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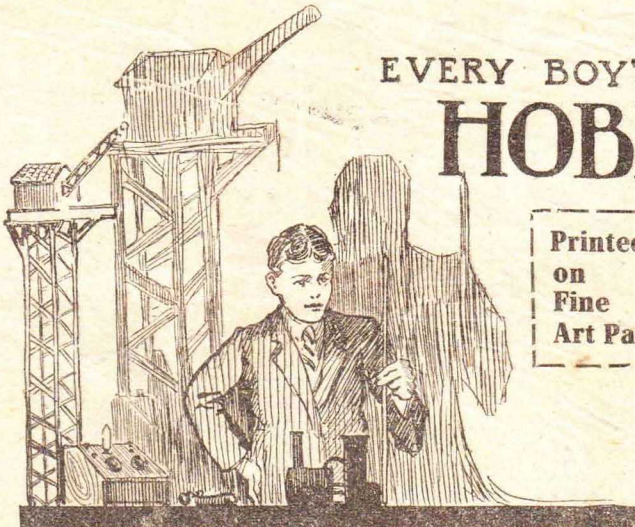
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Vol. XXX.
No. 969.
September 4th.
1926.



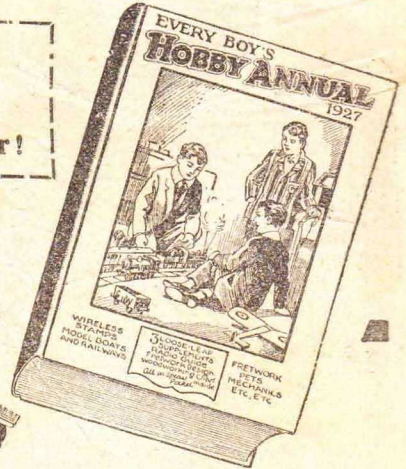
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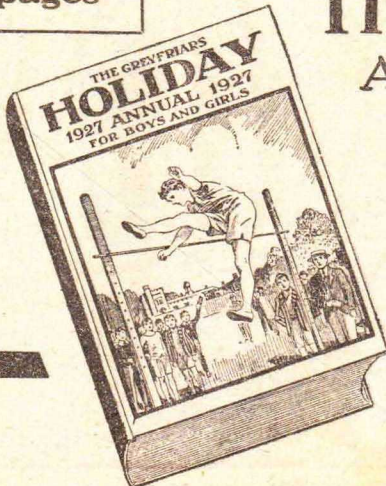
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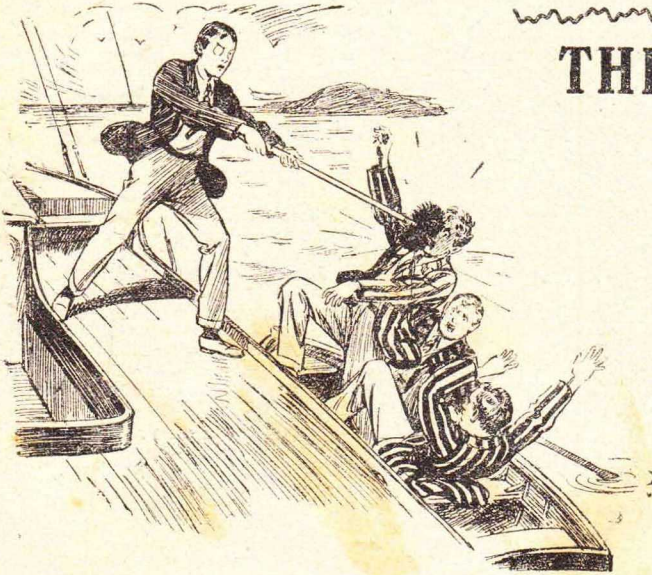
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The GREYFRIARS'
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ANNUAL



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ADVENTURE STORIES!

THRILLS! When Tom Merry & Co., the motor-boat boys, land on Lonely Island, they certainly don't expect to run up against any adventure. But they have more than their share of thrills before they are successful in solving—



THE SECRET OF LONELY ISLAND!

A Magnificent New Long Complete Story of Tom Merry & Co. on holiday.

By

Martin Clifford.

CHAPTER 1. Experimenting!

BANG!
"Bai Jove! What——"
"What the thump——"
Bang!

It was a much louder bang this time—indeed, it was a rather terrifying bang—and Tom Merry & Co. fairly leaped up from their seats in the cockpit of the motor-cruiser Silver Spray.

The long summer day was drawing rapidly to a close, and the shadows were lengthening over the rolling, gleaming waters of the Channel. But though a hazy, ominous-looking sun had long since vanished over the Western horizon it was still overbearingly hot and close on board the motor-cruiser.

There was thunder in the air—there was no doubt about that. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy had given it as his carefully considered opinion that they were in for a thunderstorm, and his chums had agreed with him. In their view it did not need any careful consideration. The ominous, leaden sunset, the oily swell on the sea, and the heavy, stifling atmosphere were clear enough indications that there was thunder about—not to mention the black, lowering clouds overhead.

The prospect did not trouble the motor-boat boys, however. They had made for shelter for the night, and now the Silver Spray was safely moored in a little sheltered bay of a rocky islet off the Hampshire coast. They felt safe enough from any storm there, and, in any case, they were cheerfully prepared to take the rough with the smooth. Since the St. Jim's juniors had started the cruise they had enjoyed excellent weather, and they were not going to grumble at a change now.

In the little bay not a breath of air stirred, and the juniors lounged in the aft cockpit and sweltered—feeling like wet rags, as Blake expressed it.

At least, they all sweltered there, with the exception of Bernard Glyn, the schoolboy inventor. That enthusiastic and energetic scientist did not seem to trouble about the heat. The moment the Silver Spray had anchored he had vanished into the cabin, closing the door, after telling his chums he had some "work" to do.

What that work actually was his chums only realised now as they heard those alarming bangs that came from the cabin.

"Great pip!" groaned Tom Merry, glaring at the closed doors of the cabin. "He's at it again! Fancy experimenting with giddy stinks on a night like this!"

"The burbling chump!"

"The dangerous jabberwock!"

"Yaas, wathah!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "I weally doubt whethah we shall get through this cwaise without bein' blown up altogethah, bai Jove!"

"The silly ass ought to be chained up!" said Monty Lowther. "Phew! What a frightful niff!" I vote we chuck

Glyn and his blessed chemicals overboard before— Oh, my hat!"

Bang!

Crash! Splinter, splinter! Crash!

It was another terrifying bang, followed by the crash of breaking glass and a muffled howl. Through the cracks of the sliding doorway leading to the cabin poured streams of yellow, pungent smoke.

"Oh crumbs!" gasped Tom Merry, coughing violently as the choking fumes reached him. "He's done it this time! Come on, for goodness' sake!"

Tom Merry, full of alarm now, was just starting for the cabin door, when it slid open with a crash, and a figure staggered out, coughing and gasping. The figure was followed by a volume of yellow smoke and a most awful smell of chemicals.

It was Bernard Glyn, the schoolboy inventor, and he was a sight. His clothes were blackened and singed, and his face was likewise blackened, and his hair and eyebrows singed.

He staggered out and fairly collapsed on to the grating. "Glyn!" said Tom Merry.

The juniors jumped to the aid of Bernard Glyn, their faces showing only alarm now.

"My hat! Are you hurt, old chap?" said Tom in great concern. "I knew you'd do it one of these days."

Glyn coughed and choked, and then, with Tom's aid, he staggered to his feet.

"I'm all right, you asses!" he panted. "Only just singed and burned a bit! It was a little mistake, you know—I must have mixed the wrong ingredients or something."

"I should jolly well think you did!" snorted Jack Blake, holding his nose tightly and glaring at the youthful scientist. "You—you born idiot! You'll blow the boat up and us as well before you've finished!"

"Rot! It was just a slight error—a thing that wouldn't happen again, you ass!"

"Happen again!" howled Blake. "Why, it's always happening at St. Jim's, and it's been happening ever since we started this trip. You've nearly blown us up at least a dozen times in the last week!"

"What rot!" snorted Glyn. "Accidents will happen, anyway, and a chap has to take risks when he's mixing chemicals. As for the smell— Pooh! You'll get used to that in time."

"You—you——"

"Now, don't start grousing again!" said Glyn. "I tell you the smell will clear off in time—a day or so, I should think."

"Oh, bai Jove!"

"The stuff got spread all over the place when it went bang," explained Glyn. "It's all over the cushions of the lockers and the blankets in the bunks, I think. Awful nuisance! But it can't be helped."

"Well, you—you raving——"

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"Oh, dry up!" said Glyn impatiently. "It's nothing to make a fuss about. I suggest that you chaps sleep ashore for to-night in the tents. I could do with the cabin to myself for a bit, matter of fact, as I want to go on with my experiments until late. I'm going to have a wash and clean-up now. If you like, you chaps can be cleaning up the mess in there."

"Well, my hat!"

The juniors glared at the schoolboy inventor speechlessly for some moments, all of them holding their noses, for the odour coming from the cabin was horrid, to say the least of it. Blake hurriedly slammed the door shut.

Bernard Glyn was undoubtedly clever. He was an inventor, and when he wasn't experimenting with electrical contraptions he was experimenting with chemicals. But his cleverness in the latter direction, at least, was not appreciated by the fellows in the Shell at St. Jim's who had their studies near to Glyn's own study. At times they were driven to desperation by the disturbing noises and noisome odours permeating the Shell passage.

Being fully aware of this, Tom Merry & Co. had hoped against hope that Glyn, having invited them on the cruise in his father's motor-cruiser, would also take a holiday from his experiments.

But their hopes were doomed to disappointment. Though the engine of the Silver Spray took up a great deal of Bernard Glyn's time, he still found time for his beloved experiments—though he usually took care that the rest of the juniors were ashore when he did experiment.

On this occasion, however, the enthusiastic inventor had taken no such precaution, nor had he remembered, apparently, that the cabin would be required for sleeping purposes that night.

It was this latter omission that annoyed Tom Merry & Co.

"Well," said Tom Merry, finding his voice at last. "You—you awful idiot, Glyn! How the thump are we to eat any supper in there with that awful niff about?"

"And how are we to sleep in there?" stuttered Herries wrathfully. "Phew! Great pip! It's enough to gas an army corps!"

"Rats!" said Glyn, grinning a little now. "You'll get used to it, just as I've done. I scarcely notice a smell. In any case we've a couple of tents aboard, and you chaps can easily have your supper and sleep ashore—you've done it before, lots of times."

"But we're in for a thunderstorm, ass," snorted Blake.

"What's a thunderstorm," said Glyn, raising what was left of his eyebrows. "Fancy being afraid of a giddy thunderstorm and a drop of rain!"

Tom Merry breathed hard. Bernard Glyn was certainly trying at times. But he was their host on the cruise, and he had to be "given his head."

"You—you silly juggins!" gasped Tom. "Who wants all the trouble of making camp when it isn't necessary? You're doing no more fatheaded experimenting to-night, Glyn. Come on, chaps, let's clear that awful smell out."

He opened the sliding door again as he spoke, and made a desperate dive into the smoke-filled cabin, and Blake, Herries and Manners followed him. They found the floor covered with pieces of glass, and everything spattered with a queer, yellowish liquid.

The odour was overpowering, but with hands clutching their noses the juniors braved it, and started to open port-holes and to raise the cabin skylight. Then opening a far door to allow a draught to blow through they rushed out again, gasping and choking.

"Groooogh!" gasped Blake. "How frightful! That born idiot ought to be chucked overboard! I can't see that awful stink clearing in a hurry, anyhow."

"It won't," said Glyn with a chuckle. "It'll hang about for days I expect. But you'll get used to it."

"Used to it," howled Blake in deep exasperation. "Who wants to get used to it, blow you!"

"And asking us to clear up the mess," hooted Digby. "The cheeky ass!"

"Well, let Trimble clean it up," said Glyn.

"I'm jolly well not," snorted Baggy Trimble. "Poof! I say, you chaps, make the beast clean it up himself."

"That he jolly well will," said Tom Merry grimly.

"But we'll clean him up. I suggest a jolly good bumping to start with, and then a ducking over the side to clean him up. How's that?"

"Good wheeze!"

"Hear, hear!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Look here—" began Glyn. "No larks, you know, it was only an accident."

"Well, you're going to meet with another accident now," said Tom Merry grimly. "Collar him, chaps!"

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"What-ho!"

"Here, hold on, you idiots!" roared Glyn. "I say—leggo! Oh, my hat!"

Bump!

Collared on all sides the hapless inventor was lifted and lowered with a hearty bump on to the grating of the cockpit.

CHAPTER 2. Ordered Off!

BUMP!

"Yarrooooooh!"

Glyn howled with mingled anguish and wrath as his anatomy met the hard grating with a resounding bump.

"Now again!" said Tom Merry wrathfully. "This is hardly the way to treat one's host, chaps, but there's a limit! Glyn must be taught that his giddy guests are entitled to be treated with consideration, and not subjected to horrid smells and nerve-racking explosions."

"Ha, ha! Yes, rather!"

"Look here—"

Bump!

"Yooooooop!"

Another hearty bump interrupted Glyn's wild expostulations. And after that Glyn had little chance to expostulate—he needed all his breath.

Bump, -bump, bump, bump!

Again and again the youthful inventor was bumped, and his wild howls for mercy went unheeded. Had Glyn been at all contrite the juniors would have been merciful. But he was not.

The juniors ceased at length, however, glad enough to do so in point of fact. Glyn's clothes and person were drenched in chemicals, and it was not pleasant to be at close quarters with him by any means.

"There," gasped Tom Merry, as Glyn sprawled on the grating and roared and gasped. "Let that be a lesson to you, Glyn."

"Ow-wow! Grooooh! Rotters!" gasped Glyn. "Oh crikey! I'll make you asses sit up for this, you see if I don't. Ow-yow!"

"He's not sorry yet," said Tom grimly. "He's like the giddy Huns, still defiant and cocky. We'll clean him up and cool him down by dipping him over the side. Grab him again."

Grabbing Glyn was no pleasant operation, but the juniors braved the awful smell and grabbed him gallantly. But this time Glyn struggled furiously, and it took four or five of them all their time to lift him and lower him over the side of the motor-boat.

Glyn yelled fiendishly, but his yells were ignored. With Tom Merry, Blake, Noble, and Herries hanging on to his legs he was lowered until his head touched the water. Then he was dipped several times, and hauled in again dripping and gasping.

The juniors grinned down on him as he collapsed on the grating, his head and shoulders streaming with water.

"Sorry now, old chap?" asked Blake. "Or do you still think it funny?"

"Grooooooh! Oh crumbs! Oh, you rotters!" panted Glyn. "Oh crumbs, I'm whacked!"

And Glyn staggered to his feet and tottered into the cabin to change his drenched and evil-smelling garments. It was clear that Glyn saw nothing to grin about now.

"Well, that's settled him," remarked Tom Merry, with a rueful grin. "But it also settles us as far as this boat's concerned for to-night. We can't have supper in this awful niff, and it'll be impossible to sleep on board, too. We'll have to camp."

"But it doesn't look very cheerful," grunted Herries, gazing at the threatening sky.

"Well, we've camped in storms before to-day," said Tom Merry cheerfully. "In any case, it'll be as bad for those chaps who would have had to sleep under the awning in the cockpit here. And, after all, we did intend to go ashore and camp, so what's the odds. We'll leave Glyn in the boat, and he can go on experimenting until he busts."

"What about supper, though, I'm hungry," complained Trimble.

"We're all hungry, for that matter," said Tom Merry briskly. "Come on, chaps, let's get busy. The storm may blow over yet."

"Yaas, wathah! No good gwousin', deah boys," remarked Arthur Augustus. "We must take the wough with the smooth, bai Jove!"

It was wise counsel, and the juniors set to work with a will. They were all hungry, and they knew they would have to remain hungry until they had fixed the camp up ashore. Even Baggy Trimble lent a hand without the usual persuasion of a boot behind him.



Cash! A fierce blast of wind caught the tent and fairly wrenched it away. "Oh, my hat!" gasped Tom Merry. "Sweet Scott!" said Arthur Augustus. The campers fairly bounded from their blankets, with yells of alarm. The tent was gone, then the heavens seemed suddenly to open, and down upon the bare heads of the luckless juniors came the rain in torrents. (See Chapter 3.)

It was not the first time by any means that the juniors had amped ashore during the cruise, and very soon the two tents were got out and stowed in the dinghy with the tackle. Four trips the boat made, carrying the camp tackle and cooking utensils and foodstuffs, and by that time it was growing darker, and Tom Merry looked about him rather anxiously.

As a matter of fact, all the juniors had been keen enough to camp ashore for a change, and the island certainly looked a delightful spot on which to camp. But with darkness coming on, and a storm threatening, the prospect was not quite so cheerful as it might otherwise have been. As the juniors stood together on the sandy beach the distant mutter of thunder reached their ears.

"Better look lively!" said Tom Merry briskly. "Sooner we've settled down the better, chaps. There should be plenty of camping sites here, and—Hallo! There's a building of some sort behind those trees there!"

"Looks like old ruins," said Blake, staring at the patch of trees, through which could be glimpsed the top of a building. "Jove, it's an old tower! What about trying that? Better shelter than a tent for to-night, anyway!"

