Co., with feelings that could not have been expressed in words, watched them go. They were feeling a good deal as Tom Merry & Co. had felt after their combat with Albert and his merry men.

The overloaded canoe glided out, deep in the water, and Tom Merry paddled with great care. Monty Lowther suggested that Herries should hang his feet over the side, and thus lighten the weight of the cargo by one-half, a suggestion that was greeted with a snort by Herries. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy waved his eyeglass in farewell to the New House trio—and nearly upset the canoe in doing so.

"Steady, fathad!" said Blake warningly.

"Weally, Blake—"

"Bring back our canoe, you School House rotters!" roared Figgins, almost dancing with rage on the Berkshire bank.

"Our canoe, old top!" sang out Lowther.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Look here, we want our canoe!" shrieked Fatty Wynn.

"Yes, we have no bananas."

"You—you—you—"

George Figgins' furious voice died away across the Thames. Slowly but surely the canoe won across to Oxfordshire. Fortunately there were few craft abroad at that early hour, and the canoe had only one narrow escape from a skiff, and another from a punt, and then floated into safety to the bank.

"Bai Jove! That was a vewy close fit," said Arthur Augustus. "I weally thought we were goin' undah evewy othah minute. Howevah, I should have been there to rescue you chaps."

"And who would have rescued you?" asked Blake.

"Weally, you ass—"

Tom Merry stepped carefully ashore, and the School House juniors unpacked themselves one by one from the New House canoe. They were safe ashore at last, about a hundred yards lower down the river than the spot where Albert had tied on the Old Bus to the stump.

Blake picked up the paddles.

"You chaps hoof it, and I'll toddle the canoe along," he said.

Tom Merry & Co. walked up the bank to the Old Bus. Gladly enough they jumped on board their own craft again. Blake paddled up the canoe, and it was made fast to the boat.

"And now—" said Tom Merry.

"Now I am goin' to get a wash, deah boy," said D'Arcy.

"I wegard that as the first important pwoceedin'."

"And then—"

"Then I'm goin' to change my clobber."

"Even that won't take the whole day, perhaps," suggested Monty Lowther, with sarcasm.

"Weally, Lowthah—"

"Well, let's get cleaned first, and then we'll hold a giddy council of war," said Tom Merry. "We're jolly well not going to let Albert off scot-free after handling us like that!"

"Wathah not! I insist upon givin' that gang a feahful thwashin'." One of the howvid beasts hit me with a stick," said Arthur Augustus. "I was hittin' him on the nose when he had the cheek to stwike me with a stick, you know. It has made quite a bwaise. We cannot possibly wessume our journey till we have thwashed them."

"How?" asked Lowther.

"I have not thought that out yet, Lowthah."

Tom Merry & Co. were wet and muddy, and they were glad to get washed and changed. It made them feel ever so much better. By that time they had a keen appetite for their breakfast. Albert and his roughs had done some damage in the boat; but, fortunately, the "grub" locker was intact, and there were plenty of provisions. The kettle was soon singing on the stove, and Blake filled a saucepan with eggs to boil.

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Tom Merry stood up in the Old Bus and stared across the river. Under the trees he could make out the figures of Figgins & Co. on the Berkshire side. Quite a breeze had sprung up during the night, and the surface of the Thames rippled and gleamed before it. Figgins was shaking his fist across the river, and apparently speaking, though the School House fellows could not hear what he said.

"They've got a good walk home, if they're going back to Abingdon," grinned Monty Lowther. "School House wins this time, I rather think."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Are we carrying off their old canoe after brekker, Tom?"

"I've been thinking," said Tom Merry.

"Bai Jove! Have you weally, deah boy?"

"Yes, ass! We've knocked off Figgins & Co," said Tom.

"We've proved that School House is cock house at St. Jim's, though I suppose those cheeky asses won't own up. Still, they're St. Jim's fellows. I've got an idea. Let's go over to them."

"And wallop them?" asked Herries.

"H'm! No. We'll ask them to brekker," said Tom, "and we'll join up with them and go after the pimply party."

"Bai Jove! That is weally a good ideah. I am surprised that you thought of it, Tom Mewwy."

"Ass! You see," said Tom, "we're not big enough for that gang of roughs. They've taken advantage of that, like rotters, as they are. But with three more, to back us up, I fancy we can handle them. Those three are only New House bounders, but they know how to scrap, especially Figgins. My idea is to join up with them and look for Albert."

"Hear, hear!"

There was not a dissentient voice. The warfare between the rival houses of St. Jim's was always more or less in the nature of good-humoured frolic—and never left a grudge on either side. While with Albert and his ruffianly gang matters were quite different. All the crew of the Old Bus felt that there had to be a reckoning with Albert & Co. And with three such redoubtable recruits in the fighting line as Figgins, Kerr, and Wynn, the St. Jim's party felt that they would be strong enough to turn the tables on the river roughs.

That decision having been made, the Old Bus was pushed out into the stream and tooled across to the Berkshire bank, with the canoe in tow. Figgins & Co. watched the party coming with almost wolfish eyes.

Tom Merry waved his hand.

"Make it pax?" he asked.

"Oh! You want to make it pax?" asked Figgins, in surprise.

"Yaas, wathah, deah boy!"

Figgins grinned.

"Well, I own up you've got the better of us," he said. "You wouldn't, if I'd known there was a monkey in the tree—"

"Why, you silly ass—" began Monty Lowther.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"If you want to make it pax, it's a go," said Figgins. "We're willing. We're miles from everywhere, and we've had no brekker."

"Pax, then," said Tom Merry. "and brekker with us."

"Good man!"

It was quite an amiable party that sat down to breakfast—ten juniors on the best of terms, in spite of the late alarms and excursions. And when Tom Merry propounded his idea to Figgins & Co., they assented at once with willingness.

"We'll back you up like billy-ho!" said George Figgins emphatically. "Know where to look for the rotters?"

"They went up the river," said Tom. "They were rowing, and we've got a wind this morning, so we shall overtake them easily enough, I think. If they're still afloat, we'll run them down all right."

"We'll give them jip!" said Fatty Wynn, as he cracked his seventh egg. "I say, these eggs are good. So is the ham. So is the coffee. And that cake looks nice."

"Twy it, deah boy!"

"I'll have a few more eggs first, and some ham," said Fatty.

"Bai Jove!"

Breakfast over, Fatty Wynn beamed with happy good-humour. The Old Bus pushed out into the river and the canvas was hoisted. Tom Merry sat at the sheet, and the Old Bus ran up the river before the wind in great style. It was not likely that Albert & Co. were very far ahead, as they were rowing, and they were not a hard-working crew. Tom expected to overhaul them before reaching Sandford Lock, though he was prepared to track them to the headwaters of the Thames rather than leave so many wrongs unavenged.

As it happened, Albert & Co. were sighted a good way below Sandford. Their boat was tied up to a tree in the shade, and Albert & Co. were disposing of either a late breakfast or an early lunch, with plenty of bottled beer in evidence.

(Continued on page 20.)



## A THRILLING AND DRAMATIC FOOTER YARN!



# The Boy Back!

by JACK CRICHTON.

A Splendid Yarn of the footer field, telling of Dick Dawlish's leap from barge-boy to League player.

## CHAPTER 1.

### His First Game!

THE barge Helda moved gracefully and slowly down the sleepy canal, and Dick Dawlish stood at her stern, watching the shore with a peaceful eye.

The day's work was nearly over, and it had passed quite uneventfully for the lad, and he would be glad when they could tie up to the shore and he would be able to get a little exercise.

Old Captain Jim, his uncle and skipper of the barge, was a good fellow, and he never had an objection to the lad getting ashore whenever possible; and a few minutes later, when the old chap put his head up and told Dick that they had progressed far enough for that day, Dick lost no time to making things fast, and then getting his tea.

When he came on deck again he heard the sound of a football being kicked about, the cheerful shouts, the laughter, and then again the thud-thud of the leather as it leapt from foot to foot.

They were practising here again, the little village team, by the side of the canal.

As he turned he saw them, the humble lads he had often watched at this point in the canal, and he slipped ashore to get a more excellent view of the game.

It was only a practice game—one team divided up, and a few humble lads doing their best to keep in training after their day's work.

And, to be quite candid, it was not very great soccer, but Dick thought it wonderful.

He had never had a chance.

Ever since he had been a mere child his life had been on the barge, and, although his uncle was one of the kindest of men, the life had not meant that the lad could often get ashore to spend time playing football.

Suddenly the ball came hurtling his way, and it looked as though it would certainly go into the canal.

"Stop it!" shouted one of the players.

And, almost before the lad realised what he had done, he had rushed in and sent the ball skimming back through the crisp autumn air.

He himself was surprised, and he was exhilarated as he felt the leather leave his toe.

It certainly was some kick! He didn't realise it as much as the lads who watched him. He felt the unmistakable glory of a really good punt, and watched the ball as it flew through the air with genuine satisfaction; but he would have been very surprised indeed had he been told that it was quite a remarkable effort.

Again the ball came his way, and again he booted it back.

This time he put even more ginger into it, and for a moment the game stopped.

A youngster came up to him, and to Dick's surprise there was a look of absolute awe in his eyes.

"I say," exclaimed the stranger, "would you care for a game? It would make us six a side, if it would not seem too much of a kid's game to you."

Dick blinked. "I don't play," he said quietly.

"Eh?" "I've never had the chance to play," Dick confessed.

The other grinned, and it was clear that he did not accept Dick's word very seriously.

"Oh, I see!" he said. "But come along and try. Try back, will you?"

Dick, of course, knew enough to understand what this meant, and within five minutes he was playing his first game of Soccer.

It was really an amazing effort. Quite apart from the fact that the fellows he was playing with were not great players, he was a giant amongst pigmies. It was simply a case of pure genius suddenly coming to light. He could do no wrong, and never once did they manage to get past him, while after a little, as the niceties and subtleties of the great game became clear to him, he began to feed his line of three forwards with a skill that was extraordinary.

They finished soon, the light giving out, and the lads gathered about Dick.

The youngster who had asked him to play came up to him.

