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Every Wednesday.



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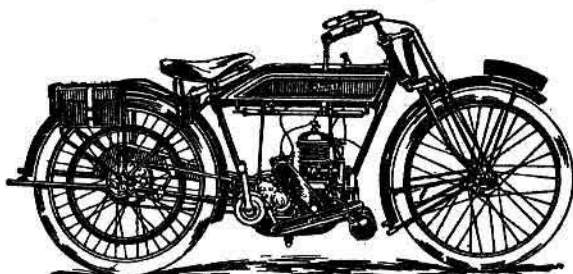
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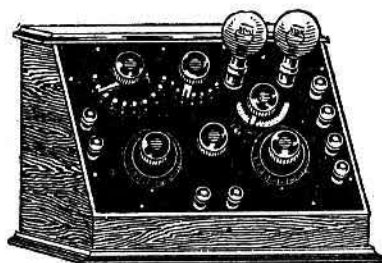
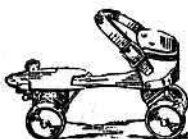
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A Screamingly Funny Story of the Famous Chums of St. Jim's, telling of the Exciting Wind-Up of their Up-River Holidays.

By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

CHAPTER 1.
Serious Trouble!

YE distant spires—

"Dry up!"

"Ye antique towahs—"

Whiz!

A cushion flew along the Old Bus, and caught Arthur Augustus D'Arcy upon his watch-chain.

There was a howl from Arthur Augustus, and his poetical quotation ceased quite suddenly.

He sat down, with a concussion that shook the boat.

"I warned you!" said Blake.

"Gwoogh!"

Tom Merry & Co. chuckled. The Old Bus, with the seven voyagers of St. Jim's on board, had passed Ifley Lock, and was rolling on towards Folly Bridge. More and more buildings of Oxford were coming into sight; hence Arthur Augustus' outbreak into poetry. Hence, also, the whizzing cushion and the sudden collapse of the swell of St. Jim's.

Jack Blake gave him a cheery grin as he sat and gasped.

"I knew that the distant spires and antique towers were coming, as soon as we sighted Oxford," he remarked. "I had the cushion ready."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You uttah ass!" gasped Arthur Augustus. "I wegard you as an uttaly unpoetical wuffian, Blake."

"Good!"

"And a feahful beast."

"Go it!"

"And a howwid hooligan!" roared Arthur Augustus.

"Hear, hear!"

Arthur Augustus picked himself up. There was wrath in his aristocratic countenance, and he was evidently meditating assault and battery. Blake picked up a bookhook in a careless sort of way.

"Peace, my infants, peace!" said Tom Merry soothingly.

"I wufuse to peace—I mean, I am goin' to give Blake a feahful thwashin'!" said Arthur Augustus hotly. "I am not goin' to be bowled ovah with impunity."

"You were bowled over with a cushion," said Monty Lowther.

"Wats! Will you dwoop that boathook, Blake?"

"Where will you have it?" asked Blake.

"I will not have it anyhow, you ass! I wequest you to put down that boathook while I thwash you!"

"All because a chap gets fed-up on distant spires and antique towers," said Blake, with a sigh. "Gussy has been bursting with poetry and historic associations all the way up from Kingston, and this is the first time I've biffed him. You ought to be grateful, Gussy."

"You uttah ass! What ought I to be grateful for?" demanded Arthur Augustus.

"For the number of times I've nearly biffed you, and haven't," said Blake. "You asked for it a hundred times at least before you got it."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Will you dwoop that boathook, Blake?" asked Arthur Augustus, in concentrated tones.

"Anything to oblige," said Blake.

He dropped one end of the boathook upon the light and elegant shoe that adorned the right foot of Arthur Augustus.

Another wild howl rang through the Old Bus, and Arthur Augustus D'Arcy hopped on one foot, claspng the other with both hands.

"Yawwooh!"

"What's the matter now?" asked Blake, in pained surprise. "It seems to me that it's impossible to satisfy Gussy."

"Yawwoooooop!"

"Keep that up, D'Arcy!" exclaimed Manners of the Shell, making a grab at his camera. "Keep it up, old chap! Let me snap you like that—"

Arthur Augustus ceased to hop abruptly.

"Mannahs, you dummay—"

"You see, I've got a lot of views and things," said Manners. "But I haven't any comic pictures, except my snap of Coker in the punt. Go it!"

"You silly ass!" roared Arthur Augustus.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Arthur Augustus, for once forgetting the repose that stamps, or should stamp, the caste of Vere de Vere, rushed at Blake. Perhaps it was by accident that Digby's foot came in the way. Arthur Augustus reached Blake, but he reached him sprawling, and his noble features landed on Blake's knees.

"Oh cwumbs!" gasped Arthur Augustus.

Blake promptly opened his knees, and jammed Arthur Augustus' head between them, and then closed them like a vice, with his hands on the back of Gussy's noble head.

"A fair catch!" he remarked.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Gwoogh! Welease me!" came in muffled accents from Arthur Augustus, as he wriggled furiously in the trap.

"Snap him like that, Manners," said Herries, with a chuckle. "It will make a ripping picture for the study, when we get back to St. Jim's."

"What-ho!" said Manners.

Arthur Augustus struggled frantically. But really, in his present position, he had no chance, and certainly he made an extraordinary picture, with his head pinned between Blake's knees and his legs thrashing wildly.

"Welease me!" he howled. "Mannahs, you awful beast, I wufuse to be snapped in this widiculous posish! Yawwooh!"

Snap!

The camera clicked. "Now it's on record," said Manners, with great satisfaction. "This beats my picture of Coker in the punt. Much obliged, Gussy."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Will you welease me, Blake?" shrieked Arthur Augustus.

"That depends," said Blake cheerfully, compressing his sinewy knees on Gussy's noble ears. "Are you going to make it pax?"

"Certainly not, you wuffian! I am goin' to give you a feahful thwashin'!"

"Then I fancy I'll keep you pinned," said Blake. "I don't mind, old fellow—I'll keep it up as long as you do. Besides, you're amusing the natives. There's a lot of girls on the tow-path who seem no end interested."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Arthur Augustus wriggled with anguish.

"Bai Jove! Do you mean to say that there are any gals lookin' at me in this widiculous posish, you bwute?"

"Droves of 'em!" said Blake.

"Oh, you wottah! Welease me at once! Do you heah me?"

"We have no bananas to-day," answered Blake.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Hewwies, dwag this bwute off—"

"Not till you make it pax," said Herries. "We can't have you fighting in the boat, Gussy, in full view of the respectable population of Oxford."

"Wats! There is nobody in Oxford now—it's vacation."
 "There seem to be a few people about, all the same," said Tom Merry, laughing. "Common or garden town-folk, I suppose. Chuck it, Gussy."
 "I am goin' to thrash Blake!" howled Arthur Augustus, in muffled tones of rage. "Dig, come to the wescue, you wottah!"

Robert Arthur Digby shook his head.
 "Not till you make it pax."
 "I shall no longah wegard you as a fwiend, Digby."
 "Gussy, old man, chuck it!" said Manners. "Here's a chap in the boat coming to ask what's the matter."
 "You can tell him that I made a sewious mistake in comin' on a twip up the wivah with a gang of wuffians!" gasped Arthur Augustus.

A skiff ranged alongside the leisurely Old Bus. An old gentleman in gold-rimmed glasses blinked inquiringly into the St. Jim's boat.

"Is anything the matter?" he inquired.
 "All serene, sir!" said Blake cheerily. "Only this poor chap has got one of his outbreaks."

"Gwoogh! I—"
 "He is taken like it at times, and then we have to hold him," said Blake seriously. "He will recover soon; but, of course, we have to be careful to keep him from violence."

"Bless my soul!" said the old gentleman, startled. "Is the poor boy not quite right in his head?"

"Well, he's not what you'd call dangerous, as a rule," said Blake. "But at times he has to be restrained."

"Gwoogh! I pwest—"
 "Perhaps you'd like to step on board and hold him for a time, sir," said Blake courteously. "I hardly think he would bite. He might, of course; but generally he does not bite."

"I—I— Excuse me, I—I am in rather a hurry!" exclaimed the old gentleman nervously, and he backed off from the Old Bus in a way that was very hurried indeed, his gold-rimmed glasses falling off in his haste.

The skiff fairly flew away.
 "You—you—you uttah wottah, Blake!" gasped Arthur Augustus. "You have made that person believe that I am pottay!"

"I only told him the facts!" said Blake, in surprise. "I said that generally you don't bite. Generally you don't, do you?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"
 "You—you—you—" stuttered Arthur Augustus.

"I'll keep him like this till we're past Oxford," said Blake thoughtfully. "Then we sha'n't hear anything more of the distant spires and antique towers that crown the giddy glade!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"
 "Besides, the girls on the towpath are enjoying it," said Monty Lowther. "Look at their faces!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"
 "Oh, you uttah wottahs!" gasped Arthur Augustus. "Blake, welease me at once, and I will let you off that thrwashin'."

"Making it pax?" asked Blake cheerily.
 "Yaas."
 "Honest Injun?"

"Yaas, you wuffian!"
 "Good man!"

Blake released his noble chum, and Arthur Augustus raised a crimson and furious face to view. There was a roar of laughter through the Old Bus. Blake wiped his eyes.

"Gussy will be the death of me yet!" he said.
 "Gussy, old man, why will you be so funny? Don't you know that the giddy poet says that life is real, life is earnest; and you make it into a screaming joke!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"
 Arthur Augustus stood and looked at Blake. He could not assault and batter his chum now; he had made it pax, and Gussy's word was his bond. But he gave him the most withering look of which he was capable, with the aid of his celebrated eyeglass.

Having looked Blake up and down, in a way that ought to have reduced him to dust and ashes on the spot—but didn't!—Arthur Augustus turned away, and sat down in grim silence. And it dawned upon the ship's company that Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was on his 'dignity,' and intended to remain, for the present at least, on that frozen elevation.

"Gussy, old man—" said Tom Merry.
 "You did not come to my wescue, Tom Mewwy, when that wuffian was holdin' me in a widiculous posish!" said Arthur Augustus sternly. "I wefuse to wegard you as a fwiend!"

"Fathead—"
 "Pway do not address me, Tom Mewwy!"

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"Ass!" roared Tom.
 "I wefuse to weply!"

"Look here—"
 "I decline to uttah one syllable!" said Arthur Augustus.

"I realise now that I made a vewy sewious mistake in hwingin' you wuffianly fags on a twip up the wivah!"

"Us what?" roared Herries.
 "Wuffianly fags!"

"You cheeky ass—"
 "Wats!"

"Look here, you image—"
 "Pway dwy up!"

"Tell us all about the distant spires and antique towers," suggested Monty Lowther temptingly. "I'm yearning to hear all about them!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"
 "Wats!"

And Arthur Augustus sat in frozen dignity while the Old Bus rolled on towards Folly Bridge.

CHAPTER 2. Dignity and Impudence!

"HALLO! There's the jolly old gent again!" remarked Digby.

Arthur Augustus looked round quickly.
 Opposite Christchurch Meadow, the old gentleman in the skiff came into view in the offing again.

He was a very benevolent-looking old gentleman; his plump features beamed with benevolence, and even his gold-rimmed glasses gleamed with it. There were a good many craft on the river that sunny afternoon, and the old gentleman, whose sculls seemed to be chiefly occupied in catching crabs, had bumped into a punt, and narrowly escaped collision with a launch, and barely preserved his life from a hooting motor-boat.

From that sea of troubles he emerged to bump into the Old Bus, and Blake caught on with a boathook to steady him, and the old gentleman was gasping an apology, when he sighted Arthur Augustus, and recognised the St. Jim's boat's crew.

He started back so suddenly that his hat fell off, revealing a head that was completely bald, and that reflected back the rays of the sun like a mirror.

"Bless my soul!" he stuttered.
 "All serene now, sir!" said Tom Merry. "If you like to hang on we'll pull you through the crowd."

"Thank you very much!" gasped the old gentleman.
 "You are—are very—very kind. I think, however—"

He eyed Arthur Augustus nervously.

Arthur Augustus realised that this was the "person" to whom Blake had conveyed an impression that he, the Honourable Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, was not precisely "all there" in the matter of intellect.

Obviously, it was an opportunity to correct that false impression, and Arthur Augustus did not lose it.

He jumped up, and raised his Panama hat to the gentleman.

"I am vewy glad to see you, sir!" he exclaimed. "I desiah to assuah you that—"

"He's all right now, sir," said Blake. "He's quite calm."
 "You wottah!" roared Arthur Augustus. "You know vewy well—"

"Hush!" said Blake.
 "Calmness, old chap—calmness!" said Monty Lowther.

"I am quite calm, and you are vewy well awah of it!" shrieked Arthur Augustus, looking anything but calm. "I wefuse to wemain on this boat with a set of wuffians who have no wespsect for a fellow's personal dignity. I assuah you, sir, that—"

"Yes—yes, exactly!" gasped the nervous old gentleman, striving to push off from the Old Bus. "Quite so! I—I—I am extremely sorry for—for one so young—so sadly afflicted—"

"I am not sadly afflicted!" yelled Arthur Augustus. "I assuah you—"

"Pray release my skiff!" stuttered the old gentleman.
 "You are holding it with that boathook. I—I am in rather a hurry—"

"Pway listen to me, sir!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus.
 "Will you have the great kindness to put me ashore in your skiff? I should take it as a vewy gweat favah, as I cannot wemain any longah with these wuffians."

"Yes—no—oh dear!" gasped the alarmed old gentleman.
 The prospect of taking a youthful lunatic on board his skiff was quite enough to alarm any old gentleman; however benevolent—even though, as Blake had assured him, Gussy did not bite!

Arthur Augustus put his foot on the gunwale, preparatory to stepping into the skiff.

"Stop him!" shouted the old gentleman, making a frantic effort to push his skiff away.

"Weally, sir—"



As the skiff ranged alongside the Old Bus its occupant, an old gentleman in gold-rimmed glasses, blinked inquiringly into the St. Jim's boat. "Is anything the matter?" he inquired. "Only this poor chap has got one of his attacks," said Blake, "and we have to hold him like this to keep him from violence." (See page 4.)

Blake released the skiff, and gave it a shove with the boathook. It rocked away, and collided with a punt, and the old gentleman was left to an excited argument with the punters, as the Old Bus rolled on towards Oxford.

"You've alarmed that old chap, Gussy," said Blake, with severity. "Most benevolent-looking old merchant, and you've frightened him out of his jolly old wits!"

Arthur Augustus breathed wrath.

"You uttah wottah!" he gasped. "You have made that old fellow believe that I am pottay!"

"Facts speak for themselves," remarked Blake, with a shake of the head. "What did you expect him to think?"

"I wefuse to speak to you, Blake! I no longah wegard you as a fwiend; and when we get back to St. Jim's I shall change out of Studay No. 6!"

"Will you take your hatboxes and neckties and things with you?" asked Blake, with interest.

"Yaas, certainly!"

"Then next term there'll be room for a fellow to breathe in the study," said Blake. "Thanks, old chap!"

"I made a mistake in comin' up the vivah with you wottahs," said Arthur Augustus. "I am goin' to leave this partay at the first opportunity."

"Gussy, old man—" murmured Tom Merry.

"I am Gussy to my fwiends, Tom Mewwy," answered the swell of St. Jim's icily. "I do not wegard you as a fwiend."

"Well, I shall always regard you as a silly ass, old chap, the same as usual," said the captain of the Shell.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Wats!"

Arthur Augustus sat down again, with an expression of frozen dignity on his noble face. Arthur Augustus was wrothy; and evidently he was prepared to let the sun go down on his wrath. So his comrades could do nothing but wait for him to emerge from that painful and frozen state of reserve; and in the meantime they devoted their attention to their voyage.

But when, at the landing-place by Folly Bridge; Arthur

Augustus made an attempt to go ashore Blake gently but firmly grasped him by the back of the neck and sat him down in the Old Bus.

"Not this time!" he said chidingly.

"I am goin' ashore, Blake!" roared Arthur Augustus.

"I am Blako to my friends," said Blake, with dignity.

"To you I am Mr. Blake."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You uttah ass—"

"I refuse to be called an utter ass by a fellow I am not on friendly terms with," said Blake, in the same dignified manner. "I am surprised at this familiarity, Mr. D'Arcy!"

"You—you—you—" gasped Arthur Augustus. "I want you to undahstand that I wefuse to wemain on this boat with a cwew of wuffians."

"We refuse to be called ruffians by an unfriendly stranger," said Monty Lowther.

"Certainly!" said Manners. "Awful neck, I call it, for a fellow we don't know to call us names!"

"Weally, Mannahs—"

"Mr. Manners, please!" said Manners reprovingly.

"Remember your manners—I mean your mister manners," said Monty Lowther gravely.

"Weally, Lowthah—"

"Who is this fellow who persists in calling us by name when he doesn't know us?" asked Monty Lowther.

Arthur Augustus looked as if he were on the point of suffocating. The crew of the Old Bus looked at him and shook their heads seriously. The Old Bus floated on; and perhaps Tom Merry & Co. expected that the clouds would roll by, and that Arthur Augustus' good-humour would return, and all would be calm and bright. But if they expected that they were disappointed. There were times when Arthur Augustus displayed the obstinacy of a mule—which he was wont to describe as the firmness of a wock—and this was one of the times. Evidently he was bent on shaking the dust of the Old Bus from his shoes, and abandoning his comrades almost at the end of their summer

trip. Tom Merry & Co. were equally determined that he shouldn't, and they kept a wary eye on the swell of St. Jim's as they threaded their way onward.

Not a single mention came from Arthur Augustus of distant spires and antique towers and storied windows richly light, casting a dim religious light! His noble brain was crammed with items of historic interest concerning Oxford, which he had intended to impart to his chums, but now he resolutely refused to impart them, or to utter a word at all. Which was, perhaps, a compensation for the withdrawal of his noble friendship from the crew of the Old Bus.