"Good egg!" said Tom, brightening up. "This island isn't inhabited, and if we can get inside and there is shelter—well, it'll certainly save us no end of work. Let's have a squint at it first."

"Yaas, wathah!"

Leaving their tackle on the beach near the boat, which they had drawn up high and dry, the juniors started off at a run for the building. They could see now that it was a ruin—a stone edifice, obviously in ruins and obviously centuries old. But it looked like shelter, and the juniors felt it could save them bothering to shove tents up for that night. They did not reach the tower then, however. As they

raced towards the spot a figure came out from the trees that almost hid the ruins—the figure of a grim-looking, ill-kempt old man, with a ragged white beard and white moustaches.

The juniors stopped and stared. As Tom Merry had only just assured them that the island was not inhabited, they were naturally startled at the sight. Moreover, the old man held a thick cudgel in his hand, and his attitude was obviously unfriendly.

"Well," he exclaimed, in a savage, threatening voice. "You've come again, have you—more of you—eh? What did I tell you this afternoon? Am I to lay this stick about you again, you sneaking little hounds?"

"Oh, bai Jove!"

The juniors stared blankly at the ominous figure, and then they exchanged glances. It was not only an unfriendly greeting, but it was also a puzzling one.

"I don't know what you mean," said Tom Merry quietly. "We've only just landed on this island, and we were miles away this afternoon."

"You lie!" almost shrieked the decrepit old man, with a ferocity and force that made the juniors jump. "Three of you came trespassing here this afternoon, and I laid my stick about you! Get out! Get off this island, I tell you!"

"Does the island belong to you?" asked Tom Merry.

"Never mind that—clear!" was the savage answer.

Tom Merry set his lips. He remembered Glyn saying he knew the little island, and that it was uninhabited. In that case it was scarcely likely to be owned by such a strange, wild individual. In any case, the man's own words were enough to satisfy him on that point.

"I don't believe the island can belong to you," he answered quietly, "and we're not clearing. But we mean no harm.

We only want shelter in the building, if there's shelter to be had there!"

The old man's eyes glittered, and he came closer to the juniors, swinging his stick threateningly.

"Get out!" he snarled. "You hear? Get out! You'll get no shelter in that tower, my lads!"

"Look here!" said Tom Merry mildly. "If the tower is where you live, then we'll clear, and camp somewhere else on the island."

"Will you?" snarled the man. "Then perhaps this will make you see that I allow no trespassers on this island!"

With that the bent figure straightened up swiftly, then the strange old man made a rush at the juniors with amazing agility.

"Look out!"

"Oh, my hat!"

The motor-boat boys scattered like chaff before the wind, Arthur Augustus only just missing a vicious blow of the stick as he leaped away.

"He's mad!" shouted Blake. "Oh, my hat! Run for it!" The juniors did run for it quickly enough. Few of them doubted that the old man was mad. They raced back for the beach, and, after chasing them for a few yards, the ancient individual retraced his steps and vanished among the trees.

"Phew!" panted Jack Blake. "That was a jolly narrow escape for some of us, anyway. That old chap must be batty!"

"I scarcely think so," said Tom Merry, staring back at the distant trees. "He's some tramp, who's made his home in that tower, and doesn't wish to be disturbed. Or else—well, he may have some game on, and objects to visitors."

"He certainly objects to visitors," grinned Lowther. "Blow the old hunks. My hat! He looks jolly old, but he's pretty lively for all that!"

"We'll leave him alone, anyway," said Tom Merry, frowning. "But we're not clearing off the island to-night, chaps. I don't believe he has any right to order anyone off. It isn't likely that queer merchant either owns that tower, or is a caretaker. Come on! Let's find a site, and camp!"

"Oh dear!" panted Baggy Trimble, who was almost trembling with fear. "I—I say, you fellows, let's clear out! Supposing he attacks us again?"

"Well, what if he does?" said Tom Merry coolly. "We're enough to tackle him, though he does look a hefty old chap. Still, we'll risk it!"

"Yaas, waihah! I'd wathah wisk a storm or twouble with that unpleasant old fellow, than sleep on board the Silver Spway to-night!" said Arthur Augustus, with emphasis.

And all excepting Baggy Trimble agreed with him there. Reeking as it was with the stench of Glyn's horrid chemicals, the Silver Spray was certainly uninhabitable. There was nothing else for it but to camp on the island, and so the juniors set about the task with a will, despite the protests and fears of Baggy Trimble.

Very soon a site was selected, and very soon the tents were up, and all made ship-shape for the night. Then the juniors—not troubling to light a camp-fire—soon had the spirit-stoves going, and while the darkness deepened they devoured a meal of potted meat and biscuits, washed down with coffee. Then they sat in the tent watching the play of lightning across the sky, and listening to the roll of distant thunder, and discussing the strange old man of the island.

That there was something mysterious about him they had little doubt, and it was generally agreed that it wouldn't be a bad plan to explore the ruins in the morning—whether the old fellow objected or not. And, having arrived at that decision, Tom Merry & Co. turned in.

CHAPTER 3. Very Wet!

"OH, dear!"

"This is awful!"

"Fwightful, bai Jove!"

"I'm drenched through, almost, already," groaned Manners. "It's coming through the dashed canvas—"

"And the water's coming in under the tent," said Digby dismally. "My blankets are soaked—they feel soaked, anyway."

"For goodness' sake don't touch the canvas of the tent anywhere," said Herries, "or we'll have it pouring through. It's bad enough already."

"Yaas, waihah! What a night!" gasped Arthur Augustus. It certainly was a night!

Tom Merry & Co. had turned in cheerfully enough; but it was not to sleep. For scarcely had they settled down for the night when the threatened storm broke over the island.

And it was a storm!

The thunder was bad enough, and the lightning was

worse; but the rain was the worst of all. It came down in sheets, and it seemed to be doing its utmost to flatten out the tent altogether.

The thunder broke with terrific claps and went rolling across the sky almost without pause. The tent seemed to be continually lit up with the brilliant flashes of lightning. Around the tent the rain hissed and pelted down in torrents. The tent was almost a new tent, but the rain found its way in, for all that. It also came in under the floor, as Digby had already dismally announced.

In the deepening gloom it had not been so easy to find a suitable camping place, and the juniors were not so careful in their selection as they usually were. As he took a peep through the flap of the tent Tom Merry saw that they were full in the course of a little stream of water that came down the little slope.

The stream had not been there, certainly, when they had camped; but it was there now, undoubtedly, and it was bound to increase and multiply, so to speak.

But to shift the camp now was an utter impossibility, and they could only hope for the best.

The tent was quite a roomy one, and was supposed to shelter eight fellows. Just now it was doing its best to shelter nine—counting Baggy Trimble, who was looked upon as requiring the space of two fellows, at least. And what with the stuffy heat and the necessity for keeping clear of the walls of the tent, it was anything but comfortable quarters for nine. Indeed, it was most uncomfortable.

Altogether, Tom Merry & Co. were not enjoying themselves. They wondered, after all, if they would not have been much better off on board the Silver Spray, in spite of Glyn's horrible chemicals.

And the storm was growing worse!

"Never mind!" said Tom Merry, trying to speak cheerfully. "It's all in the day's work. No good grousing, chaps!"

"Who is grousing?" asked Blake.

"We all seem to be grousing, more or less," grinned Tom. "But we knew the storm was coming, and we might really have expected something like this. After all, it might be worse."

"Yes, it might," agreed Lowther. "It might rain bricks, for instance, or cannon-balls. And the sea might rise up and engulf the giddy island. Or the tent might be struck by lightning and turn us into lightning conductors. Or an earthquake might—"

"Chuck it, Lowther," said Digby. "It's bad enough without you trying to be funny. My hat! Hark to that!"

It was a heavy clap of thunder, that seemed to shake the earth.

"It can't last long," remarked Blake. "Where's Trimble?"

"He's hiding under his blankets," chuckled Lowther. "He's afraid of the lightning, or thunder. Trimble's like the giddy ostrich that hides its napper in the sand."

A deep, hollow groan came from Trimble's blanket. The fat junior did not like thunderstorms at all.

"Camping out isn't all lavender," said Tom Merry cheerily. "But we've got to take the rough with the smooth. Cheer up, Trimble!"

Groan.

"Hallo!" remarked Noble, as a sudden gust of wind shook the tent. "Wind's rising. That ought to blow the giddy storm away. It won't—"

"It may also blow the giddy tent away," said Lowther.

"Grousing again!" chuckled Tom Merry.

"Eh? I wasn't grousing at all," said Lowther warmly.

"He was being funny," explained Jack Blake. "When Lowther tries to be funny it's rather hard to make out whether he's grousing or joking. It's his special brand of humour, you know."

"Look here—" began Lowther.

"Oh, don't squabble," said Tom Merry. "Matters are bad enough, but—"

"Who's grousing now?" said Lowther triumphantly.

"Oh, rats!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

It was rather a hollow laugh, but it was a laugh, and it cheered the juniors up a trifle. But not for long. Without a doubt the wind was rising—and it was rising with remarkable suddenness.

It did not seem to be blowing the storm away, for all that. It just seemed to be adding to the general fury of the elements. And it certainly seemed to be doing its best to blow the tent away.

Tug, tug, tug!

The tent fairly shook before another sudden gust, and a shower of water fell upon the heads of the hapless camps.

"We're getting it at both ends!" groaned Digby. "My dashed ground sheet seems to be fairly floating, and we're getting it on top, too. Groooogh!"

Tom Merry climbed out of his blankets and went to the tent door again, and peeped out. The rain was tearing

down, and all around there was the hissing and splashing of water. A vivid flash of lightning came lighting up the tossing, rolling sea, and the swaying trees on the island as if by daylight. A sudden gust of furious wind came, and Tom staggered back almost drenched with the hissing rain that shot through the opening in the tent.

It also flew across the tent over the rest of the campers, and there came a howl.

"Shut that flap, you ass!"

"You born idiot! Look out!"

Tom grinned, and fastened the flap securely.

It proved to be trouble for nothing.

For even as he did so there came another furious gust.

Crash!

The fierce blast of wind caught the tent, and fairly wrenched it away.

"Oh, my hat!"

"Gweat Scott! Look out!"

Tom Merry & Co. bounded from their blankets with yells of alarm.

The tent was gone. And the heavens seemed suddenly to open, and down upon the bare heads of the luckless campers came the rain in torrents.

In the darkness, and the rain and wind, the campers stared round them aghast while the downpour drenched them through and through. They seemed stunned by the sudden, swift calamity.

Where the tent was they could only guess, but they could hear it flapping about in the deep blackness somewhere. At their feet floated blankets, and ground-sheets, and clothes, at least, they seemed to be floating, everything seemed to be floating.

But they did not stand still for long. Tom Merry gave a sudden howl.

"Grab your clobber and make for the dinghy!" he shouted.

"Quick! Blow the tent!"

"Where is the giddy boat, or the blessed sea?" gasped Blake.

"Oh, my hat! This is awful!"

It certainly was awful; but at that moment came a flash that seemed to split the skies, and then they saw the sea—but not the dinghy!

The flash showed the sea all round, and the beach. But it did not show the boat. It was simply not there. A hundreds yards out, however, was the Silver Spray, rocking safely on the tossing, seething waters.

"Gone!" gasped Tom Merry.

"Oh, my hat!" groaned Herries.

"Oh, our boat!" said Lowther, with a poor attempt at humour. "We're done this time, chaps."

"The rotter!"

The sudden exclamation proceeded from Blake. He was staring out to sea, in the direction of the Silver Spray. Then he shook his fist.

"The rotter!"

"What are you burbling about?" asked Tom Merry testily.

"There's the dinghy!" snorted Blake, pointing to the stern of the Silver Spray. "You can see it every now and then as it rises on a wave!"

"Great Scott!" exclaimed Tom Merry. "I didn't think Glyn was rotter enough to pinch the dinghy and leave us stranded just because we handled him a bit."

"That's just what he must have done," snorted Herries. "The rotter evidently swam ashore and rowed back in it. It's his idea of a joke."

There were growls of rage from all the juniors as the explanation of the missing dinghy became clear. Not for one moment did any one of them seek any other explanation. Glyn undoubtedly had taken the dinghy with the idea of getting even.

"It's no use standing here," said Tom Merry, frowning. "If we shout Glyn couldn't hear us. Make for the trees."

There was nothing else for it now. Glyn had "done them" fairly, and shouting to him was useless—indeed, he could never have heard their shouting amid the roar of the elements.

And they were already drenched through to the skin, and the rain was coming down in sheets. With one accord Tom Merry & Co. turned and plunged through the darkness and ran towards the dimly seen trees, with feelings too deep for words.

CHAPTER 4.

Queer!

IT was wet under the trees like everywhere else. The foliage was thick enough, but it was also high, and the driving rain swept under and beat upon the hapless campers. Indeed, it was little better than being out in the open—if at all better, as it was certainly not so safe in a thunderstorm. But the juniors were bemused and desperate, dazed by the pelting rain and fierce wind.

"Get your clothes on, chaps," panted Tom Merry. "Oh, my hat! What a night. Fancy the blessed wind getting up like this! Oh crumbs! I feel about scattered."

"Same here! Oh dear!"

In the deep blackness under the trees, the juniors scrambled into the few things they had managed to salvage, and groaned and growled in chorus. It was very difficult, indeed, in such distressing circumstances, to keep from grouching.

"Well, it can't be helped!" said Tom Merry, trying to pierce the darkness about him. "We'll find the tent and things all right in the morning."

"Oh crumbs! Are we going to stick here all night, then?" groaned Blake. "Oh, help!"

"I say, it isn't safe, you fellows," wailed Baggy Trimble, as a flash of lightning lit up their faces under the trees. "It's dangerous to shelter under trees. Oh dear! I wish I'd never come with you chaps!"

"Oh, dry up!" said Tom Merry—like everyone else, his temper was getting just a trifle "edge-wise." "We're certainly not staying here, though."

"Well, what next?" asked Herries glumly.

"The old tower, of course," said Tom grimly. "When the next flash comes, take your bearings, chaps, and then we'll make a rush for it."

"But—but what about the madman?"

"Madman, be blowed!" sniffed Tom Merry. "That merchant wasn't mad, I tell you! Anyway, we can't afford to consider him, you idiot! I'm not staying out here all night, anyway."

"Nor me!"

"Wathah not, bai Jove!"

There was a chorus of agreement.

When the next flash came—which it did quickly enough—the juniors took their bearings, and then, at a word from Tom, they were off, pelting away through the wet grass, squelching over the sodden ground, with Baggy Trimble panting and yelling behind in fear and trembling of being left behind.

The flash had shown them the broken top of the tower just showing above the trees, and they made a "bee-line" for it.

They were soon over the open ground, and Tom Merry hung behind to help the panting Baggy Trimble. Reaching the trees they slowed down, for it was black as ink hereabouts.

"Carefully, now," warned Tom Merry. "Phew! Hallo, here we are! Quiet, Gussy! If that merchant happens to be in there—"

"Bai Jove!"

Arthur Augustus had tripped headlong in the darkness, and he gave a yell as he thudded down on the soaked undergrowth. Not to give voice in such circumstances was rather too much to be expected in Gussy's view.

The tower was much bigger than the juniors expected, and it was all but overgrown with thick, tangled masses of ivy. In the darkness and steaming rain it looked ominous and grotesque. The juniors could not help feeling a little disquieted at the sight of it.

Only the vague outline of the eerie building could be seen as yet, but suddenly, as the juniors stood in silence, a vivid flash of lightning lit up the scene, making all light as day.

And as it did so more than one of the juniors gave startled, half-strangled gasps of fear and amazement, and staggered back, clutching involuntarily at each other. Tom Merry felt Trimble grasp him, and heard his teeth chattering.

Then darkness fell again like a blanket.

But in that brief lightning flash the juniors had seen something—something utterly unusual and unmerging.

It was a vaguely-seen figure, standing by the old tower, fantastic and eerie in the extreme. It was the figure of an old man, yet upright and of fierce demeanour—a figure of an ancient warrior, clad in an ancient robe upon which glittered ornaments of yellowish metal. In his hand was a long, gleaming sword, and on his head was a queer, ancient helmet, which also glittered.

Such a weird figure, seen in that brief flash of brilliant lightning, with the dark, swaying trees, the ancient tower, and the lightning-riven sky as a background, was terrifying in the extreme, and certainly astounding.

Tom Merry & Co. felt their hearts throb, and their mouths went suddenly dry.

In the blackness, under the dark, wind-blown trees, they stood and gripped each other. Then Tom Merry spoke, his voice little more than a whisper.

"You—you fellows saw it?" he panted. "It—it wasn't just my imagination?"

"We saw it!" whispered Blake, his voice shaking a little.

"It—it looked like one of those ancient Saxon warriors I've seen pictures of."

"Just what I thought," agreed Tom Merry, striving to control his voice. "It—it fairly made me jump."

"It was a g-ghost!" quaked Baggy Trimble. "I say, you fellows, let's bolt—quick! Oh dear!"

"Rats!" said Tom Merry, giving an uneasy laugh. "It was somebody playing the ghost, most likely. My hat! That old chap who tried to scare us away—it was something like him!"

"But this was taller—much taller," said Herries. "That—that old rotter was bent and much older, I should think."