"I'm Harry Long," he said. "I'm captain of this team. Village team, you know. Hulleston Wanderers we call ourselves. Not much class, I'm afraid, but we are as keen as mustard. But, my word, I wish you could play for us!"

Dick started and stared. "Play for you?" he ejaculated. "But I'm no good!"

How they laughed!

If they hadn't been such decent lads, the youngster would have thought that they were gibing at him. But it was clear that they thought he was being unduly modest, and Dick's head began to spin about.

Suddenly he realised that for several years now, while he had been watching lads like this kick a football about, he had had it in him to be as good as any of them, and that all he had lacked had been opportunity.

"Don't suppose," said the young skipper quietly, "you could manage to play for us next Saturday, could you? We have a match on against some fellows

about here who rather fancy themselves. Young Sir Maurice Hunter, from the Hall over there"—he nodded towards a big house in the distance which Dick had often observed—"is bringing the team, and they are talking about smashing our heads off for us, and it would be great to whack 'em."

Dick started. "Play for you?" he gasped. "But, look here, I'm not fooling. This is the first time that I have ever played the game!"

The other nodded. "Well," he said, "I don't know anything about that, but the fact remains that you are a marvel. I may not be much good myself," he went on modestly, "but I have been following Soccer all my life, and you are a natural player. Could you turn out for us?"

Dick considered, and then he nodded quickly.

The barge was going to be laid up for a week a few miles farther up, while some repairs were done to her.

"Yes, I could, if you really want me," he said.

Harry Long held out a hand. "Want you?" he said. "I should think we jolly well do! Will you be down here to-morrow evening for another kick about?"

"Rather!" And so Dick went back to the barge walking on air and wondering whether he would not wake up to find that it was all a dream.

## CHAPTER 2.

### A Great Discovery!

IT was not a dream, however, as Dick Dawlish discovered when he turned out for the village team on the following Saturday.

His uncle had been quite sporting about the business, and, indeed, had insisted upon rigging Dick out himself and coming along to see how he shaped.

"Mustn't be disappointed, my lad," the old chap said, "if you don't do much good in your first effort."

"I won't, uncle." It was only a little game, but it was being played upon the ground of the Hall, and quite a big crowd of people had turned out.

Besides, the Hall had put up a really good team.

"They've got two of this year's Oxford team playing for them," Harry told Dick, as they took the field. "A couple of Corinthians also, and a chap who has played for Chelsea several times. We

ought to go through the mill pretty well, Dick. But show them what you are made of."

Dick laughed. "I'll do my best," he said. "But remember, Harry, it is your fault if I let you down."

The game started, and it was at once clear that Harry had not exaggerated when he had said that they had put a good team into the field—the other side.

They were fast and scientific, and the rather heavy, rough, and plodding methods of the village lads were of little avail against them.

When a village player made a heavy, devastating charge, his opponent simply was not there, and the ball had already been sent across the field, with a brilliant pass, or, on the other hand, he simply could not go the pace of his opposite number.

And so at once the pressure on Dick commenced.

As the ball came to him for the first time, he felt a little nervous, and mis-kicked.

A shout of encouragement went up from all round the field, as the opposing centre-forward swooped down on the ball, and started up the field.

For a moment Dick watched him with a feeling of horror in his breast, realising what he had done. Then in another second he was after him in a flash, and before the fellow had realised what was happening, or had had time to get rid of the ball, Dick had robbed him, and with a mighty punt had sent the ball right to the other end of the field.

There was a gasp round the field, and people looked at the sturdy lad for a moment in surprise.

The game progressed, and within five minutes it was Dick playing the other side.

It really was a remarkable performance.

He might have been an International for his coolness, his lack of nerves, his resource, his wonderful method of know-

In another moment he was in front of goal, and without a second's hesitation had taken a flying shot, and had the wonderful satisfaction of seeing the ball go hurtling into the top right-hand corner of the net, as pretty a goal as had ever been scored on that pleasant ground.

Then the whistle went. How they cheered Dick as he went off the field!

The whole village gathered round him, congratulating him, and one of the first to come up to him was his old uncle, his honest face wreathed in smiles.

"Boy, boy," he exclaimed, "it does my old heart good to see you play like this! I never had any idea. Here's a gentleman wants to speak to you."

Dick looked up, and found himself face to face with a tall, pleasant-looking man.

"My name is Hamilton," said the stranger. "I'm managing director of the local League team, you know—Hungley Wednesday."

Dick glowed as the great man held out his hand. The lad, of course, knew Hungley well. They were well up in the Second League, and had made good progress of late.

"Is it true that this is your first game?" asked Mr. Hamilton.

"Yes, sir."

The gentleman regarded Dick closely, as though he did not quite believe what he was being told.

"You are sure?"

"Oh, yes, sir!" Dick smiled.

"Well, you're a marvel, my lad; that is all I can say. And before this evening is out you are going to be signed on for Hungley, and you will be playing for England before a couple of years are out."

Dick's head went round and round. He could not believe his ears, and then when he turned and looked at his uncle, and saw the smile on the old chap's face, he realised that it was no dream, and that his uncle knew what was in Mr. Hamilton's mind.

Indeed, before Dick went back on to the field, the old chap took the lad on one side.

from the field, and Mr. Hamilton came towards him and patted him on the back.

"My boy," he said, "you are great! Change, then come along with your uncle and me, and we'll sign you up for Hungley."

CHAPTER 3.

In the Way!

THERE was no doubt at all about the interest that Dick Dawlish had caused in the honest hearts of the Hungley fans.

Mr. Hamilton brought him out in a reserve game, and although there had been certain whispers about the wonderful find the managing director had made, there had certainly not been any expectation that a real football genius had been unearthed.

And yet it was so, and Dick towered amongst the players here as much as he had done in the little game against the Hall team.

Mr. Hamilton was delighted, and as soon as the game was over he came up and offered the youngster his hand.

"Splendid, Dick!" he said. "I knew you would do it. Now, let me see. You'll be all right for Saturday. We are playing Kenton."

Dick gave a gasp, and suddenly felt himself growing hot and cold all over.

"Kenton, sir. A League match!"

The managing director had to smile.

"Well, my lad," he said quietly, "you don't think that I signed you on for the club to have you watch us and see how well we played. You are going to start next Saturday. And if you play half as well as you have done to-day you are certain of a place for good."

Dick could scarcely speak.

It all seemed too good to be true, and he felt that he must surely be walking on air, and that suddenly that dim subject would give way and he would come to earth with a crash.

Still, he had not lost his head.

He was a modest and a sensible lad, and he was determined not to think too much of himself. He had found quarters in Hungley, with Mr. Hamilton's help, and although he had been rather cut up at leaving his uncle, he had settled down to his new career with a will.

He was on his way home that evening, when someone came up alongside of him.

"Good-evening!" said a voice.

Dick turned, and to his surprise he saw that it was Ginger Jones, the right full-back of Hungley, a man who in his time had played for England, and had a great name in the town, although he was getting past things a bit now.

"Good-evening!" said Dick.

"Good game you put in to-day, Dick," Jones observed; "very good."

—MISS IT, AND YOU MISS A TREAT!

Mr. Hamilton have anything to say to you afterwards?"

Dick was caught unawares. For the moment he forgot that the other was right-back, the position he himself had occupied that afternoon, and that if he were to play for the first team in the League match the following Saturday it would surely be to the exclusion of Jones.

"Yes, he told me I was to play next Saturday," he said.

Jones started. "I see."

"A SPORTSMAN TO THE CORE!"

By Jack Crichton.

The Most Exciting Footer Yarn Ever Told!

"Wants you to play for Hungley, Dick," he said. "It's a fine chance for you. Not much in this barge life, you know, boy; and I don't mind you signing on, if he offers you the chance. Do your best."

Dick's heart leapt.

Not that he wished to leave the old fellow, or the barge, for he had been happy, but this was a new vision such as would have gladdened the heart of any sensible and sporting British lad.

He played—well, it can't be said as he had never played before, but he played a great game, and when it was all over and the village had won by two goals to nil, both scored by Dick himself, the Hall team—fine sportsmen that they were—carried him shoulder high



SPECIAL FOR NEXT WEEK—

ing exactly what was going to happen, and where to be to counter it before it happened—if it can be put like that.

The other side could not get past him, and as half-time approached the score stood at nil all.

Dick's side certainly had not shown any signs of scoring, and it was just before the whistle went for the interval that it suddenly occurred to the youngster that it was all very well defending like this, and enjoying himself rather more than he had ever enjoyed himself in his life, but what was the good of it all, if the home goal remained intact.

The ball came to his feet.

No one was close to him, and as he glanced rapidly up the field, steadying himself, he saw that none of his forwards were ready to receive the leather.

In a flash he started forward himself.

An opposing half-back came for him, and Dick swerved as though he had been at the game all his life, leaving his opponent standing.

Then on. People watched him in wonder. There was no mistaking it. The lad had natural genius, pace, everything which goes to make a great player.

Two full-backs next approached him. They were players of great skill, and yet he left them standing, looking at one another, while he slipped coolly in between them.





Bang! Like a shot from a gun the ball left Dick's toe and went skimming back through the air to its owners. Dick felt the unmistakable thrill of a really good punt, and he watched the ball as it flew through the air with genuine satisfaction.

Then Dick realised what he had done, but it was too late, and the lad was grateful that in another moment his companion seemed to have forgotten the subject and was speaking quite kindly to him.

"Well, you deserve your trial, youngster," he said, "although you have been a bit lucky to get your chance so easily. Some of us have to wait for years, and then we don't get it. However, do your best, and if you like I'll turn out one or two evenings and give you a few hints."

Dick glowed with gratitude. This was the proper sporting spirit.

"I'd like nothing better!" he said. "Right you are. Then to-morrow evening, I'll be there. Dare say I can put you up to a few wrinkles."

"Dare say you can," laughed Dick modestly. "I expect you know more about it than I ever started to learn."

"Good-night!"

"Good-night!" returned Dick. They parted, and Dick went on his way feeling that life was very good indeed. He had almost reached home when he felt someone behind him.

Turning, he found that it was Harry Long, the skipper of the village team, and really the person responsible for giving him his chance.