CHAPTER 3.
The Cold Shoulder!

TIE up for supper," said Tom Merry.
"Looks all right here."
"Yes, rather!"
"What do you think, Gussy?"
"Yes, let's hear what Gussy thinks! Gussy knows all about camping."
"All there is to be known, and a bit over! What do you think of tying up here for the night, Gussy?"
It is said that the soft answer turneth away wrath. Generally such a method was quite efficacious with the Honourable Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.
But on the present occasion it failed.

All through the St. Jim's voyage from Kingston to Oxford it had been the opinion of Arthur Augustus that he was an authority on camping, and that it was the height of recklessness on the part of the other fellows to neglect that fountain of knowledge so close at hand and readily available—as they often did.

Now, really for the first time, they unanimously acknowledged Arthur Augustus as the great authority, and looked to him for guidance.

But it was a case of the hungry sheep who looked up and were not fed.

Arthur Augustus maintained a stony silence. Oxford had been left behind, and all through the voyage since that very unfortunate incident that had started with the "distant spires and antique towers," Arthur Augustus had maintained an impenetrable reserve.

Perhaps it had been a relief not to draw upon his stores of knowledge, while Oxford was at hand. But now Tom Merry & Co. felt that it had gone far enough; and they sought to persuade Arthur Augustus off his dignity, and they did not spare the "soft sawder."

But soft sawder failed of its effect. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was not to be drawn.

"I asked you a question, Gussy," said Tom Merry gently. Silence.

"I don't see how we're to choose a suitable camp if Gussy doesn't help us," remarked Monty Lowther.

Unfortunately, Lowther winked at Manners as he made that remark, and Arthur Augustus spotted the wink. Lowther's words might have softened him, but the wink had quite the opposite effect. Arthur Augustus realised with great clearness that his noble leg was being pulled, and, like Pharaoh of old, he hardened his heart.

"Think this is a good place, Gussy?" urged Blake. Stony silence.

"Look here, you image—" said Blake, forgetting for a moment that Gussy was to be persuaded off his dignity.

"Pway do not address me, Blake."

"You champion ass—" roared Blake.

"Pway keep your distance."

"How long are you going to keep up playing the giddy ox?" demanded Blake.

"Wats!"

"Now, look here, Gussy, old top—" said Manners.

"I wefuse to speak to you, Mannahs. You have taken a wiculous photogwaph of me."

"Only pulling your silly leg, old bean!" grinned Manners.

"There wasn't any film in the camera when I snapped you."

"Oh!" ejaculated Arthur Augustus.

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

Arthur Augustus gave them an icy glare.

"Pwobably Mannahs' foolish twick seems vewy funny to you," he said. "I cannot congwulate you on your sense of humah. I wegard Mannahs as an impertinent ass!"

"Why, you cheeky fag—" began Manners.

"I wegard you all as an impertinent ass—I mean, as impertinent asses! I wefuse to remain with you."

"Dear old ass—" said Digby.

"If you will have the kindness to put me ashore, I will welieve you of my company," said Arthur Augustus, with stately dignity. "I wepeat that I wefuse to remain."

"Can't possibly spare you," said Tom, shaking his head.

"Can't do without some comic relief," said Monty Lowther.

"I put it to you, Gussy."

"Shut up, Monty! Now, Gussy, old top—" "Wats!"

"Oh, go and eat coke, you silly duffer!" exclaimed Blake.

"We're going to tie up here, anyway. If Gussy tries to get ashore, brain him with the boathook."

"Yes, rather!"

The juniors tied up under the trees, as the sun sank lower in the sky. It was a fine evening, a peaceful close to a fine day. There were keen appetites on board the Old Bus, and the cooking-stoves were soon going strong.

But the voyagers kept one eye on Arthur Augustus. It was quite impossible to allow the swell of St. Jim's to desert the party; that was not to be thought of for a moment.

On the morrow he would come round, or on the day after the morrow; a couple of days would be sufficient to allow Gussy to forget even that a crowd of girls on the towing-path had seen him in a ridiculous position, and that a bald-headed old gentleman had supposed that he was "potty." Tom Merry & Co. hoped for the best, anyway; and, meanwhile, they kept one eye on Gussy and prepared supper.

"Ready, old Gus!" called out Blake. "Come and pile in!"

Arthur Augustus, seated in the extreme stern of the Old Bus, did not stir.

"Getting deaf in your old age, Gussy?" bawled Blake.

"Wats!"

"Don't you want any supper?"

"Yaas!"

"Come and have it, then."

"I wefuse to bwreak bwreak with fellows I wegard with contempt!"

"Oh, my hat!" ejaculated Blake. "Look here, Gussy, you'll get jolly hungry if you feed on nothing but your dignity!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I wefuse to bwreak bwreak—" "No need to break it," said Monty Lowther soothingly.

"I'll slice it up for you. There!"

"Wubbish!"

"I'll feed you with a spoon, if you like, old chap," said Herries.

Even that generous offer did not placate the irate Gussy. He frowned at Herries.

"If you fellows are goin' to keep me on this wotten old boat against my will, you might at least wefwain fwom adwessin' fwivolous wemarks to me," he said loftily.

"Won't you try this kipper, Gussy?"

"I will not twy that kippah, Blake."

"The coffee's good," said Tom Merry.

"Bothah the coffee!" "Try these chocs—" "I wefuse to twy those chocs!" So Arthur Augustus sat in solitary and dignified state,

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MYSTERY NOW ON SALE! ADVENTURE



Pulling himself up on the sagging branch Arthur Augustus D'Arcy worked his way along to the parent trunk on the riverside. There was no sound from the boat, save the faint murmur and ripple of the water as it flowed by. Only a faint brushing sound came from D'Arcy, as he worked his way along the branch. (See this page.)

supperless, while Tom Merry & Co. supped. The shades of night had closed in over the Thames, and the Old Bus was dimly lighted by a lantern swung from an overhead branch. After supper, the chums of St. Jim's made more than one attempt to persuade Arthur Augustus to abandon the frozen perch of his dignity. But that noble youth persisted in giving them the cold shoulder and the marble eye; the sun had gone down upon his wrath, and the moon rose on it.

The juniors gave it up at last, nothing doubting that by the morrow Gussy would be his genial self again.

It was a fine, warm night, and the campers of the river did not trouble to put up the canvas roof over the boat. They rolled themselves in blankets and went to sleep.

Blake cast a last suspicious glance at Arthur Augustus; but it really did not seem likely that the swell of St. Jim's, indignant as he was, would desert the boat in the middle of the night, and wander forth into strange and unknown country by the glimpses of the moon. And Blake was reassured by the fact that Arthur Augustus, leaning back against a bag, had closed his eyes and was breathing regularly.

"Safe till morning," murmured Blake sleepily.

But Blake was mistaken. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy had made up his noble mind; and he was in that determined mood which he would have described as the firmness of a rock, and his friends as the obstinacy of a mule. So far from being asleep, Arthur Augustus was only biding his time.

Ten minutes after they had rolled themselves in blankets and rugs, Tom Merry & Co. were sleeping the healthy sleep of youth. Then Arthur Augustus' eyes opened wide.

But he did not move yet.

He was only too well aware that his affectionate chums were determined not to part with him, and that if he were caught escaping, he would be unceremoniously jerked back.

So he left nothing to chance.

He waited another half-hour, and by that time the tired juniors were so fast asleep that something like an earthquake would have been required to awaken them.

Then Arthur Augustus rose softly to his feet.

The boat, tied up to low branches that overhung the water, was some feet off the bank—too far for a jump in the dark. Arthur Augustus decided not to risk landing in water and mud, and awakening his comrades with a mighty splash. But there were other ways of reaching the shore.

He reached up to a branch, and hung on it to test it with his weight. It sagged, but it bore him.

Pulling himself up, the swell of St. Jim's worked his way along the branch to the parent trunk on the riverside.

There was no sound from the boat, save the faint murmur and ripple of the water as it flowed by.

Only a faint brushing sound came from D'Arcy, as he worked his way along the branch. He reached the trunk at last, and slid down to terra firma. There he caught his foot in a root, and stumbled, and sat down, and the fact that, sitting down, he discovered thorns, was announced to the silent night by a wild howl.

"Yawwoop!"

Jack Blake started out of slumber on board the Old Bus, and raised his head.

"What's the row?" he murmured drowsily.

"Ow! Wow! Oh ewumbs!"

"Gussy, of course," yawned Monty Lowther, sitting up. "What's the matter with the image now?"

"Keep quiet, Gussy!"

"Where is he?" asked Blake, staring round in the dimness.

"Gussy! Where are you, you ass?"

"Oh ewumbs! Bothah these wotten thorns! Oh deah! I weally believe I have torn my twousahs!"

Blake jumped up in alarm.

"He's ashore!" he shouted.

"Oh, my hat!"

All the crew of the Old Bus were awake now, and on their feet. Six voices shouted to Arthur Augustus.

"Gussy, you ass!"

"Come back, Gussy!"

"You frabjous jabberwock, come back!"

From the darkness of the bank there came a sound of scrambling in the thicket, and then the voice of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

"I wefuse to come back! I wegard you as a set of wotten boundahs, and I absolutely decline to have anythin' more to do with you."

"You silly ass!" roared Blake.

"When we get back to St. Jim's, I wequest you not to speak to me. If you do, I shall cut you."

"You frabjous cuckoo!"

"I am sowwy that your twip on the wivah will end in your comin' a muckah, as it is bound to do if I am not there to look aftah you. But aftah your cheek and impertinence, I cannot possibly have anythin' furthah to do with you. Fwom this moment I dwop your acquaintance."

Blake brandished a fist.

"If only a chap were near enough to hit him on the nose!" he breathed.

"Gussy!" roared Tom Merry, as another rustling in the wood told that the swell of St. Jim's was departing.

There was no reply.

"Gussy, you dummy!"

"Let's get after him and yank him back by the ears!" exclaimed Herries.

The rustling had ceased.

"We should never find him in the dark," said Tom Merry. "Can't be helped. We'll find him to-morrow."

"What's going to be done, then?" asked Dig.

"Well, I'm going to sleep, for one," said Tom. And he returned to his blankets.

And the other fellows, after some consideration, decided that they could not do better than follow his example. So sleep descended once more upon the Old Bus and its crew, and the errant Gussy was perforce left to his own devices.

CHAPTER 4.

Lost!

"BAI JOVE!"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy uttered that ejaculation in rather dismal tones about a couple of hours later.

In leaving the Old Bus and its crew to their fate—likely to be a disastrous fate without the guidance of Gussy—the swell of St. Jim's had had his plans mapped out.

He was going to traverse the wood to a lane or road, and then walk back to Oxford by the light of the moon. At Oxford he would knock up some inn or hotel for shelter for the remainder of the night. In the morning he would do a little shopping—as it was impossible to face a new day without a clean collar. Then he would take the train.

After that his plans were vague. He did not want to arrive at home, at Eastwood House, with the explanation that he had parted with his holiday comrades on ill terms. Besides, his minor, Wally, was at home, with his dog Pongo and his fag comrades of the Third Form—Manners minor and Levison minor. Arthur Augustus had a proper affection for his young brother, but no affection at all for Pongo—a dog that had no respect for a fellow's trousers.

But there were many places where Arthur Augustus was welcome. Almost any St. Jim's fellow would have been glad to welcome him for the vacation. Levison and Clive and Cardew, of his Form at St. Jim's, would have been glad to take him with them on their walking tour; and Arthur Augustus wished that he knew where to look for Levison & Co. But he understood that they had gone to Cornwall, and that was rather too long a journey from Oxford, especially as he did not know where to look for them in the County Palatine.

But there was Talbot of the Shell, at Lyndon Lodge, who would be glad to see him; and Dick Julian, and Clarence York Tompkins—and, in fact, any number of fellows. Arthur Augustus was, indeed, spoilt by chance. Any number of doors were open to him if he chose to knock.

So though his plans were vague after leaving Oxford by train in the morning, there was nothing to worry about. He had only to decide upon his destination and arrive there.

But though the subsequent part of his journey was easily arranged for, the beginning of it presented difficulties. For the first proceeding was to find a road that led to Oxford—and a road that led to Oxford was precisely what he could not find. He had not allowed for the difficulty of finding his way in a strange country at night.

The wood in which he was roaming now was not an extensive wood. But it seemed an interminable forest at the present moment.

It was probable that it was a private wood, and that he might run up against traps and snares and irate keepers; but that could not be helped. Gussy was prepared to take those risks, so long as he could get out of the wood. But the unhappy wood was not to be got out of; a circumstance largely due to the fact that Gussy was spending a considerable

amount of time and energy in walking in a circle, almost on his own tracks.

Several times he came out on the river-bank, and the cold, starry gleam of the Thames met his eyes again and again. But at this point there was no towpath on the Oxfordshire bank, and no guidance for the hapless Gussy.

"Bai Jove!" he said at last, halting and breathing hard. "This is weally the wotten limit! I shall be wandewin' about till mornin' at this wate. Those cheekay boundahs have got a lot to answah for."

After leaving Tom Merry & Co. Gussy had experienced a twinge of compunction—feeling that the St. Jim's crew would be seriously up against it, when deprived of his valuable assistance and advice. But now, for once, the swell of St. Jim's was thinking only of himself. He was obviously lost in the wood—like Dante of old, he found himself in the midst of a dark wood where the right way was lost. And this wretched wood seemed to him darker and more obscure than the "silva oscura" which baffled the ancient Italian gentleman.

He was tired, he was getting footsore, and he was wrathful. He would have found relief in punching somebody's head; but there was nobody's head handy to punch—only his own head occasionally punched itself against some low-hanging branch.

He stopped and stared around him. In two hours—if he had only known it—he was barely half a mile from the point where he had left the Old Bus.

"Wotten!" groaned Arthur Augustus. "I would like to meet even a keepah. I could ask him the way, at any wate."

As that reflection passed through his noble mind he heard the sound of a footstep close at hand.

He started and listened.

Through the tree-tops a gleam of moonlight came; and in that gleam Arthur Augustus caught sight of a slinking figure.

In the dimness all that he could see was that it was a human figure, and the sight of it was very welcome to his eyes.

He hurried towards it, careless whether the man was keeper or poacher, so long as he could discover where he was, and how to get away from where he was.

"Excuse me—" began Arthur Augustus.

The dim figure gave a startled jump.

He did not answer.

Instead of answering, he hit out from the shoulder, and Arthur Augustus, catching a bony fist with his chest, sat down suddenly, with a gasp. The next moment the dim figure was fleeing away among the trees, and it vanished into dimness.

"Oh cwumb!" gasped the astonished swell of St. Jim's. He sat where he was for a full minute, too astonished and breathless to move. Then he picked himself up and stared round wrathfully for the enemy.

But the enemy had vanished, and the rustling in the thickets had died away. Arthur Augustus was alone.

"Bai Jove!" breathed Gussy, rubbing his chest. "Bai Jove! I should like to give that wotten wuffian a feaful thwashin'. He must have been a poachah or a twamp or somethin'. Bai Jove!"

There was no sign to be seen of his dim and mysterious assailant, and Arthur Augustus resumed his weary way, hoping to arrive somewhere or other in the course of time.

There was a starry gleam through the trees.

"Bai Jove! That wotten wivah again!"

The Thames seemed ubiquitous that night; it was haunting the footsteps of Arthur Augustus, though he was continually turning his back on it. He came out of the trees on a grassy stretch by the river-bank, and stumbled over something in the deep shadow of the trees.

The next moment a hand grasped him, and he was rolled over on the ground.

"Ow!" gasped Arthur Augustus as he went down.

A knee was planted on his chest.

"Got him!" exclaimed a voice.

"Good! He's come back, then!"

"Yes, rather! And I've got the brute!"

For an instant Gussy supposed that he had wandered back to the Old Bus, and fallen into the hands of his comrades. But the voices he heard were not the voices of Tom Merry & Co.—though all the same they sounded familiar to his ears.

"Hold him!" exclaimed a third voice. "We'll give the rotter a lesson! Hold him while I get a light!"

"What-ho!"

An electric torch gleamed out under the dark trees, and then three voices exclaimed in unison:

"Gussy!"

CHAPTER 5.

Fallen Among Friends!

RALPH RECKNESS CARDEW, of the Fourth Form of St. Jim's, removed his knee from the chest of Arthur Augustus. Ernest Levison and Sidney Clive caught hold of him, and helped him to his feet.

"Gussy!" repeated Cardew. "Gussy—the one and only!"

"How on earth did you get here, D'Arcy?" asked Levison. "We took you for a tramp—"

"Bai Jove! Is that Levison of the Fourth?" gasped Arthur Augustus, hardly knowing whether he was upon his noble head or his aristocratic heels.

"Yes, rather!" "I wathah thought I had heard your voices befoah, deah boys. But I weally do not see why you should have taken me for a twamp. I twust I do not look like a twamp!"

"How could we see what you looked like in the dark?" said Clive.

"Yaas; but—"

"You see, a tramp came along, and tried to pinch things from us, about half an hour ago," explained Levison. "Luckily we woke up, and started him off. We thought he had come back when you butted in and Cardew bagged you."

"Oh!" gasped Arthur Augustus. "I—I compwehend. I—I suppose that wuffian I met in the wood was the twamp?"

"But how on earth did you get here, all on your lonely own?" asked Levison. "I understood that you were boating up the Thames this vac, along with Tom Merry's crowd."

"Yaas, wathah; but—"

"Lost your way?" asked Clive.

"Yaas." "Then you've landed in the right spot," said Levison cordially. "We're camping here—our last night out—and we can spare a bit of the blanket for an old pal. We'll help you find your friends in the morning. They're bound to be along the river somewhere. Where did you leave them?"

"A few miles above Oxford."