"He was slippery enough, anyway," muttered Tom Merry, staring hard into the blackness by the tower. He was beginning to get his nerve back now, and he had no intention of allowing himself to think of ghosts. "His face was something like that old chap's, anyway. Here goes!"

And Tom advanced towards where he had seen the figure. He had already armed himself with a stick, and he went cautiously, his eyes scanning the deep blackness round the tower. But nothing was to be seen, and his outstretched hand touched the drenched ivy.

"Gone, anyway," said Tom with a shaky laugh. "We've frightened the giddy ghost, chaps. Now what about getting inside this place?"

"We couldn't get much wetter if we stayed out all night," said Herries, who did not seem to relish the prospect of entering the tower at all. "Let's clear!"

"I'm hanged if I will!" said Tom Merry, setting his teeth. "No thumping ghost is going to frighten me away to-night. We're getting inside this place, if there's a way. I saw a window somewhere about here. Hallo, here we are!"

A break in the ivy about eight feet above their heads showed where the window was. They could just make out its outline faintly in the deep gloom.

Tom Merry listened a moment or two. Save for the noises of the storm no other sound was to be heard. As he listened there came another flash of lightning. It showed up the window clearly, and the ivy-clad tower. But it showed up nothing else—the ghost, or whatever the figure had been, was gone.

"Come on!" snapped Tom. "You chaps follow me! By Jove! Hold on, though. Let's try the door, if there is one."

Tom started a circuit of the old tower, and his chums followed him silently. They very soon reached a break in the ivy-clad masonry, and Tom's fumbling hands felt a great, oaken door, studded with rusted nails.

He placed his shoulder against it, but it did not budge an inch. He felt over the door for a handle, but there was none to be felt.

"No good!" whispered Tom. "It'll have to be the window. If only we had a blessed pocket-torch or lantern!"

He felt his way back to the window, or the arched aperture that had once been a window. All the juniors, excepting Trimble, were feeling better now, and Tom's suggestion that it might be the old man playing ghost to frighten them away was certainly more feasible than the actual ghost theory. The juniors were trembling with excitement, but their fears were leaving them. They scarcely felt the discomfort of their drenched garments and of the pouring rain now.

"Give me a back, somebody," said Tom.

Blake stooped, and, helped by the others, Tom climbed up until he could grasp the ivy, and he was on the sill of the little window the next moment. It was very deep, the walls being of enormous thickness. It was also very narrow, and Tom could barely squeeze himself inside.

"Wait there, chaps!" he whispered. "I'll see if I can get the door open from the inside. You can come and help, Blake."

"Right-ho!"

Blake followed him up the ivy, and dropped down after Tom inside the ancient tower. It needed nerve to drop down into the deep blackness of the unknown, but both reached a stone floor safely.

The two waited a moment, listening and staring into the darkness; but no sound came, and they saw nothing.

From his pocket Tom took a small silver box of matches. Arthur Augustas had found them in a pocket of his blazer, and they felt thankful for the find now, for the matches were quite dry.

Striking one, Tom held it up. The flickering flame showed up a bare stone apartment, wide and half-circular, the flat wall making it clear that there was another room beyond. In one corner a steep flight of broken stone steps went upwards through a hole in the flagged ceiling. The whole place was distinctly ancient, and was probably built centuries ago.

"Here we are," said Tom Merry, pointing to an arched, oaken door, black with age. "We'll soon have that open."

Striking another match, Tom held it up whilst Blake

examined the door. There was no lock to be seen, and the door only appeared to be held closed by a wooden bar placed across in rusted iron sockets.

Blake easily lifted the bar out, and as he dragged at the door by the rusty iron ring it swung open with a grating of unoiled hinges.

"Oh, good!"

The juniors outside had heard the noise made by the door, and they soon appeared in the doorway.

They crowded into the apartment with deep breaths of relief, glad enough to be in shelter at last.

"Oh, good!" repeated Herries. "My hat! This is dry enough, anyway. If only we had beds!"

"Great pip!" exclaimed Tom Merry in disgust. "Some chaps are never satisfied. He wants jam on it! Be thankful for the shelter, you ass!"

But it was really little enough to be thankful for, as even Tom himself had to admit. The floor was quite bare, and it did not look inviting as a bed. And the juniors were tired—very tired.

"We'll have to sit on it, anyway, until morning, or, better still, keep ourselves from catching cold by walking about," said Tom. "We had better make sure that we're alone here first, though."

"My hat! Yes, rather!"

It was certainly a wise precaution, and the juniors followed Tom as he led the way through the low, arched doorway into the next apartment. Like the other, it was bare, and the juniors retraced their steps. Tom Merry started for the stone stairs, striking another match.

The match flared up, and Tom held his hand high, allowing the flickering light to play on the steep steps.

As he did so he caught his breath—hard—and his hair began to rise on his head. From the other juniors came queer gasps, while a half-stifled yelp came from Trimble.

At the top of the steps, just below where they vanished into the blackness of the apartment above, a figure was standing—an eerie form of an old man with white hair and beard and moustache—the figure of an armed Saxon warrior of fierce appearance. His eyes seemed to flash fire as the feeble light from the match caught them.

He stood motionless, his flashing eyes fixed upon the juniors. Then he began to descend the steps, slowly, soundlessly. And as he came down he raised his huge, gleaming sword above his head.

The juniors stood like statues, as if petrified with terror. They had forgotten the old man now—or, at least, Tom's suggestion that it was a trick. They could only stare dumbly at the strange, wild figure with its gleaming sword and glittering metal.

The figure reached the floor, and then just as the sword described an arc of whirling, gleaming steel, the match went out and dropped from Tom's nerveless fingers.

Then Tom found his voice and raised it in a wild yell.

"Run for it!"

And the juniors turned tail and ran—plunging from the apartment in a wild, mad stampede. Luckily, Tom had left the door wide open, and they surged out and went plunging into the rain and darkness of the night.

CHAPTER 5.

Shelter at Last!

"YAROOOGH! Oh dear! Wait for me!" It was a wild, terrified shriek from Baggy Trimble, and Tom slowed down and, grabbing the terror-stricken Trimble's arm, he helped him along. They tore on at breakneck speed, stumbling and tumbling in the deep darkness of the stormy night.

How they got through the bunch of dark trees without disaster Tom Merry & Co. never knew, but they did get through, and then Tom Merry slowed down, after a glance behind him, and shouted to the others to do likewise.

"Oh dear!"

"Oh crumbs!"

"Oh, bai Jove!"

With gasps of deep relief the juniors stopped, realising now that they were not followed—and realising the fact with deep thankfulness.

Then, in the gloom, they eyed each other, white-faced. In the ordinary way Tom Merry & Co. were by no means funks—far from it. But there was a limit, and they had met the limit. Whether the apparition was flesh and blood they did not say—they had divided opinions on that point. But were it flesh and blood, and were it daylight, they could scarcely have helped doing as they had done. To face that strange figure—and especially to stand and face that gleaming, threatening sword, was more than they could have done—and more than fellows far older than they themselves could have done, possibly.

In the circumstances they had every excuse for bolting.

At deep midnight, with thunder rolling and crashing overhead, and with lightning flashes stabbing the darkness, and in that ancient, eerie flashon tower the apparition was doubly terrifying.

And they had good cause to be afraid apart from the question of "ghosts." If the figure was flesh and blood, and if he was, as Tom Merry suspected, the old man who had chased them away earlier on, then the danger was none the less real. The old man must be mad.

"Phew!" panted Jack Blake, shivering as he glanced back again. "That was a narrow shave and no mistake!"

"Tewwible, bai Jove!" gasped Arthur Augustus. "Oh deah! I was nevah so startled in my life before."

"Let's—let's get on!" groaned Baggy Trimble shakily. "Ow-ow! I'm whacked! I'm half dead!"

"It—it was a rotten experience," said Tom Merry. "But it was that old chap—I'm certain it was! Goodness knows what it all means, though!"

"What are we to do now?" asked Blake. "The dashed storm seems to be blowing over, thank goodness!"

"I thought it couldn't last very long when the wind got

The juniors could see a little better also, and they hurried down to the beach on the heels of Tom Merry. Certainly it was almost an impossibility for them to get wetter, than they were already, but none of them relished the prospect of remaining out in the open for the remainder of that memorable night.

So none of the juniors objected to Tom's plan, and it was carried out. The dinghy itself could be seen now, lying alongside the rocking motor-cruiser, and Tom Merry swiftly stripped off his soaked clothes and waded out into the warm waves. Then he plunged in and started to swim.

The rest of the juniors watched him not a little anxiously. A hundred yards in the ordinary way was as nothing to a swimmer like Tom Merry. But the circumstances were unusual to say the least of it. The sea was still fairly rough, and it was dark enough, though nothing like what it had been. And Tom was tired out, like they were, and was far from being in the best condition for a swim.

But the juniors need not have worried. Once having made up his mind to do a thing there was no turning back for

CAMEOS OF SCHOOL LIFE.

THE FIGHT IN THE GYM.



The clarion call of "Time!" is heard,
The boxers take their places,
Not pausing to exchange a word—
How resolute their faces!
They set to work with right good will
And fairly revel in it;
The atmosphere is hushed and still,
But only for a minute!

Tom Merry is the School House man,
A boxer of the best;
With Redfern, of the New House clan,
His skill he's keen to test.

The fellows, gathered round the ropes,
Now cheer with vim and vigour;
The partisans have pinned their hopes
To each strong, sturdy figure!

"School House for ever!" comes the cry,
"Tackle your man, Tom Merry!"

"Reddy's the lad!" is the reply,
"A stunning boxer, very!"

Spurred by the shouts, the boxers clinch,
And blows they freely shower;
Neither will yield a precious inch—
They punch with "pep" and power!

Now look forward to the next ripping poem in this series, which is entitled:

Now look forward to the next ripping poem in this series, which is entitled:

"THE PILLOW FIGHT!"

Round One is fast and keen and fierce,
Excitement is intense!

Tom Merry knows the way to pierce
His rival's stout defence.

But Reddy gives him blow for blow,
And so the contest rages;

Full details of that fistic show
Would fill a dozen pages!

Round follows round; and then the close
Comes sudden and dramatic;

Reddy is down! Full-length he goes,
The verdict is emphatic.

"Tom Merry wins!" exclaims Kildare,
He gets a grand ovation;

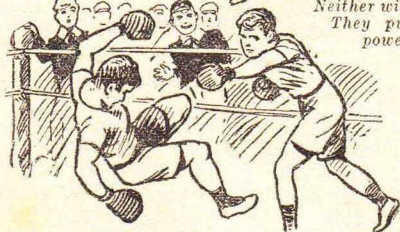
School caps go whirling in the air,
'Tis our jubilation!

Moved by a mutual desire,
Victor and vanquished shake,

Then to the tuckshop they retire
For ginger-pop and cake.

And when they next come face to face,
Models of fighting fitness,

Within the gym I'll find a place,
Their doughty deeds to witness!



up," said Tom Merry. "Well, this has been a night and no mistake. I wonder— By Jove! I'll do it!"

"Do what?"

Tom Merry hesitated a moment. "We can't hang about all night in wet things," he said grimly. "There's only one thing left for us to do now, chaps. We'll have to take shelter on board the Silver Spray, and be blown to the smell."

"But the dinghy, you ass!"

"I've thought about that," said Tom, gazing seawards through the murky gloom. "But we'll get the dinghy all serene. I'm going to swim out to it, chaps."

"Oh, bai Jove!"

"Phew!"

"It should be easy enough," said Tom. "It's not so bad close in shore, and it's clearing up now fast. Come on!"

It was undoubtedly clearing up a little—only a drizzle was falling now, and the thunder was only occasional, and getting farther distant every minute; the lightning also was faint and scarcely noticeable. The black clouds had drifted away, and a faint, watery moon showed through the murky haze overhead.

Tom Merry, and he faced the task with vigour and determination.

They glimpsed his white arms and shoulders now and again, and then they gasped with relief as they saw him at last reach the dinghy and clamber aboard her. They saw him clearly as he stood up in the swaying boat and waved his arm to them.

"Good man!"

"Yaas, watah!"

"Here he comes," said Herries.

The dinghy was seen to leave the motor-cruiser, and very soon it was grounding on the sandy beach. Tom Merry stood up in the boat with an oar in his hand.

"Jump in, chaps!" he grinned. "I think our night's troubles are over now. But they're just going to start for friend Glyn!"

"Bai Jove! Then—then you mean to deal with Glyn now?"

"No time like the present," said Tom Merry. "Hand my clobber in, chaps, and let's get off."

"What-ho!"

Tom Merry's clothes were handed over, and the juniors crowded on board the dinghy. It was a tight squeeze, but they managed it, and the boat made for the silent Silver Spray.

Drenched and shivery as the juniors were, all of them were feeling a bit better now. Their feelings towards Bernard Glyn, however, had not improved at all.

The dinghy touched the side of the motor-boat at last, and the juniors swarmed over the rail. The boat was made fast again, and then Tom Merry dropped down into the cockpit, which was covered overhead and at the sides with stout canvas secured to strong iron framework. Under this it was customary for the juniors to take it in turns to sleep, the rest sleeping in the bunks of the cabin or in the forward cockpit.

Only one fellow was in the aft cockpit now, however, and that fellow was Bernard Glyn. He was fast asleep, and breathing steadily.

"Phew!" remarked Blake grimly, as the juniors joined Tom Merry. "The beggar's slept through the storm, I do believe!"

"While we've been going through the mill!" said Manners. "My hat! That dashed cabin fairly reeks yet, and the doors are still open!"

"No wonder Glyn decided to sleep out here!" grunted Herries. "Wake the rotter up!"

But the arrival of the juniors had awakened Glyn by this time, and he sat up sleepily and faintly blinked as he saw the juniors in the light that streamed out from the cabin.

"What—what— Well, I'm blown!" he gasped. "You chaps got back, then?"

"Yes, we've got back all serene," said Tom Merry.

Glyn stared at them a trifle uneasily.

"But how the thump—" he began blankly.

"I swam over and got the boat," explained Tom calmly. "You see, the tent blew away, and we were fairly swamped, Glyn."

Glyn stared, and then, as he noticed the drenched garments of the juniors, he doubled up in his hammock and roared.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You think it funny, then?" asked Tom Merry. "You guessed, of course, that we should have a rough time?"

"Of course I did!" chuckled Glyn. "You should have been more careful with your boat."

"Why, you cheeky rotter—" began Tom Merry wrathfully.

"Oh, don't waste time gassing!" growled Blake. "Bump the silly idiot!"

"Yaas, wathah! I must say, Glyn, I think your ideah of a joke is in vewy bad taste," said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

But Glyn only roared. Evidently he saw something funny in the drenched figures of his chums.

That did it. With one accord the motor-boat boys swarmed over the schoolboy inventor, and Glyn's roars of laughter ended abruptly, giving place to yells of anguish.

"Bump him!" exclaimed Herries.

There was little need of the suggestion. Before he quite knew what was happening, Glyn found himself lifted in many hands.

Bump! Bump!
"Yarooooh!"

Bump!

"We'll teach you to pinch our boat and leave us stranded!" snorted Blake.

"Yaas, wathah!"

Bump!

"Yow! You silly asses! Yooop! Leggo!" howled Glyn, realising that the "joke" was no longer anything humorous.

"I didn't pinch your boat!"

"Oh!"

The enraged juniors paused in the act of bumping Bernard Glyn for the fifth time, for they knew the schoolboy inventor was not in the habit of telling whoppers to evade a licking.

The respite gave Glyn the breath he needed. He sat up, drinking in deep gulps of air.

"You silly idiots!" he roared at last. "Do you think I pinched the rotten dinghy?"

"We—we— How else could it have been tied up to the rail of the cruiser?" said Tom Merry, beginning to realise that there was a mistake somewhere. "We left it on the beach."

"I know you did, you silly, footling asses!" hooted Glyn, getting his second wind, as it were. "And the painter must have snapped, or something, for I saw the dinghy drifting out to sea, and only just managed to reach it with the long boathook."

"Oh!"

It was a chorus of surprise. Really, it had not occurred to Tom Merry & Co. that their dinghy might have broken loose. And yet it was evident to them now that Glyn was speaking the truth.

"Bai Jove, deah boy," stammered Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, "I wathah think that we owe you an apology, you know!"

"We does! We do!" grinned Lowther.

"Oh, that's all right!" said Glyn, with a smile. "You haven't done much damage, and you look pretty knocked up yourselves. We'll call it square."

And call it "square" they did. For the next few minutes the party were busy arranging beds and bedding under the awning and changing into dry clothes. Half an hour later slumber reigned supreme on the Silver Spray as she rocked gently to and fro at her mooring.

CHAPTER 6.

Too Much Sand!

"WELL, what's the programme, you chaps?" Bernard Glyn asked the question cheerily next morning.

Breakfast had been over some time now, and the motor-boat boys were now taking it easy on the sands, after having spent a weary hour locating the lost tent and the ground-sheets, etc.

They had had a far from good night's rest, and none of them were feeling up to much exertion. Only Manners had seemed in an energetic mood, and he had gone off with his camera to take a few "snaps." Baggy Trimble—never in an energetic mood, but having been persuaded into activity by various boots—had been left behind to erect the tent. The rest of the juniors had their own jobs to do aboard the boat, and they felt entitled to take it easy ashore. So now they lounged on the sands, some of them sprawling full length in it, some of them leaning with their backs against the sandy bluff behind them.