They greeted one another like old friends.

"Hallo, Dick!" exclaimed Harry. "I have been trying to catch you for some time, but I could not come up while you were with that other chap."

Dick laughed. "Why not?" he asked. "It was only Ginger Jones."

Harry nodded. "I know," he said. "I want to talk to you about him, Dick."

The youngster started violently,

while the lad started to speak very seriously.

"Listen, Dick," he said; "you know I'm not the sort of chap to carry tittle-tattle."

"No, I know." "Well, I heard to-day that Jones is determined that you shall not turn out for the team next Saturday."

"What?" "Of course, it is all over the place that you are going to play instead of him. Mr. Hamilton was telling everyone in the stands this afternoon, and Jones heard. Now, things are bad with Jones—"

"I say," exclaimed Dick, "that is rotten. I don't like doing a chap out of a job."

But here Harry shook his head. "You needn't worry about that, Dick," he said. "Jones has had a long run, and he has been a rotter and fool. There are some very nasty stories about him, and it's a wonder that the directors have stood him as long as they have. Fact is, he's not straight, and you'll be wise if you look out between this and next Saturday."

But the lad was not impressed.

He was so utterly above anything of the sort himself that he could not believe that a fellow would do such things, and although he promised to listen to what the other lad was saying, and although he quite understood that it was all being said in the best possible spirit, he did not for a moment believe that Ginger would try to do him any harm.

He moved along slowly as soon as Harry had left him, thinking to himself, and making up his mind that on the following Saturday he would play the game of his life.

Then suddenly he heard a quick step behind him.

He turned just in time to find a man approaching him, and before he had time to step on one side a great blow had been aimed at his head.

He managed to dodge the stick in time.

"You brute!" he cried, and lunged out himself.

At that moment he caught one glimpse of Ginger Jones' brutal face.

"I'll show you!" Jones cried, and before the lad had time to duck he had brought his stick down with terrible force on Dick's head.

The lad sank to the ground with a moan.

In a flash Jones was on him. He was a coward if ever there was one, for the fact that the lad was down and almost out did not stop him for a second, and with a brutal kick he put Dick absolutely beyond consciousness.

But he was not satisfied.

In fact, Harry had spoken but half the truth when he had told Dick that the fellow was determined that Dick should not play on the following Saturday.

Jones was beside himself with worry and with rage, and he was more than determined. He did not care to what lengths he went. Bending down, he picked up the prostrate body of the lad. In another moment he had staggered to the side of the road, and then without hesitation he had lifted Dick high into the air and had flung him as far as he could into the slow-moving canal at the roadside.

In another moment he had turned and was running as though the fiends were after him.

It was the water that saved Dick's life.

He was just coming to, as a matter of fact, as the man lifted him up, and the sudden rush of cool water about his head and ears brought him round; and as he went down for the first time he realised that he must make the effort of his life, and he struck out.

He came to the top in a moment and started to swim, and suddenly he realised

that it would only be with a gigantic effort that he could save himself.

He was as weak as a kitten.

A light at last!

As a matter of fact, had he struck out for the bank he would have been all right, but he was dazed, and for some way he had been swimming downstream.

He reached the light, took a deep breath, and then clambered up the side of the barge. A man came forward quickly, and with an oath of surprise gathered the lad into his arms as he sank forward exhausted.

Dick opened his eyes and looked about him.

Where was he?

He could remember nothing. This, however, was not his uncle's barge. That was the chief thing that struck him; and a few minutes later, when a rough man put his head down and had a look at him, the lad cried:

"Where am I, mister?"

The man came to him.

"Hallo, you woke up at last, son? Thought you were never going to finish sleeping. This is the barge King George. You swam to her last night. Where did you come from?"

Dick put a hand to his aching head.

"Where did I come from?" he asked, his eyes opening in wonder. "Why, my uncle's barge, I expect!"

The man started.

"Your uncle?" he cried.

Dick nodded.

"Yes, the Helda—that's my uncle's. I work for him."

Dick had forgotten everything about football now. His mind was a blank.

The bargeman nodded again.

"I see," he said kindly. "Well, you must have fallen overboard and hurt your head. You've got a nasty cut on it. You stay there to-day. I'll make some inquiries about the Helda, and I dare say you'll be able to pick her up in a day or two. Now don't you worry."

Dick did not worry. In fact, he was only too pleased to get to sleep again, and for the rest of the day he remained there quite comfortably, all thought of

the Wednesday having vanished from his mind, and little imagining that by this time Mr. Hamilton was beginning to get rather concerned about him.

Old Bill Hawkins, the man who had saved him, was a kindly fellow, and he insisted with a rough sort of hospitality in making the lad very comfortable.

A couple of days passed, Hawkins inquiring everywhere for Dick's uncle, and hearing that he was up the canal.

It was on the Saturday morning that Dick, now quite fit, although his memory was still sadly at fault, went ashore with old Hawkins, and then heard his own name mentioned.

"Old Captain Jim," said their informant. "Why, sure, he's up at Hungley. He wouldn't miss the League game against Kenton to-day for a mint of money. That nephew of his, young Dick, is playing for Hungley, you know. They say he's a real marvel!"

Dick gave a cry.

"But I'm Dick!" he said.

And then suddenly he sat down and began to laugh hysterically, as though he had thought of something very funny indeed.

#### CHAPTER 4.

##### The Game of His Life!

**I**T was on the stroke of half-past two when Dick Dawlish reached the ground, and the teams were just taking the pitch.

He saw Jones, and rushed up to him like a madman.

"You tried to murder me, Jones," he cried, shaking his fist dangerously near to Jones' face, "so that you might play to-day! What have you got to say?"

Jones did the wrong thing. The sudden appearance of the lad he thought dead, the sudden thought of all he would now have to face was too much for him, and he struck out wildly, catching Dick on the shoulder.

"Stop that!" roared Mr. Hamilton, rushing upon the scene. "What is all this?"

The other players had rushed upon Jones and were holding him back, and no one was listening to him very much as he

shouted all manner of strange, terrible threats.

"Where have you been, Dick?" the managing director asked.

Dick pointed to the fuming Jones.

"Ask him!" he said fiercely.

"I ask you."

Swiftly the lad told his tale, and it was apparent by the way people listened, and then by the way in which they turned on the unhappy Jones, that they believed the strange story they had just heard.

Mr. Hamilton turned to Dick.

"Go and change quickly, my lad," he said. "You must play. As for you, Jones, come along with me. This is a serious matter."

He turned away; and although Jones did his best to escape, he was soon collared by a large number of fans, and was dragged off screaming, with all the signs of madness in his voice.

Dick did not waste a moment.

He still had to make good.

He was no fool, and he realised that as matters stood at the moment it was simply a matter between himself and Jones, that it was one man's word against another's. But he did not hesitate, and a few minutes later the lad ran on to the field.

What a cheer they gave him!

It did him real good to hear it, and he little realised that his previous showing had got about the town, and, what was much more, Jones was not at all popular.

The game started, and Dick was all out at once.

There was a terrific amount of rough business to start with and the man with the whistle had a good deal of work to do, but Dick kept himself quite calm.

There was no point in joining in this sort of play, and he kept his head admirably. He charged fairly and squarely, and his clearing was splendid.

And then the visiting team really began its pressure.

The lad was amazing.

He never seemed to get flurried, and he had that amazingly valuable attribute of a full back. He had pace, and he was able to race across the field at the most pressing moments, when he was least expected, and so relieve the pressure.

"Our win!" gasped Kerr.

"Hurrah!"

"St. Jim's for ever!" roared Blake.

"Yaas, wathah!"

Albert & Co. crawled ashore, muddy and drenched and dripping, and shook furious fists at the juniors, with torrents of expressive language. Heedless of the roughs, Tom Merry untied the boat, and tied it on behind the Old Bus.

"We're leaving your boat on the other side!" called out Tom Merry. "Same as you did for us, you know. Ta-ta!"

"Good-bye, old beans!" yelled Lowther.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Albert & Co. were left raging ashore. On the opposite bank their boat was tied up, to be reclaimed when and how Albert & Co. could contrive it. That was their business, not Tom Merry's.

"Quite a nice little scrap," said Figgins, rubbing his nose, which had received some damage. "You fellows going on up the river?"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"We're going down. We'll have our canoe, if you don't mind."

"Yours for the asking," said Tom Merry, laughing. And Figgins & Co. embarked in the canoe, and cast off from the Old Bus.

"Good-bye, kids!" called out Figgins, as the two craft parted. "Lick you next term at St. Jim's."

"Not in your lifetime!" answered Tom Merry cheerily.

"School House ass!"

"New House fathead!"

And so they parted, and the Old Bus sailed merrily on up the silvery Thames, bound for Oxford.

THE END.

(More exciting adventures for the St. Jim's holiday-makers next week. Be sure you read: "JUST LIKE GUSSY!" you'll say it's grand.)

## "RUCTIONS ON THE RIVER!"

(Continued from page 16.)

Tom Merry ran the Old Bus up, and the sail dropped.

"Hallo! 'Ere's those young 'ounds again!" called out Albert. And he took a pot-shot with an empty beer-bottle.

It smashed on the gunwale of the Old Bus.

"Go for them!" shouted Tom Merry.

Blake hooked on, and ten active juniors swarmed over into the enemy's boat. Arthur Augustus, mindful of the stick that had cracked on his noble napper, had armed himself with his malacca cane, and all the rest had picked up some article or other to serve as a weapon. Albert & Co., who were so reckless with beer-bottles and sticks, found themselves paid in their own coin on this occasion.

They jumped up from their breakfast, or lunch, grasping bottles and oars to use as weapons. But the rush of ten determined juniors fairly scattered them. Gussy's malacca smote Albert on his bullet head, and dropped him like a log into the bottom of the boat. A cushion wielded by Herries knocked 'Enry over the side, and he splashed into the shallows. Figgins gave another of the roughs his right full on the jaw, and the recipient thereof howled dismally, and went after 'Enry.

For several minutes there was a wild tussle in Albert's boat. But the odds were on the side of the St. Jim's juniors now, and it was no longer a case of empty hands against ruffianly knuckles and sticks. One after another the river roughs were pitched out of their boat, swamping into shallow water and mud, and those who strove to clamber back were shoved off without ceremony.