"Well, this spot is not more than a few miles above Oxford. They can't be very far away; but it's no good looking for them in the dark. Camp with us till morning."

"You are vewy kind, deah boys. I am fwightfully fatigued," confessed Arthur Augustus. "I seem to have been wandevin' about for houahs and houahs and houahs. I did not expect to wan across you fellows heah. I thought you were walkin' in Cornwall or somewhah."

"Oh, we've done Cornwall long ago!" answered Levison. "We stayed with some Greyfriars fellows there for a time, at a place called Pengarth—jolly old place, with a giddy ghost. We've had no end of a jolly walk, haven't we, Cardew?"

"Br-r-r-r!" said Cardew.

"We've had to wrestle with Cardew every now and then, to keep him off trains and motor-cars," said Clive, laughing. "Now he's gone on strike, and we're letting him off after to-day."

"Oh!" said Arthur Augustus. "Are you givin' up your tour?"

"Finishes to-morrow," said Cardew. "We've walked some millions of miles, more or less—more than I ever want to walk again in this world! To-morrow I'm leadin' these chaps to a place on the river where I've got a tame uncle. We're stayin' there for the rest of the vac—to recuperate."

"Here's your blanket, D'Arcy."

"Thank you, deah boy!" Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was glad enough to join Study No. 9's camp. He was tired out; and he was fast asleep almost as soon as he was rolled in the blanket.

He did not open his eyes again till the sun was shining down on the Thames, and the birds were singing cheerily.

Then he sat up and blinked round him.

He had forgotten, for the moment, the happenings of the night, and expected to find himself in the familiar surroundings of the Old Bus—especially as there was a smell of breakfast cooking.

But the grateful and comforting scent proceeded from a frying-pan held over a spirit-stove by Levison of the Fourth. He was turning rashers of bacon in it.

Clive, with another methylated stove, was brewing coffee. Ralph Reckness Cardew was watching them at work. A great part of Cardew's occupation, during that walking tour, had consisted in watching his two comrades do things.

"Oh, bai Jove!" ejaculated Arthur Augustus. "Good-mornin', you fellows!"

"Top of the mornin', old bean!" said Cardew.

"Feelin' chippy?"

"Yaas, wathah! Weady in a few ticks!"

Arthur Augustus, with the assistance of the river, performed his morning ablutions, and then breakfast was ready.

Seated on a projecting root, in the rising sunshine, with the gleaming river rolling before his eyes, Arthur Augustus tucked in to fried bacon and poached eggs and coffee, with an appetite that was almost worthy of Baggy Trimble.

"Bai Jove! This is weally wippin'!" he said. "I am vewy much obliged to you fellows for your hospitality. I was fwightfully hungwy!"

"Nothing like the open air," remarked Clive.

"A good thing," said Cardew. "Isn't there a sayin', though, that you can have too much of a good thing?"

"Slacker!" said Clive.

"Oh, it's been a rippin' walk!" said Cardew, with a yawn. "A jolly good thing, and I'm glad I've done it, and gladder that it's over. We shall get a rest chez mon oncle."

"We're going to find Gussy's pals for him before we go on to your uncle's place," said Levison.

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"Oh, yes, anythin' to oblige!"

Arthur Augustus coloured.

"That's all wight, deah boys," he said. "You needn't worry about me. The—the fact is—"

He hesitated.

Levison looked at him rather curiously.

"You want to find the boat?" he asked.

"No; the fact is, I don't," confessed Arthur Augustus. "I—I—I— You see, I have parted with the othah chape."

Levison whistled.

"Not a row, I hope?" asked Clive, looking concerned.

"Not pwecisely, deah boy. I felt that it was up to me to wotire fwom the partay, as I was not tweeked with the wespetch that I considah my due."

"Oh! Ah! Yes! Exactly!" gasped Clive.

"I was placed in a wiculous posish," said Arthur Augustus warmly. "That uttah ass, Blake, actually held my nappah with his silly knees, while a lot of gals on the bank were cacklin'!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Bai Jove! I do not see anythin' to laugh at in Blake's wotten impertinence!"

"Ah! No! No! Certainly not!" stuttered Levison.

"And that was not all," resumed Arthur Augustus, glowing wrathfully with the remembrance of his wrongs. "A vevy kind old gentleman, with a bald head, inquired what was the mattah, and Blake actually led him to suppose that I was off my wockah, and had to be westwained."

"Oh, my hat! Awful!" gasped Clive.

"Yaas, wathah; and when I saw the old gentleman aguin, you know, believin' that I was a lunatic, he was fwightened—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Weally, you fellows—"

Levison & Co., with great efforts, became grave. It was evidently a serious matter to Gussy, though the chums of Study No. 9 found it difficult to take it seriously.

"So I have shaken the dust of the boat fwom my feet!" said Arthur Augustus majestically. "I have told those fellows that I have dwopped their acquaintance, and I wufuse to know them when we return to St. Jim's. I could not do less in the cires."

"Oh!" gasped Levison.

"They had the awful check, you know, to pwevent me fwom leavin' them!" said Arthur Augustus. "That is how I came to leave the boat in the middle of the beastly night, you know. I should have had a vevy wuff experience if I had not fallen in with you fellows. Bai Jove, I was vevy glad of this bwekkah! You see, I was feahfully hungwy, because I wufused to bwreak bwead last night with fellows whose acquaintance I had dwopped."

"Oh, my hat!"

"Any othah course would not have been consistent with a fellow's personal dig," explained Arthur Augustus. "But I was vevy hungwy all the same."

It required almost herculean efforts on the part of Levison & Co. to keep their faces serious. Fortunately, they succeeded.

"So, you see, I won't delay you fellows any'longah," said Arthur Augustus. "I am goin' to take the twain fwom Oxford."

"But—"

"If you had been keepin' on your walkin' tour I should have been vevy pleased to join up, if you would have liked my company," said Arthur Augustus modestly. "But as you are chuckin' it I think I will give old Talbot a look in."

"But—"

"So that's all wight."

"Hadn't you better make it up with your friends, old chap?" asked Clive.

Arthur Augustus shook his head.

"Impos!" he explained. "You see, it is a question of a fellow's personal dig."

Levison and Clive and Cardew exchanged glances. There was a suggestion in Levison's expressive glance which Ralph Cardew understood, and proceeded to act upon.

"Well, as you're not goin' back to your pals, old man, why not put up with us for a few days?" said Cardew.

"But you are not goin' on any'farthah."

"My jolly old uncle will be glad to see you," said Cardew.

"He hangs out up the river near Lechlade, place called Green Gates. Not my Uncle Lilburn," he added. "Uncle on the other side of the family, a jolly old gent named Pilkingham. Most respectable old gent. Not at all like my Reckness relations. He will be awfully glad to see me arrive with respectable friends. It's so unlike me."

"Bai Jove!"

"I can answer for a jolly warm welcome," said Cardew gravely. "Mr. Pilkingham is an old gent who likes boys. Extraordinary taste, but there you are! He actually likes me. Otherwise he is quite normal."

"Weally, Cardew—"

"Do come, old chap!" said Clive.

"Weally, you know—"

"For a few days, anyhow," said Levison. "We'll be jolly glad to have you, and Cardew can answer for his uncle."

"If you are weally suah that I shall not be intwudin'—"

"My dear chap," said Cardew, "you'll be as welcome as the flowers in May. It's a go, what?"

"Thank you vevy much, deah boye! It's a go!" said Arthur Augustus.

And when Levison & Co. broke camp, Arthur Augustus walked with them, manfully helping to carry some of the impedimenta. Levison and Clive exchanged a smile, and Ralph Reckness Cardew winked into space. It did not even occur to Gussy's unsuspecting mind that Levison's design was to keep him in hand while he communicated with Tom Merry & Co., and somehow or other brought about a reconciliation, and healed the rift in the lute. But that was exactly what Levison of the Fourth intended, though, for the present, he did not consider it judicious to mention his intentions to Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

CHAPTER 6.

An Alarming Guest!

TOM MERRY & CO. looked for Arthur Augustus D'Arcy that sunny morning. It was not surprising that they did not find him. Quite bright and early

Arthur Augustus was tramping westward with Levison, Clive, and Cardew, and they had crossed the Wind-rush, and were tramping on towards Bampton-by-Cote, while the crew of the Old Bus hunted for the missing junior, and sounded his name till the banks of the Thames rang with the words "Gussy!" and "Fathead!"

Having cut off the loop of the Thames—thus unconsciously keeping far out of touch with the Old Bus—Levison & Co. struck the river again above Rushey Lock, and after that the "stripling Thames" remained in sight. It was the intention of Tom Merry & Co. to track Father Thames to his lair, as it were, as far as a boat could go above Oxford, right on into Gloucestershire, if they found enough water to float the Old Bus. But that intention, if carried out, was likely to be carried out without Arthur Augustus D'Arcy to help. The sun had gone down on his wrath, had risen upon it, and was now shining down upon it with all the warmth of a fine October day. As the four juniors tramped in sight of the Thames, Arthur Augustus' noble brow became thoughtful.

"Is Gween Gates on the wivah, Cardew?" he asked.

"Not exactly on it," said Cardew gravely. "Beside it."

"Bai Jove! I did not suppose your uncle's house was floatin' on the wivah like a barge, deah boy. It looks on the wivah?"

"Yes. As the old joke has it, in the summer the river's

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"We'll give the rotter a lesson," came a voice. "Hold him while I get a light." "What-ho!" An electric torch gleamed out under the dark trees. And then three voices exclaimed in unison: "Gussy!" Ralph Reckness Cardew removed his knee from D'Arcy's chest, and Levison and Clive caught hold of him and helped him to his feet. "Gussy!" repeated Cardew. "Gussy—the one and-only!" (See page 8.)

at the bottom of the garden, and in the winter the garden's at the bottom of the river."

"Bai Jove! Then when those boundahs come along in the Old Bus they will pass within view of the house?"

"Looks like it."
 "I do not want to meet them again, of course," said Arthur Augustus. "But, aifah all, they are not likely to guess that I am stayin' at Mr. Pilkingham's house."

"Not likely to guess it, certainly," said Levison, closing one eye at Clive. "I don't see how they could guess it."

"That's all wight, then," said Arthur Augustus. "Havin' turned them down, you know, and drowped their fwiendship, it would be wathah awkward to wun into them."

Cardew looked at his watch.
 "We shall be late for lunch," he said. "Uncle Pilkingham has a nap in a hammock after lunch. One of his many funny ways. That's Green Gates, D'Arcy."

It was a handsome bungalow standing in pretty grounds on the border of the Thames. There was a boathouse, and a skiff lay on the landing-raft. Old beeches and elms shaded the gardens. Cardew opened the wide wooden gate, and the St. Jim's fellows walked in. Cardew, with a faint grin, made a gesture towards a hammock slung under a tree close by the water. The hammock was filled by a portly form, with a hat over the face. The hat had slipped aside a little, giving a glimpse of a bald head.

"That's nunky," said Cardew. "We won't wake him up. He's lunched, and now he's retired to his lair to digest his prey like the giddy boa-constrictor we read about in the natural history books. He's a remarkably good-tempered old gent as a rule, but you can never rely on an old gent who's woke up out of an afternoon nap. This way!"

Cardew led his comrades into the house. The door stood wide open, and it was cool and shady within. A plump and portly butler appeared with sleepy eyes, apparently having been roused out of an afternoon nap, in which he had been indulging like his master. He saluted Cardew with great respect, his gaze lingering for a fraction of a second upon Arthur Augustus' attire, which had suffered considerably from his scrambling in the wood the previous night.

"We don't want to wake nunky, Tomlinson," said Cardew. "I've spotted him in the garden, sleeping the sleep

of the just fed. Trot out some lunch, like a good boy, and we'll be ready in a quarter of an hour."

"Yes, Master Ralph."
 "This way, you chaps."

"Bai Jove, I feel wathah awkward, you know!" said Arthur Augustus, as he entered Cardew's room. "I cannot possibly sit down to lunch in boatin' clothes, in a howwibly gubby state. What evah is to be done?"

"Stand up to it," suggested Clive gravely.
 "Weally, Clive—"

"Dear man, I can lend you some clobber," said Cardew. "We're much of a size, and I've got some things here."
 "Bai Jove, you weally are a fwiend in need, Cardew!"

Levison and Clive, it appeared, had had their bags sent on to the bungalow. In a short time the four Fourth-Formers of St. Jim's were newly swept and garnished, so to speak, and Arthur Augustus changed into an elegant suit of Cardew's clothes with great satisfaction. The fit was not absolutely perfect, which was a drawback; but the cut was excellent which was a compensation. Arthur Augustus felt quite himself—or almost himself—again when he joined his new comrades for lunch.

Three of the juniors had been expected at Green Gates that day, and late as lunch was, it was an excellent lunch, and the walking party enjoyed it. Mr. Pilkingham was still sleeping the sleep of the just—or, of the just fed, as Cardew expressed it—and did not appear. But the juniors lunched very well without him, with the portly Tomlinson hovering over them and looking after their wants. Ernest Levison was keeping an eye on a window that gave a view of the river. Sooner or later the Old Bus had to pass within sight of the bungalow, and Levison did not intend to let it pass unailed. Tom Merry & Co. certainly would not guess that Arthur Augustus was a guest at Green Gates; but they would know when they were told! In spite of Gussy's mulish determination, Levison was determined that somehow or other there should be a reconciliation before he parted with the swell of St. Jim's.

"Nunky's puttin' in a good innings in the hammock to-day," remarked Cardew when lunch was over. "I dare say he's been on the river this mornin'—he's great on the
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liver; biggest catcher of crabs between Cricklade and Putney. We'll borrow his skiff while he's snoozin', and have a run on the water, what?"

"Good idea!" said Levison.

"Just the thing!" agreed Clive.

"Bai Jove! I don't think I'll go on the wivah this aftahnoon, deah boys. I might vewy likely wun into those boundahs."

"Oh! Ah! Yes!" said Cardew. That, as a matter of fact, was exactly what Cardew thought probable.

"But don't let me stop you fellows," said Arthur Augustus. "I should enjoy a stwoll wound the gwounds while you chaps go on the wivah."

"Not at all," said Cardew. "There's a puttin'-green here, and I believe you're great on golf, Gussy. I'll find you a club, and you shall show me some of your wonderful shots, while these chaps go on the water."

"Yaas, deah boy."

Levison and Clive grinned assent. Cardew's arrangement gave them an opportunity of getting into touch with Tom Merry & Co., which, of course, was what Cardew intended, though Arthur Augustus was far from suspecting it. The four juniors sauntered out of the bungalow, Arthur Augustus with a golf-club under his arm.

Levison and Clive launched the skiff and pushed out into the river, following the current down. They were going to look for the Old Bus and its crew. Cardew led the way to the putting-green, and set Arthur Augustus to work, and then strolled away—possibly to smoke a cigarette in private now that he was out of sight of his chums. Arthur Augustus, who was quite keen on golf, was glad of a little practice. He "putted" for some time with great satisfaction to himself—too interested to note the fact that a bald-headed gentleman had sat up in a hammock at a little distance and was regarding him with startled eyes.

Had Arthur Augustus glanced at that bald gentleman, he would have recognised him as the benevolent gentleman who had hailed the Old Bus the previous day below Oxford, and who had received so alarming an impression with regard to Gussy's sanity.

But Arthur Augustus did not glance at him, being too keen on his occupation, especially as the golf-ball had developed a will of its own, and obstinately refused to go in the direction in which Gussy desired to propel it.

The old gentleman slipped from the hammock, and with nervous hands adjusted a pair of gold-rimmed glasses on his nose and stared at Arthur Augustus again.

"Bless my soul!" he ejaculated.

Arthur Augustus heard that ejaculation and looked round.

"Bai Jove!"

He recognised the old gentleman at a glance.

It was a fortunate meeting from D'Arcy's point of view. The unfortunate impression that had been left on that old gentleman's mind worried Gussy; it was, indeed, the head and front of Blake's offending. Now was an opportunity to explain the facts of the matter, and Gussy was not likely to lose the opportunity.

He fairly ran towards the old gentleman.

The latter started back in alarm.

"Keep off!" he gasped.

"My deah sir—"

Mr. Pilkington glanced round wildly.

D'Arcy was between him and the house—there was no escape that way. The trees shut off the bungalow from view, and there was no hope of the servants coming to the rescue. And here was a lunatic rushing on him with a golf-club in his grasp!

The unfortunate old gentleman's knees knocked together. He had not the slightest doubt that the lunatic was again the victim of one of his violent fits, which Blake had had to restrain in the boat; otherwise, why was he here, and rushing on him with a golf-club?

There was no time to be lost.

Mr. Pilkington dodged round the hammock and ran for it.

"Pway stop!" gasped Arthur Augustus in amazement.

"I assuah you, my deah sir—"

"Help!" panted Mr. Pilkington.

"Stop!"

The bald gentleman glanced back. Arthur Augustus was in full and excited pursuit, golf-club in hand.

"Oh, help! Bless my soul! Help!"

The river was in front, and the lunatic, club in hand, behind. And the lunatic was gaining ground!

Mr. Pilkington halted on the margin of the river, perspiring and scared almost out of his middle-aged wits.

"Stop!" shouted Arthur Augustus.

"Keep off!"

"I—I—"

"Help!"

Arthur Augustus came on at a breathless run. Caught between the river and Gussy, Mr. Pilkington simply could not escape the explanation which, from Gussy's point of view, was so important. But the old gentleman was expecting, not an explanation, but a crash on his bald head with the golf-club.

He backed away in horror, and as the river was behind him, and he backed over the margin, the law of gravitation did the rest.

Splash!

"Oh cwumbs!"

Arthur Augustus, with horrified eyes, gazed at the widening circles on the river where the hapless old gentleman had disappeared from sight.

CHAPTER 7.

Missing!

"THE frightful ass!"

"The frabjous chump!"

"The burbling bandersnatch!"