"Just at present," answered Tom Merry, with a grin. "I don't feel like troubling about any programme. But after a rest I vote we go and explore that giddy tower by daylight."

"That was what I was thinking about," said Glyn, who had already been told of the previous night's adventures. "It's a jolly queer business altogether, you fellows. I'm rather sorry I missed it now. I vote we stay on this giddy island for a bit, and try to solve the mystery—if there is one."

"I'd like to do, too," said Tom, nodding. "And, in any case, it's a ripping little island. But—but if we do happen to be trespassers—"

"What rot!" said Blake. "If we had to you think that old chap would have treated us as he did? Besides, there's no notice-board up, anyway," he added, with a chuckle.

"Blow the notice-boards!" snorted Glyn. "I'm dashed keen to see something of that tower, and I'd like to see that giddy ghost! My hat! Fancy you kids running away like that!"

"You wouldn't have done if you'd been there, of course," said Lowther, with heavy sarcasm. "It's all very well to laugh about it in the daylight!"

"Yaas, wathah! It was a weally howwible expewience, Glyn," said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, shaking his head. "I am inclined to think, howehav, that it was merely that feahful old fellow dwessed up."

"That makes it not much better," grunted Herries, "for it's pretty clear he's mad. I vote we clear out and give the rotten tower a wide berth."

"Rats!"

"No fear!"

"We're looking into it," said Glyn grimly. "There's enough of us to deal with the old chap, even if he is mad. What about going there now?"

"Plenty of time!" yawned Tom Merry. "But we'll explore all the same, chaps. My hat! Where's that ass Manners?"

"Gone off with his giddy camera!" grinned Lowther.

"The silly ass!" grunted Tom. "Let's hope he hasn't gone near that tower."

And Tom jumped up and climbed to the top of the little bluff, and glanced quickly about him. There was no sign of Manners anywhere near the old tower which was just visible above the trees, but as Tom glanced along the shore he saw the photographic enthusiast just snapping some seagulls close inshore.

With a chuckle, Tom dropped down again, and as he did so Herries pointed out to sea in the opposite direction.

"Boat coming this way," he remarked.

Tom nodded as he glimpsed the white sail of a small boat approaching the island. He watched it until it vanished round a rocky bluff some distance along the island beach.

"Only some trippers from Portlea," he remarked. "Jove! I wonder if it's the chaps who must have been here yesterday afternoon? That queer old chap took us for them—at least, he spoke as if somebody had been here, and he'd chased them off."

"What about Portlea?" interrupted Lowther. "I thought we were calling there to-day, chaps?"

"We should have been there now but for the storm," grinned Glyn. "We'll put off calling on dear old Figgy until to-morrow, I vote."

"So that's why you want to call at Portlea?" exclaimed Noble. "Are Figgins and his pals staying there, then?"

"Yes," said Tom Merry, with a chuckle. "Figgins, Kerr, and Wynn are staying with an aunt of Kerr's there, and I promised Figgy we'd look 'em up if we happened to be near during the cruise. It'll be rather a lark to see 'em."

"And a bigger lark to jape 'em," said Lowther.

"Yaas, wathah! It will be wathah fun to meet those New House boundahs, deah boys!"

"No reason why we shouldn't run over there this afternoon," said Glyn.

"It's only about a couple of miles away on the mainland. You can see it from the other side of this island."

"We'll see how this exploring stunt turns out!" grinned Tom Merry. "We may have a few broken heads to mend by then if that old Saxon warrior is on the warpath."

"Yaas, wathah!" said Arthur Augustus, glancing along the shore. "I see that boat has gone, deah boys. It would be wathah intewestin' to see who it is. If they've landed—"

"Blow them!" said Glyn, yawning.

"Some giddy trippers, I expect."

"May not have landed," agreed Tom. "Let 'em rip!"

And Tom Merry & Co. dismissed the boat from their minds—for the time being.

Had they seen what happened to the boat just then, however, they would have been very much interested indeed.

Just round the rocky bluff the boat grounded on a sandy beach, and three cheery-faced youths stepped out. One was tall and rather long-legged, the second was medium-sized, with a freckled face, and the third was short and fat—not to say podgy. And all three wore boating blazers and flannels, with straw hats, round which were the colours of St. Jim's College.

Tom Merry & Co. would have been very much surprised and interested indeed had they seen them and recognised them.

They jumped ashore, and as they did so they appeared to be arguing.

"I'm certain that's the giddy Silver Spray," said the long-legged junior, his rugged features breaking into a good-humoured grin. "Old Glyn showed me a snapshot of it once."

"But—but it can't be, surely, Figgy," said the fat youth.

"Why not?" said Figgins, staring out to where the Silver Spray rocked at her moorings. "We know those measly School House blighters are cruising along the coast, and they promised to look us up somewhere. I bet that's their boat, and they're hanging about somewhere."

"Hallo, yonder's a tent!" said Kerr, pointing inland.

"And that fat chap!" almost yelled Fatty Wynn. "It's Baggy Trimble!"

"My hat! So it is!"

There was no mistaking the far from graceful form of Baggy Trimble, even from that distance. Figgins & Co.—or it was those three heroes, right enough—watched Trimble vanish into the tent; and then Figgins chuckled.

"Shall we shout?" grinned Wynn.

"Not likely!" snorted Figgy in alarm. "My hat! It's the chance of a lifetime for a jape on those School House worms! They don't know we're here, and we'll catch 'em napping. We'll leave exploring that giddy tower again for a bit. This'll be much more fun than being chased by a mad old jossar armed with a club."



At the top of the steps an eerie figure was standing—the figure of an armed Saxon warrior of fierce appearance. His eyes seemed to flash fire as the feeble light from the match Tom Merry was holding caught them. Suddenly Tom Merry found his voice. "Run for it!" he yelled. (See Chapter 4.)

"Ha, ha! Yes, rather!"

"Keep out of sight!" chuckled Figgins. "No reason why we shouldn't show those School House chaps who's top dog even on holidays."

"Rather not, Figgy!"

"We'll scout round a bit and find out where the others are," remarked Figgins. "I can't see a soul on the motor-boat, and they must be ashore. Come along this way, and— Phew!"

All three of the New House juniors suddenly sighted Tom Merry & Co. at the same moment.

"Back!" warned Figgins.

He and his chums backed away quickly. Figgins peered over the edge of the sandy ridge, and then he chuckled.

"This way, chaps," he said. "I've got a little wheeze to be going on with. There's a big heap of sand on the bluff behind where they're slacking about. If we happened to push it accidentally on top of them—"

"Good egg!"

Fatty Wynn and Kerr agreed, with chuckles, and the three conspirators crept along, keeping well out of sight behind the ridge of sand that ran along the top of the bluff behind Tom Merry & Co. on the beach below. They scouted cautiously along until they judged they were exactly above Tom Merry & Co., and then Figgins raised a warning hand and peered over.

As he expected, they were exactly above the School House juniors, and even as Figgins drew his head back Tom Merry spoke, his voice reaching them quite easily.

"Yes, chaps," he was saying. "We'll look in on those New House blighters just to let 'em see we're still alive, and we'll let 'em know it, too. The School House has got to keep its end up, even in the vacation, you know."

"Yes, rather!"

"I'd rather like to take 'em by surprise," went on Tom Merry thoughtfully. "I know the house they're staying at, and if we scout round first we may catch that long-legged

Figg napping. I sent the beggar a postcard when we were in France the other day, but he'll hardly expect us back yet. We'll give the New House bounders a surprise, what?"

"Yaas, wathah!"

There was a chorus of hearty agreement, and Figgins & Co. looked at each other and grinned gleefully. Then Figgins pointed to the sandy heap, and the others nodded and got to work silently but very briskly and efficiently. There was already a great pile of sand almost on the brink of the little sandy cliff, and the three New House jokers set to work with a will adding handful after handful of sand to it. It was a very easy task, and only care was needed to prevent some of the sand going over too soon. But the sand was still wet from the rain, and it clung together nicely. Figgins nodded his satisfaction at last.

"Now we'll see who gets the surprise," he murmured. "Go it, my hearties!"

And the New House trio "went it"—pushing with hands and feet desperately and swiftly, heedless of noise now. And over the brink went the sand—first in a shower, and then in a great piled mass.

Swooooosh!

Flop, flop, flop!

Thump, thump, thump!

Right down on the unsuspecting heads of Tom Merry & Co. went the avalanche of wet sand; and from below came a sudden startled howl, followed instantly by a chorus of startled howls that swiftly ended in muffled yelps and gasps and gurgles.

Figgins, Kerr, and Wym glanced swiftly over. They saw little else but a heap of sand, amidst which whirled arms and legs and startled faces.

"That's good enough!" murmured George Figgins.

"Here's where we move, chaps!"

"Ha, ha! Yes, rather, Figgy!"

And Figgins & Co. moved.

CHAPTER 7.

Retribution!

"YAWWOOOOOGH!"

"Oh, great Scott!"

"What the dickens— Groooooogh!"

"Oh crumbs! Yooop! Gerroff me face, Blake!"

"Oh, my hat!"

From the whirling heap came yells of mingled wrath and surprise and anguish. As well as the sand Figgins & Co. had sent down part of the overhanging earth, and several of the hapless loungers below were all but smothered beneath earth and sand.

Naturally, they floundered about desperately, and fists and feet got in the way of features and other tender parts of each other's anatomy, eliciting a succession of howls and yelps.

Tom Merry was about the first to recover his scattered senses, and as he blinked about after clearing his eyes and mouth of sand he fairly gasped.

"Well, I'm blowed!" he ejaculated. "How the thump did that happen, you fellows? Groooogh! My blessed eyes are bunged up, and I've swallowed more than a ton of beastly sand!"

"Same here! Groooooogh! Mu-mum-my hat!"

"Bai Jove! I'm absolutely smothered, deah boys!" groaned Arthur Augustus dismally. "Just look at my clobber! Oh, bai Jove!"

"Was—was it an earthquake?" panted Lowther. "Or was it only a landslide?"

Blake seemed to be in a worse state than any of them, but just then he finished spluttering and raised his voice in a choking yell of wrath.

"Landslide be blowed!" he howled furiously, jumping up and glaring upwards. "It was somebody up there; I just spotted a chap's straw hat!"

"Great Scott!"

"Is that a fact, Blake?" gasped Tom Merry.

"Yes, I tell you I spotted somebody," stuttered Blake, gouging sand from his eyes. "Just when the sand started coming I looked upwards and I spotted a straw brim—somebody was just peeping over. Come on!"

And, almost trembling with rage, Blake started to climb up the sides of the steep bluff. It was not an easy task at all, but after slipping and sliding back time after time Blake reached the top and glared about him.

By this time most of the others had followed him, shaking sand and earth from their persons as they did so. They were looking furious now, and their amazement had vanished. If Blake had spotted somebody above, then it was fairly clear that it could not have been either an earthquake or a landslide. It was just somebody playing a trick on them.

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"Not a giddy soul to be seen!" growled Herries, as he reached Blake. "You must have been mistaken, Blake."

"Yaas, wathah!" panted Arthur Augustus. "There isn't anyone on the island but ourselves, deah boy—and that queeah old fellow, of course."

"He wouldn't play a trick like that," said Digby.

"More likely do it to bury us, though," grunted Herries.

"It's thundering queer!" said Tom Merry, blinking about him. "Whoever it was they must have been pretty quick to get out of sight—even to reach those trees yonder."

"That's where the rotter is, whoever he is!" snorted Blake. "We'll jolly soon root him out! Come—"

"Hold on!" said Tom Merry, his eyes gleaming as he scanned the sand. "There's been more than one fellow here. Look!"

In the sand were footprints of more than one fellow, and they were small footprints—certainly not the footprints of a man, or of men.

"That boat we saw!" snapped Tom Merry. "Some giddy trippers from Portlea, I'll bet. Well, we'll give them some sport, if that's what they're after."

"Yes, rather!"

Blake was about to start off for the bunch of trees he had pointed out, but Tom Merry called him back.

"Hold on!" he snapped. "They'll only bolt, and we'll lose 'em if we rush it. We'll scout round and surround them."

"Oh, good!"

All the juniors were trained Scouts, and the task of surrounding the little bunch of trees was a very simple one. Beyond the trees was open ground, and they could easily see anyone leaving the shelter of the bunch of trees.

The juniors spread out—Tom Merry, Blake, and Herries remaining on watch where they were, while the rest started an encircling movement of the trees, the long ridge of sand hiding them completely.

There came no movement from the trees; and, after waiting three or four minutes, Tom Merry gave a whistle and followed by Blake and Herries he started off at a rush for the trees.

As they did so three figures darted out from the trees at the far side and raced away towards the beach, roaring with laughter.

"My hat!" panted Tom Merry, as they raced along. "I—I'm certain I know those merchants. Put it on, chaps! If they reach their boat— Oh, good!"

Tom Merry broke off and chuckled as he saw several forms rise swiftly from behind the ridge of sand and race towards the running strangers at various angles.

The three trippers stopped dead, hopelessly cut off. They seemed at a loss to know what to do.

"Collar them!" roared Tom Merry.

"Yaas, wathah! Oh, bai Jove!"

Arthur Augustus and Digby were the nearest to the strangers, and they suddenly gave yells of surprise as they closed in upon them.

The next moment Tom Merry himself understood why as he pelted up, and recognised the trio of "trippers."

"What—what— Why, it's—"

"Figgins!" howled Jack Blake. "Great pip! It's those New House worms!"

"Oh, my hat!"

The School House fellows almost fell down in their great astonishment at sight of the redoubtable Figgins & Co. They had wanted to meet Figgins & Co., and they had determined to seek them out. But they now saw them sooner than they had expected, and did not seem at all pleased thereby.

All the School House juniors were on the spot now, and, finding themselves trapped on all sides, Figgins & Co. grinned ruefully.

"Yes, it's little us," said Figgins, with a chuckle. "Fancy meeting you School House duds here!"

"You—you New House bounders!" gasped Tom Merry.

"So you were the rotters who bunged that sand over us?"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Figgins & Co. They had time to see the state Tom Merry & Co. were in now, and they roared at the sight. All of them were smothered from head to foot in wet sand and damp earth, and they looked terribly dishevelled and dismal.

"Collar them!" gasped Tom Merry. "Laugh will they? We'll show 'em!"

"Yes, rather!"

"Here!" howled Figgins. "Hold on! We make it pax! It was only a lark, you School House worms!"

But the School House worms had no intention of making it pax yet. It was not a lark so far from their point of view. From the wrathful gleams in their eyes it was probable that Figgins & Co. would very soon have cause to change their views.

"Pax, eh?" panted Blake, as he helped to bring Figgins crashing down. "We'll give you pax—half burying us in beastly sand, you rotters! We've given you measly New

House worms the kybosh during term time, and we'll show you we can do it in the vac, too. If you want to keep it up, we're with you!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

Figgins did not answer at the moment. With Digby sitting on his face he found it exceedingly difficult to answer. And very soon Kerr and Wynn were in a like hapless position. The School House fairly swarmed over the New House juniors.

"Now," said Tom Merry, "we'll have a little chat, Figgy. Let him breathe, Dig, old chap. We don't want to put them out altogether."

Digby got up off Figgins' head, and the New House junior gasped for breath.

"Oh, you—you rotters!" he gasped. "Lemme gerrup!"

"Shortly, old chap," said Tom. "How did you know we were here, Figgy?"

"Groooogh! I didn't know!" panted Figgins, glaring. "We'd only just spotted you. We came to explore the dashed tower over there, not to see you, you rotters! Yah!"

"My hat!" exclaimed Tom Merry, giving a start. "Was it you chaps who came here yesterday, then?"

"Yes, blow you! But a silly, batty old chap chased us with a thumping great stick, so we're trying it on again to-day!" snorted Figgins. "What are you chaps doing here, anyway?"

"We ran in here to shelter from the storm," grinned Tom. "But we've been chased by a queer old merchant, too, Figgy," he added eagerly. "Do you know anything about the place?"

"Only what we've heard at Portlea," grunted Figgins. "The fisher folk call it Lonely Island. They say the tower's haunted—haunted by the spirit of a giddy old Saxon king, or some such rot. That's why we came to explore in the first place. We didn't get the chance, though. That old idiot with the stick went for us."

Tom Merry chuckled.

"He went for us, too, Figgy," he remarked. "And we were just going to tackle the job again when you turned up."

"Oh, good!" said Figgins eagerly. "Then I vote we go and nose round Lonely Island, chaps. We're awfully glad you fellows turned up, aren't we, chaps?"

Fatty Wynn and Kerr nodded.

"Very glad indeed!" gasped Fatty.

"Fearfully glad!" said Kerr, glancing hopefully at Tom Merry. "Let go of us, you fellows, and we'll all explore that tower now."

"That's the wheeze!" said Figgins. "We'll make it pax, and join forces. How's that?"

"Very nice," smiled Tom Merry. "Very nice indeed—for you. But we've a certain little matter to settle with you dear little fellows yet."

"Yaas, wathah! Pway put the wottahs thwough it, deah boys!"

"Give 'em some of what they gave us!" snorted Herries.

"Hear, hear!"

"And we're going to," smiled Tom Merry, wriggling as some of the sand tickled his back. "We can discuss pax afterwards—if you New House fatheads are desirous of discussing it then. I fancy you won't, though!"