Albert, struggling hard, was the last to go. He went with a terrific splash.





As the leather came to Dick he saw an opening, and like a flash he was through it, with only the goalie to beat.

Still, he could do no more than keep the enemy at bay, and at last they were too much for him.

The whole line got away together, and raced down the field.

He did his best, but he was one man against five, and there is always an end to that sort of thing.

The leather was slung past him with admirable passes, and before he could do much to save the situation, the ball was resting in one corner of the net, and the home team were one goal down. He went off the field for half-time feeling very depressed, but when Mr. Hamilton came up to him with the news of Jones, the whole world seemed to grow very much brighter.

"Carry on, my lad!" he said. "You are playing wonderfully, and you have got nothing to fear."

Dick looked at the great man.

"I hope you believe that tale I told you, sir," he said.

Mr. Hamilton smiled.

"My dear lad," he exclaimed, "do you think—do you really think that I doubted you for one moment? I have known Jones for a long time. Don't forget that. He has confessed everything, and all is well. Now play for your side, and win this match for us, and your place is secure."

It was rather a tall order.

After all, he was only a full-back, honoured position though that was, and he could not do marvels.

The second half commenced, and Dick entered upon it with a grim determination to win or to die.

But the trouble was his forward line.

Not that the lad was at all vain, but he had by this time realised that he must not ask them to do so much against such a side as this, and that if the match was

to be won by his team something like a miracle must take place.

The pressure by the opposing team was still extreme, and he could do no more than keep it at bay.

But he was waiting.

He was making up his mind the whole time, and he was waiting for an opening. It was no good, he realised, for him to try and force an opening. He must play the game properly and skilfully until an opening came, and then he would burst through.

WATCH OUT for our . . .  
BIG FOOTER COMPETITION  
GREATEST PRIZE LIST EVER KNOWN!

At last his first chance came.

There was a lot of play about his own goal, in which it was touch and go all the time whether a second goal was not to be added by the enemy. Then suddenly the leather came to him, and he saw an opening.

Like a flash he was through it.

There was only one back in front of him and the opposing goalie.

He did not hesitate.

Neatly he tricked the back, and there he was with the world before him to conquer.

Never had he moved at such a pace, never had the blood sung so in his veins.

Now, only the goalkeeper to beat.

The fellow ran out at him, and the lad suddenly checked himself.

In another moment he had neatly stepped to one side. The goalie realised

his mistake, and tried to stop his impetuous rush. But it was too late.

To the immense delight of the crowd he floundered on, and there landed in the mud.

With the goal at his mercy Dick notched the equalising point.

So the game progressed, and there was no doubt that their full-back had given the home lads a great deal of courage and inspiration. Already they had begun to pull themselves together, and more than once they honoured themselves by pressing, and almost getting close enough to shoot.

There was a few minutes to go, and Dick was desperate.

The play was in mid-field, and then suddenly the home centre-forward got away, and was only brought down in the area by a most palpable foul.

"Foul!" the roar went up to the skies.

It was absolutely colossal, and there was a breathless silence while the kick was taken.

Dick was told to take it.

It was the most horrible moment of his life.

His place, he fondly imagined, in the team, depended upon this kick, and he felt as nervous as a child.

He steadied himself, drew a breath, and then shot.

For a moment he watched the ball as it went fleeing towards the net, and then suddenly pandemonium was set loose on the field, and Dick knew that he had won.

The ball had entered the net well beyond the goalie's reach.

Dick Dawlish had won the match!

THE END.

(Another ripping footer yarn next week boys: "A SPORTSMAN TO THE CORE!" Make a point of reading it.)

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RIVER-WISE NED IS "RIGHT THERE" AGAIN, BOYS!

# THE MISSING MOTOR-BOAT!

A Tale of  
RIVER-WISE NED.



Another Thrilling Experience of River-wise Ned and his staunch supporters, Long Jim and Tony Parr, aboard the Thames Barge, Estuary Belle. A Topping Tale of Exciting Adventure,

By **ROLAND SPENCER.**

## CHAPTER 1.

### An Alarm at Midnight I

**C**REEKSEA, situated on the eastern side of a creek leading into the Thames estuary from the Essex shore, is always a sleepy little place except at high water. Then, when the fishing boats arrive home, barges put in, and watermen get busy with their boats, the place is lively indeed.

The Estuary Belle, hundred-and-twenty-tons London sailing barge, just sneaked into the creek one evening with the last of the flood tide, and dropped her anchor off a small private dock belonging to a man called Rendell.

The barge was light—that is, she had no cargo on board—and her master and mates were in holiday mood.

"Blest if we'll budge from dear old Creeksea till after the regatta," said Ned Derry, the bright, care-free young skipper of the barge.

"A few days of well-earned rest in Creeksea will enable me to regain my dwindling strength," put in Tony Parr, one of the barge's two mates. "I need a rest."

"You always do, you lazy old porpoise," said Long Jim Cartwright, the other mate.

"Well," laughed Ned Derry, as he gave an extra sweat on the mainsail brail, "we've often said we'll take it easy, and something always happens to make us take it hard. Hallo, here's Mr. Rendell coming over in his dinghy!"

The gentleman in question, a big, jolly-looking man of about thirty, turned his head as Ned spoke, and grinned a broad grin to welcome his young bargee friends to Creeksea.

"How are you, Ned?" he cried, clambering aboard the barge while Long Jim hitched the painter of his dinghy to the mizzen rigging.

"Oh, I'm able to sit up and take a little nourishment now, Mr. Rendell. How are you?"

"Fit as a fiddle! Stopping to see the regatta?"

"Rather!" chorused the ship's company of the Belle.

"Good! Come up to my house to lunch to-morrow, will you? By the way, I'm glad you've dropped your hook just here. See my new motor-boat?"

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Mr. Rendell nodded towards his little dock, where a long, lean, graceful-looking motor-boat, covered with a green canvas sheet, swayed gently with the slight swell that was making itself felt between the stone walls of the dock.

"Ay, ay!" replied Ned. "She looks a beauty. She's for the big motor-boat race on Saturday, of course?"

"Yes; and I expect to beat the Westward. My boat is called the Rancee—that means Indian princess, you know. She is the only boat of her design turned out by Jolliffe's, of Southampton. They let me have her cheap if I'd race her at most of the regattas and knock out the Westward, which, as you know, walks off with first place every time. They particularly want her to be in this, the last regatta of the season."

"Your boat has originality of design, sir, anyway," said Ned, looking at the craft with a critical eye. "Well, we'll keep an eye on her warps and things while we're here."

"Good! I was going to ask you if you'd do that. Well, see you at lunch to-morrow. Chin-chin!"

Mr. Rendell, whom the chums had once rescued in very heavy weather in one of the northern channels of the estuary, set off in his dinghy. He gave the lads a hearty wave as he clambered up the side of his little dock, and then disappeared from view round the corner of his storehouse.

"Jingo, chums, I hope Mr. Rendell wins with the Rancee. His boat'll have to be pretty smart to lick the Westward, though," remarked Ned.

"Ay, that she will," said Long Jim. "Well, what about those fresh farm eggs you said you would make an omelette of, Tony? By the time we've had a good feed it'll be time to run up the riding light and turn in. Oh, for ten hours solid in my bunk!"

The omelette was quickly made, and more quickly dispatched. The fresh jam-tarts, farmhouse butter, and new farmhouse bread they had bought six hours earlier at their last anchorage disappeared like magic. The chums had made a clean sweep, as they always did at mealtimes.

Soon, the three adventurous young bargees were sleeping the sleep of physical exhaustion; but Ned, though a sound sleeper, could always reckon on waking if anything unusual should

happen. The lad was used to sleeping "with one eye open" as far as the safety of his barge was concerned.

It is, therefore, not surprising that a flickering light showing through the skylight of the cabin should wake him. Ned jumped up, hauled Tony Parr and Long Jim out of their bunks by their legs, and as he scrambled into his trousers, his pyjamas still on, and made for the deck, he shouted:

"Fire! You sleep-headed duffers—fire! Tumble up! Gee, it's Rendell's motor-boat!"

Tony Parr and Long Jim were in the barge, boat almost as soon as their skipper, and with mighty strokes with the oars the big barge boat swept into Rendell's dock, where flames were licking upwards from the long, curious hull of the Rancee.

The chums saw three forms slinking away in the flickering light of the flames as they arrived. They shouted for aid, but the men disappeared from view.

Ned slipped overboard to wet his clothes and his hair, and then jumped right amongst the flames in the well of the motor-boat. He had one of the oars of the barge boat, and with the butt end of this he smashed at the thin planking of the boat, bursting a fair-sized hole through.

In poured the water, and soon the motor-boat was practically sinking, but the fire had been put out. Then Ned tore away at the parts of the green canvas cover which had escaped the flames, threw them to his chums, and told them to cram the pieces of canvas over the hole in the motor-boat's hull, somehow.

Long Jim did this by diving overboard and clawing under the motor-boat, a perilous task, for at any moment the nearly full craft might sink and crush him down on the bottom with it. While Long Jim saw to stopping up the hole, Ned worked the pump rapidly, and Tony Parr got busy with a bucket.

By their prompt action, the chums had saved the Rancee from being burnt out. The inrush of water had nipped the fire in the bud, so to speak, and the engine and expensively built hull would be saved.

The motor-boat would be on the mud at low water, and then Ned meant to tack some of the canvas over the hole he had made in the craft's bottom and



to keep her staunch enough till Mr. Rendell himself could be informed.

It would not be an impossible task, even now, to get the craft on a slipway and have the planks which had been broken by Ned repaired by a shipwright. A motor engineer could see to the engine, put on a new magneto and sparking plugs, and have the boat all ready for the regatta after all.

"Crumbs, old fruits," gasped Long Jim, when their frantic salvaging operations were over, "we've started our few days of rest at Creeksea in fine style—what?"

CHAPTER 2.

Where is the Raneec?

MR. RENDELL, when he found out what the chums had done for him, could not thank them enough. They had saved his boat from total destruction, without doubt.