Tom Merry & Co., of course, were discussing Gussy. For hours the Old Bus had hung on at the camping-place, while the crew beat the shore for the missing Gussy. But they had not found him, and it was clear that he was no longer in the vicinity. And Tom Merry & Co. breathed wrath.

"We ought to have tied him up!" said Blake in concentrated tones. "Next time I'll buy a dog-chain for him."

"Where the dickens has he gone, though?" said Tom.

"Back to Oxford, most likely, and taken a train for home," said Manners.

"The ass!"

"The chump!"

"We'll scrag him for this," said Herries. "If we don't see him before next term, the first thing I shall do at St. Jim's will be to punch his silly nose."

"Hard!" said Digby.

"Well, he's gone," said Tom Merry. "We've done all we can; and we can't rag him as he's not here. Are we hanging on, or going up the river?"

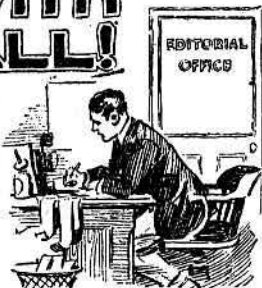
There was a grim silence for some minutes. The crew of the Old Bus were in an exasperated frame of mind, and had Arthur Augustus appeared in the ofing just then, certainly he would have received the ragging of his life.

Nevertheless they were extremely unwilling to resume the voyage without him.

But there was, as Herries remarked, nothing doing. Wheresoever Arthur Augustus might have been, certainly he wasn't there. If his plan had been to take the train at Oxford, he had had ample time to do so, and it was possible that he was now well on the way home. Obviously the Co. could not abandon the Old Bus on the river, and start a railway chase after their elusive chum. And equally obviously, they could not keep their craft tied up in one

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spot for the remainder of the vacation, in the hope that Gussy might turn up like a bad penny.

"Better get on," said Blake at last.

"He's not likely to come back," said Tom Merry reflectively. "I shouldn't like him to come back and find us gone."

"Serve him jolly well right!" growled Herries.

"Yes, but—"

"He won't come back!" growled Blake. "You know what an obstinate mule he is. Oh, won't I punch his silly head when I see him again!"

"Well, if he comes, he'll know we've gone up the river, and he can follow," said Tom. "Let's get going. No use hanging about here all the blessed morning."

And the Old Bus was untied, and set in motion again.

But the crew did not start their voyage that morning in their usual sunny spirits. They were worried about Gussy.

The prospect of ragging him next term at St. Jim's was only a slight consolation.

They wanted to rag him now.

It was a fine October morning, and Tom Merry & Co. would have been in the best of spirits, but for their concern about the missing member of the crew.

But that could not be helped; and they made up their minds that they were not going to see Arthur Augustus again till the end of the holidays; little dreaming how near at hand their elusive comrade was.

Half a mile after shinning water glided by the Old Bus. The juniors lunched en route; and it was after lunch that the Old Bus was suddenly hailed from a skiff:

"Hallo! Ahoy, there!"

"Great Scott! It's Levison!" exclaimed Tom Merry.

"And Clive! Hallo, you chaps! Jolly glad to see you!"

"Oh, my hat!" ejaculated Levison. "That won't do, you know. Our idea is a reconciliation, not a ragging."

"That's all right; we'll have the reconciliation after we've ragged him," said Blake. "One thing at a time, you know."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Levison shook his head.

"Cut out the ragging, or we can't hand Gussy over," he said. "Give him an apology instead."

"What rot!"

"Well, Gussy thrives on rot," said Levison. "If he likes being rotted, why not rot him?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"That's all right," said Tom Merry, with a chuckle.

"We'll pull the old duffer's leg as soon as we find him. We're not going to let him slide out if we can help it. After all, it was rather rough on Gussy. That ass Blake made an old gent on the river think that Gussy was potty—and it seemed to worry Gussy somehow."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Well, then, if it's going to be peace, we'll take you to Green Gates, and hand him over," said Levison, laughing.

"Good man!"

The Old Bus rolled on, towing the skiff. Tom Merry & Co. had brightened up wonderfully—they had really missed Gussy, and their exasperation with their noble chum was in proportion to their real regard for him. Everything seemed much more cheery now that Arthur Augustus was going to be brought back into the fold.

"That's the show!" said Levison, as the bungalow came in sight, through an opening in the trees. "There's a landing-raft by the boathouse yonder— Why, what— Great Pip!"

Levison stared.

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"Yes, rather! Come aboard!" called out Blake.

The skiff glided alongside, and Blake caught hold with a boathook. Levison tied on, and stepped into the Old Bus, with Clive. It was a very agreeable meeting on both sides.

"I thought you fellows were on tramp with Cardew," said Tom Merry, as he opened a bottle of ginger-beer for the refreshment of the unexpected visitors.

"We've hung up at Cardew's uncle's house now," explained Levison. "You fellows lost anything?"

"Lost anything?" repeated Tom. "No! Only a silly ass that wandered off last night."

"You haven't seen D'Arcy, by any chance?" asked Blake. Levison and Clive chuckled.

"We were looking for you on the river, to tell you that we've found your lost donkey," said Clive, laughing.

"Oh, good!"

"I hope you've got him tied up safe?" said Digby.

"Ha, ha! No! We've left him at Green Gates, Mr. Pilkington's house, with Cardew," said Levison. "Of course, he hasn't the faintest idea that we came out to look for you. He's arranged very carefully to let you fellows go past Green Gates without seeing him."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Of course, it's nothing serious?" asked Levison. "If it was a serious quarrel, of course, we wouldn't butt-in. We took it for granted that it's only Gussy's rot."

"That's all," said Tom Merry, with a laugh. "The dear old ass is on his precious dignity. We'll jolly soon yank him off it!"

"Jolly soon, when we collar him!" said Herries. "We'll give him dignity, and worrying his old pals!"

"What he wants is a jolly good ragging!" said Digby.

"We made rather a mistake in not ragging him sooner."

"That's how it was," assented Herries.

"Holy smoke!" gasped Tom Merry.

"Gussy—"

"Oh, my hat!"

It was a startling sight. On the green margin of the stream a bald old gentleman, evidently in a state of terror, was backing away from Arthur Augustus D'Arcy—who was approaching him hurriedly, with an excited look on his face, and a golf-club in his hand.

"Gussy!" gasped Blake.

"That's the old gent!" exclaimed Herries.

"Eh! You know him?" asked Levison.

"The old gent we saw yesterday on the river—he thought poor old Gussy was a lunatic and had to be restrained—"

"That's the chap!" said Tom.

"Great Pip! It's Cardew's uncle—Mr. Pilkington!"

"Phew!"

Splash! The boat was still at a distance, when the catastrophe came. Mr. Pilkington disappeared under the surface of the Thames, and Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was left on the bank, gazing after him in horror and consternation. The next moment Tom Merry had thrown off his straw hat and his jacket, and dived into the river, and was cleaving his way with rapid strokes towards the spot.

CHAPTER 8.

Merely a Misapprehension.

GUG-gug-gug!" That was Mr. Pilkington's first remark, as he came to the surface. He spluttered and blew like a grampus.

"Grooogh! Hoooh-hoooh! Gug-gug-gug!"

Tom Merry's grasp closed on the old gentleman, as he floundered in the water.

"All serene, sir!" he gasped. "I've got you."
 "Groooh!"
 "Oh cwumbs!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus. "What a vewy extwaordinawy old gentleman! I wondah why he backed into the wivah?"

"Gug-gug-gug!"
 "Hold on, sir!" gasped Tom.
 "Owl! Grooh! I can swim! Ooooooh! I am in no danger. Ooooooh! I have—groooh—swallowed some water. Ooooh! A great deal of water. Owl! Gug-gug—"

The Old Bus glided up, and Blake reached over with a bathhook.

"Got him!" he exclaimed.

"Yooooooop!"

"I've got him!"

"Yaroooh! Help!"

The hook had hooked on, apparently causing Mr. Pilkingham a pain somewhere. But he was dragged to the boat, and many hands grasped him from above, while Tom Merry shoved from below. Gasping and spluttering, Mr. Pilkingham was landed in the Old Bus in a pool of water.

He sat and spluttered.

"Safe now, sir!" said Blake comfortingly.

"Groooh! Where is the young scoundrel who prodded me with a bathhook?"

"Hem!"

Tom Merry climbed in after the rescued old gentleman. He wrung the water from his hair and his clothes. Mr. Pilkingham sat and spluttered.

"Bless my soul! Oh dear, I am drenched! Groooh! I have swallowed vast quantities of water. Oooooh! Gug-gug!"

Cardew came racing through the garden. The Old Bus floated alongside the landing-raft, and Ralph Reckness Cardew jumped on board.

"Uncle—" he ejaculated.

"Groooh! Is that you, Ralph? Take care, my boy!" gasped Mr. Pilkingham. "There is a lunatic at large."

"Wha-a-at?"

"A dangerous lunatic, armed with a golf-club!" gasped the old gentleman. "He pursued me with murderous fury, and I fell into the river. Gug-gug-gug!"

"Oh, bai Jove!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus. "I twust, Blake, that you realise now what an uttah ass you are."

"A—a—a lunatic!" exclaimed Cardew, in bewilderment. "I—I don't see, uncle—"

"There he is!" roared Mr. Pilkingham, as Arthur Augustus jumped on board. "Seize him! Restrain him! Seize him at once!"

Cardew blinked.

"Gussy—"

"It's all right, sir!" gasped Blake. "He—he—he's not a lunatic. Only a silly fathead, sir!"

"Weally, Blake—"

"Restrain him, I tell you!" roared the alarmed old gentleman. "He is dangerous. Cannot you see the insane glare in his eyes?"

"Oh cwumbs!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"It—it's all a mistake, sir!" stammered Blake. "This—this chap is all right—right as rain."

"He's a friend of mine, uncle," said Cardew. "It's D'Arcy, a relation of mine really. I know him well, sir."

Mr. Pilkingham staggered to his feet. It was not easy to reassure him after his alarm and his ducking.

"If he is not mad, why was he attacking me with a golf-club?" he demanded, eyeing Arthur Augustus warily.

"Oh deah! I was doin' nothin' of the sort!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus. "I assuah you, sir, that that uttah ass, Blake, was only pullin' your leg yestahday. It was one of his wotten fag jokes. Nothin' in it, sir. I was twyin' to explain when you wan away, sir—"

"It's all right, uncle," grinned Cardew. "This chap is D'Arcy. You've heard me speak of him. I—I brought him to the house as a guest while you were taking your nap in the hammock."

"You brought a lunatic as a guest—"

"He isn't a lunatic!" gasped Cardew. "He's all right."

"I assuah you, my deah sir—"

"This boy told me that he was a lunatic!" roared Mr. Pilkingham, pointing an accusing finger at Blake.

"Not at all, sir!" gasped Blake. "I only told you that he had to be restrained. You see, he was playing the ox."

"Weally, Blake—"

"You told me that he did not bite—"

"Well, he doesn't."

"Oh!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Hadn't you better come in and change your clothes, uncle?" asked Cardew. "You may catch cold."

"Groooh! Yes, certainly! Owl! Are these boys friends of yours, Ralph?"

"Oh, yes, uncle! They're all St. Jim's fellows."

"Then I can only say—groooh—that I am surprised—oooh—at your choice of—groooh—friends!"

And with that Mr. Pilkingham plunged ashore, and started for the house, evidently in a towering wax, and not looking in the least benevolent. Cardew closed one disrespectful eye at Tom Merry & Co., and went with his uncle.

"Oh, my hat!" said Tom. "Here's a pretty kettle of fish! Gussy's done it now!"

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—"

"Doesn't he always do it?" said Levison, with a chuckle.

"Weally, Levison—"

"Frightening old gents, and nearly drowning them!" said Blake. "What on earth made you pretend that you were a lunatic, Gussy?"

"I—I—I—" Speech almost failed Arthur Augustus, in his indignation. "I—I—you—you—you uttah wottah, it was you!"

"Oh, put it on me!" said Blake resignedly.

"Bai Jove! I wepeat—"

"That's how Gussy treats his host, a respectable old gentleman, when he's a guest in a bungalow," said Monty Lowther. "I must say I am surprised."

"Lowthah, you wottah—"

"Is it company manners to chase an old gent round his own grounds with a golf-club?" asked Blake.

"I did not!" shrieked Arthur Augustus. "I was simply twyin' to explain to that obtuse old gentleman—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You uttah wottahs!"

"Well, we'd better get in," said Levison, laughing. "Mr. Pilkingham will get over it. He's really a very good-tempered old merchant. Come on, Gussy!"

Arthur Augustus shook his head.

"Undah the circs, Levison, I can scarcely remain as a guest at Gween Gates," he said. "I twust you will apologise for me to that wathah obtuse old gentleman, but I will wefwain fwom entahin' his residence again. I might alarm him again, you know. He seems a vewy touchy and nervy old gentleman. Thanks vewy much, deah boys, and good-bye!"

"But—" said Clive.

"It's all right," remarked Blake. "Gussy's staying here, anyhow. Now we've got him we're not going to lose him again."

"Oh, all serene!" said Levison. "See you again some time." And Levison and Clive went ashore.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, with a haughty look at his former friends, stood irresolute. Having decided, rather wisely, not to return to Green Gates, he had not much choice about remaining on the Old Bus, for the present at least. His mind was made up for him by Blake, who pushed off from the landing-raft.

"I twust," said Arthur Augustus, breaking a grim silence, "that you fellows will give me a passage ovah to the tow-path, so that I can go my own way."

"Any old thing," said Blake.

"I am much obliged," said Arthur Augustus loftily and distantly.

"Oh, don't mench!"

And the Old Bus glided out into the river again.

CHAPTER 9.

And All Was Calm and Bright!

"I T'S too bad!" said Tom Merry.

"Rotten!" agreed Monty Lowther.

"Can't be helped!" said Blake.

"No. But we were going to navigate the jolly old Thames right up to Cricklade, and finish the vac in style—and now it's all knocked on the head."

And Tom Merry shook his head gloomily.

"It's hard cheese!" said Dig.

"Well, we must bear it," said Herries philosophically. "It's rotten, and that's a fact, but there it is."

"After all, we've had a good time," said Manners. "This upsets our plans—but accidents will happen."

Every face on board the Old Bus was dark and gloomy. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy glanced from face to face.

He was wrothy. He was indignant. The catastrophe at Green Gates had added to his wrath and indignation. Owing to Blake's lamentable jokes of the day before he had given Cardew's uncle a ducking, and felt compelled to leave Levison & Co.; and it had also occurred to him that he was dressed in Cardew's clothes, and that his own outfit had been left in the bungalow. In a word, a whole sea of troubles had been caused by the juvenile thoughtlessness of his comrades; and Gussy, like the prophet of old, felt that he did well to be angry.

Yet he was worried now—about the fellows he was wrothy with, and whose friendship he had dropped. He hated to see them all looking troubled and gloomy like this.



"Take care, Ralph, my boy," gasped Mr. Pilkingham. "There is a lunatic at large—" "Wha-a-t!" "A dangerous lunatic, armed with a golf-club," gasped the old gentleman. "He pursued me with murderous-fury, and I fell into the river. Gug-gug-gug!" "A-a-a lunatic!" exclaimed Cardew in bewilderment. "Yes, there he is," roared Mr. Pilkingham, pointing at D'Arcy. "Seize him at once!" (See page 14.)

Having dropped their friendship, and decided not to know them any more, Gussy might have been expected to be indifferent to their gloomy and dolorous looks. But he wasn't. If they were in trouble, as it seemed, Arthur Augustus was exactly the fellow to rally round and forget all grievances. As Tom Merry & Co., in point of fact, were very well aware.

"It seems a chance," said Manners. "The weather's pretty good, and we might have had another week of it."

"We might!" said Dig. "But what can't be cured must be endured."

"No good grouching!" sighed Tom Merry.

Arthur Augustus coughed.

The Old Bus was ranging up to the towpath, and Arthur Augustus—apparently—was free to go ashore and shake the dust of the old boat from his noble feet. But he hesitated.

"You fellows—" he began, and stopped.

Blake looked at him.

"Did you speak, Mr. D'Arcy?" he asked politely.

"Weally, Blake—"

"Well, here we are," said Tom, as the nose of the boat bumped on rushes. "Here ends the jolly old voyage. It's rotten, but there you are."

"Bai Jove! But why—" began Arthur Augustus. "Do I undahstand that you fellows are chuckin' up the twip?"

"What else can we do?" asked Blake glumly.

"Has anythin' happened?"

"As if you don't know!" said Blake, gazing at his old chum more in sorrow than in anger.

"We don't blame you, Gussy!" said Monty Lowther seriously. "I dare say you're satisfied. If you are, all right. As I said, we don't blame you."

"Not at all," said Manners.

Arthur Augustus stared as six juniors blinked at him with sorrowful, hypocritical seriousness.

"Bai Jove! What have I done?" he exclaimed.

"He asks us what he has done!" said Blake.

"Yaas, wathah," said Arthur Augustus warmly. "I am wetiwin' fwom this partay because I have been tweated with gwoss diswespect. But that need not make any diffewence to you fellows."

"Do you think we can keep on without you?" asked Blake, raising his eyebrows. "Who's to advise us about camping?"

"Who's to give us tips about handling the boat?" asked Dig.

"Who's to give us help all round, when tact and judgment are required?" asked Monty Lowther solemnly.

"Who's to look after us generally, like a—an uncle!" said Manners.

"Like a father," said Blake.

"Bai Jove! If you fellows weally look at the mattah like that—" said Arthur Augustus slowly.

"How on earth did you expect us to look at it?" demanded Blake. "Do you think we can keep on without you to manage things for us?"

"Pwobably not. But—"

"Well, then—"

"I have been tweated diswespectfully," said Arthur Augustus. "A vevy wespactable old gentleman has been made to believe that I was pottay, and has bagged a duckin' in consequence. But I am vevy fah fwom wishin' to muck up your twip. If you weally feel that my pwesence is essential—"

"Well, isn't it?" asked Blake.