"Look here—" began Figgins, a trifle apprehensively. He had hoped that his suggestion to join forces would "turn away wrath" and make the rivals forget recent happenings. But that had failed.

"We're looking," remarked Tom Merry pleasantly. "And we see three ugly New House worms from that mouldy old casual ward, the New House at St. Jim's. If worms will come out looking for trouble they mustn't grumble at finding it. Yank them along to that sand-head, chaps!"

"Right-ho!"

The School House juniors were only too glad to do that. And, despite the furious struggles of Figgins & Co., they were dragged back to the scene of their recent triumph. Neither of the three jokers looked triumphant now, however. "Here we are," grinned Tom Merry. "Now give 'em some of the sand they gave us."

"Good egg!"

"Stick it, New House!" bellowed Figgins, struggling furiously. "Let 'em see— Yooop! Yow-wow! Mum-mum-m-m-m-m-m-m—"

Figgins' gallant call to arms ended in a weird gurgle as a handful of wet sand was jammed into his mouth.

"Go it, chaps!" laughed Tom Merry

And the School House juniors went it with a will. They were in overwhelming numbers, and the New House fellows, gallantly as they resisted, stood no chance whatever. As Tom Merry told them, however, they had asked for it, and were getting only what they had asked for.

Wet sand and wet earth was jammed into their mouths, and down the backs of their necks, and a great deal went into their eyes and up their noses. They were then rolled in the sand, over and over and over, until they were fairly

smothered in it. The meeting between the rival clans on Lonely Island had been quite unexpected, and it wasn't long before Figgins & Co. had good reason to wish that it had never taken place.

They were allowed to stagger up at length, gasping and choking desperately, and gouging sand from eyes and mouths, and shaking it from their persons in showers.

But Tom Merry hadn't finished yet.

"Now we'll speed the parting guests," said Tom Merry. "Let 'em have it hot and strong!"

"Hear, hear!"

"What-ho!"

Figgins & Co. jumped to escape, and as they went a shower of sand-balls—wet sand fashioned after the style of snowballs, followed them in showers.

Whizz, whizz, whizz, whizz!

With sand bursting all about them, Figgins & Co. fled.

CHAPTER 8.

Trapped!

HARRY MANNERS grunted as he "snapped" the group of seagulls floating on the dancing water, and then he tucked his camera under his arm and wandered off in search of fresh fields to conquer.

Really there were not many fields to conquer in the photographic sense on Lonely Island, hence Manners' rather disgusted grunt.

Seagulls were all very well in their way, and they made quite a pretty picture. But Manners was in search of something a little more original and spectacular.

There was, in the St. Jim's photographer's view, only one thing worth "taking" on the island, and that was the ancient Saxon tower.

Manners had cast a longing eye on that tower just now as he turned away.

It made a fine picture with the morning sun streaming and glimmering on the stonework, and on the masses of ivy, and on the foliage of the trees that almost surrounded it.

Manners had wanted badly to go and photograph it immediately after breakfast, but the rest of the juniors were nothing like so enthusiastic, and he had had to postpone the treat in store until they wanted to go.

With the memory of the previous night's adventure fresh in his mind, Harry Manners, despite his enthusiasm, did not quite feel like visiting the mysterious tower on his own. Ghosts or no ghosts, that fierce old man with his hefty stick made the prospect anything but inviting.

Yet now, as he glimpsed the tower nestling amidst the thick trees, Manners felt an overpowering longing to bring his beloved camera to work upon it, none the less.

"By Jove! I've a jolly good mind to risk it," he murmured, cocking a calculating eye towards the tower. "The light's good now, and it may not last. I think I'll take just one snap, anyway."

The temptation was irresistible, and after another moment's hesitation Manners gave a hasty glance round, and then started towards the tower, keeping a wary eye about him as he advanced.

He reached the trees without seeing anything at all suspicious, and, after stopping to listen for some moments, he crept on towards the tower itself.

"Good!" murmured Manners, halting at last. "All serene, after all. I'll make sure of getting one, anyway. Here goes!"

He adjusted his camera, and squinted into the viewfinder with a professional eye.

Apparently the view did not quite meet with his approval, for after a moment he moved aside a few steps and tried



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again. He was just about to close the shutter when a loud snap behind him made him jump almost out of his skin.

He looked round swiftly, and then he gasped, and his mouth suddenly went dry.

Behind him, scarcely a couple of yards away, was the old man, his fierce eyes fixed upon the junior wolfishly. The man's head was bare, and his white hair was towseled and dishevelled, giving him the appearance of a strangely wild figure.

"Oh!" gasped Manners.

Manners was a fellow not easily frightened, but the sudden appearance of the weird figure utterly unnerved him. His silent approach was startling enough, but his silence as he stood eyeing the junior so fixedly was strangely terrifying.

The junior stood motionless, unable to move, until suddenly the strange figure flung out a claw-like hand to grasp him.

It was enough for Harry Manners.

He gave one wild gasp, dropped his camera from his nerveless fingers, and dashed away helter-skelter.

At the edge of the little wood he halted, aware that the wild fellow had not followed him, and that the camera had been left behind.

Manners thought of his precious camera. He blamed himself bitterly for having dropped it in his mad flight. What a hopeless funk he was to lose his head like that!

The thought made the junior grit his teeth, and after listening a moment, he started back again cautiously.

Madman or no madman, he was determined not to lose his precious camera. Of material things that camera was the junior's most treasured possession.

He reached the clearing without hearing a sound, and then he saw the old man. The sinister figure was ambling, with his queer bent gait towards the open door of the tower, and in his hand was the camera!

Manners caught his breath, but the next instant his eyes gleamed, as he saw the old man place the camera on a block of masonry near the great oaken door, and vanish inside.

"My hat!" breathed Manners.

He gazed at the camera, his heart thumping madly, and then he made a rush for it. His fingers closed on the strap, and he darted away with it.

Bad luck, however, overtook the daring junior, for even as he turned away his foot caught a trailing creeper, and he went crashing down. His camera flew out of his fingers and rolled away into the undergrowth.

The heavy fall had badly winded the junior, but he scrambled up desperately. The old man had appeared in the tower doorway, and was rushing down upon him.

A fiendish grin was on his face, and even in that swift moment Manners realised that the man had placed that camera there purposely to entice him back again.

With a startled gasp the junior leapt to escape. A claw-like hand closed on his shoulder and swung him round violently. Manners twisted desperately and wrenched himself free, almost falling headlong over the big block of masonry just by the door of the tower.

But for that Manners would have escaped, possibly, but as he swerved aside the old man with surprising agility sprang before him, cutting off his escape.

There was only one way left open, and Manners took it in his sheer desperation.

He darted into the tower, and, sighting the stone steps, he fairly flew up them. The old man followed almost at his heels, muttering threats and wild imprecations.

"Oh, my hat!" panted Manners.

In entering the tower Manners had acted in sheer desperation, just to get out of reach of that clawing hand. But he realised now that he was trapped, as he heard the old man thundering after him.

Yawning gaps showed in the stairs where the solid stone steps had broken away, and it was dangerous going in the extreme.

But the junior had lost his head now, and his one thought was to get away from his pursuer. Through two more circular apartments the flight led him, and then Manners came to a trap-door, black with age, obviously leading out on to the roof of the tower.

Manners sighted the rusted bolt, and tore desperately at it. But it had evidently been recently oiled, for it slid aside easily enough, and with all his force the junior heaved up at the door, sending it crashing over.

Then he leaped through; and as he did so he heard a savage howl behind him—a howl abruptly muffled as Manners slammed down the trap-door.

But the junior was little better off now, for he had no

means of fastening down the door, and, acting on sudden impulse, he rushed to the edge of the broken battlements.

Thick, ancient ivy grew over the masonry in profusion, and after a swift glance downwards, Manners took his courage in both hands and lowered himself over, grasping at the thick tendrils of ivy.

The next moment he heard the crash of the trap-door as the old man sent it back. Next he heard stamping feet on the stone flags above.

"Here goes!" breathed the junior.

And he started the climb, hand below hand, clinging on with hands and toes to the thick roots. It was not a difficult or a dangerous climb to an active youngster, and in other circumstances Manners would have revelled in it.

But he did not revel in it now, by any means. His heart was thumping madly and his mouth was dry. And the



The old man stood in the arched doorway, with hands pressed against the stone, and yelled Tom Merry. But his warning came too late. The junior slid down the steeply, sending the alarmed juniors sliding downwards.

thought of the madman above—Manners did not doubt now that he was mad—made him take risks that he would never have otherwise taken.

He looked up once, and saw the man's face peer down at him; then it vanished, and he heard the old fellow's steps on the flagstones of the roof.

Manners guessed that he had gone back through the trap-door, hoping to cut him off below, and the thought made him ignore caution. And suddenly his feet, scraping for a foothold, met only air, and as he dangled by the hands he looked down, seeing that he had reached a window in the wall.

It was a narrow escape, and Manners was just swinging himself sideways to reach the ivy alongside the aperture, when, without warning, a hand and arm came clutching out of the window.

Manners fairly yelled with fear as the hand clutched his dangling leg. He did not need to see whom the hand and arm belonged to. The old man had obviously rushed downstairs—just in time to catch a glimpse of him passing the window over the stone stairs.

Manners kicked out vigorously and frantically, and felt the clutch loosen, but almost simultaneously the ivy-roots to which he was clinging tore away amid a shower of rain-drops.

Desperately the junior clutched for fresh hold, but in vain, and the next instant he was falling heavily, tearing at the ivy as he swished downwards in a last attempt to save himself.

Then he struck the ground with a terrific force, and to Harry Manners the world seemed to end in a blaze of light.



...scious manner on either side of the doorway. "Quick!" ... strange grinding sound and then the stone floor tilted ... crumbling mass into inky blackness! (See Chapter 11.)

CHAPTER 9. A Little Rag!

"OW! Oh crumbs! I'm about whacked!"
"Same here! I'm fairly bunged up with rotten, beastly sand!" groaned Fatty Wynn pathetically.
"Those awful cads—"
"Those rotters!" panted Kerr.
"Those beastly worms!" added Figgins.

Figgins & Co., of the New House at St. Jim's, waxed eloquent in their remarks concerning Tom Merry & Co., their rivals from the School House.

And as they waxed eloquent they doubled themselves up, coughed and choked, and twisted themselves into all sorts of shapes and positions, in their frantic efforts to get rid of the sand.

But it took some getting rid of. It was in their eyes and up their noses and in their throats, and their clothes were full of it.

By vigorous shaking, however, and by various acrobatic contortions, they managed to get rid of a great deal of it. And then, replacing their blazers and hats, they blinked at each other wrathfully.

Figgins & Co. had certainly "put it across" their rivals, to begin with, but they had not anticipated such a strategic and encircling movement on the enemy's part. Their brief victory had been turned to a ghastly defeat.

"Well, what a frost!" groaned Kerr dismally. "We might have known those School House blighters would not take it lying down, Figgy. They've put it across us fairly!"

"That's right enough," said Figgins gloomily. "No good grouching about it, though. We'll get our own back, never fear, Kerr!"

"They're too many for us, Figgy!" said Fatty Wynn dolefully. "Better clear out and give them a wide berth. Besides, it's getting on for lunch-time."

Figgins glowered at his fat chum.
"Well—well, you worm!" he snorted. "Mean to say you want us to take it lying down, fathead?"

"No; but—"
"We're not taking it lying down, my pippin!" snorted Figgins, glaring about him as if in search of inspiration. "I don't care for those School House rotters, if they're a hundred strong. We'll beat 'em yet!"

"Ahem! Yes, but—"
"Oh, don't croak!" said Figgins wrathfully. "We'll show 'em who's cock House, even on holidays! Now, we've got to think of some wheeze—"

"Let's have lunch first, then, Figgy!"
"Oh, you—you—" Figgins spluttered, as he glared at Fatty Wynn. "You fat grub-guzzler!" he roared. "We're not putting off our revenge for thumping lunch or anything else, I tell you! We've got to find— My hat!"

Figgins suddenly broke off his tirade. His eyes had just fallen upon a white tent glimmering through the trees. It was obviously the tent of Tom Merry & Co. Figgins looked at it, his eyes gleaming, and then he looked out to sea to where the Silver Spray rocked at her moorings, the morning sunlight gleaming on her white paint and flashing on her brasswork.

"I've got it!" he said gleefully, starting to dance about, greatly to his chums' astonishment. "I've got an absolutely top-notch wheeze, chaps! Why not raid their camp, and then clear off with their dashed motor-boat and leave them marooned? How's that?"

Kerr and Wynn blinked at him.
"Figgy, you awful idiot—" began Fatty.
"Don't you see?" grinned Figgy. "It will be easy as falling off a bucking bronco. There's nobody on the boat, and if we can't handle that boat I'll eat my hat! We've been out in your uncle's motor-boat every day since we've been here, and we all can handle her well enough, Kerr."

"Yes, but—"
"Oh, don't start betting again!" snorted Figgins, in great exasperation. "Your uncle's boat's powerful enough, and we'll handle that tub of Glyn's as easily as those School House worms do, I bet—better, in fact!"

"Well, that's so. New House can always beat School House at anything, we admit that!" said Kerr. "But let's hear the idea, Figgy?"

"It's simple enough," grinned Figgins. "We'll take all the foodstuffs from their camp, and leave 'em just the tent. Then we'll clear off with the motor-boat for the rest of the day, and have a good trip round in it. The idea is to leave 'em marooned on the island without grub, or anything. That will make 'em sit up, I bet!"

"You only mean for this afternoon, of course?" gasped Kerr, his eyes beginning to glimmer.

"Of course, ass! They won't know that, though—they'll think we've gone off for longer, and they'll be in a blue funk. Anyway, they'll be without grub until we return to-night, and they will be raving by that time."

"Ha, ha, ha!"
Kerr and Wynn roared; the idea evidently appealed to them.

"My hat! We'll do it!" chuckled Kerr. "We take our boat, of course."

"Naturally! And we also take their dinghy, of course. We can easily tie 'em both behind the cruiser. We'll have to be jolly slippy, though!"

"Yes, rather!"
"Come on, then!"

Figgins looked back cautiously, and, having made quite sure that Tom Merry & Co. were out of sight, he started off at a run for the camp, his chums at his heels. Figgins had undoubtedly thought of a great wheeze this time. To clear

off with the big motor-boat and leave their rivals without grub for nearly a whole day would certainly be a great score. The thought of Tom Merry & Co. coming back from their ramble, hungry and tired, to find their camp ransacked and their boat gone, made Figgins & Co. chortle with anticipatory glee.

It was only a hundred yards to the white tent, and as they came up to it Figgins halted suddenly, his hand held up warningly.

"Hark!" he muttered. "I can hear something!"

"Phew! What a queer row! I've heard it before somewhere," said Kerr.

"It's somebody snoring," said Fatty Wynn. "My hat! I don't remember that Manners wasn't with those freaks? Perhaps—"

"Manners wouldn't snore like that!" sniffed Figgins. "It sounds like a pig grunting after a heavy meal. Hold on! I'll take a peep!"

On tiptoe George Figgins crept towards the big bell-tent. He peeped inside, and then a broad grin spread over his features, and he beckoned to his chums.

They joined him, and glanced over his shoulder into the tent.

"Trimble!" murmured Kerr. "What a scream!"

The three New House raiders looked in on Baggy Trimble with grins on their faces. Baggy Trimble, who had been left in charge of the camp, was sleeping the sleep of the unjust and overfed. He lay on a heap of blankets, with his arms behind his head and a fat smile on his features. His mouth was wide open, and from it proceeded the extraordinary noise that Figgins had likened unto the grunting of an overfed pig.

"Isn't he a beauty?" remarked Figgins chuckling. "My hat! Fancy those chaps being idiots enough to bring Trimble on a holiday! They must be potty!"

"What's to be done now?" asked the practical Kerr.

"We'll tie up Trimble first!" chuckled Figgins. "It doesn't matter if he does wake and yell. Those chaps are far enough away by this. Come on, let's get busy!"

And Figgins & Co. got busy on the instant.

The first task was to deal with Baggy Trimble, and that proved to be quite simple. There was a bucket of water handy, and they awakened the sleeping fat youth by tipping half the contents of the bucket over his fat face.

Baggy awoke with a wild howl, and as he jumped up Figgins & Co. grabbed him, and tied him to the tent-pole. Trimble was far too astounded on recognising the juniors even to think of struggling—until it was too late.

"All serene, Trimble!" grinned Figgins. "We're not going to harm you, old fat man!"

"Oh, you awful beasts!" gasped Baggy Trimble, still staring at the New House fellows as if they were ghosts. "What's this game?"

"A New House game," smiled Figgins. "No good yelling, Baggy; your pals are far away!"

"Lemme go!" howled Trimble, struggling furiously now. "Oh, you awful rotters! Help! Help! Rescue, School House! He— Groooooogh! Mum-mum-m-m!"

Trimble's yelling ended in a faint gurgle as Kerr whizzed a blanket round his head and the tent-pole. He tied it into place with a length of string.

"That's settled Trimble!" he remarked. "Those rotters may be far away, but we can't afford to risk it, Figgy."

"Buck up!" chuckled Figgins.