The forms which had slunk away into the shadows, despite Ned's shout for aid, interested Mr. Rendell mightily. That big man was furious, for he was certain that the firing of the boat had been foul play on the part of Denner, the owner of the Raneec's rival. This was the opinion of Ned and his chums, too, but they didn't have too much to say about it. Rendell said enough for all of them.

However, the motor-boat was in perfect order the day before the regatta, and Mr. Rendell rubbed his hands with glee at the thought of beating the Westward. The money prize was not large, but there was a cup to be won, and Mr. Rendell wanted to take that cup from Denner, the owner of the Westward. He was a man nobody liked, sly and conceited. Besides, there was the business point of view. It did not interest Rendell, but it did interest the representative of the Raneec's builders—a Mr. Small—who had come to Creeksea to see how the new craft of his firm would shape in a hard race.

The Westward was the standard design for the fastest of motor-boats, so far, and Denner, who had designed and built her, had sole rights to do so. He therefore made a fine thing out of the Westward's successes, for, after each fresh achievement of that wonderful motor-boat, orders came pouring in to his offices. The Raneec's builders wanted a turn at being cock of the walk as far as racing motor craft were concerned, so they badly wanted the Raneec to win on that account alone.

The night before the regatta, Mr. Rendell put a watchman to guard the dock where the Raneec, now sound and lit again, was lying. He did not trust his rival, Denner. Ned and his chums had volunteered to keep watch, but Mr. Rendell had laughingly told them that they had already made him their debtor by their rescue of his boat from fire. The watchman was a trusted person and everything would be all right.

Before the chums turned in that night they stood on the after-deck of the Belle and had a last look at the Raneec.

"Everything looks peaceful enough," said Jim Cartwright. "Good luck to her on the morrow, anyway."

"Ay, ay, good luck to her!" said Ned.

"That watchman looks keen," remarked Tony. "Crumbs, I shouldn't like to stop that stick of his on the top of my head. He's got a whistle to summon the policeman of the boat, too, hasn't he?"

"Yes," said Ned; "to summon the policeman, not to mention the ship's company of the Estuary Belle. Come on, you two, let's turn in now."

The chums slept soundly all night. In the early morning, Ned was up and on deck. Then Tony Parr and Long Jim turned out in double quick time as Ned's Limehouse Reach voice bawled down into the cabin.

"Turn up, you lazy beggars, turn up! The Raneec's gone, and the watchman's lying senseless on the quay!"

Ned and his mates were ashore in no time, bending over the watchman. The man had received a nasty blow on the forehead, but beyond unconsciousness it did not appear as if he were very badly hurt.

Leaving Tony and Jim to see to the watchman, Ned ran like the wind up through the town, seemingly deserted at that very early hour, and hammered on the door of Mr. Rendell's house. The round face of the Raneec's owner appeared at an upstairs window, and Ned gasped out his news. The head disappeared, and in a brace of shakes Mr. Rendell was down in the street with Ned, dressed after a fashion.

Back to the dock they ran. The watchman had regained consciousness by now but he could throw no more light on the matter than that he suddenly felt something strike him on the forehead. That was all.

Mr. Rendell was in a white anger.

"Lads," he said, "will you scour the creek for me? It isn't very large. I'll go out to the coastguards at the point and they'll tell me if any craft put out during the night. There's only one way out, as you know, and they're sure to have information if the boat went out."

Ned and Tony and Jim set off, not

very hopefully, for it was not reasonable to suppose that the boat would be stolen and left floating in the creek to be picked up again and brought back to Creeksea.

"She's on the bottom, for sure," said Long Jim, and Tony nodded in agreement.

"I'm afraid you two must be right," said Ned. "Let's climb up Bramble Hill for a start. We can see the whole of the creek there. Then we can think it out a bit. Things have been too much of a whirl to think clearly so far."

At the top of Bramble Hill the chums halted. The creek could be traced from its mouth right up to where there was only a foot of water at high tide. Ned sat on a stile, and Tony and Jim perched themselves on the fence at the side.

"Bare as the palm of your hand," said Long Jim. "She's not there."

"She might be there, old scout, but on the bottom," said Tony Parr. "I'd bet my Sunday-best hat that she's been sunk."

"A fisherman with his trawl would decide that in a couple of hours' trawling the creek," said Ned. "But look at that hay-barge over there. She's the only other craft in the creek. If the Raneec has not been sunk, the only place she can be in is under that hay—and the barge wasn't loaded yesterday evening, as we know."

"Gee, you're right, Ned. Look, here comes Mr. Rendell and, judging by his face, he's drawn a blank with the coastguards."

Mr. Rendell, puffing slightly, came up to where the chums were sitting.



As Ned and his chums made an attempt to board the hay-barge, a fierce boarhound, its gleaming white teeth showing, made a spring at them.

"No boat, except two rowing-boats, went out of the creek last night," he said miserably. "The Rancee's sunk in the creek, for certain. It's all U.P. with me as regards this regatta, lads. I've got old Fisherman Dave trawling with his motor-bawley. He'll no doubt find the poor old Rancee soon."

"I'm not so sure about it, sir," said Ned. "The Rancee is in one of two places—the mud of the creek bottom or that hay-barge over there."

ANOTHER TOPPING YARN  
of RIVER-WISE NED  
NEXT WEEK—

"Then she's in the mud," said Mr. Rendell promptly. "She couldn't be in the barge."

"Look here, Ned," said Long Jim, "if the motor-boat could be loaded into the barge she could easily be loaded into a motor-lorry and trailer and taken away by road."

"And there isn't a derrick or crane big enough to lift the Rancee in Creekease or on any of the wharves up the creek," put in Mr. Rendell. "No, she's on the bottom."

Ned's unusually sunny, care-free countenance was puckered in thought. He was watching the hay-barge and a wooden-built wharf near her through half-closed eyes. Suddenly, he turned to Mr. Rendell.

"Will you have the police search that hay-barge on suspicion, Mr. Rendell?" said the young barge skipper.

Mr. Rendell put his hand on Ned's knee.

"Ned, lad, I'd like to do all you say, but that barge belongs to a friend of mine. So does the hay that was loaded on to her last night. It would be like accusing them to order a search, even if the police would do it."

"Not at all, Mr. Rendell. Your friends did not do the actual loading, did they?"

"No, Ned, but much as I admire your river-wisdom—you have earned your name, I know—I must say that it is utterly ridiculous to think that the Rancee could be under that hay."

Ned laughed as he jumped lightly down from the stile.

"Oh, right-ho, Mr. Rendell! But I don't know your friends at all, so I'm just going to work off my own bat, if you don't mind. I think—mind you, I'm not saying anything definite—but I think I'll have the Rancee in your hands in time for the motor-boat race this evening."

Mr. Rendell stared, and wanted to explode with laughter. But Ned had helped him before, so politeness, courtesy, and gratitude all forbade the laugh.

"Go ahead, lad," he said, without enthusiasm, "and good luck to you!"

"Right-ho, sir!" Ned replied blithely. "Come on, you two gaping chumps, we've work to do!"

### CHAPTER 3.

#### River-wise Ned—Detective

WITH Tony and Jim slanging Ned to further orders, the irresponsible skipper of the Belle led his chums down to the creek.

It was now dead low water, and where the chums struck the creek they could wade it. Ned told his mates to get

their shoes and socks off and follow him.

Still growling and expostulating, Tony and Jim followed Ned as he squelched down over the mud, waded the creek, and squelched up the bank the other side. Then the three made their way to the hay-barge, lying on the mud.

"Going to force an entrance?" asked Tony Parr sarcastically.

"No, I'm not, chump!" snapped Ned. "I'm going to look at the depression in the mud made by that barge's chains. See, there are six chain-marks on the mud, some of them very faint—the first ones made when the barge came here. They all radiate from one point. That point is not where the anchor is at the moment, is it?"

"By jingo, no, Ned!" gasped Long Jim. "That means that the anchor was weighed last night and put down again. The barge has been away from this berth during the night."

"Exactly. Well, what's the inference? Come on; let's get ashore and sit down on the saltings. I want to talk to you two dummies!"

The chums were soon ashore, and no sooner had they got the hay-barge blocking the view from Creekease than three men who had been hiding behind the barge rushed at them, brandishing short sticks.

"Fight!" yelled Ned. "Let into 'em, chums!"

River-wise Ned and his mates had practised a means of defence when attacked in this way. They were smart boxers, so back to back as they were, thus having one of them facing the enemy from any direction, they soon showed the attackers that they could hold their own.

### "THE WRECKERS!"

By ROLAND SPENCER.

THE sticks were the danger. But Tony Parr caught one of them and sent it flying out over the mud. Then he did his best to register a knock-out blow on the now stickless man.

Ned had just missed a whizzing blow which all but grazed his head. The young bargee's recovery from his duck, however, was quicker than the ruffian's recovery from the twist his body had perforce to make, since the stick had met nothing solid. In a jiffy, the man was rolling on the coarse herbage of the saltings. He sat up, but almost immediately fell back again with a gasp. Then he lay still.

The others lost their appetites for the fight after that. With shouts to their prostrate companion, they slipped away, Tony and Jim after them; but Ned called his eager mates back.

"Not so fast, please!" he called. "Let's make sure of this ruffian. Do you two ninnies think I'm right about the motor-boat being on that barge now?"

"By Jupiter, I do!" gasped Tony Parr. "You're a wonder, Ned! But I reckon you'll have a job to explain how it got there."

"I'll show you, right enough. What we've got to do now is to rush this fellow back to Creekease for an interview in the presence of Mr. Rendell. He'll p'raps tell us what the game is, though I know already."

"No bloomin' fear, I won't, guv'nor!" said the man faintly, recovering his senses.

"Oh, so you're awake!" snapped Ned.

"All the better. You can let your legs

carry you over to Creekease, then. Get a move on—and sharp!"

The man could only obey, but he maintained a stolid silence as the chums tried to drag information out of him. Nor were they successful in Mr. Rendell's house at Creekease.

"Fisherman Dave says that the motor-boat is not sunk in the creek," said Mr. Rendell, thoroughly puzzled.