"Yaas, I suppose so. If you fellows look at it like that, I shall be willin' to ovahlook your wascally impertinence, and vewenat with the partay," said Arthur Augustus generously.

"Honest Injun?" asked Blake.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Hurrah!"

Sunshine followed clouds at once. Every face in the Old Bus wore a smile.

Arthur Augustus smiled, too.

"It's all wight, you fellows," he said. "Wight as wain, in fact! Let's forget all about it!"

"Let's!" grinned Blake.

Arthur Augustus did not land on the towpath. He did not abandon his old chums. Having dropped their friendship, he now picked it up again, as it were.

The Old Bus went on up the Thames, and Arthur Augustus sat at the lines and steered. Tom Merry & Co. smiled—they seemed unable to keep from smiling, and even from chuckling. Perhaps it was because they were so relieved to have Gussy's invaluable assistance, without which the voyage could not have continued—perhaps! Perhaps it was because Arthur Augustus' aristocratic leg had been so successfully pulled—which was more probable. Anyhow, they smiled and chuckled—and the silvery Thames had never seen so merry a crew.

Levison & Co. dropped in at the next camp of the St. Jim's voyagers, and found that all was calm and bright. They brought the news that Mr. Pilkingham was quite placated, and had recovered his usual benevolence, and requested the company of the St. Jim's crew at Green Gates. So the Old Bus floated down to the bungalow again, and tied up there for several days—very jolly days, as it turned out.

By the time the voyagers pushed on to Lechlade a suspicion had dawned upon Arthur Augustus' noble mind that the little scene by which his determination had been changed had been got up for the especial purpose of pulling his noble leg. But by that time Arthur Augustus' wrath was a thing of the past.

"You fellows were wottin'!" he said suddenly.

"When, whom, and how?" asked Tom Merry.

"You weren't weally goin' to give up the twip."

"Go hon!"

"You were wottin'," said Arthur Augustus. "Pullin' my leg, bai Joye! But, aftah all, pewwaps I was more watty than I should have been. I ought to have wemembahed that you fellows were thoughtless youngstahs—"

"Bow-wow!"

"Weally, Blake—"

"Bosh!" said Blake cheerily.

"Your mannahs leave vewy much to be desired, Blake, but I am glad I decided to stick to you and see you thwough," said Arthur Augustus. "It's been a weally wippin' twip. I wondah what it would have been like without me to look aftah you fellows?"

"I wonder!" said Tom Merry, laughing.

"Next summah, pewwaps, I will take you fellows for anothah vivah twip, up the Severn or the Clyde," said Arthur Augustus graciously. "But I shall insist on your behavin' yourselves. I feel bound to insist upon that. What do you fellows say?"

"Yes, we have no bananas!" said all the fellows together.

"Wats!"

Everything comes to an end; and Tom Merry & Co.'s river trip was no exception to the rule. But they retained many pleasant recollections of their voyage up the Thames, and when they gathered once more in the classic shades of St. Jim's.

THE END.

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WRITTEN SPECIALLY FOR THE "GEM"



A Stirring Yarn of the Footer Field. By JACK CRICHTON.

CHAPTER 1.

In the Dead of Night!

IT was by the merest chance that Jack Hunter went back to the office.

It was not absolutely imperative that he should do the work that took him back, but he was rather keen on pleasing his chief at the moment. As the long evening loomed ahead of the lad with nothing much to do, and as he lived near the big office in which he worked, he thought he would slip round and get the work which was so urgent.

Little idea did he have of the strange consequences that visit late at night was to have for him.

He had a key to his own office, having intended to get there early in the morning to work, and so he had no difficulty in getting in.

Without thinking he opened the door, and started to go into the office, when suddenly he stopped short.

He had heard a sound.

"Hallo," he muttered to himself, "that's rum. Someone about?"

He was very quiet, and went forward on tiptoe. His own office was in complete darkness, but as his eyes grew used to this darkness he espied a dim light coming from the main office of the building.

He stood quiet for a moment.

He didn't want to make a fool of himself. He was not the only person capable of coming back late at night to work, and it would not do if he were to pounce upon one of the heads of the firm and accuse him of being a thief. But, at the same time, it was his bounden duty to discover who was in the main office so late at night.

He went forward cautiously, and slowly opened the door leading from his own office into the other.

He stood silent and staring hard at the sight which met his eye.

A man was bent down at the great safe, working hard at it; and even as Jack stood looking at him he seemed to succeed in his work, for the heavy door of the safe swung slowly open, and Jack even heard the sigh of relief that came from the fellow's lips.

"I say!" It was Jack who spoke, and the other shot round like a man suddenly touched in the dark by an unseen hand. "Oh!"

It was only a tiny exclamation, and in another moment the man had switched off his electric torch, and the office was in darkness.

Jack did not lose his head.

"It's no good," he said, and slammed the door. "You're caught, my friend, and you'll have to come with me—"

He had scarcely finished when he felt someone close to him, and in another moment the intruder had caught at the handle of the door.

Jack struck out.

"No, you don't!" he cried.

He got no further, for at the same time the burglar hit out, and caught Jack squarely between the eyes. The lad reeled, and then, with his blood up, hit out. He felt flesh beneath his fist, and heard the other give a grunt; but the door was opened now, and the thief was through it like a shot, slamming it after him.

Jack followed, shouting.

Once on that headlong rush down the office steps he caught one glimpse of a white, fearful face, and then it was gone; and when at last Jack reached the street, and stood there shouting for the police, there was not a human being in sight.

"I've made a nice mess of it," he thought, and went forward to meet the policeman who came running up.

He told his story. A search was made, and at last Jack went home, more than a little annoyed at the very obvious fact that the police had certain suspicions with regard to himself. Not that that worried him very much, for he knew that the heads of the firm would believe in him.

But he was worried.

He got home and sat for a long time thinking to himself.

In front of him he saw a face.

It was only a glimpse he had caught of that face in the dark, but he could not get away from it—surely it was not possible! Ken Morton was no thief?

And yet he could have sworn—

CHAPTER 2.

The Game of His Life!

THE next day Jack was sent for by old Mr. Morton, the head of the firm, and he naturally thought that it was with regard to the happening of the evening before,

although he had already given his story to Mr. Smith, the manager, who had assured him that no one who knew him would have a moment's doubt with regard to his story.

He went in rather curious to see what the old gentleman would say to him.

For Mr. Morton had the reputation of being a hard man, and a man upon whom it was not too safe to rely. One could not tell what he would do next, and many a person who had trusted to him too long had lived to regret the day.

He looked up, however, with a friendly smile as the lad came in.

"Ah, Hunter," he said, "I wanted to see you. I understand that you have been asked to play for the town reserves on Wednesday afternoon?"

Jack started. This was so. He was very keen on soccer, and for a long time he had been the shining light of the Morton team. And now at last his great ambition had been realised and he was going to be given a chance to show his paces in the town reserves, and perhaps, if he did well enough, he might later get a chance in a League game as the first amateur that had ever played for Bumble.

"Yes, sir," he said, "if I can be spared."

He spoke diffidently, because he knew that old Morton had not much sympathy with sport. Indeed, the old chap could rarely be persuaded to take any interest whatsoever in the club connected with his firm, and it was very much to the credit of the lads in the firm that they had made such a distinct success of it.

"Of course you can be spared, my lad," the old man said. "I am always only too glad to have my people do well in games. You are a credit to the firm, and I shall be interested to hear how you get on."

Jack stared.

He couldn't help it.

It was all he could do not to exclaim in sheer surprise. If the old man had suddenly said that his salary had been doubled for no apparent reason he could not have been more surprised. This indeed was a new coat for old Morton to wear.

"My nephew is also playing," he said. Jack started.

This was news to him.

He knew that Ken Morton had stood

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just a chance of being asked to play in this match. He was a skilful inside-left, and a rare good trier, and only second in skill in the firm's team. But Jack had not heard of the invitation.

And now, as he heard the fact from old Morton himself, a fleeting memory of the horrible suspicion in his mind came back to him, but he turned it aside quickly.

"Yes," the old man went on, "he is playing, and I am very glad to have you both take the afternoon off. In fact, I shall come and watch the game myself with real interest. Oh, by the way, Hunter, you—you had a bit of an adventure here last night?"

"Yes, sir."

Their eyes met, and instinctively the lad knew that this was why the old man had sent for him. So far it had all been blind, and he had merely been leading up to something which was now coming.

But why was he so nice? Butter wouldn't melt in his mouth to-day, and it was not like him.

"What happened?" asked Morton.

Briefly the lad explained, and the old man listened with great attention.

When the lad had finished he said:

"Got any idea what this person was like?"

Jack started.

It was an ordinary, very natural question, but, after all, it came to him as a little shock. Was there anything behind it?

In a moment he shook his head.

"No, sir," he said.

The old man seemed almost relieved, and he gave the lad a beaming smile.

"Well, you did your best, Hunter," he said, "and you will be glad to hear that nothing was touched. But I can't have you working late like that. I don't pay you for it, and I don't want it. Besides, you will not do yourself credit for the town if you work all night as well as all day. Now then, get along, and good luck for Wednesday afternoon!"

"Thank you, sir," said Jack, more and more surprised at all that was happening.

He went to the door, but his hand had scarcely taken hold of the handle before Morton called him back.

"Oh, Hunter!"

"Yes, sir?"

"The less said about this business the better."

Jack started.

"Yes, sir," he said at once.

Their eyes met again, and once more Jack was conscious that for some reason of his own the old man was trying to propitiate him. He could not understand why; but, after all, he was boss here, and it was not his job to know the whys and wherefores of every single move in the game.

"In fact, don't talk too much about it," Morton said grimly; "people might think that it was too easy to break in, and we don't want any more attempts. Next time it might be rather more serious."

"Very good, sir," said Jack, and went on his way.

As he was passing through the general office to his own small office he saw Ken Morton just arriving.

He owned a most lovely black eye, and suddenly, as he looked at Jack, he turned very white.

Jack looked quickly away, and then dived into his office.

"Have I gone out of my mind?" he asked himself.

It certainly was Ken Morton, then, the man who had been burgling the safe.

But what did it mean, for he had

always liked Ken immensely, and had always found him a sport? Could a fellow be a real sport, but a thief?

He asked himself this question a hundred times in the next few days.

Time and again he told himself that it was his duty to go to the manager or to Mr. Morton and say what he knew. But he could not bring himself to do it. It was not as though young Ken Morton was not a good fellow.

He was immensely popular in the firm. No one had done so much as he to build up the fortunes of the football club. When it had been started, and old Morton had looked down his nose at it, and had said that it would only be an excuse for a waste of time, the lad—and then he had not been much more than a lad—had taken the whole burden upon his own shoulders and had forced the thing into success.

Then he was such a stickler at the game itself.

It was that, really, that persuaded Jack to say nothing.

He was only a lad himself, but his knowledge of life and men seemed to tell him that no one who could stick so hard to a game, who could take such hard knocks as he had seen Ken take with a grin, and who never knew when he was beaten, could be anything but a real good sport, and, therefore, not a thief.

Wednesday came, and old Morton excelled himself. In fact, the office thought he had taken leave of his senses when suddenly, in the middle of the day, he walked through the office, clapping the office-boy on the back and exclaiming:

"Don't want to see any of you here this afternoon. We must cheer our lads on to victory."

And there he was, as large as life, in the directors' stand when the reserves ran out on to the field.

Jack was playing in his ordinary place at centre-forward, and Ken was on his right, and they went on to the field together.

Ken was silent, but after a moment Jack spoke.

"How do you feel?" he asked.

"Oh, I'm going to do or die to-day, Jack," he answered.

Their eyes met.

"I'd like to have a word with you after the game, too," Ken said.

Jack started violently.

"Oh, all right," he said, but he wished that Ken had not spoken then, for he knew that the thought of what was to be said after the match would be running through his mind all through the game, and he always found that to be quite fatal.

The game started, and Jack could not settle down.

To begin with, it was quite a different type of football to what he had been playing in—faster and more scientific, and although he was quite equal to it at his best, for some little time he found it difficult to throw off his rough-and-ready methods of ordinary club soccer.

Again and again the leather came his way, and he would try to do all the work himself, as he too often had to do for the firm's team, forgetting that to-day he had really good men on either side of him.

In fact, before long he was conscious of the fact that he was making a hash of things, and suddenly the other team were a couple up, and the Burleigh boys were getting disorganised.

The half began to draw to a conclusion, and then at last there came a chance for Jack.

He got away by himself, and was going smoothly down the field, when he slipped and fell.

A groan went up from the crowd, for he had had almost a clear run, and already an opposing back was after the ball.

But Ken was there, too.

"Go it, Ken!" Burleigh roared, and to their delight the youngster reached the ball first.

There was a quick, sharp tussle, after which Jack had regained his feet and came running in.

"All right, Ken," he said quietly, with confidence in his voice for the first time, and Ken had just time to slip the leather out to him before another opponent came to the attack.

Jack moved quickly on. He was approaching goal. A back charged him heavily, and he half fell.

"Foul!" roared the crowd, but the man with the whistle did not think so, and a moment later Ken had the ball, and was posing himself for a shot.

He could easily have shot then, but a back was close to him, and it was a question whether he would have had a clear line.

Ninety-nine forwards out of a hundred would have taken the chance, and ninety out of a hundred would have shot wide, and missed.

But Ken did nothing of the sort.

He was calmness itself.

He waited until the back was on him, and then, with a clever movement of his foot, he passed to Jack.

Jack was waiting, as though he had expected this, and in another moment he had scored a splendid goal.

The whistle blew for half-time, and Jack left the field, knowing that he had done something to rehabilitate himself in the eyes of the directors after his shaky start.

"Thank you, Ken!" he said quietly, as they left the field together. "You gave me that goal."

Ken shook his head.

"Jolly good shot!" he said.

CHAPTER 3.

A Long Talk!

THAT goal seemed to have inspired Jack, and in the second half he was really brilliant.

He started by getting his forward line together.

Long, swinging passes out to the wings, to drop exactly at the waiting foot, and send the swift gentleman gliding down the line; gentle little taps, which defied opponents; and now and again a long-range shot of stinging force which kept the opposing goalie absolutely on the qui vive, and began to rattle the backs.

And then, when the home lads had begun to feel that they had a leader now, he started to play himself, and, with a fine solo run, he made his way down the entire length of the field, and when well in position steadied himself, and gave the custodian not an earthy with a low shot bang into the left-hand corner of the net.

"Well done, Jack!" screamed the crowd, and the directors started to congratulate one another.

So the game progressed.

It went better and better. There was no stopping the lad now, and his brilliant play was having the same effect upon the merry men under him. Ken was playing really good stuff. He was being beautifully exact, and, although he did not get many other chances to score, he was always where he should be, and time and again he was able to send a wing off towards the enemies' camp,

or was able to place Jack in such a position that he had the goal in danger.

They scored twice again, and left the field heroes.

As they entered the pavilion the managing-director came up to them.

"Well done, you two boys!" he said. "I am going to try you for the team next Saturday. What do you say to that?"

Jack's head spun dizzily. It seemed almost too good to be true. This was the ambition of his life, and here it had come about almost in an hour.

"Thank you, sir!" he said, and went to change.

Ken was waiting for him when he came out some minutes later, and came up to him quietly.

"Can I have a word with you, Jack?" he asked.

"Sure!" said Jack, remembering all that had happened, and making up his mind that he was going to hate the next few minutes very much indeed.

They strolled along together then for some way without speaking, until they had left the crowd behind them, and were alone in the friendly shelter of the night.

Then suddenly Ken Morton started to speak.

"Look here, Hunter," he said, "I had better speak straight out! Man to man. You saw me the other night?"

Jack's heart stood still.

He had expected something like this. He had expected the other to come out with a confession, but he had certainly not expected anything quite so abrupt as this.

"Yes," he said.

There was a short, tense silence. Jack hated it all very much.

"Why haven't you said something?" Ken then asked.

Jack started.

"I don't know," he said.

The other gave a low laugh.

"Well," he said, "I'm very grateful to you, Jack."

Jack gave a start.

"It wasn't," he explained, "that I did not think it my duty to speak to Mr. Morton, Ken, or that I was not sure that it was not you when I saw that black eye the next morning."

Ken laughed.

"Yes, you certainly landed me a beauty."

Jack had to smile.

"I know. Well, it was only that I could not believe that a chap who is such a jolly good sport could possibly be a thief."

"I am not a thief!"

As Jack Hunter heard the words he stopped, and, with a sharp cry of satisfaction, held out a hand to the other.

"I am jolly glad to hear you say that, Ken," he said. "I believe it."

They looked into one another's eyes.

"Look here, Jack," Ken said, "you are being a prince of good fellows, and one of these days I will explain everything to you. I can't now. But I ask you to believe, on my word of honour, that I had absolutely nothing evil in my intentions that night, and that I am not a thief."

Jack laughed almost happily.

"I believe it," he said.

Ken gave him a sidelong glance.

"I say," he exclaimed, "why are you so ready to take my word?"

Jack laughed again.

"My dear chap," he exclaimed, "Soccer is only a game, but it is a great game, like life. Those who play it like men must be men. Those who play it like brutes are brutes. I have played at your side three years now. I have seen how you played. I've seen you



The leather struck the crossbar with a deafening thud and rebounded into play. Jack Hunter was ready. He did not hesitate, but jumped clean into the air. His hard head met the ball and directed it clean out of the goalie's reach into the goal.

when we were losing and when we were winning, and if one has any sense at all one can tell at times like that whether a fellow is a real man or not. I have no doubt."

And he held out his hand.

"I will explain before long," said Ken, in rather a gruff voice.

And so they parted the best of friends.

CHAPTER 4.

A Denial!