The New House raiders very soon did what they wanted to do. The foodstuffs were very soon gathered into a pile—there being very little ashore—and Figgins tied the lot into a bundle inside a blanket. There was little else in the camp excepting ground-sheets and some clothes hanging out to dry on bushes close by. They were the clothes that had been drenched during the storm the night before, and which had been brought ashore.

Figgins chuckled as he looked at the rumpled trousers and other articles of attire.

"Looks as if they've had a giddy wetting," he remarked. "Well, we'll leave 'em their clobber—they can't eat that, anyway."

"Now we'll quit!"

Bidding an affectionate farewell to Baggy Trimble, whose wails of woe were still coming feebly from behind the blanket, Figgins & Co. departed with their burdens, and started for the boat.

They were just emerging from the trees when Figgins gave a warning hiss, and pulled his chums back into the shelter of the foliage.

Along the beach, towards the dinghy drawn up on the golden beach, a figure was sauntering, brushing sand from his clothes as he came along.

It was Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, and the three New House juniors gave groans of disgust.

"Oh, Gussy!" murmured Figgins. "Well, what awful luck! He's making for the boat, for a pension!"

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 968.

"I bet I can guess what for!" grinned Kerr. "He's going to change his giddy clobber."

"That's it!" said Figgins, with a grunt. "Silly duffer! That about mucks up our game, chaps!"

"Why should it?" said Kerr. "We can either wait until Gussy goes back, or else we can kidnap Gussy."

"My hat!"

"Why not?" grinned Kerr. "Why not kidnap Gussy and make him work for us on the trip? It'll be no end of a score, and a lark!"

"Good man!" said Figgins, a broad grin spreading over his rugged features. "What a ripping wheeze, Kerr! We'll do it! We'll wait until he gets aboard—he's bound to go below to change—and then we'll run over and do the trick!"

"Ripping!"

And having agreed upon that Figgins & Co. waited.

CHAPTER 10.

Piracy!

ARTHUR AUGUSTUS D'ARCY did not hurry—there was no need to hurry. As Figgins & Co. had so knowingly guessed, Arthur Augustus was, indeed, bound for the Silver Spray with the sole purpose in view of changing his "clobber."

Arthur Augustus took it easy. He was very concerned indeed about the state of his clothes, and he was feeling very hot and bothered, and annoyed with Figgins & Co. His chums had been annoyed also, but they had not felt it at all necessary to change their clothes. Only Arthur Augustus did. Even on that lonely little island it was necessary, in Gussy's view, to be respectably dressed on all occasions.

Luckily, the dinghy was not drawn up high on the sands, though, even so, it was no easy matter for one fellow to launch it. The New House juniors felt like rushing to the aid of Arthur Augustus as they watched him struggling to launch it.

But they resisted the temptation, and after a mighty struggle, Arthur Augustus succeeded in getting the boat afloat, and jumping in breathlessly he pulled out to the rocking motor-cruiser.

Little dreaming how closely his actions were being watched, Arthur Augustus climbed aboard the Silver Spray and tied up the dinghy. Then he went below for his clothes. And as he vanished from sight Figgins & Co. left their hiding place and raced away for their own boat further along the beach.

Arthur Augustus had just changed into a fresh suit of clothes when he heard the splash of oars. He looked over the side and fairly jumped as he saw the boat containing Figgins & Co. approaching the Silver Spray.

"Bai Jove!" murmured Arthur Augustus. "I wondah what those wottahs are aftah?"

Arthur Augustus watched the boat's approach in growing alarm. The grins on the features of Figgins & Co. were rather disturbing to begin with. Arthur Augustus was a very trusting and innocent youth as a rule. But long experience with the New House jokers had taught him caution.

He eyed the New House fellows with growing suspicion, and then he picked up a deck-mop and laid it close to hand. After which, sighting a bucket of water a few yards away, he brought that to the side and waited. Being a scout, Arthur Augustus believed in being prepared for any emergency.

He felt prepared now, and he hailed Figgins & Co. as they drew closer.

"Hold on, Figgins!" he called grimly. "What are you aftah, you New House wottahs?"

"Hallo! Cheerio, Gussy!" said Figgins cheerily. "Just making a social call, old chap!"

Arthur Augustus lifted the bucket-full of water up on to the rail and balanced it there.

"I do not believe you are makin' a social call at all, Figgy," he said. "You are up to mischief, bai Jove!"

"Oh, Gussy!"

"Pway wefwain fwom appwoachin' anothonah yard, Figgy," said Arthur Augustus grimly, "or I shall feel obliged to empty this bucket of watah ovah your nappahs!"

"Oh, crikey!" murmured Kerr. "Look out, Figgy!"

But Figgins had already pulled alongside, and as the boat touched, he stood up, and reached up for a grip swiftly.

"Rush the dummy!" he hissed. "He won't chuck it!"

And Figgins sprang on the gunwale with the intention of climbing aboard. But, alas, for his faith in the innocence of Gussy.

Swoosh!

"Oh my—Groooooogh!"

Crash!

"Yaroooooogh!"

Arthur Augustus had kept his word to the letter. The

shining stream from the bucket took the trusting Figgins full in the face, sending him backwards on top of Fatty Wynn, and both juniors went into the bottom of the boat, with a crash and two wild howls of wrath and pain.

"I warned you, you know!" said Arthur Augustus, grinning down at the struggling New House juniors. "I trust for your own sakes, deah boys, that you will not attempt to board again, or I shall feel obliged to bring this deck-mop into play."

And dropping the empty bucket, Arthur Augustus raised the deck-mop—after thoughtfully dipping the business end in the little water that had been left in the bucket.

Then he waited for the struggling, yelling figures to sort themselves out. They did presently, gasping and panting.

"Ow! Oh crumbs!" panted Figgins, spluttering with wrath and dismay. "I'm drenched through to the skin!"

"And I'm as bad!" snorted Fatty Wynn, glowering up at the smiling Arthur Augustus. "Go for him, chaps—fetch the dummy into the rotten sea."

"We'll jolly soon do that!" roared Figgins, and he made a frantic jump to board the Silver Spray.

Thump!
"Yaroooooooh!"

It was the end of the mop, and it biffed Figgins full in the face, and he went crashing on top of Wynn again. This time Fatty Wynn crashed against Kerr, and the next moment all three were struggling together in the bottom of the boat.

"Go it, deah boys!" called Arthur Augustus encouragingly. "I can keep this up all day, bai Jove!"

"Can you?" howled Figgins. "We'll jolly soon see about that, you rotter! Great Scott! Are we going to let that tailor's dummy lick-us, chaps?"

"Rather not!"

"Up and at him!" roared Figgins, and he made another jump upwards, and this time his usually wrathful chums followed.

Thump, thump, thump!

Arthur Augustus was armed, and he was high up and had all the advantages of his position. And he made good use of them. The terrible mop fairly rained down on top of the boarders.

The first blow sent Figgins staggering, and the next caught Fatty Wynn full in the chest. He bumped against Kerr, and as Kerr happened to be standing on one of the seats he over-balanced.

Splash!

It was done in a moment. With a wild howl, Francis Kerr went over the side of the boat, and the blue water closed over his wrathful head.

But Figgins and Fatty Wynn scarcely realised what had happened—indeed, the gallant Arthur Augustus gave them no chance to realise anything. He knew now that Figgins & Co. were up to mischief, and he was fairly on his mettle.

The terrible mop swept round again, and this time Figgins got it full in the neck, literally, and he was wiped overboard, as it were.

Splash!

Figgins had joined his chum Kerr in the blue sea.

Again the mop swept round—aimed this time at Fatty Wynn. But at the critical moment Figgins appeared above the surface and clutched at the gunwale of their boat.

The boat rocked violently, and Fatty Wynn swayed and sat down with a hearty thump—just missing the swinging mop.

"Come on, bai Jove!" roared the triumphant Arthur Augustus.

At that moment Arthur Augustus thought of what he should have thought of before—the necessity of getting help on the scene. He had won the first round, but he knew that Figgins & Co. would not be at all likely to take that as a knock-out.

He jumped swiftly to the Klaxon horn, and the next moment its shrill, harsh note was echoing and re-echoing over sea and land.

"Oh, my hat!" panted Figgins, who had just clambered over into his boat. "That's done it! Quick, chaps!"

"Great pip! Yes!"

Kerr had already climbed aboard, and heedless of their drenched clothes, the New House trio jumped up to renew the attack. Arthur Augustus gave one last brazen call on the Klaxon, and then he jumped to the side again, grasping his faithful mop.

He was only just in time, and Figgins was just in time to take a hefty smack from the mop in his chest. Then the mop fairly rattled around the heads of the invaders, or, rather, boarders.

Thump, thump, thump!

Figgins, Kerr, and Wynn roared as Arthur Augustus wielded the mop vigorously, every single blow telling. But Figgins & Co. were reckless now, and they swarmed up, heedless of the blows and digs.

"Rush him!" bellowed Figgy. "Try to— Got it!"

Figgins had certainly got it. His grasp closed on the whizzing mop, and after a brief struggle he wrenched it out of the gallant hands of Arthur Augustus.

The next instant Figgins & Co. were aboard the Silver Spray, and Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was on his back with the New House juniors swarming on him.

"Overboard with the rotter!" gasped Figgins. "My hat! Those other worms will be here in a few ticks. We'll have to get rid of Gussy, after all."

"Yes, rather!"

"Bai Jove! Don't you— Bai Jove! Leggo!" roared Arthur Augustus.

In the grasp of the irate three Arthur Augustus was raised on high, and then he was sent flying over the rail with a wild howl.

Splash!

Arthur Augustus plunged under the blue water and vanished from sight. Figgins & Co. did not even trouble to look after him. They knew he could swim like a fish. They worked furiously getting the anchor up, and at last it was done.

"Smart's the word!" called Figgins briskly. "We're not drawing back now!"

"Rather not!"

Figgins took one swift glance along the beach. In the distance he glimpsed several figures running towards them, and he chuckled.

"They're coming, chaps!" he said. "But they haven't a boat, and by the time they've swum here we'll be off, with a bit of luck."

As he spoke Figgins jumped to the engines, and next moment he was busy at work, heedless of anything but the job in hand. Fatty Wynn went to the wheel, and, grabbing a mop, Kerr stood at the side ready to repel boarders, if occasion arose.

And it very soon did arise.

Tom Merry & Co. had already sighted the New House raiders on board the Silver Spray, and they came racing pell-mell along the beach, yelling wrathfully.

But they pulled up with howls of fury when they discovered that the dinghy had gone from the beach.

At that moment Arthur Augustus managed to clamber into the New House juniors' boat, and he turned and shouted to his chums ashore.

"Wescue, deah boys! Wescue! The wottahs are goin' to take our boat, bai Jove!"

"Great Scott!"

"Quick!" roared Gussy. And he started to climb aboard the Silver Spray, heedless of Kerr's threatening weapon.

The sight was quite enough for Tom Merry & Co. They did not consider clothes or anything else just then; indeed their clothes were scarcely worth considering very much, as they had already suffered sorely in more ways than one. Moreover, they could see that the Silver Spray was already beginning to drift.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy's gallant charge set them the example, and they kicked off shoes and tore off blazers, and then they plunged in to the rescue.

"Back up!" yelled Kerr excitedly. "Here they come! And here you go, Gussy!"

This last was addressed to Arthur Augustus, and it was accompanied with a vigorous dig of the mop. The wet, ragged end took Arthur Augustus full in the face, and with a wild howl he toppled backwards.

Splash!

Luckily he just missed the boat in his fall, and his second plunge into the sea did him no harm. Then Tom Merry, with Blake, Glyn, Herries, and Lowther in a bunch behind came forging up.

At that very moment the engine burst into a roar, and as the boat throbbed from stem to stern Kerr gave a yell.

"Leave 'em to me, chaps! Look to the wheel, Fatty!"

"Yes, rather!"

Kerr leaned over the rail, the mop in his hand. Tom Merry grasped the boat, and fairly hurled himself into it. Then he jumped to board the Silver Spray.

The mop took him in the chest, and he went backwards with a crash into the small boat again. Kerr chuckled, and jumped clean over the rail into the boat. He grasped Tom by the leg and gave a vigorous heave to it, and as Tom Merry was already half over the gunwale, the heave finished him.

Splash!

Into the sea went Tom Merry, but by this time Blake and Herries had reached the boat, and as they swarmed in Kerr met them vigorously.

Thump, thump, thump!

The mop thumped and prodded unmercifully, and with a howl Blake went overboard almost as soon as he boarded. And just then Figgins' voice was heard.

"All clear there, Kerr?"

"Go ahead!" bawled Kerr.

The propeller thrashed the water, and the Silver Spray began to move. Tom Merry made a desperate clutch at the gunwale of the dinghy, but that was also moving now, and he just missed it.

But they were not clear yet. Herries made a wild rush at Kerr, while Lowther was climbing desperately into the dinghy.

Kerr was ready, however. The mop sent Herries staggering back against the stern of the boat, and, leaving the engine, Figgins reached the rail, and jumped down into the dinghy to deal with Lowther.

Just then Kerr followed up his advantage, and as Herries lay half-winded, he grasped him and rolled him overboard. Then he jumped into the dinghy to aid Figgins.

By this time the Silver Spray was moving in a wide circle, with Fatty Wynn at the wheel. Behind them the water was dotted with swimming figures.

"Over with him!" chuckled Figgins. "Here's where we score! New House for ever! Over you go, funny man!"

For a brief moment or two Lowther fought furiously, but against the two he stood no chance whatever, and over he went, splashing into the curling wake of the dinghy, which was now moving behind the Silver Spray.

Figgins and Kerr waited to make sure he was safe, and then they swarmed aboard the motor-cruiser, yelling with laughter.

"New House wins!" roared Figgins. "Hear us smile!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The New House fellows did smile—loudly. And in the water behind them the hapless and marooned Tom Merry & Co. fairly shrieked with wrath and dismay.

With Fatty Wynn at the wheel, and Figgins at the engine, and Kerr seeing to the ropes of the dinghy and small sailing-boat, both now rocking and dancing in the wake, the Silver Spray went round in a wide sweep, and then, gathering speed, she forged away. And in the water behind, with feelings too deep and dismal for words, Tom Merry & Co. watched them go, and shook their fists after them in helpless rage. New House certainly had scored, so far.

CHAPTER 11.

Alarm!

"Oh dear!"

"Oh, my hat!"

"Dished, diddled, and done brown!"

"Oh, the rotten pirates!"

Thus Tom Merry & Co. as they congregated on the beach after swimming ashore—there being nothing else to do but swim ashore.

The Silver Spray had gone—shouting, pleading, threatening had all been of no avail. Figgins & Co. had gone, waving their hands cheerfully in mock farewell. The Silver Spray was now passing fast from their vision like a dream.

Figgins & Co. had undoubtedly scored!

As they stood in a dripping, dismal crowd on the beach Tom Merry & Co. had to admit that. It was not a pleasant thing to admit by any means.

"Well, it can't be helped," said Tom Merry at last, when they had exhausted their remarks for the time being in regard to what they thought about Figgins & Co. "I don't think even Figgy will dare to keep the boat for long. He'll be coming back with it before dark. After all, it'll not make any difference as we didn't intend to leave here to-day. We've got grub and stuff at the camp, so actually we've lost nothing by it."

"But the boat!" groaned Glyn, who was looking very anxious. "If they can't handle her—"

"They can—that's pretty clear!" said Tom. "Figgy's not the sort to tackle a job like that unless he felt sure he could see it safely through. I'm not worrying about that, Glyn. It's the idea of having been done by those New House worms!"

"That's just it!"

"Yaas, wathah! They'll cwow no end about this when term starts at St. Jim's!"

"Oh, my hat!"

It was a most dismal thought. Their present position did not worry Tom Merry & Co. anything like so much as the thought of the New House having scored over them.

"Well, the sooner we get our wet togs changed the better!" snorted Herries, rubbing his head, which had been in violent contact with the terrible mop. "Thank goodness, we left those other togs ashore to dry!"

"Phew! Yes, rather!"

It was the only cheering thought about the affair—in addition to the thought that there was plenty of foodstuffs at the camp. As yet no thought had entered the minds of Tom Merry & Co. that Figgins & Co. had visited their camp.

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The thought was very soon forced unpleasantly upon them, however.

In a grumpy, gloomy crowd the juniors gave a last look at the motor-boat, now fast disappearing in the summer haze, and then they started off for the camp.

As they neared the tent Lowther suddenly whistled in great surprise.

"Phew! What the thump is the matter with the tent, you fellows?" he said. "Look at it!"

"My hat!"

"Bai Jove!"

The big bell-tent was certainly behaving in a curious manner. It was rocking and swaying about as if caught in a violent whirlwind.

"Bai Jove!" ejaculated Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "That is vewy stwange, deah boys!"

It certainly was strange, and the juniors started for the tent at a run, greatly wondering. Tom Merry reached the tent door first, and as he gazed inside he gave a gasp.

"Great Scott! It—it must be Trimble! He's tied to the giddy tent-pole!"

"Then those awful rotters must have been here, too!" yelled Blake.

It wasn't long before Blake's statement was proved to be only too true. As they tore the blanket from Trimble that fat junior gave a choking gurgle.

"Groogh! Cut me loose for goodness' sake, you fellows!" he spluttered furiously. "Oh dear! I've had an awful time! Grooooooh! Those rotten beasts—"

"Was it Figgins?" snapped Tom Merry.