"Course she isn't, sir!" said Ned. "She's on that hay-barge under the hay. We don't need police help now. My pals and I will do it all."

"The Rancee can't be on the barge, Ned," said Mr. Rendell wearily. "I tell you that there isn't a crane in the whole of Creekease strong enough to lift the motor-boat. I don't care whether you have proved that the hay-barge's anchor was weighed and dropped again last night or not—"

"But the Rancee's not on the bottom, Mr. Rendell!" protested Ned. "She didn't go out. The hay-barge is the only place she can be hidden in."

"It is all very puzzling, lad."

"It's as clear as daylight through a skylight, Mr. Rendell. Be at the wooden wharf half-way up the creek at two o'clock—that'll be about high water—and I'll unload your boat from the hay-barge same way as she was loaded. Then you'll see."

"The crane there isn't strong enough!"

"The crane hasn't been used, sir. Now my chums and I must be off."

Ned took Tony and Jim into his confidence now, and after he had explained things to them they howled with delight.

"You fatheaded chump, Ned, we've half a mind to dump you overboard for not telling us before!" cried Tony, as the three rowed up the creek in their barge-boat.

"Golly, what a surprise for Mr. Rendell?" chuckled Jim.

"And what a surprise for that hay bargee—eh?" said Ned, with relish.

"Not 'arf, as the poet said!" replied Tony Parr.

The lads rowed right up abreast of the hay-barge. The vessel was about to get under way, for the tide had now flooded up the creek to nearly high water. She was bound for Barking.

The chums of the Belle were chuckling joyfully over the surprises that were in store for the skipper of the hay-barge, who was looking across at the lads suspiciously, and Mr. Rendell, who had already appeared on the wooden staging a little way down the creek. However, the surprise that was in store for the chums themselves had to come first. It came just as Ned cried out:

—Filled with THRILLING incidents and BREATHLESS situations!

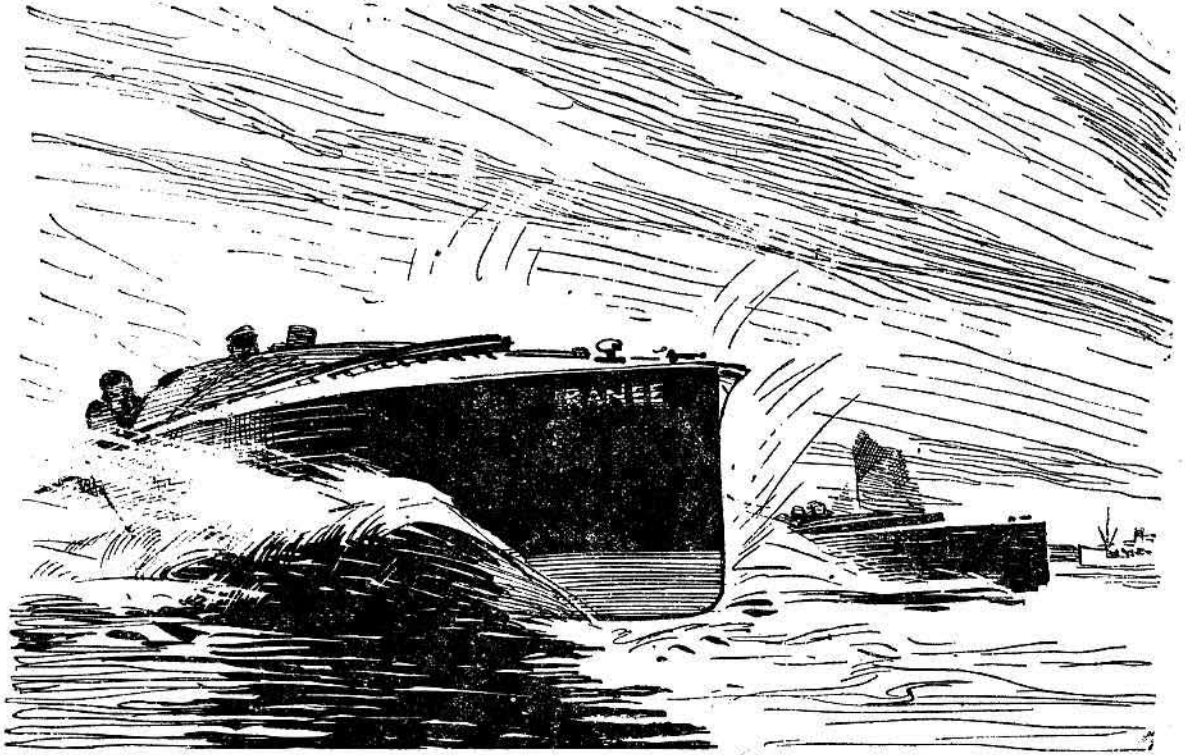
"All aboard, chums! Rush the skipper and his mate, and then I'll tear away at the hay while you drop the hook of the barge again. When we've made certain that the motor-boat's there we'll be able, legally, to retain this barge!"

### CHAPTER 4.

#### Once Aboard the Lugger!

THE barge-boat of the Belle charged forward under the powerful strokes of Tony Parr and Long Jim, straight towards the after-deck of the hay-barge. The





Out into the open Thames the Westward and the Rance swept, cutting through the water like torpedoes and sending up a spray ten feet in the air.

latter was free and drifting, waiting for the ebb to become strong at the moment. The stout, bewhiskered skipper of the hay-barge did not seem very excited about Ned's rush. In fact, he merely grinned and whistled through his sandy whiskers.

"Ere, Bruce, up an' at 'em, lad!"

The barge-boat of the Belle had now ground up against the side of the hay-barge, and Ned was about to jump aboard, leading his chums in the attack, when he flopped back hastily and did his best to push the barge-boat away from the barge. For, with red tongue out, mouth open, and white, gleaming teeth showing, a big, fierce boarhound had sprung at them. The dog was snarling and snapping, jumping here and there in his defence of the barge. His eyes were like live coals, and the hair of his back was bristling angrily. The chums of the Belle were glad to get twelve feet of water between them and that terrible dog.

The barge skipper laughed a harsh, throaty laugh.

"Ho, ho, ho! Thought ye would rush me, did ye? Ye reckoned w'out my Bruce, though. Good dog, Bruce; keep 'em off!"

The wind had filled out the hay-barge's top-sail, and the big, stout skipper pressed the tiller up. The barge was gathering good way, and if the chums did not take quick action she would be out of the creek and off. They would thus have no opportunity of proving the presence of the motor-boat under the hay, and Rendell would lose all the way round.

"By Jupiter, my children," cried Ned, "that brute of a dog gave me quite a turn, as the old lady said when the motor-bus broke into her sitting-room. We've got to settle the brute before many minutes are past, or it's good-bye to getting that motor-boat! Come on, Long Jim, see if you can rope the gentle

little creature with the painter. Thank goodness, we've got a good length of painter rope!"

Long Jim, be it said, was a dab at throwing ropes, lassoing, and what not. As he had often remarked, he ought to have been born a cowboy, instead of a bargee.

At once grasping Ned's idea, so keen was his intelligence, he scrambled over the thwarts of the boat, and took up the painter, or long rope fixed in the bow. While Ned took the vacated rowing position, Jim coiled the rope carefully, made a running noose in the end, and then told his pals to edge closer.

"Here, Fido lad! Good doggy!" he called, as he swung the rope round and round his head. "Didums get angry with little boys, then? Dinkums Dodo, pretty little lap-dog oo is!"

Jim's words sent the raging dog into a furious passion, and, snarling and roaring, he pawed at the side of the barge, crouching and backing, judging his distance for a leap, and then giving it up as a bad job. In the meantime, Jim's lasso whizzed through the air, and Bruce's body passed right under the noose, as the maddened hound leapt at the rope.

Jim, proud of his skill, gave a sudden jerk, just as the barge skipper, now conscious of the chums' manœuvre, sprang forward to save his dog. But he was too late; as his great horny, hairy hand stretched for the dog's collar, Jim hauled on the rope, whisked the entangled Bruce overboard into the water to cool down, and shortened in the rope till the swimming dog was close alongside the barge boat.

"All aboard now!" shouted Ned. "The dog can swim till we've finished our job. Up you go, Tony!"

"Hurrah! Here you are! Once aboard the lugger and the boat is ours. Come on, Jim!"

The barge skipper lashed out with his

arms, long and powerful as they were. They swung round at random, like a couple of flails, but the sprightly chums of the Belle easily dodged the unscientific blows. They had the skipper on the deck and made fast with the end of the jigger-sheet in no time. Then they climbed up over the cargo of hay, settled the cowering mate on the foredeck by bundling him into the fo'c'sle, and slamming over the hatch.

The swift victory ended with the roar of triumph of the anchor chain as the big, rusty mud-hook splashed downwards and the hay-barge swung up to face the now strongly ebbing tide.

It only took Ned and his mates a few minutes to bore a way down through the hay to where they judged the motor-boat would be lying in the hold. A muffled shout of delight came from the heaving mass of hay at last. It was Ned's voice, and Long Jim and Tony Parr, on guard outside the hole Ned had bored, whooped with joy.

"The boat's there, all right!" bawled out Long Jim to Mr. Rendell, who was waiting impatiently on the wharf opposite to where the barge was riding. "We're going to sheer in towards the wharf, Mr. Rendell. Coming now!"

Tony pressed the tiller over to port, and the unwieldy hay-barge pointed in towards the wharf. Long Jim scrambled forward and slackened away the anchor chain, while Ned, red-faced, gasping, but triumphant, appeared from the depths of the hay.

"Sheering in?" said the young skipper, as he looked round. "Good lads! Bit more a-port, Tony. I'll jump ashore with a warp when we touch the wharf. Haven't any time to spare if we're to get that boat unloaded to-day."

When the barge was alongside the wharf, the fat old skipper, his dog, and his mate were handed over to the two policemen who had come down, attracted

by the high-pitched voices. Indeed, though the regatta had now commenced, crowds of people left the water-front of the town and came up to the wharf where Ned and Tony and Jim were getting very busy. The clown in his tub wasn't the chief attraction that day.