IT was the following Friday morning.

Nothing further had happened with regard to the attempted burglary. Ken had not mentioned the matter again, and Jack certainly did not wish to do so. He had heard all he wanted to about the whole unsavoury business, and he hoped it was at an end.

And now he had been sent for by Mr. Morton again, and, entering the chief's office, he had found Ken there, very white and pale, and the chief police-inspector of the place, with a person whom Jack realised at once must be a detective.

"Oh, Hunter," said old Morton, looking very serious, "I am sorry to bother you, but we have got to ask you one or two questions."

"Yes, sir."

"This gentleman," said old Morton, with a wave of the hand, "is a detective, and he has been looking into the matter of the attempted burglary here the other night, and he has discovered something rather alarming."

He paused, and the lad held his breath. What was coming?

"The fact is, Hunter, a finger-mark has been found on the safe, and it has been identified."

Jack looked down at the ground. He was very glad that he was not asked to speak at that moment, or his voice would have betrayed his knowledge.

"Hunter, would you recognise the thief again?"

Jack looked up quickly.

"Yes, sir!" he said.

"Ah?"

They were all watching him closely, and now, at the sound of his own voice, which was quite steady, the lad took courage.

"Of course," said Mr. Morton, "all that passes in this office is absolutely confidential between ourselves, young man, but I have to inform you that my nephew's finger-mark was found on the safe—"

Again he paused, and Jack started to smile.

"Yes, sir?"

"Was the thief anything like my nephew?"

Jack smiled broadly. He knew he was taking a great risk. Possibly he was shielding a fellow who was an out-and-out rotter. Perhaps he ought to have spoken up then and there and insisted upon the other giving his mysterious explanation, whatever it was. But, instead, he trusted to a sport.

Once a sport always a sport. It was a good motto, and he had little doubt that he was right once again.

"No, sir," he said, "not a bit like Mr. Kenneth. He was ever so much bigger."

"Ah!" cried old Morton. "What did I tell you, inspector?"

The inspector grinned from ear to ear.

"Well, sir," he said, "no one is more pleased than I am. Because I was looking forward to seeing Mr. Kenneth play this afternoon, and now we can drop this matter."

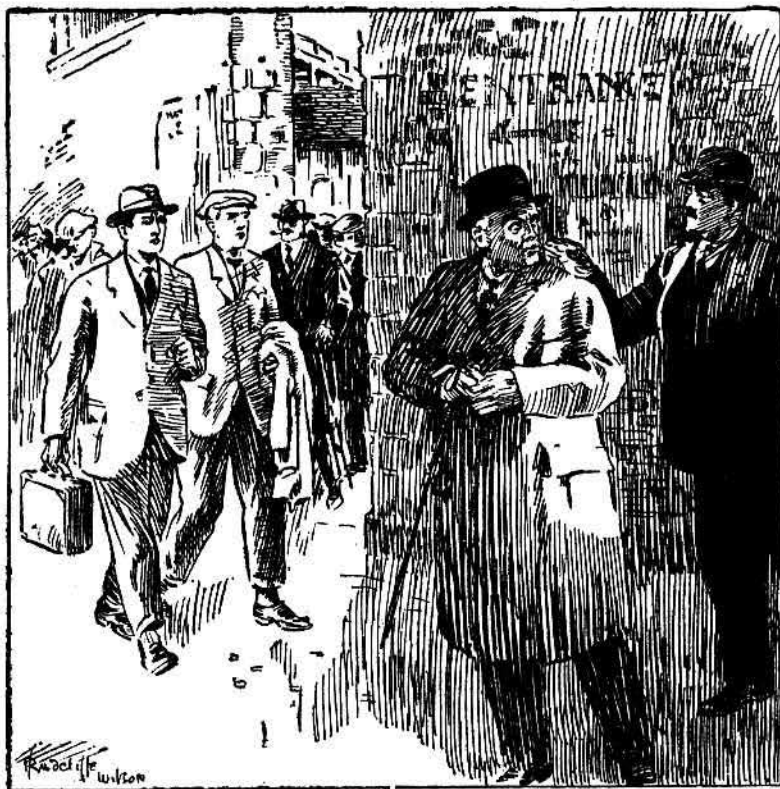
"I wish it dropped," said old Morton rather quickly.

"Yes, sir," said the detective.

Old Morton spread out his hand.

"You see," he said, "there is really nothing strange in my nephew's finger-mark being on the safe, for he has reason to go to it many times a day. Well, thank you, Hunter!"

Jack went from the office wondering where all this was going to end, and very much amazed at the old man's last words.



Mr. Morton was approaching the two footballers when a man stepped suddenly from the shadows of the ground, and placed a hand on his shoulder. "Sorry, Mr. Morton," he said, "but I have a warrant for your arrest. You'll have to come along with me."

For he knew very well indeed that Ken never went to the safe at all.

Of course, it might be that old Morton was trying to shield his nephew, but that for some reason or other the lad could not help believing that there was an ulterior motive in the whole mysterious business.

He did not meet Ken until the next day, when he turned up on the field for the League game.

Then young Morton came straight up to him.

"Thank you, Jack!" he said, and held out a hand. "I think I shall be able to let you know the truth to-day."

Jack started.

"My word," he said, "but that will be good, Ken!"

"It will—very," said Ken rather grimly, "and bad for a certain person."

Their eyes met, but that was all, and they went in to change.

They were playing one of the leading clubs in the League, well up in the table, and although they had the advantage of being at home, the local fans had not much hope of seeing more than a draw, for Burleigh had not been doing much of late.

Besides, the general opinion was that the directors had taken a big chance in playing two youngsters like Ken and Jack.

Certainly they had played together for a long time for Morton's, and certainly they had given an excellent exhibition on the previous Wednesday, but this was very different class football now.

But they went on to the field like old stagers, and a roar of delight went up from the crowd as, at the very start, kicking off against the wind, Jack passed neatly to Ken, Ken back to his centre-forward, and, between them, executing

as neat and as pretty a run as need be imagined, they reached the other end of the field, and Ken sent in a stinger, which only missed by inches.

It was a glorious start, though it was too much to expect that they could keep it up.

However, it had put life into the whole team, and as soon as the game settled down, the backs began to play the game of their life, and, with the wind much against them, the home lads certainly held their own.

Jack felt confident.

He didn't know why. He was as human as anyone, and had always been liable to nerves. But to-day he felt that everything would go well.

He did not allow the bigness of the occasion, nor yet the wind to worry him at all. He simply kept his head, and watched for opportunities, and when they came his way, took them as coolly as though he had been playing a practice game on Morton's home ground.

It was just before the first half had ended that he received a glorious chance, and scored a goal which is still spoken of to-day in Burleigh.

The play was in midfield, and Ken passed to him when pressed.

He was keenly marked at the time, however, and had only just an opportunity to slip the ball out to his left wing.

The lad there was waiting, and was away like a flash, verging towards goal all the time.

But instead of steadying himself, and letting Ken or Jack do the dirty work, he took a long, raking shot from an almost impossible angle.

The custodian easily cleared, and kicked.

But the leather fell short.

Jack had followed up well, with Ken

at his side, and the ball came bounding towards him.

He had not much time, as a back was hard on him, and so he had to take more or less of a pot shot. A few moments before, had his winger centred, he would have had the goal at his mercy. But moments are like hours in a game of this sort.

He shot—a real beauty—and the crowd held its breath with a sort of intaken sob.

Zipp!

The leather hit the crossbar like a cannon-ball, and came rebounding back, head high, straight for the lad.

He did not hesitate; but, jumping clear into the air, he got his hard head down to it, and in another moment the ball was resting happily in the net.

Burleigh were one up at half-time, and Jack left the field a local hero, which, after all, is the most satisfactory sort of hero to be.

The second half was rousing, for the visitors put up a really good show.

They were a fine team, and they were angry at being a goal down, but they could not rattle Jack and his merry men.

Besides, the home people now had the wind at their backs, and although it had fallen very considerably, it was nonetheless a great help, and they did the majority of the pressing.

The visitors, however, were not to be denied.

To start with, they had Jack and Ken absolutely marked now, and, although the rest of the team were playing well, the two youngsters were the outstanding members of the side.

Then suddenly one of the Burleigh backs made a mistake, and the whole visiting line, like a revengeful army, swooped down upon the home goal!

There was a swift, sharp tussle: Jack raced back, but he was too late, and from the general melee in front of goal the ball went over the line, and the scores were equal.

Jack played like a fiend after that. Perhaps he lost a little of his science, perhaps he lost a little of his grip upon the rest of the team, but he made up for it by his work. He simply would not be denied, and time and time again he broke away, until there were actually three men only marking him, and still he fought for the opposing goal.

But it was Ken who won the match.

In the last minute he received the ball, and realising that there was not a moment to be lost fiddling about in midfield, he swung the leather out to his right wing, and then raced like a madman towards the opposing goal.

Back came the ball, right to his foot, and from a terrific distance he shot.

It was a corker, and could have beaten any custodian.

As it happened, the visiting custodian did his best to save. But the ball actually passed above the top of his fingers and under the crossbar. The whistle sounded for time. Burleigh had won the match.

In high spirits the Burleigh men carried Ken off the field on their shoulders, a hero; and Jack followed behind, feeling very happy indeed that his assistance had helped the lad to take part in such a splendid game.

"I'll eat my hat," he said, "if he is not a true sportsman!"

They had changed, and were leaving the ground together when suddenly they saw old Morton in front of them.

He started to come forward, when suddenly a man stepped forward from the shadows of the ground and placed a hand on his shoulder.

"Sorry, Mr. Morton," he said, "but I

have got a warrant for your arrest. You'll have to come along with me."

Morton swung round like a madman.

"What's this?" he cried.

The man warned him.

"You are arrested on the charge of having forged your brother's will a few years ago, and you'll be given every chance of speaking at the station. Shall we take your car?"

The old man stood white and trembling for a moment, and then he turned swiftly about, broken.

"Yes—my car!" he exclaimed.

And they moved away.

It was several weeks later, and Ken Morton, seated in the place that had been his uncle's at the office, had just sent for Jack.

"You see, Jack," he explained after the first few words, "I had to find a paper in my uncle's safe, and I came to do it that night. I had discovered at home, through some old papers, that although my father and my mother had quarrelled when I was a boy, and had parted, my father had relented, and had left the business to my mother—not to my uncle. I had to find the necessary papers, and I did that night."

"What?"

Ken laughed.

"At the cost of a black eye," he said.

"I'm sorry," Jack stammered.

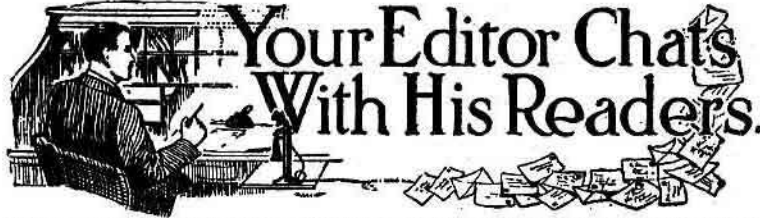
"Not at all. I hate being hard on the old chap, but you must remember, Jack, that he more or less killed my mother, and a man does not forget that very easily. So—so—well, Jack, I was

wondering whether you would like a job in here with me. I—I have played right and left centre-forward to you a good many times on the footer field, and you stood by me like a real sport on one occasion. I wonder whether you would like to come and help me in here, and in a few years you might become a junior partner. I don't intend to do this job all myself, you know."

And he held out a hand, which Jack gripped tightly.

THE END.

(Make sure you read next week's special "Feasting" Number of the "St. Jim's News." It is no end amusing.)



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.

OUR COMPANION PAPERS.

- "THE BOYS' FRIEND" Every Monday
- "THE MAGNET" Every Monday
- "THE POPULAR" Every Tuesday
- "CHUCKLES" Every Thursday
- "THE HOLIDAY ANNUAL" Published Yearly.

My dear Chums,—Look out for next week's special issue of the GEM. I have no hesitation about once again offering this advice, for though everybody always does keep on the qui vive for the tremendously popular Wednesday school paper, there are extra reasons on this occasion for making sure that you get the number which will be published next week.

THE FOOTBALLERS' NAMES COMPETITION!

In the next copy of the GEM you will find the start of the most amazing, and far away the grandest competition ever put before readers. In one sense we are all competitors, for life itself is a competition with plenty of prizes for pluck, perseverance, and perspicacity. But our new Footballers' Names Competition fills a place which certainly has never been so well tenanted before. It is right down fascinating; it provides just the right spur to cleverness and ingenuity; it fosters the best spirit, and, what's more, it brings to this football season an added excitement unequalled.

THOUSANDS OF POUNDS!

The prize list is tremendous, and the value of the prizes runs into thousands of pounds. You will see all the details on another page. The First Prize is £100, the Second Prize £50, while the brilliant array of other awards, apart from hard cash, suggests that some specially look-alive magician had been at work with his enchanted wand conjuring up the very articles every fellow most wants. Tell any chums you may have who have not as yet come within the charmed circle of GEM readers, that this offer is unparalleled. The thirty "James" motor-cycles to be given

away will cause any fellow keen on motor-cycling to sit up; there are a hundred James "Comet" cycles, turned out by the same firm as the motor-bikes; then the programme includes ten two-valve wireless sets, each of the value of £20, six billiard-tables, fishing-rods, model railways, and a crowd of other things calculated to tempt the sportsman or the hobbyist, whatever his special tastes may run to.

THE SPECTRE OF THE PAST!

By Martin Clifford.

This is the great Talbot yarn of St. Jim's for next week. It is bound to surprise you for its mystery and the wonderful working out of an enthralling theme. Talbot possesses a name to conjure with. His adventures are linked up with some of the finest chapters in the splendid history of St. Jim's. From the outset, when we find that John Rivers, who is spending a well-earned holiday in the vicinity of St. Jim's, has vanished, and left not the faintest clue

as to where he has gone, we are plunged into a whirl of expectation and baffling mystification. The sinister figure of Jim Dawlish is seen moving in the background of this really powerful drama, while, of course, we meet the charming Marie Rivers, who has always been a prime favourite with readers of the GEM. The story will be welcome, I know. It has been asked for over and over again, for the whole history of Talbot is magnetic—the story of a fine fellow battling for the right to be free for ever from the fetters of the bygone.

TWO BIG REASONS!

There are two extra important reasons why you should be early with your orders for next week's issue of the GEM. There will be a rush of a phenomenal sort on account of the great competition, also on account of the wonderful Talbot yarn. So make a note of it, and be in time before the shop of the trusty news-agent is bare!

THE ST. JIM'S NEWS!

The merry Supplement next Wednesday will be devoured with relish. It is a Feasting Number—a sort of foretaste of Christmas, though the festive season is still some little way ahead. There have been grumbles about the "St. Jim's News" of late, because readers, like Oliver Twist, wanted more. I feel certain the coming issue will make up for any past shortage. It is a perfect marvel. Fatty Wynn scores again. His "Ode to an Apple-Tart!" is great.

OUR COMPANION PAPERS!

The allied weeklies of the GEM have splendid programmes this week. Read "Fed-Up With Football!" John W. Wheway's grand serial in the "Boys' Friend." Also make a note that the "Magnet," apart from a topping Greyfriars story, has a gripping instalment of "The Brotherhood of the White Heather." The "Popular" is carrying on in brilliant fashion with its four complete school stories, and a pirate serial, "Morgan o' the Main!"

"THE TRIERS!"

Jack Crichton's football serial is a yarn you are bound to enjoy. The hero is a real true blue, just the fellow to conquer difficulties, though he has plenty of rough going. Sterling merit is found here in good measure. The story is great in many ways, for its picture of northern grit will set one thinking. Then you have the treachery of the jealous hound who is all out to down his opponent. He stops at nothing. The author has a big theme, and his treatment is masterly. Next week's instalment brings matters to a crisis, and you are left wondering how in the world things can be made straight again.



COMICAL COLOURED MASK FOR YOU!

This screamingly funny mask of Harold Lloyd is FREE inside this week's KINEMA COMIC. There will be another topping mask in each of the next three issues of this great paper. Don't miss them. Give a regular order for

THE KINEMA COMIC

Every Wednesday.

Your Editor.

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 818.

RIVER-WISE NED IS ON THE SPOT AGAIN THIS WEEK, BOYS!



THE WRECKERS!

A Tale of
RIVER-WISE
NED.

Another Thrilling and Adventurous Yarn of River-wise Ned and his staunch companions aboard the Thames barge, Estuary Belle.

By ROLAND SPENCER.

CHAPTER 1.

A Lady in Distress!

YOU'LL never get through, you prize chump! The channel, though deep, winds about like a wriggling snake. You want a blinkin' aeroplane, not a barge, you cocksure beggar!"

Ned Derry, skipper and owner of the Estuary Belle, London sailing barge, grinned at Tony Parr, the speaker, in a tantalising way. He was trying to get the old barge through a narrow, tortuous channel between sandbanks just covered by water as to be invisible. It would save many miles in their passage from Harwich to Erith.

"The Belle can do it," he said. "What's more, she is doing it. We're too far along the channel now to draw back, so just you get busy with that sounding pole up for'ard, Tony, and you, Jim, heave your lanky carcass hither and give me a hand with the wheel if we have to alter helm all in a hurry."

"Well, all I can say," grumbled Tony, as he savagely plunged the bamboo sounding-pole overboard and registered "no bottom"—"all I can say is, we're going aground. You're too cocksure of yourself by fathoms, Ned, for all your nickname of River-wise."

"Tony, lad, do shut your mouth and give your dial a chance to be seen—though it isn't much to look at," said Ned politely. "I tell you I know this channel like the lines on my hand. So does the Belle, bless her. She could smell her way through. We sha'n't come to grief, so don't be frightened. I'm navigating, and, as I say, I'm dead sure of myself."

The Belle, in an amiable endeavour to prove Ned's words, ran gently and firmly aground.