"Of course it was!" gurgled Trimble, almost collapsing, as Blake cut him free. "The beasts tied me to that pole, and then they tied that beastly blanket round my head. They woke me up by chucking water over me!"

"My hat! That explains it, then!" said Lowther, staring hard at the fat youth. "I scarcely recognised you, Baggy. I couldn't understand why you looked so different. It's the water that's done it, of course."

"Yah! It's nothing to joke about!" snorted Trimble, glaring at the chuckling juniors. "What are we going to do about dinner and tea and supper—eh?"

"Great pip! Why, they haven't—"

"Yes, they jolly well have!" almost wept Trimble. "I heard them say they'd leave us no grub, and I heard them taking it all away. They wrapped it all up in a blanket and rushed off with it!"

"Oh, my only hat!"

"Oh, bai Jove!"

The juniors gazed at each other, with sudden alarm in their faces. To be marooned on an island with nothing to eat for the biggest part of the day was no joke; it was, in fact, a tragedy, in their view. And when Trimble learned that Figgins & Co. had indeed gone he almost fainted with utter dismay.

But the juniors had to make the best of it—all realised that.

"We may as well get changed," said Tom Merry. "And then we'll go and do that bit of exploring. No good hanging round grousing and getting hungrier all the time."

"What's happened to old Manners all this time?" asked Lowther, with a sudden start.

"By Jingo!"

Tom Merry looked quite startled. Certainly it was rather strange that they had seen nothing of Manners for so long—it was more than strange.

"We'd better have a hunt round for him, chaps," said Tom Merry, in alarm. "Dash it all, the island's only tiny, and he can't have gone far. He should have been—"

"The tower!" breathed Lowther, his face paling a trifle.

"Suppose the awful idiot did go there, after all?"

Tom Merry nodded without speaking. In his own mind he felt certain something had happened to the enthusiastic photographer. More than once Manners' enthusiasm had led him into dangerous situations. Tom remembered, with a thrill of alarm, how Manners had tried to persuade them to visit the tower just after breakfast.

All agreed that it looked ominous, and they changed swiftly into their clothes. Luckily, these were dry; the hot sun had very soon dried them, though trousers and jackets were considerably the worse for the wetting. Arthur Augustus almost wept as he gazed at the rumples and creases in his trousers.

But there was no time for Arthur Augustus to lament, and very soon the juniors were ready and following Tom from the camp.

Tom had already climbed to the top of a tree, from which point of vantage he had a good view of the whole of the little island. But nowhere did he see a sign of the missing photographer.

So now Tom did not hesitate. He led the way straight for the ancient tower, all the juniors looking grave and grim. If anything had happened to Manners—

The ruins were silent and still as ever, and no sign of life was to be seen about the place. The juniors scouted round



Swoosh! Right down on the unsuspecting heads of Tom Merry & Co. went the avalanche of wet sand, and from below came a chorus of startled howls. Figgins, Kerr and Wynn glanced over the little cliff and chuckled as they saw the whirling arms and legs. "That's good enough!" murmured Figgins. "Here's where we move, chaps!" (See chapter 6.)

the eerie structure, and it was just as they were completing the circle that Blake suddenly jumped forward and dragged something from the bushes.

It was a camera—Manners' camera, without a doubt!

The sight sent the blood ebbing from Tom Merry's face. Here was Manners' camera! But where was Manners? Only a tragic happening could make Manners lose sight of his precious camera.

"Something's happened to old Manners!" mumbled Tom, his voice husky.

"No doubt about that!" breathed Blake. "What's to be done?"

Tom Merry stared at the ivy-clad tower, his face pale, but determined. He started as he caught sight—or fancied he caught sight—of a face at one of the windows high up in the tower. It was the face of that queer old hermit—if hermit he was—Tom felt sure.

"I believe we're being watched, chaps!" he breathed. "Don't look—don't look up at the tower. I'm sure I spotted that old man at one of the windows. Look here! The door's open. Are you fellows game to rush the place?"

"Yes; but why—" began Blake.

"Because I believe Manners is inside there!" said Tom grimly. "It looks to me as if he's been attacked and dropped his camera here."

"Phew! It does look like that! What if that loony merchant goes for us with that bread-knife of his?" said Lowther. "Better go armed with sticks or something."

"Good egg!"

"You'll back me up, then?" asked Tom

"Yes, rather!"

It was a chorus, and, careless whether they were watched or not now, the juniors cut sticks from bushes and trees. Then Tom gave the word, and they made a rush for the tower. Tom Merry reached it first, but even as he entered the gloomy place, he staggered back with a gasping cry.

Before him, standing on the stone-flagged floor, was the strange figure of the old man. He was in the rather rusty black suit they had first seen him in, and his head was bare, showing his wild hair.

There was a curious, mocking look on his wild face, and his eyes glowed as he fixed his gaze on the juniors. He eyed them craftily, calculatingly.

"Well?" he demanded, in a cracked, harsh voice. "What seek you here? Are my past warnings useless, then?"

Tom Merry licked his suddenly dry lips. Somehow the look in the old man's eyes made him shiver.

"We're looking for our chum," he replied, striving to control his trembling voice in vain. "He came here. He must be here. We found his camera outside."

The old man raised a clenched fist.

"You lie!" he shrieked, with sudden passion. "You have come, like the others, to rob me of my treasure! Thieves you are! Norman robbers! But an English king knows how to guard his treasures from foreign robbers!"

The juniors jumped, and, despite themselves, they stepped back a pace. To be called Norman robbers was astounding and terrifying. It brought back their fears as to the old man's sanity with unpleasant swiftness.

Tom Merry set his teeth. It took all his courage, all his nerve to stand instead of turning tail and bolting for his life, as he and all of them felt like doing.

"We have not come to rob you at all, and we know nothing of any treasure," he said, steeling his voice to steadiness. "Our chum is missing, and we mean to find him before we leave here!"

"All lies—lies!" was the savage answer. "Last night you came—"

"We came to shelter from the rain—our tent had been blown away by the gale," answered Tom. "We have no desire—"

"Lies—lies!" shrieked the old man, raising his thin hand again. "You have come—" He broke off suddenly, as if he had just recollected something, and his face became cunning. "So you seek your chum?" he added, in a lower tone.

"Yes. We are sure he is here."

"And you are right, lads," said the old man, with a

"Your chum is in the next chamber—he is hurt. I f

him lying on the ground outside, where he had fallen from the ivy. "Go if you wish to see him!"

He pointed a slender forefinger to the arched doorway leading through the flat wall of the half-circular chamber. Tom Merry looked at his chums warningly. He suspected a trap.

But, even as he looked there came a sound from the next room—a sound like a low groan. It made Tom's heart beat fast, and he hesitated no longer.

He jumped to the doorway and peered inside.

Manners was there. He lay on the stone floor, with his back to the wall. His hands were tied behind him, and a gag was over his mouth.

The sight made Tom forget caution—everything. He gave a startled cry.

"Manners, old man!"

The next moment he was across the chamber and at his chum's side, slashing at the bonds that held him. He tore the gag from Manners' mouth, and placed a hand behind his chum.

"All serene!" gasped Manners, with a shudder. "Where—where is that— Oh, good!"

Manners broke off with a thankful exclamation, as Blake, followed instantly by the rest of his chums, hurried into the bare, tiny apartment. They had been unable to resist following Tom after hearing his glad cry.

"Back, chaps!" cried Tom, in sudden alarm. "Watch that—"

Tom's cry of warning came too late. His sudden suspicion of a trap was only too well founded.

For scarcely had the last junior crowded in when the wild figure of the old man appeared in the doorway, and his face was fiendish with gloating triumph.

He stood in the arched doorway, with hands pressed in a curious manner on either side of the doorway, and his lean, parchment-like face went red with the strain of his effort.

"Quick!" yelled Tom, springing up.

He expected something to happen, and it did happen—far too quickly for the startled juniors.

There came a strange grinding, grating sound, and then the stone floor tilted steeply and suddenly, sending the alarmed juniors sliding in a scrambling mass on top of one another, too startled even to cry out.

Then they dropped, dazed and terrified, into deep blackness, struggling and grasping vainly for support, while in their ears rang a screech of unearthly and horrible laughter.

CHAPTER 12.

A Terrible Position!

THAT screech of horrible laughter almost turned the juniors' blood cold in their veins, but it was stopped with startling suddenness as the floor above resumed its former position with the same grinding and grating, shutting out the sound.

Silence followed, deep and intense, save for the gasps and hard breathing of the alarmed juniors.

Luckily the fall had been of little account. The juniors had seemed to slide down in a jumbled heap, and save for scratches and bumps none were seriously hurt. Tom Merry's chief concern at the moment was for Manners.

"You all right, Harry?" he gasped, his voice husky with tense excitement.

"Yes; a bit faint, that's all," came Manners' voice in a whisper. "What on earth happened? The floor—"

"It's a secret trap, obviously," said Tom Merry, striving to make out his chums' faces in the deep blackness. "The floor works on a hidden iron pivot, I suppose, though it must be jolly cleverly balanced. Jove! We were fairly trapped! Rest of you chaps all right?"

There was a reassuring chorus of replies from the rest. The juniors were badly scared, but luckily all had escaped injury.

"We've got to get out of this," said Tom Merry grimly. "Anybody got any matches? Gussy, you had a box—"

"I've got them, deah boy!"

There was a fumbling in the darkness, and Tom Merry gave a deep breath of relief as a match scraped and flared up. It showed up the white faces of the juniors, but little else.

It went out presently, and Arthur Augustus handed the box over to Tom Merry. He got to his feet and struck another, holding the flame high above his head.

It burned steadily, showing that the air in that strange cellar was quite good. Evidently the vault was ventilated by a hidden pipe or shaft.

It also showed the ceiling, scarcely four or five feet above the juniors' heads, and now they saw a great rusty iron pivot running across it. Then the match went out, and Tom lit another, and started to examine the walls.

They were of solid stone. The room was obviously a dungeon—a far from pleasant discovery for the hapless

juniors. But Tom's heart leaped as the light showed, against the flat wall, the outlines of a great door, black with age, and iron-studded.

A closer examination revealed a square, iron-barred aperture high in the door, but it seemed to be blocked by a grating behind. Nothing could be seen through.

But it gave the juniors a gleam of hope. Obviously there was another room beyond—indeed, the shape of the dungeon suggested that at once. As in the case of the basement of the ancient tower above their heads, the two rooms formed a circle.

"Well, this is a fine go, and no mistake!" said Tom Merry, for once dispirited. "That old man is insane, without a shadow of doubt. That means—"

"Anything may happen to us," breathed Manners.

"How did you manage to get collared, Manners?" asked Herries in a whisper.

"I—I was a fool!" said Manners remorsefully. "I suppose it's through me you chaps are in this fix. I came to snap the tower, and that chap chased me and collared my camera. I went after it, and he chased me up the stairs of the tower to the top. I tried to escape down the ivy, and fell. I remembered nothing else until I found myself trussed up in one of the rooms. I've got a bump on my napper like a giddy hen's egg," he added ruefully.

And Manners gave his chums his story in detail. It did not cheer his chums up much. But they did not pass any remarks upon Manners' foolishness, though Manners had undoubtedly been foolish in venturing in the first place.

For hours the juniors sat there, discussing their position, and until nearly all the matches had gone they examined every inch of their prison, striving to find a way out.

But there seemed to be none, and the door resisted all efforts to budge it a fraction. There seemed to be no bolt or lock of any kind on it, and it was obviously secured from the other side—possibly by a bar in sockets.

They gave it up at last, and lay on the floor, their backs to the wall. Tom Merry—to cheer his chums up—started a discussion on cricket matters and football matters at St. Jim's, but the conversation soon languished. To discuss such matters for long was more than the juniors could do in the circumstances.

They were hungry and thirsty—very thirsty—and their hearts almost failed them as the thought came that possibly the madman—if madman he was—intended them to remain there—to die of starvation in that horrible black dungeon. It was a terrible thought, but try as they would, they could not banish it.

And then quite suddenly Tom Merry gave a muttered cry and jumped to his feet. On the wall, high up, had suddenly appeared a curious beam of light. As he stared at it Tom Merry grasped the fact with a queer thrill that it came from the grating in the door.

"Quiet!" he breathed.

Tom stepped swiftly to the door, and standing on tip-toe he peered through the slit. He could scarcely see anything at first, and then the light seemed to get brighter.

It was a strange scene his staring eyes now beheld. He was looking into a chamber the same size and shape exactly as the dungeon they were in. And at the moment it was occupied.

Down some stone steps, evidently from a square aperture that showed above in the stone ceiling, came the old man, a lighted lantern in his hand.

He placed the lantern on a box, and now Tom Merry could see a number of things that amazed him.

In one corner was a small camp-bed, on which were tumbled bedclothes. There was a little pile of boxes, obviously containing foodstuffs—or that had contained foodstuffs—and on the big box were the remains of a meal. In one corner were spades and various tools, and also several instruments Tom did not know the use of. There were some books also, and writing materials. And piled in a careless heap was a big bundle of white canvas, easily recognisable as a tent, while a long tentpole lay against the wall.

This last was surprising enough, but there was something else in that strange underground apartment—something that took the junior's breath away.

On another large packing-case was a heap of metal that glinted significantly in the lantern light.

There were metal vessels—flagons of various sizes and shapes, plates, vases, drinking-cups—all of ancient design and there were also ancient coins in little piled heaps.

Tom Merry did not need keen eyesight to see the kind of metal the objects were made of. He knew instinctively that they were of precious metal—gold!

On the packing-case also was a large, ancient helmet—the one Tom had seen on that strange ghostly Saxon warrior's head the night before. And across the case also lay the great two-handed sword.

As Tom Merry looked he saw the old man finger article after article, a strange gloating expression on his thin,

white features. Then the old man picked up the helmet and stuck it on his head at a grotesque angle.

In other circumstances Tom Merry would have laughed unrestrained at the curious figure; but he could not laugh now. His chums were at his elbow now, and he gave place to them, each of them taking a peep into the strange, weird apartment.

They were amazed and thunderstruck as he had been.

"What does it mean?" breathed Jack Blake. "That stuff's gold, for a pension!"

"It is!" whispered Tom Merry. "That old chap must have found it, and means to stick to it. It's treasure trove, though, and belongs to the Crown. By jingo! No wonder that villain is scared of trespassers!"

"He's mad, though!"

"I wonder," muttered Tom.

He was frankly puzzled—bewildered.

What was the meaning of the tent, and of all the rest of the stuff in the secret apartment? Tom had suspected a den of coiners—all sorts of things—to account for the mystery hanging over the tower. But though he now knew treasure trove lay at the bottom of it he was still mystified.

"Let's have another squint," breathed Lowther.

He peeped into the room again. The old man moved just then, and started up the steps, leaving the light behind on the case. His attention was, it struck Lowther, to close the stone trapdoor above his head. As he moved the queer, gold-banded helmet seemed to wobble on his head, and the result was really ludicrous.

It was far too funny for the fun-loving Monty Lowther.

Before he could stop himself a half-stifled splutter of laughter burst from him—a slip Lowther had cause to regret the next moment, though it did happen for the best.

The old man heard the stifled laugh.

He obviously had no idea he could be seen by his prisoners, for he gave a sudden violent start, half-turned round on the narrow steps, and then slipped.

He fell heavily sideways, struck the steps heavily, and rolled to the bottom. He lay there still and silent.

Lowther was horror-stricken.

Tremblingly he told his chums what had happened, and as he looked through the slit, Tom Merry's face went white.

The old fellow was stunned, if not worse—and they could not help him. They could only watch him, and hope that he would come round. And in turn the juniors watched whilst the lantern burned lower and lower.

CHAPTER 13.

Up to Figgins & Co.!

"HERE we are again! Splice the main-brace and drop the anchor, my hearties!"

Thus George Figgins, as the Silver Spray came gently to rest in the little cove of the island. The New House juniors were in fine spirits. They had had an enjoyable afternoon—having had lunch at Portlea, and a good long run in the "borrowed" motor-cruiser. And as they had brought the Silver Spray back safely, Figgins & Co. were feeling very pleased with themselves.

The juniors had left it later than they had intended doing, and already dusk was falling, whilst the last red glimmer of sunset was sinking over the tossing channel in the west like a great red ball of fire.

"Done it!" grinned Figgins, as he shut off the engine.

"Is she moored all right, men?"

"All serene, cap'n!"

"Good!" said Figgins, wiping his hands with a piece of cotton-waste. "Then the sooner we do a giddy moonlight, the better, chaps. They can't follow us, 'cos I've hidden every tin of giddy petrol, and I've drained the blessed tank dry. So we've done 'em there if they try it on. See any of them, Fatty?"

Fatty Wynn, who was scanning the shadowy beach, shook his head.

"Not a soul, Figgy," he remarked. "I expect they're hiding their diminished nappers until—Hallo, here's that fat rotter, Trimble! Great pip! What's the matter with him?"

"Starving, I expect," said Figgins, with a chuckle. "I really hope he hasn't eaten up the rest of 'em—turned cannibal, you know."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Baggy Trimble rolled down to the beach, panting and gasping, his face as white as chalk—even at that distance they could see it. He waved frantically to them, and even dashed down into the surf up to his fat knees.