Mr. Rendell seemed dazed.

"But we can't unload the motor-boat, anyhow," he gasped. "The crane—"

"I'll unload the boat in time for the race, sir," said Ned. "Don't worry. Have that motor engineer handy to look over the engine as soon as we get the hay off. Volunteers, please, to unload this hay-barge in double-quick time, easy work, but no pay. For the good of the cause. Follow me, all good sportsmen!"

#### CHAPTER 5.

#### An Exciting Race!

WITH shouts of delight and enthusiasm, scores of people swarmed on to the hay-barge. Tony and Jim had already rolled off the tarpaulin covering on the hay, and pitchforks, sticks, boathooks, oars, and what not, were soon very busy. In record time that hay had been taken from the barge and stacked on the wharf. Then the Rancee, apparently none the worse for her adventures, came to view.

"Quick, there—Tony and Jim! No time to waste! Tide's down a foot already. Chains and shackles! You know what to do."

Ned had given his mates their instructions beforehand, and smartly the chums worked. They passed chains round the body of the motor-boat, shackled them, and Ned fixed the ends of the chains to the bollards on the wharf.

"See the idea, now, Mr. Rendell," said the young bargee. "As the tide drops, the barge will drop, and leave the motor-boat hanging to the wharf. Then we warp away the barge, and lower the Rancee into the water, letting her down gently, the chain out link by link from its turn round these bollards."

"Well, I'm blest!" gasped Mr. Rendell. "Ned, you're worth your weight in gold. They loaded her the same way, of course. They towed the motor-boat to the wharf at high water during the night, then, as the tide dropped and left the boat hanging up, they moved the hay-barge under her, lowered the Rancee down, took the barge over to her old berth, or near enough, loaded the hay on top of the Rancee, and there you are!"

"Exactly," said Ned. "Well, while the tide's dropping you'd better get your engineer to overhaul the engine. It'll be three hours before we can get your Rancee into the water, sir, and that's just half an hour before the big motor-boat race. Best get the man to look lively, Mr. Rendell."

The engine was in perfect order, and fifteen minutes before the handicapped boats were to start, while the Westward

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was jockeying about on the starting line, the Rancee's engine roared out. Mr. Rendell was at the tiller, and Ned, Tony, and Jim had a place of honour in the cockpit.

Slicing through the water like a torpedo-boat destroyer, the Rancee, with a hull of white sea just abaft her big transom stern, rushed towards the starting line. She arrived just as the gun went off for the start of the Westward and herself. She had a bad start, being some yards behind the other, but she had way on her, and so she quickly picked up what she had lost.

The Westward and the Rancee soon had left the line far behind. One by one they overhauled the boats, which had been granted a start in the handicaps worked out by the regatta committee. Out into the open Thames they swept, roaring along with the sound of airships going hard, the water flashing by, and the hulls almost hidden by the spray, flying ten feet in the air on either side of the boats as it was.

The first buoy was rounded with the starboard coamings of the motor-boats awash, so great a list did the boats take from their curve as they swung round. Then off they roared on the long leg to the easternmost marking buoy.

The Westward at first crawled slightly ahead of the Rancee, but Mr. Rendell was chuckling, for he still had power to spare. So had the Westward, however, but Denner, the owner of the Westward, was forced to give his boat the greatest speed before long. Then Rendell opened out, and if those boats had moved before, they went along like greased lightning now.

The forty-mile course was covered within an hour, and as the roaring craft

approached the committee boat and the winning line, every face watching the race was tense. All had heard the story, and all rightly deduced that Denner had worked the schemes to knock out the Rancee, so that his own firm would not lose next year's racing motor-boat orders. Consequently, all sympathies were for the Rancee.

The representative of the Rancee's builders was gripping the rail of the committee boat till his knuckles showed white. Would his firm's boat win, and so make a big business scoop? It meant more to Mr. Small than to anyone else there.

The two boats were almost neck and neck. But suddenly the Rancee disappeared from view. Nothing but spray could be seen, and a mountain of white, seething water astern of where all knew the boat to be. Her nose could be seen just in front of the hissing and flying spray. She had opened out to her fullest power.

Ned, Tony, Jim, Mr. Rendell, and the engineer were wet through with the drizzle of spray that descended on to them. They could see nothing but the committee boat ahead. They did not know how near the Westward was. They were going all out; that's all they were conscious of.

However, the boom of the gun sounded through the wall of white water to port of them, so the engineer throttled down. The Rancee had won. The people from the committee boat, the rowing boats, and the shore saw the fountain of spray die down, and the hull of the Rancee appeared, gleaming wet and glossy in the sunlight. The roar of the engine died down to a steady "thrum," and the chums and Rendell looked anxiously astern. The Westward, half a mile behind when the Rancee had crossed the line, had turned, and was storming off down river as quickly as her propellers would drive her.

"Denner doesn't like the thought of an inquiry about that burning stunt and the hay-barge business," said Mr. Rendell dryly, as the Rancee hummed gently up the harbour, past the cheering crowds on either shore.

The criminal actions of Denner in trying firstly to destroy, and secondly to steal the Rancee met with its just reward. And the firm of Jolliffe & Co., Southampton Water, did a roaring business building the Rancee type of racing craft for all the moneyed motor-boat maniacs in the kingdom.

The chums did well out of it, too. They received a letter from the firm, saying they would be only too pleased to dock and overhaul the Estuary Belle whenever she needed it, quite free of charge.

THE END.

*(More exciting experiences of the Estuary Belle and its brave crew are related in next week's thrilling yarn: "THE WRACKERS!" Be sure you read it!)*

### SOMETHING TO REMEMBER!

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Printed and published every Wednesday by the Proprietors, the Amalgamated Press (1922), Ltd., The Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4. Advertisement offices: The Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4. Registered for transmission by Canadian Magazines Post. Subscription rates: Inland and Abroad, 12s. per annum; 6s. 6d. for six months. Sole agents for South Africa: The Central News Agency, Ltd. Sole agents for Australia and New Zealand: Messrs. Gordon & Gotch, Ltd.; and for Canada, The Imperial News Co., Ltd. (Canada) Saturday, October 6th, 1923.





### Tuck Hampers and Money Prizes Awarded for Interesting Paragraphs.

(If You Do Not Win a Prize This Week—You May Next!)

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 PERTH!

##### A STICKY TRICK!

A teacher told her class to bring something to demonstrate the use of the word "immaterial." Next morning a bright youth brought a big stick. "Well," said the teacher, "how does that demonstrate the use of the word immaterial?" "I'll show you, miss," said the lad. "Take hold of one end, then the other. That's it. Now leave go one end." "Which end?" asked the teacher. "Well, it's immaterial, miss," said the lad, "there's treacle on both ends!"—A Tuck Hamper filled with delicious tuck has been awarded to Miss J. R. Wight, 11, Inchaffray Street, Perth, N.B.

(Half-a-crown has been awarded for each of the following paragraphs.)

##### FULLY EXPECTED.

Little Johnny was at the tea-party and had eaten more than sufficient for him, when the hostess came round and asked: "Well, Johnny, what will you have now?" "I think," said Johnny, after a slight hesitation, "that I'll have a pain in me stummick!"—A. S. Dixon, 27, Havelock Square, Bath Avenue, Sandymount, Dublin.

##### QUITE UNCONCERNED!

Gent (to boy just returning from a fishing expedition, loaded): "You've had a fine haul, my lad! Where did you catch them?" Lad: "Go down that path marked 'Private!' cross the field marked 'Beware of the bull!' keep on till you come to a notice, 'Trespassers will be prosecuted!' then turn to your left, and you'll see a pond marked 'No fishing allowed.' That's it!"—W. Parsons, 8, Coppermill Lane, Walthamstow, E.17.

##### STRANGE, BUT TRUE!

Maid (to mistress): "Please, mum, the cat's 'ad chickens."  
Mistress: "Nonsense, Jane! You mean kittens!"  
Maid: "Well, mum, wot wos them you brought in the bag this morning?"  
Mistress: "Chickens, Jane."  
Maid: "There, I knew I wos right. The cat's 'ad 'em!"—V. J. Hartley, 19, Boothen Old Road, Stoke-on-Trent.

##### VERY OBLIGING!

Guest: "I want some raw oysters. They must not be too large nor too small, neither too salty nor too fat. They must be cold, and I want them quickly."  
Butler: "Yes, sir. With or without pearls?"—M. Kam, 4, Lamb's Lane, off Caledon Street, Cape Town, S. Africa.

##### THEN HE COLLAPSED!

Barber: "How do you like the razor, sir?"  
Customer: "I could hardly believe I was being shaved."  
Barber (flattered): "Then what did you imagine, sir?"  
Customer: "That I was being sandpapered!"—T. Bradshaw, 26, Ainsdale Street, off Pollitt Street, West Gorton, Manchester.

##### A NASTY RUDE BOY!

Johnny had been using some very unparliamentary language, much to his mother's distress. "Johnny," she cried, "do stop using such dreadful expressions! I can't imagine where you pick them up!" "Well, mother," replied Johnny, "Shakespeare used them!" "Then don't play with him again!" commanded his mother. "He's not a fit companion for you, I'm sure!"—Hattie Evans, 1, Ardilaun Villas, Clonliffe Road, Dublin, Ireland.

##### THEN THE COLONEL COLLAPSED!

The squad had marched forty miles in a broiling sun, and now were feeling "dog-tired." The colonel asked: "What man is willing, for the honour of the regiment, to march back to headquarters? Let him stand still. The rest, forward—march!" One man remained. "What!" said the colonel. "One man! I congratulate you, Murphy! So you are willing to uphold our prestige?" "No, sorr!" said Murphy. "I'm too tired to march forward, begorrah!"—J. Carless, 42, North Street, Newport, Mon.

##### HONESTY THE BEST POLICY!

"Yessuh, I's done proved dat honesty is de best policy, after all." "How?" demanded his friend. "You remember dat dawg dat I took?" "Sho' I remembers." "Well, suh, I tries for two whole days to sell dat dawg, and nobody offers more'n a dollah. So, like an honest man, I goes to de lady dat owned him, an' she gives me two pounds!"—B. Kemp, 15, Maitland Street, Edinburgh.