The confident smile faded from Ned's bronzed face as he felt the barge scrape on something hard, then stop dead. But Tony Parr and Long Jim Cartwright, the barge's two mates, made up for Ned's lost smile with the broad grins that o'spread their features at this new development. The mates didn't speak. They had no need to. The whole occurrence spoke for itself.

"Look here, you two grinning

dummies, we can't be aground," said Ned, puzzled as well as annoyed. "Hang it all, Tony, can't you make a sounding, you grinning ass?"

Tony plunged his pole triumphantly over, and then turned a blank face to Ned.

"No bottom," he said, puzzled. "We must be aground on a sharp ridge of sand."

"The leeboards aren't touching bottom, anyway," replied Ned. "It must be a very sharp ridge of sand, you boob. We're not aground, I tell you."

Tony Parr had recovered from his mild surprise at finding such deep water under the bow.

"Oh, no," he scoffed, "we're not aground. Our topmast must have got entangled with some wireless waves in the air, of course! That's what it is! We're not aground, Jim. Ned says we're not."

River-wise Ned was more puzzled than ever. He was just about to tell Long Jim to walk forward, so that the weight of his feet would sink the barge a bit by the head when the Belle seemed to shake herself slightly. Then she drifted clear.

"Anchor down, Tony!" bawled Ned. "We'll see what that obstruction was. It wasn't bottom, I'm certain. I'll dive over, for whatever it was it isn't more than four feet below the surface."

The barge was brought to her anchor, and before the stout old ship had decided whether to swing head to wind or head to tide Ned was in his bathing-costume and had dived over the side of the barge. The young bargee felt about with his feet while he "trod water" over the obstruction. Then he let out a yell of pain.

"Ned's found it!" chuckled Jim. "Given it a cosh with his foot."

Ned glared at his facetious mate for a second or two. Then he dived below the surface. He reappeared again, gasping.

"It's the broken mast of a boat, and it's been sawn half-way through and then broken off!" he spluttered. "I'm coming aboard. Jim, have a prod about with the quanting-pole. We'll feel the boat if we can't see her."

The result of the prodding and scraping with the pole was the knowledge that the sunken boat was a ketch—that is, a

two-masted craft rigged with a large mizzen sail. She was forty feet long, or thereabouts, and was probably a yacht.

The chums had to leave the spot then to get on with their passage. They got safely through the channel, and then completed their rather slow passage to Erith, on the Kentish shore, well up the London river.

There Ned prepared a letter informing the wreck authorities of the obstruction, and the three chums locked up the anchored barge and went ashore to post the letter.

They were walking along the London Road towards Erith, on the look-out for a pillar-box, when they were nearly run down by a car. The vehicle was travelling slowly, but it was swerving about a good bit, the headlights flashing on to the walls first on one side of the road, then on the other. A heavily-veiled woman was at the wheel, and the chums noticed as they dodged clear of her car that she was sobbing.

"Crumbs, shipmates, what a rotten depressing sight!" said Ned sympathetically. "She's had a knock-out blow over something."

The car swerved on. Then it suddenly climbed on to the pavement and stopped dead against a brick wall there. The woman's head had dropped forward over the wheel. She had evidently fainted.

The chums rushed forward. Ned got into the car and did his best to revive the veiled little woman, while Tony Parr and Long Jim heaved the car back on to the road and then joined Ned.

Beauty in distress always made a very strong appeal to the young bargees, and they soon had the little lady back to her senses. She sat up, looked round in a frightened way, realised what had happened, and laughed rather mirthlessly, a little hysterically.

"I fainted," she said. "Thank you all very much indeed. You will think it funny, my driving a car while in this state. As a matter of fact I thought a breath of fresh air would pull me round. I've had a terrible blow!"

"Who was it, ma'am?" asked Long Jim, with a frown and a clenched fist. "Is he near by?"

The young woman laughed her mirthless laugh again.

"I mean, I'm suffering under a terrible sorrow. I can see that you three are sailors, so you'll understand. Sailors always do. My husband, they say, has been drowned at sea, among the sandbanks of the Estuary."

A small gloved hand indicated the mouth of the Thames to the east, and the chums of the Belle listened with sympathy and interest. Ned somehow felt he ought to know more about this, since the Thames Estuary came into it.

"Was your husband a sailor, ma'am?" he asked.

"He was a proficient yachtsman. He had set sail from Erith, single-handed, in his twelve-ton ketch yacht, and he and the yacht simply disappeared. The police and all my friends say the yacht was cut in two by a steamer, and sunk."

At the word ketch the chums started and pricked up their ears. Ned told the young woman that they had that very morning fouled the mast of a sunken ketch near the Gunfleet Sands. At this the small gloved hands gripped Ned's arm and a trembling, eager voice asked for more particulars.

They were given, particularly that about the mast having been sawn off, presumably so that it wouldn't be seen above the surface at low water. In return the chums were told that Mr. Benson, the lost yachtsman, had a great secret—an invention of a new type of aero-motor, not yet complete—and that an attempt to capture him had been made before. Thus young Mrs. Benson feared foul play, and would not believe that her husband had been drowned.

Mrs. Benson was all excitement now, and a tinge of colour had crept into her cheeks, making her seem more beautiful than before. Ned told her his name.

"My pals and I have a way of our own of nosing into river mysteries," he said, "and we'd much like to try to find out more about your husband's disappearance."

"Oh, I should like nothing better than to leave it to you, Mr. Derry. I read about you and the Shara pearls in the paper. The police, even with your clue, would only alarm the villains, whoever they are. That might mean my husband's death. You will keep in touch with me, and write for money when you need it? Here's my card. Please—please write often, and let me know how you are getting on."

The chums now bade the distressed little woman a hearty au revoir, and turned thoughtfully back to the Belle.

"More thrills—what-ho!" sang out Long Jim, as he and Tony bent to the oars of the barge-boat as they rowed out towards the Belle's riding-light. Ned nodded eagerly.

"Ay, ay! It promises to be thundering interesting, and we might prove useful beings once more," he said, as he tore up the letter to the wreck authorities into little pieces and scattered them over the swirling water astern of the barge-boat.

CHAPTER 2.

Desperate Measures!

NEXT day the chums pressed the man for whom they were delivering cargo at Erith for an early release of their barge. The consequence was that they were under way again the following night, bowling down the river with a fresh south-westerly wind bluffing them rapidly down towards Gunfleet and the sunken ketch.

They arrived there just after midnight, and commenced operations at once. Ned had hauled out his shrimp-trawl, and with this they commenced trawling

round the wreck, in the hope of picking up any clues. If that should prove unsuccessful they would enlist the services of a diver, or hire a diving-suit and do the job themselves.

They were saved this trouble, however. Three times they had trawled round the wreck, bringing to light only a few stones, a pint or so of shrimps, two old flounders, looking very sick at being caught, and an old rusty condensed-milk tin.

They were about to shoot the trawl for the fourth time when Ned raised his head and then held up his hand for silence. The rattle of a sailing-boat tacking was heard not far off in the darkness. Then a little white yacht—a speedy-looking little affair—loomed up.

"Hallo, there!"

"Hallo!" returned Ned.

"Run aground?"

"No. We're at anchor. Nor'east, half by north for Goldmer Gat. You're heading right on to Gunfleet."

"We know what we're about. What we want to know is what you're about."

"Who the thump are you, anyway? Customs?"

A harsh laugh sounded from the little yacht, which had hove to. The little craft was drifting towards the Belle, gaunt and ghostly not far away as she rode to her anchor.

"Back to the Belle, chums," whispered Ned. "There's something fishy about those johnnies. Jingo, they're going to board the barge!"

"Not if we know it, skipper ours!" replied Tony Parr. "Bend to your oar, Jim, lad, and let's leap right aboard the Belle first!"

The chums were soon bumping against the side of the old Belle, but the men

from the yacht were already in possession. Ned walked boldly up to them and demanded their business.

One of the men, a heavy-jowled, flabby-faced being in a white-covered yachting-cap, grinned at Ned in a tantalising way.

"Salving—eh?" he asked, indicating the rough wooden buoy the chums had tied to the broken mast of the sunken ketch so that they could locate it easily during their trawling operations.

Ned thought for a moment, and concluded that it would be useless to evade the answer.

"Yes," he said crisply, "and it's our pudding, this. What do you want? If you're bounders—out to be unpleasant—you can clear, and quick!"

The man laughed harshly again, and a bow-legged person behind him said:

"Don't beat about the bush, Handstrom. This barge is the Estuary Belle, and that cub is River-wise Ned. They've smelt a rat, for I've just taken this card of Mrs. Benson's out of this coat I found lying on the skylight!"

Handstrom wheeled with a scowl, and took the card Mrs. Benson had given to Ned. He glowered at the chums.

"Right-ho! Secure them, men! Stand back, you young rats! You're all covered with automatics. It is our business to watch this wrecked yacht here and turn off any people who nose about. But those put on the job by Mrs. Benson are our prisoners. Bind 'em up—"

But Ned and Tony and Jim, with cries of rage, had sprung at the five yachtsmen who had boarded the Belle. Two automatic pistols spoke, the flame from the shots stabbing into the darkness like rapiers of fire. No one was hit, however,



Ned struggled with his bonds, but it was useless. "It looks as if we're going to say good-bye to the Belle," he said to his two staunch chums. Handstrom approached his three prisoners. "Cheer up," he said. "You're all going down with the Belle, so you and your wife old barge won't have to part company!"

and the fighting was at close quarters in less time that it takes to let go a halliard.

To and fro on the barge's hatches swayed the struggling mass. Ned was at grips with Handstrom himself; but the man was very powerful, and even Ned Derry, tough and skilful as he was, was as a child in the hands of the heavy, long-armed, bull-necked man.

The fight was quickly over. Ned and his mates had no chance, and they were soon secured with rope.

"Get the barge under way!" bawled Handstrom. "Wrench off that wooden float from the ketch's mast before we leave, you fool! Want everyone passing to come over to see what it is? Two of you sail the yacht while the others keep with me on the barge. I'll have her just below Sunk Head buoy, in fourteen fathoms. Look alive now."

Ned looked with a tragic face at his chums, and Tony and Jim asked him what Handstrom's words signified.

"Ask yourselves, my children," said Ned. "That is the deepest hole in the estuary. 'Course, I may be wrong, but it looks to me as if the Belle is to be sunk like Benson's ketch, in water deep enough for her topmast not to be visible at low tide. There aren't many places in this old estuary where that can be done, but Sunk Head is one of them."

"Good heavens, don't say that, Ned!" gasped Tony Parr, whose naturally ruddy face had blanched. "They wouldn't dare! The old Belle—"

"I'm afraid that's what'll happen, Tony," said Ned miserably. "You see, they might capture us and keep us prisoners. But how could they capture the Belle and hold her without questions being asked?"

"Oh crumbs, Ned! This is tragedy, if you like. But you must be wrong—"

Handstrom had strolled near, and he interrupted Jim.

"River-wise Ned is quite right in some particulars," he said. "He has not been named River-wise for nothing, I can see. But cheer up. You're all going down with the Belle, so you and your vile old barge won't have to part company!"

The man moved away again, laughing callously, and it struck the chums that the villain meant what he said, incredible though it might sound. Yet he might have a very high hand to play, where the lives of three young bargees aren't worth considering. The secret of a wonderful aero-motor might well be a matter of such national importance that many spies would think it well worth while to learn of it. And where spies are at work lives are cheap.

The next hour settled the minds of the chums. Handstrom's men made soundings, groped into the fourteen-fathom hole, let go the barge's anchor, blew a hole through her bottom with a bomb placed in the empty mainhold, and then left in their little yacht.

Ned and his chums stood dazed, as if turned to stone, on the deck of the sinking barge, watching Handstrom and his men sailing back towards Gunfleet.

CHAPTER 3.

Good-bye, Estuary Belle!

THE water was bubbling into the Belle. The chums could hear it under the hatch-covers, which had been put on again, with the tarpaulin covering the lot. The barge boat had been thrown adrift. So had the sweeps, poles, and other floating things on the decks. They were all now out of sight, making down towards the open sea.

"Jumping Jupiter! This is the giddy

limit!" gasped Long Jim. "I reckon we've cruised our last cruise, Ned, lad!"

Tony Parr had sunk down on to the main hatch, his head in his hands, as Long Jim spoke.

"Shut up, you blitherin' old croaker, Jim!" cried Ned. "They've taken off our bonds, and we still have a matter of five minutes before the poor old Belle goes under! Come on! Get busy! Off with the main-hatch tarpaulin, so that the wooden boards will float up when the old boat goes under! Wake up, you sobbing dummies! We'll pipe our eyes on the beach when we get ashore!"

Ned's activity was infectious. Long Jim and Tony Parr, realising how little time they had before they would have to get clear of the barge, helped their irrepressible young skipper to tear off the hatch tarpaulin by taking the iron bars out of the cleats. Then Ned and his mates, with the water now lapping over the Belle's waterways, wrenched and tugged at the heavy hatch-boards to loosen them.

But it was all of no avail. The poor old Belle shivered along her whole length, just as if she knew she were about to die. Then she lurched, and, wild-eyed and desperate, Ned got a grip of the coats of his chums, and, taking a tremendous leap, he lunged them overboard.

Gasping, the unfortunate ship's company of the Belle came to the surface, and turned instinctively to see the last of their beloved old barge. The stout old vessel's foredeck was slipping under now. The mast and great sprit swayed a little, then the old barge dived down for the bottom.

The sudden lurch of the old craft sent the water in her hold bulking forward, to come up with a bang against the wooden hatch-covers, jammed in place as they were. These burst open just as if an explosion had occurred at that moment, and Ned shouted to his chums, as they all trod water, backing away from their poor old ship the while:

"Poor old Belle! She's gone, chums! But she's released her hatch-boards for us to get another grip on life! Let the pople die down, then swim over, and each of us get a hatch-board! Lying flat on it, we'll be able to float, after a fashion! Thank goodness it isn't rough weather!"

The lads soon had a hatch-board each, and, to their delight, they found that the board would float, although it was awash, if they lay out flat on their backs. Then they joined hands, and kept themselves from drifting apart that way.

However, it only seemed as if they were waiting for death. Even now, the slight pople of the ebb tide was washing over their faces at times, making them gasp. While the water remained calm they could keep breathing. But it would be sure to roughen as the ebb turned to flood.

"Why did the callous brutes unbind us?" asked Tony Parr. "It wasn't from a humanitarian point of view, of course!"

"A bit of savvy will tell you why, Tony. Our bodies would probably be picked up. It would merely be a tale of wreck and disaster, found as we are. But if our corpses were picked up bound with ropes, investigations would commence. Sec?"

"That's why, of course," put in Long Jim. Then, after a pause: "I say, my hatch-board isn't so buoyant as yours. My legs are about eighteen inches below the water."

"Tisn't the hatch-board, Jim. It's your big feet weighing you down at that end! You shouldn't have such whopping daisy-roots, my pippin!"

Even at that desperate moment Ned joked. But no laughter greeted his aged joke about Jim's feet this time, so Ned gave up trying to keep things lively. It was a terrible strain; for, in reality, the lad felt ready to slip off his hatch-board and end things there and then. Every time he thought of his beloved old barge his head began to buzz till he felt he would swoon.

The other two were in as bad a state as Ned. Their hope was gone. They had already swept clear of the last estuary buoy, and were being rapidly swept out to the open sea. Then there was the turning of the tide just ahead, the swell which always accompanies the flood, the washing of the waves over the boards, and, after that—oblivion.

Just as the chums were at the most miserable stage of their thoughts a fishing-boat stem cut in between Tony Parr and Long Jim. The boat's bows turned the hatch-boards clean over, and the two mates were left battling desperately for breath at the unexpected tumble into the water.

"Blow me, Jem, if it ain't three barge's 'atch-boards, with a barge-boy hangin' on to heach! Swim, lads—swim! We'll put over our boat, an' we'll soon 'ave yer! Hold up another minit, an' ye're safe!"

Panting, practically at the last of their strength, half-drowned, the chums were tumbled over the bulwarks of the fishing-boat—a Lowestoft craft—and the rough, kindly fishermen commenced reviving them. Our chums, however, were of such stuff that they would revive naturally, no matter what frightful experience they had passed through.

Soon the fishermen knew the whole story. At Ned's earnest request they promised not to say a word about the rescue, so that Handstrom and his confederates would think the lads drowned. Thus the chums would be able to pursue their investigations ashore, unhampered by any efforts of Handstrom to frustrate their plans.

CHAPTER 4.

The House of Beckerley!

THE port to which the little yacht which had brought Handstrom out to Gunfleet belonged was the next thing to discover. This was easily done by the chums, simply by visiting the chief yachting centres round about. They found the little craft riding peacefully to her mooring at Burnham-on-Crouch. They settled down in the district to watch her, and saw Handstrom and his men set off down the river that very night. The men returned in the morning.

The chums of the Belle were now in rather straitened circumstances. They had read the newspaper report of the discovery of the Estuary Belle, sunk in the East Swin Channel, and how they, the famous young bargees who had had such amazing experiences, must have been drowned. The barge must have been discovered early, for the whole account was in the papers in the evening after the night when Handstrom had sunk the vessel.

To keep up the belief that they were dead, Ned could not approach his bankers for more money. Nor did the lads feel inclined to apply to Mrs. Benson just then. They had little to report, anyway, and they did not know how Mrs. Benson could keep a secret. The report of their escape with their lives just now would spoil everything.

No; the lads just had to plug along as best they could. They had found

Handstrom now, so perhaps by shadowing him an early solution to the mystery of the sunken ketch would be made. In a deadly quiet fury with the man for destroying their barge, the lads dogged him along the northern road from Burnham to Southminster. Near the latter town Handstrom entered a gloomy, forbidding-looking old house situated in a lonely spot on the edge of a marsh.

The house, the lads learnt from people round about, belonged to a man called Beckerley. They were determined to get in there to learn something further of Handstrom. But how? They made a start by scouting round the place at night, and listening to the talk of the servants—all men, and a pretty choice-looking lot.

Two of the menservants were having a smoke near the old broken gates of the place one night at about eleven o'clock. The chums were concealed in the overgrown shrubbery near the entrance. One of the men was saying:

"Old Beckerley, when 'e found as I'd put Glimmerson's light out, wi' the police 'ot on me track, 'e gets a holt o' me through Billings. An' 'e ses, ses 'e: 'You come an' work at my place, me man. I'll see as you're not copped.'"

The man here paused to relight his pipe, and in the flickering glare of the match the chums saw that the great ruffian had a face like a battered ham. His nose was broken, and he looked like an ex-prize-fighter of the ruffian type. He also looked a criminal.

"Well," continued battered ham, when his pipe was well alight, "I comes, you bet I does, an' I finds that all the servints 'ere was in the power o' Beckerley, 'cos Beckerley had a holt o' them 'count o' some crime as they'd committed, like me. I weren't worryin' abaht that, not me. I done some good jobs for Beckerley in me time, since that, the Benson affair lately, fur one. Well, arter that, Beckerley 'e 'as me in 'is study. 'Blenks, 'e ses, ses 'e, 'you did that job proper. Shake! An' now I sees yer close to, Blenks, I likes the look of yer—"

Here the men moved away from the gateway, and the chums wormed their way back into the neglected shrubbery of the house.

"I say, chums," whispered Ned, "I've got a top-notch idea. We've had some valuable information the past three minutes than we've been able to collect for the past three days. Come to the marsh so's we can talk."

River-wise Ned led his chums away from the house and out on to the extensive marshes stretching away towards Bridgwick and Tillingham. The lads were rather the worse for wear. Their faces, too, were rather pinched owing to lack of nourishment. Their clothes were torn and soiled; in fact, they were in desperate straits.

"Do you two tulips want a square meal?" Ned asked suddenly.

"Do we want the moon, you idiot, Ned? Let's discuss what we've just heard, and leave grub alone for the moment. It doesn't do my inner man any good to think about grub just now."

"Well, we're going to talk about what we've heard, too, ass! But I've an idea whereby we can be fed and get to the bottom of the mystery of Benson as well. I'll bet my bottom dollar Benson's in that house, shipmates."

Ned winced as his use of the word "shipmates" brought home to them with more force that they were now boatless.

"Talking about grub, I reckon if you can get us a good feed before we work out any of your crack-brained ideas, Ned," said Tony Parr, "it would be all



Panting, and practically at the end of their strength, the chums of the Estuary Belle were tumbled over the bulwarks of the fishing-boat, and the rough, kindly fishermen commenced reviving them.

to the good. I don't feel fit for scrapping with ex-prize-fighters in my present weak state of health, I can tell you."

"You shall have food, my children. Trust Uncle Ned to see that you don't starve. My idea is that we burgle Beckerley's house."

"Well, I'm blest!"

"You fatheaded chump, Ned! Even if Beckerley is a swab, I for one am not going to stoop to stealing from him yet."

"Listen, fatheads, and keep your silly tongues still for a spell! I propose we break into Beckerley's house, start burgling, get caught with silver spoons in our hands, or something, plead for mercy, say we'll do anything for him if he'll not give us over to the police, and so on, and, hey presto! we'll be taken on as servants there. Then our job will be to keep out of Handstrom's way whenever he comes to the house. We'll be fed and we'll be put to work, and we can then put ourselves to work, too, find Benson, release him, and work a pretty little reunion with that pretty little wife of his. What-ho, me hearties! How does that strike you?"

"My stars, what a scheme! If it would only work!" gasped Tony Parr.

"And if it didn't, and we got into clink," said Long Jim darkly, "what then, oh, skipper?"

"Simple," said Ned. "We then spout out our whole yarn to the police. It's the only thing left for us to do. We can't go on waiting and watching much longer. Without proper nourishment I know I shall never get through my infant years, and I'm fed-up with starving and watching here!"

"Crumbs, Jim, it's worth trying!"

"Well, I'm game if you and Tony are, Ned," said Long Jim, his eye now lighting up with the lust of battle. "And, Jupiter, if I get my hands on Clarence

who sank our barge, gee, I'll strangle him!"

Long Jim looked really savage. His eyes were glowing red, and with a lump in his throat at this sign of his chums' love of his own love, Ned muttered:

"Right, then! To-night's the night! Come on!"

The three desperate lads set off and reconnoitred. Later, they forced an entrance into the house of Beckerley, the criminal protector, through the manhole of the coal cellar.

CHAPTER 5.

The Round-Up!

THE result of the chums' daring entry into Beckerley's house exceeded their wildest expectations.

They got in without incident, through the manhole, and quietly found their way over the coals to the stairs to the kitchen. But a gentle thumping noise from the depths of an adjacent cellar—probably a store for wines, and so on—divided by a nine-inch brick wall from the coals, roused their suspicions.

They knocked three times on the brick wall with a bit of coal, softly, and were answered by three distinct thumps in the same time as their knocks.

"Benson, for a cert!" whispered Ned excitedly. "We may not be compelled to work the burglar stunt, after all. Up to the kitchen now, but for the love of Mike go quietly. There'll be a door down into that other cellar. We must find it."

Softly the lads padded up the stairs. They found the wine-cellar door, noted it was locked, so searched for means of getting below. They found the means in the shape of a pad-saw.

Soon they had the form of a thin, wasted man up in the kitchen, and the lads burned with indignation. The man said, on being questioned, that his name was Benson. Supporting him, the lads got him outside, and were almost into Southminster by the time the Essex barncocks were crowing to herald the grey dawn.

That morning, a raiding party of police went out to Beckerley's house and rounded up the criminals, just as the alarm had been given at the escape of Benson from the cellar.

"So," said Mr. Benson, his wasted features beaming on his beautiful young wife, and then smiling quite affectionately at Ned, Tony, and Jim, as they sat at the Bensons' luncheon table at Bexley Heath, "Handstrom has been captured—what? Splendid news! That villain and Beckerley were trying to starve me into disclosing my aero-engine secrets. But you lads came just in time."

Some lively talk went on throughout the meal. But afterwards, when in

Benson's beautiful conservatory, the chums' faces clouded over occasionally. Mrs. Benson watched in amusement. At last she jumped up.

"Here, my boys, I'll take you for a motor drive to cheer you up!" she cried. "Why are you all so dull?"

Ned forced himself to be cheerful. "We're not miserable, Mrs. Benson. We're quite happy and pleased at the happiness of you and Mr. Benson."

Mrs. Benson drove them out in her car. At last she pulled up and turned round from her seat at the wheel.

"You're all grieving about your barge, aren't you?" she said. "But you have been promised a brand new one by Mr. Benson."

The chums winced, but tried to look enthusiastic. Mrs. Benson thereupon put in the clutch and the car turned a corner opening up Erith Rands—a reach of the river—to view.

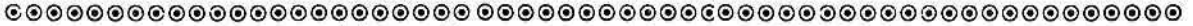
The lads stared at the water for a few minutes, then jumped up in the car with shouts of wild excitement, for there, safely at anchor, as well and as hearty as ever she was, rode the Estuary Belle.

"I had her raised in secret, feeling that she really had been sunk in the same way as my husband's ketch," Mrs. Benson said. "I got divers and a salvage ship to work the next night, so that the barge would have no time to suffer damage being ground about on the bottom by the tide, and a marine surveyor from Lloyd's came down after the Belle had been overhauled and her bottom renewed. His verdict is that the dear old barge is still A1. And there's a present in the cabin for each of you."

The present turned out to be a batch of shares in Benson's New Improved Aero-Engine Company, as a stand-by for the chums should freights become scarce and freight charges low.

And so ended another exciting adventure of River-wise Ned and his staunch pals, Tony Parr and Long Jim. THE END.

(Look out for another exciting adventure of River-wise Ned. Meanwhile make sure you read the opening instalment of our grand, new football serial: "THE TRIERS!" by Jack Crichton which will appear in next week's GEM.)



A "GO-ANYWHERE MOUNT."
All About Our Splendid Prize Motor-cycles.

IN view of our remarkable offer of thirty fully-equipped motor-cycles, in addition to hundreds of other magnificent prizes, in our Great New Competition, readers will be eager to learn further particulars of these machines. For, of course, there are motor-cycles and motor-cycles; some are very much better than others. Well, readers can rest assured that the machines offered in this wonderful competition are the very best that money can buy. They are genuine 2½ horse-power "James" motor-cycles, made by the James Cycle Company, of Birmingham, one of the oldest firms in the motor-cycle industry. These machines are listed by the James Company at £50 net cash. Each machine is fully equipped in every way, including lamp, horn, and licence-holder. It will not be necessary for the lucky winners to pay one penny piece for extras of any sort—the machines will be presented to them ready for the road in every respect.

The two-stroke engine, rated at 2½ horse-power, is of the simplest type, proved by exhaustive tests to be the best and most suitable engine for hard and continuous service. The actual power developed by it is considerably in excess of its rated horse-power of 2½, and in conjunction with the two-speed gear is sufficient to take one rider—or even two—over any roads in Britain, and for the longest tours, with the greatest of ease. This particular type of engine—the two-stroke—is particularly suitable for the motor-cycling novice, as it embodies the minimum of moving parts; valves and valve-springs, which are always potential sources of trouble, are eliminated, the gas being admitted and ejected from the cylinder by means of ports, which are uncovered in turn by the piston itself. This is the least complicated and most

reliable system, used on the majority of modern motor-cycles.

The 2½ James is light enough to afford easy handling and perfect control at all times, but not so light as to be uncomfortable or unsafe, as very light machines sometimes are. The kick-starter and easily-manipulated clutch make starting and stopping and manoeuvring in traffic matters of the greatest ease. The foot-boards are sprung, as well as the saddle, to obtain the maximum of riding comfort. It would be an easy matter to ride 200 miles a day, without undue fatigue, on the 2½ horse-power James.

Running costs are always a matter of interest to the prospective motor-cyclist, and it may safely be said that it is impossible to obtain a real serviceable go-anywhere mount which costs less to run than the James. An outlay of half-a-crown would comfortably cover the expenses of a run of 120 to 150 miles. What other form of transport can give equal service for a like amount, to say nothing of the joy of humming along the open road?

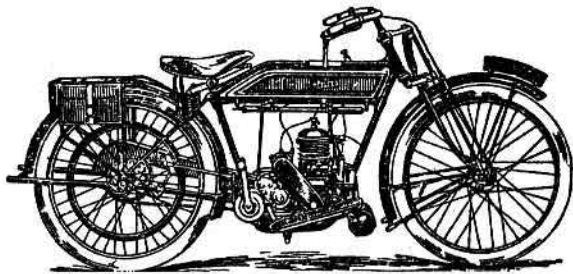
Many people still fail to realise that motor-cycling nowadays is one of the most inexpensive of pastimes. Petrol, oil, tyres—the cost of the machines

themselves—have dropped enormously in price in recent months. The convenience, the health-giving properties, and, above all, the fascination of owning your own motor-cycle are making enthusiastic recruits to the pastime every day. No one need be frightened of the "works" of the modern motor-cycle. The engine and other mechanism is now so simple and "fool-proof" that any child could manage it, and, what's more, keep it in good running condition. Motor-cycles are far better to-day than ever they were, and the latest modern up-to-date machines, equipped with every new device to ensure comfort and efficiency, like the James, are really marvellously simple, and yet wondrously powerful and efficient pieces of mechanism.

No motor-cyclist, whether he be a beginner or an old devotee of the pastime, could possibly wish for a better mount than the 2½ James—the "go-anywhere" mount. The chance represented by the Competition, announced elsewhere in this issue, in which no less than thirty of these magnificent machines are offered to readers, is one that simply no one can afford to miss. Without the least exaggeration, it may be called the chance of a lifetime!



30 of these SPLENDID "JAMES" MOTOR-CYCLES



WAITING TO BE WON!

Read all about these magnificent machines in the accompanying article.



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 STAFFS!

WANTED NO BANDS!

A weaver intending to get married went to the clergyman and said: "Ah've comed telling yo' as Aw'm getting wed." The clergyman smiled and remarked: "You mean you've come to give notice for the banns?" "Nay, that I haven't," said the weaver. "We're noan having any bands; we're only having a concertina after tea!"—A Tuck Hamper filled with delicious Tuck has been awarded to N. Hibberd, 65, Chapel Street, Handsworth, Staffs.

DON'T THINK!

Father: "Come, young man; get your jacket off and come with me!" Tommy: "You're not going to lick me, are you, dad?" Father: "Certainly. Didn't I tell you this morning that I should settle with you for your bad behaviour?" Tommy: "Yes, but I thought it was only a joke, same as when you told the grocer you was going to settle with him!"—Half-a-crown has been awarded to A. C. Hofman, 29, Peaks Field Avenue, Grimsby, Lincs.

BUSY EYES!

Hodge (reading a weekly novelette): "I ain't got no patience with this 'ere Gladys Fitzalyn in the story. The way she's abusing her beautiful eyes, she don't deserve to have none." Mrs Hodge: "Why?" Hodge: "This book is full of it. First she threw her eyes up to the ceiling, then she let them drop on to the floor; then she darted them along the corridor, and rested them on the cool waters of the lagoon. Then she must have called them back somehow, for it says she bathed them in sad salt tears, wiped them, and swept the path with them. Once she was fool enough to rivet them on the dome of the cathedral, and when I left off she was fixing them on a frame. I never heard of such a thing!"—Half-a-crown has been awarded to V. Kilmartin, 62, Alphonsus Road, Drumcondra, Dublin, Ireland.

HAND-Y!

An Irishman who was signing articles on board a ship began to write his name with his right hand, then, changing the pen to his left hand, finished it. "So you can write with either hand, Pat?" asked the officer. "Yes, sorr," replied Pat. "Whin I was a boy me father always said to me: 'Pat, learn to cut your fingernails wid yer left hand, for some day ye might lose yer right!'"—Half-a-crown has been awarded to R. Robertson, 4, Scoonie Terrace, Leven, Fife.

SUSPICIOUS!

Drill-sergeant: "Tomkins, one step forward—march! What's the matter with your finger this morning?" Tomkins: "Ran a splinter into it, sir—" Drill-sergeant: "H'm! Been scratching your head, I suppose. Reform ranks—march!"—Half-a-crown has been awarded to J. Carless, 42, North Street, Newport, Mon.

QUITE CERTAIN!

"How do I look, Sambo?" inquired the pompous gentleman, as, arrayed in the full glory of new hunting suit, cap, and crop, he stood before his negro servant. "Splendid, massa! Splendid!" replied Sambo with enthusiasm. "You look jes' as bold as a lion!" "A lion? Why, you have never seen a lion," remonstrated the gentleman. "Course I has," protested Sambo. "Ain't I see Massa Peyton's Jim ride one ober to de mill ebery morning?" "No, you fool," raved the insulted gentleman, "that's a donkey!" "Can't help it, massa," returned Sambo innocently, "you 'look jes' like it!"—Half-a-crown has been awarded to Miss I. McDowell, 107, Duke Street, Kingston, Ja., B.W.I.

CAMOUFLAGED!

In a West Cumberland mining district the poor referee had come to grief with some burly miners over a free kick. They almost pulled his clothes off his body, so on his way home he called at a tailor's shop. As he was being measured, the tailor paused, and remarked: "There's a lump here on your chest, but we will make the clothing so that you will not realise the lump is there." "I know you will," sighed the poor referee. "That's my wallet in my inside pocket!"—Half-a-crown has been awarded to W. Freeman, 1, Clausentum Road, St. Cross, Winchester, Hants.

THE TOOTH-PICK!

"I say, old man, whatever's the matter with your face?" asked Jones. "Accident," said Smith. "How did it happen?" "Why, yesterday I was walking along the street, when a workman, carrying a pickaxe, stumbled against me, hitting me in the mouth and knocking out a tooth." "Oh, I say, what a shame! That was quite a dental operation," said Jones, who loved a joke. "No, the fellow said it was axe-dental." "Ha, ha! Oh, that's too thin!" "No, it was tooth out!"—Half-a-crown has been awarded to Miss Winifred B. Thompson, Deynewood, 42, Elms Road, Sutton Coldfield, nr. Birmingham.

A DIFFERENT SORT OF CATCH!

The reckless motorist had passed. A cyclist crawled out of the ditch with his head through the front wheel of his bike. Gyles was rubbing a bump on the back of his head. "Did you catch his number?" asked the cyclist. "Dunno," answered Gyles, "I caught his lamp-bracket by t' feel on't!"—Half-a-crown has been awarded to J. R. Barnes, 15, Crescent Road, Hemel Hempstead, Herts.

A COMING GENERAL!

"Ere, Jimmy," shouted the newspaper boy to his pal, as he gazed at the contents of the bill, "what does they mean by 'strategy'?" "Why, it's like this 'ere," exclaimed the brainy youth. "Suposin' as 'ow you'd run out of ammunition and didn't want the enemy to know as 'ow you 'ad. Well, then it's strategy to keep on firin'!"—Half-a-crown has been awarded to H. Faulkner, 38, Queensbury Street, Essex Road, Islington, N.1.

SUFFERED BOTH WAYS!

As a childish wall rang out through the house, the anxious mother sprang to her feet. Rushing into the hall, she met her little daughter coming in from the garden, carrying a broken doll by the leg. "What's the matter, darling?" she asked tenderly. "Oh—oh, mother," howled the child, "Willie's broken my doll—" "The naughty boy!" cried the mother. "How did he do it?" "I hit him on the head with it!" was the slow reply.—Half-a-crown has been awarded to V. Kilmartin, 62, St. Alphonsus Road, Drumcondra, Dublin, Ireland.

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