##### ALREADY MAPPED OUT!

A man was digging a hole in his garden to bury some rubbish. After he had filled the hole in he had some dirt left over. A friend, passing, stopped to speak to him. "Where are you going to put that dirt, Pat?" he asked. "Why," answered Pat, "I'm going to dig another hole to put that in!"—F. Manning, 86, Meath Road, Plaistow, E.15.

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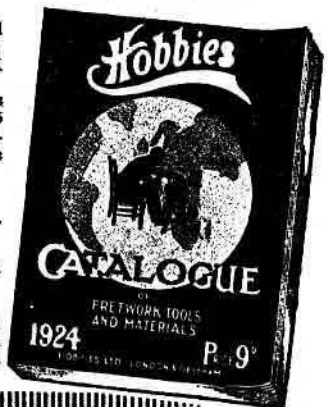
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(Continued from previous page.)

**SOMETHING BIG!**

An American was bragging to an Englishman of his fishing experiences. "Yes," he said, "I guess we had an anchor for a hook, and the fish was tugging away, and we had about two dog-gone miles of line out, and the ship was sure lurching, and—waal, I guess—" Here the Englishman broke in. "What were you catching," he asked sarcastically, "a whale?" "Nope," answered the American, "I guess we were baiting with a whale!"—Alfred Hassell, 10, Lisford Street, Peckham, S.E.15.

**PROVING ITS BREED!**

"Come into my garden," said Brown to his neighbour, Smith. "I have just bought a dog, and I would like you to see it." For some time the two men stood watching the

puppy, who was vainly trying to catch its own tail. "What sort of dog do you call that?" asked Smith. "A watch dog!" answered Brown. "Ah, then," said Smith, "I suppose it's just winding itself up!"—G. Reeve, 4, Poyntz Road, S.W.11.

**TOO MUCH!**

A man who was out of work was given a job at the Hilarity Theatre. He was duly installed in his new position, and, as instructed, put in an appearance on opening night. "Now, then," shouted the stage-manager as the clock struck eight, "all is ready. Run up the curtain!" This was too much for the new hand. "Wot yer talkin' about?" he asked roughly. "Run up the curtain? I'm a stage- and, I am, not a bloomin' squirrel!"—M. Drover, Brightstone, Mill Hill, Coves.

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Figgin's stared round from the canoe. He had not yet sighted the Old Bus tied up on the opposite bank.

"Hallo! Where—?"

"This way, Figgin's!"

The canoe paddled in. Tom Merry & Co. were standing under a big tree on the bank, whose wide-spreading branches reached far over the water. Figgin's & Co., as they paddled in, came under the shade of a great low branch; but they kept at a wary distance from the bank.

Figgin's stood up.

"Hallo, you School House cripples! Where's your boat?"

"It's been barged," said Tom. "A gang of roughs walked it off, and they've tied it up across the river."

"And you let them?" inquired Figgin's.

"You New House ass—"

"You cheeky chump—"

"Poor little kids!" said Figgin's commiseratingly. "You School House chaps shouldn't go about alone. If you haven't a New House fellow to look after you, you should get a nurse."

"Bai Jove! Wally, Figgin's—"

"It was all your fault, you New House fahnd!" growled Tom Merry. "I suppose it was you rided that gang of roughs last night in our old camp, and they thought it was us!"

"That gang!" exclaimed Kerr. "You kids do rake up some bad luck!"

"Don't jaw, old man. Go and tow our boat over like a good kid!"

Figgin's glanced across the river. He could make out the Old Bus tied up on the Oxfordshire side.

"Never mind House rags now," said Tom. "Remember you're a St. Jim's chap, and play up."

"Hear, hear!" said Figgin's, with a grin. "Of course, we know it's up to the New House to take care of the School House. We know that!"

"Yes, rather!" grinned Fatty Wynn.

"Only you kids have got to learn your place," said Figgin's seriously.

"Well, I'll look after you, and protect you, and all that—"

"You cheeky ass!" roared Blake.

"Shush! But you've got to hand back our old paddles—"

"Ask that gang for them," said Tom Merry. "I believe they chucked them at us, along with a lot of other things. They've probably floated down as far as Reading by this time."

"Oh!" said Figgin's. "Well, if you've not got them, never mind. We're not letting you keep any giddy trophies. Well, own up you've licked—"

"Rats!"

"And own up that New House is cock-house at St. Jim's!"

"Rubbish!"

"Otherwise," said Figgin's calmly, "we'll tow your old boat off, but we shall tow it back to Abingdon."

"You rotter!"

"Bai Jove! What is Lowthah up to?" murmured Arthur Augustus.

During the talk with the New House trio, Monty Lowther had climbed into the big tree, on the landward side, out of sight of Figgin's & Co. Then, with great caution, he made his way along the great bough that hung over the water, and at the present moment he was directly above the canoe that floated beneath the branch. As Figgin's & Co. did not think of looking up into the great tree, they had no idea of Monty Lowther's remarkable manoeuvres.

Arthur Augustus turned his eyeglass on Lowther in amazement, as he spotted him on the overhanging branch.

"Shurrup, you ass!" whispered Manners.

"Wally, Mannahs—"

Figgin's glanced up, following the direction of Gussy's eyeglass.

"Look out!" he ejaculated.

But the New House trio looked out too late. Monty

Lowther dropped from the branch, and came with a crash into the canoe. The next instant the canoe was under water, and Lowther and three New House juniors were splashing in the Thames.

CHAPTER 10.  
Shoulder to Shoulder!

"HURRAH!"

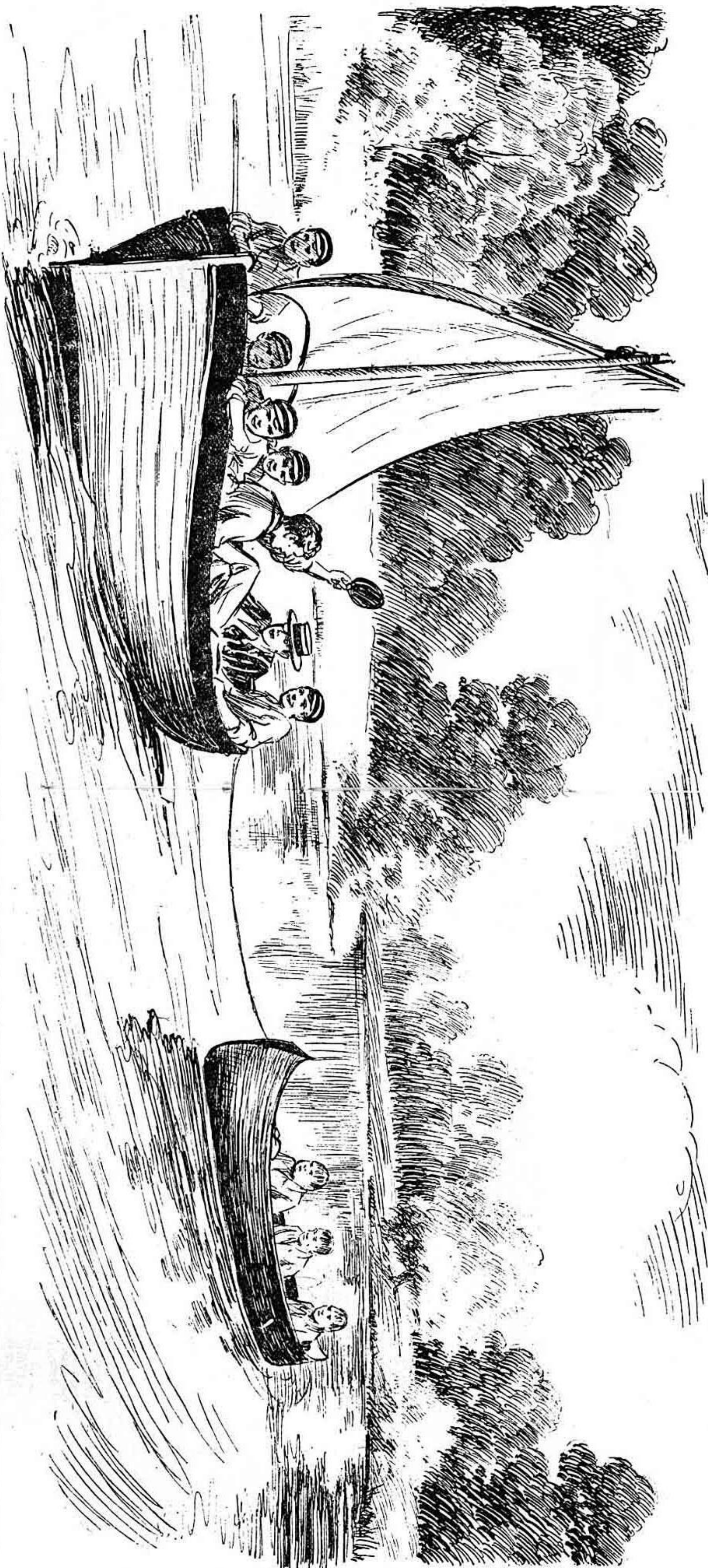
"Bwawo, Lowthah!" roared Arthur Augustus, comprehending at last.

The canoe floated, bottom up, with four fellows clinging to it. The water was shallow by the bank, and the four juniors were soon treading in mud, still holding to the canoe. Figgin's & Co. made a desperate attempt to right it, and drag it away from Lowther's; but they had no time. Headless of water and of mud, Tom Merry & Co. rushed in. With the water flowing round their necks, the School House juniors laid hold of the canoe.

In spite of Figgin's & Co. it was dragged ashore, and landed in triumph. Seven of the School House made short work of three of the New House.

Blake clapped Monty Lowther on the shoulder in great glee.

"Well done, old bean!" he chorled.



A rope was tied on the canoe's nose, and the little craft dropped a few yards behind the Old Bus. There was a keen wind up the river, and Tom Merry & Co., instead of towing as usual, hoisted out the sail. This Old Bus glided up the river gally, with the canoe towing behind, with Figgin's & Co. as passengers of war sitting in it. (See page 7.)