"Help!" he roared. "Figgins—Wynn—Kerr! Help! Don't go for goodness' sake! Oh dear! Help!"

The New House juniors fairly blinked at him. They could see very clearly that Baggy Trimble was almost beside himself with terror.

"Something's up," said Kerr, his face growing a trifle serious. "That fat ass—"

"Spoofing!" grinned Figgins. "It's a little dodge—"

"I don't think so," said Kerr emphatically. "That fat ass is upset, my lads! Better go over and see what's up! If it does happen to be a trick we can easily shove off and clear long before they can get near us."

"Well, that's so. I'm with you," said Figgins.

Very quickly their own boat was pulled alongside, and the three New House jaspers, having chalked various farewell messages all over the motor-boat, jumped down into it, and pulled shorewards towards the dancing Baggy Trimble.

"Well, what's the excitement?" asked Figgins, as the boat touched shore. "No games, mind! What's wrong, fatty?"

"Ow!" gasped Trimble, panting for breath. "Oh, I've had an awful time, you fellows—terrible! I haven't had a mouthful of grub since breakfast. And, I say, something's happened—something rotten, I believe! Those chaps haven't come back yet, and they've been away hours and hours."

"Away—"

"Yes," babbled Trimble, shaking with excitement and terror. "They went to that beastly tower to look for Manners, and they never came back! Hours and hours ago! Something's happened to them."

Figgins & Co. looked at each other, with startled faces. They had good cause to remember the tower and the big stick that had been laid about them by its queer old guardian. Moreover, they had heard strange tales of queer happenings in Lonely Island of late from fisherfolk on the mainland—indeed, it was just for that reason that they had longed to explore the haunted tower.

"Better look into this, chaps," said Figgins, going

WISDOM ON THE SEASHORE!



A happy snapshot sent in by a GEM reader on holiday.

serious. "If those School House chaps are in trouble, then it's up to us as New House chaps to get 'em out."

"Yes, rather!"

"Come on, then! Look after the boat, Trimble!"

Figgins & Co. fairly raced away—they had not expected a funk like Trimble to follow; nor did he. That they were likely enough to get into danger themselves did not seem to trouble the redoubtable trio in the slightest. They made straight for the tower, and only when they were a few yards away from its shadowy, ivy-clad walls did they exercise caution. Then Figgins led the way, keeping a cautious eye open.

He found the outer door closed, but not fastened, and he boldly opened it and walked inside, his chums at his heels.

And as they entered they stopped dead just inside, their eyes fixed in startled amazement on a big square orifice in the flagged floor of the chamber.

It was clearly a secret entrance to somewhere below, and with eyes and ears alert Figgins stepped to the edge and peered downwards.

Below in that gloomy chamber the lantern burned low, casting strange, grotesque shadows on the bare stone walls. But there was quite enough light for Figgins & Co. to see that still form at the bottom of the steps, and with a cry Figgins stepped back. Then, after a moment's shaky hesitation, he descended the stone steps into the chamber.

Patty Wynn and Kerr, their faces white as Figgins' own, joined him as he stooped over the form on the flags.

"Unconscious!" breathed Figgins, in deep relief. "By James! This beats—"

Figgins was interrupted. He jumped and swung round in a flash as he heard the sharp knock on the door at his back.

"It's Tom Merry, Figgy—let us out, quick!"

"Great pip!"

In a flash Figgins & Co. understood, and the three examined the door swiftly, and soon discovered the bar across, and had it wrenched out of its sockets. Their hearts beat with deep relief as Tom Merry, followed by his chums, staggered out from their horrible prison, almost collapsing with fatigue and hunger.

In a very few moments the matter was explained to Figgins & Co., and those startled juniors glanced in wonder at the objects in the room.

But they gave little time or thought to those things then.

"I think we'd better tie him up before he does come round," said Tom Merry gravely. "It seems heartless, in a way, but it's the safest thing to be done."

His chums agreeing, the old man's hands and feet were tied gently and not too tightly. Having shown only too clearly that he was dangerous, they felt quite justified in placing him beyond the power of doing further harm. And they were undoubtedly wise in doing so.

"And now what about fetching help?" said Tom Merry. "Glyn, I think you'd better take three chaps and race like mad for Portlea. Get a doctor if you can, and, of course, the police."

"Right-ho!" said Glyn. "I'll take Gussy and Herries and Lowther, I think. Come on!"

Glyn was a fellow of action, and he was off in a flash, the chosen three racing at his heels. Figgins—regretting having emptied the tank now—had told them where to find the hidden petrol, and in a very few minutes the Silver Spray was forging at terrific speed across to the mainland.

In that strange underground apartment Tom Merry and the others did what they could for the unconscious man, striving in vain to bring the light of consciousness to his eyes. They lifted him on to the bed, and then they waited. Blake had found a tin of oil and replenished the lantern, which was now burning brightly enough.

It was a long wearying wait, but it ended at last. Footsteps and voices sounded overhead, and then Glyn came down the steps, and behind him was a uniformed inspector and a civilian—obviously a doctor. Behind him again were two constables—with Lowther, D'Arcy, and Herries.

The inspector scarcely showed any surprise. As a matter of fact Glyn had already told him all they knew.

He crossed swiftly to the still figure on the bed, and then he turned and nodded to the doctor.

"I was right, sir," he said, with some satisfaction. "It is Professor Wilton."

"Good heavens! So it is!" exclaimed the doctor, his startled eyes falling on the old man's face. "This—this is amazing, inspector!"

"It's pretty clear, I fancy, sir," said the inspector grimly, after a glance at the gold treasure. "I suppose he found that stuff, and it turned his head. Seems to me from what these youngsters tell me—"

"I do not think so, inspector," said the doctor, after a swift examination of his patient. "There is a wound on the head here, in addition to this recent one—a wound possibly caused by just such another fall as this, and one which might easily cause insanity. Doubtless it occurred when the professor made his amazing discovery of this place and the treasure it has held all these centuries. It seems clear, at all events, that he became possessed of the idea that he was an ancient Saxon king, and that the treasure was his, and that all strangers wished to rob him of it."

"And to think," said the inspector grimly, "that I and my men have searched every inch of Lonely Island more than once since he was reported missing. No wonder we found nothing when he and his outfit has been hidden here. And you think—"

"I feel certain that my theory is the correct one," said

the doctor. "But the immediate task is to get the professor to the mainland, inspector. I suggest that your men carry him to the motor-boat, and if these boys will be good enough to take us over, we'll soon have him in safe hands."

"We'll do that gladly, sir," said Glyn eagerly.

And they did. It was no time to ask questions, and though the bewildered juniors were almost bursting to know more they refrained from asking any. They lent a willing hand, and at last the injured man was safe aboard the motor-boat, and, after locking up the tower and its treasure safely, and leaving a constable in charge, the party started for the mainland in the Silver Spray.

Figgins & Co. remained at Portlea, but Tom Merry & Co. returned in the Silver Spray to Lonely Island, and that night they slept ashore in camp under far different conditions than the night before.

But the next morning Figgins & Co. turned up bright and early, and it was then Tom Merry & Co. learned the full story. Some of the juniors had already guessed from the remarks of the doctor and inspector, but the truth amazed them.

It transpired that the old man was Professor Wilton, a noted archaeologist and antiquarian, whose home was in the locality of Portlea. Nearly a month before the professor, who had always cherished a belief that an ancient Saxon treasure existed on the island, had made one of his frequent visits to the island, taking with him supplies of food and other necessities, and intending to stay there to carry out investigations.

It was not the first time he had done it by any means. In his earlier days he had been an explorer, and he was used to roughing it on his own, and used to camping out alone.

But this time his friends and relatives had become alarmed at not having had news of him for a fortnight, and though they knew he was well supplied with food-stuffs they had visited the island to see for themselves if all was well.

All was obviously not well. For neither sign nor trace of the old professor was to be found on the island. He had completely vanished, as had his boat, his tent, and all belonging to him. Nor had the police been able to find any trace of him since he had landed on the island.

But all was clear now. The mystery was solved—thanks to Tom Merry & Co. and Figgins & Co.

The professor had first discovered the dungeon with the movable floor, and this had led to the discovery of the second secret room—and it was here he had discovered the treasure—here, also, on these same steps he had met with the injury to his head that had caused insanity.

What followed was easy to imagine. Becoming imbued with the strange idea that he was a Saxon king, and that the treasure was his, and dreading "Norman robbers," he had, with insane cunning and craft, sunk his boat and hidden his tent and all traces of himself and his work in that room underground which he had made his home.

How long matters would have gone on so if Tom Merry & Co. had not appeared will never be known; but certainly their intervention had a happy sequel. For a slight operation of the skull relieved the pressure, with the result that the professor's sanity was completely restored—news that Tom Merry learned afterwards with no little joy and satisfaction.

Tom Merry & Co. had the opportunity that morning of thoroughly examining the treasure before the inspector and his men took full charge of it—and when they saw it again it was in the National Museum for all to see, having been claimed, of course, by the Crown as treasure trove. Baggy Trimble almost went into hysterics when he heard about it. He had entertained the hope that some of the treasure trove would come his way—though how and why he entertained such an idea was quite beyond the juniors.

That day Tom Merry & Co. parted from Figgins & Co.—and they parted on the very best of terms, Figgins & Co. to return to Portlea, and Tom Merry & Co. to continue their cheery voyaging along the blue sunlit Channel. It had been a jolly meeting—and an exciting meeting—and though Figgins & Co. were not likely to "rub it in" as to how they had rescued their rivals of the School House, they were pretty certain to do so in regard to how they had left Tom Merry & Co. marooned—a fact that was not at all pleasing to the motor-boat boys, although it had been the cause of their solving the secret of Lonely Island.

THE END.

(There's another topping yarn in this splendid series, entitled: "THE SPOOFER OF THE SILVER SPRAY!" by Martin Clifford. Look out for it in next week's GEM, chums!)

THIS WEEK'S BEST READING—

No. 35. "THE BOY FROM CHINA!" By Frank Richards.

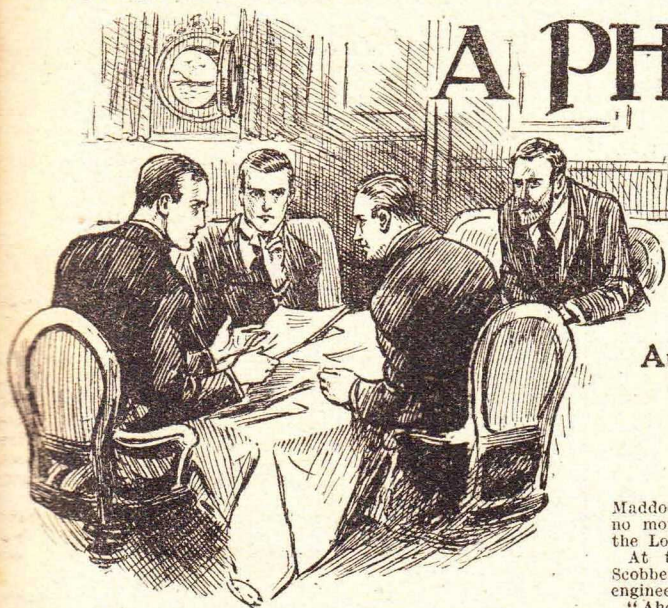
An amusing yarn of Harry Wharton & Co. at Greyfriars.

No. 36. "THE SHADOW OF SHAME!" By Owen Conquest.

A ripping yarn of Jimmy Silver & Co. at Rookwood.

GET THESE TWO NEW VOLUMES OF "THE SCHOOLBOYS' OWN LIBRARY" TO-DAY!

TO THE RESCUE! The continued absence of Val and Dave from the Lord of the Deep can only mean one thing—foul play! Somehow or another they have fallen into the hands of their German foes. Without loss of time, therefore, Prince Ching Lung and Co. hit the trail!



A PHANTOM THRONE

By Sidney Drew

An Amazing Story of Breathless Adventure and International Intrigue.

What Hal Honour found under the sea!

"NOT been back, souse me?" asked Ben Maddock incredulously. "It's Midshipman Hilton and Mr. Ap Rees, I mean. Not been back all night, you say? They had booked rooms here, hadn't they?"

"They did," answered the clerk. "But they never took the keys, and they haven't used the rooms, Mr. Maddock. That's all I know about it. Young fellows like that do that sort of thing!"

Prout and Barry O'Rooney, who were replenishing their tobacco-pouches at a neighbouring shop, heard the bo'sun's news without much alarm, but with some surprise.

"Bedad, that's queer!" said Barry O'Rooney. "Some game of their own, Oi reckon, and none of our business! Oi know Master Val knows a lot of people in Porthampton, naval officers and that, so perhaps they met friends and wint home wid them or aboard wan of the ships. Well, boys, we'll trek down and see if ould Hal Honour has made a starrt yit!"

At the wharf the nightwatchman that Val and Dave had met was off duty, but he had out the launch on a buoy and left a message which the boatman who rowed them duly delivered.

"It's two of your young swells," he said. "They took a boat last night to go to the wreck-buoy and didn't bring her back, but at least while my mate was here, and she ain't here now!"

"What?" asked Prout and Maddock. "Not back yet?"

"I don't suppose it matters much, only the bill's running up and you might remind 'em of it if you see 'em, mates," said the boatman.

"There was a nasty tide running, and most likely they found it easier to run over to the Old Steps or one of them slipways and leave her there. She's a green boat, number forty-three, and the old man's name on her, and she's totting up eightpence an hour all the time she's out, so you might tow her back and save money!"

"Bedad, don't fidget about the money, you ould weevil," said Barry O'Rooney, "for there's nothing surer than you get that! Hallo! Oi see Hal has got his business rag flying to show he's got busy!"

A couple of lighters were moored round the site of the wreck, and flags were flying to warn pilots that diving operations were in progress and to keep clear. Honour himself had just come up and was sitting on a camp-stool enjoying a pipe. Evidently he was quite satisfied with what he had found below, for he greeted the three mariners with a wave of his hand and a cheerful nod as O'Rooney guided the launch alongside.

"How's she looking, souse me, Hal, easy or bad?" The engineer flicked his left thumb upwards to signify that the position of the Lord of the Deep was satisfactory.

And the hole those murdering blatherskites punched in her gurdy ribs, phwat about that, chatterbox?"

A nod from the man of silence informed Barry O'Rooney that the hole in the yacht would not cause him to spend many sleepless nights. He struck his pipe sharply against the palm of his hand and pointed to the goggle-eyed diving helmet beside him and then to some soaked leather-bound volumes that had been placed in a sieve to drain.

"Here, Ben, give me a hand with Hal's gas-mask," said Barry O'Rooney. "Oi see he's managed to fish up the ship's books, and they'll be wanted, too, so you'd better take charge of them, Tommy, and run them through the mangle or something!"

When his helmet had been fixed, the engineer moved to the ladder, walked down it and disappeared, for Ferrers Lord had no use for air-tubes and pumps or life-lines, and the diver's movements were quite unrestricted.

Feeling no anxiety about the midshipman and his chum, Prout,

Maddock, and O'Rooney thought of going down; but as there were no more diving-suits available until they were brought up from the Lord of the Deep, this was impossible.

At that moment a dinghy came along containing Captain Scobber, with whiskers complete, and McSnort, his red-headed engineer. Scobber was doing the pulling.

"Ahoey!" growled the captain. "Messmates Prout, Maddock, and O'Rooney, I hails you! How goes it—what?"

"An' whaur's that oar o' mine? Does anybody ken?" grunted McSnort.

"Phwat oar do ye mane, McSnort?" asked Barry O'Rooney.

"It's the oar Ah lent to Mister Val Hilton last night, right here on this verra spot," said McSnort. "Ye couldna get the likes o' it for twenty-five shillings in guid siller, and Ah'm wantin' it, for we had to come awa' with an odd pair!"

"What's that, by honey?" asked Prout, pricking up his ears. "You lent Mr. Hilton an oar out here last night?"

"Gin I didna, Ah'll shave ould Scobber with a billhook! A fine oar and brand new. They broke ain of their sticks and were hanging to the buoy when Ah came along. As Ah was just lobbin' down with the tide Ah could mak' the ship aisy without twa, so Ah lent 'em ma best, twice as guid an oar as this!"

"What did they do, then?"

"Hoo do Ah ken that? They were pulling awa' north wharf-ways when Ah last spied them. Ye're not goin' to tell me that they've lost ma best oar, man! Losh! Ah wish Ah'd asked for a deposit! Here, come back! Ah'll no tak' a babbee less than twenty-five. Is it fey and looney they've a' gone, Scobber?"

Prout, Maddock, and O'Rooney had all tumbled into the launch and were heading for the western slipway.

"Ah nae doot that Ah'll be getting her back," muttered McSnort to himself, "or the twenty-five shillings gin she's gone west; but if they wanted ta borrow her again, Ah'd put more value on her, for they might lose her."

By this time, travelling almost at racing pace, the launch had reached the slipway. All the ferry-men and most of the long-shoremen who spent their time lounging about the slipway knew Val and Dave by sight; but the three mariners could obtain no information, and the missing boat was not there.

Prout, O'Rooney, and Maddock were becoming alarmed. A dash down to the Old Steps by the bo'sun and the steersman met with no better success, and Barry, who remained behind and telephoned to both hotels from the harbour-master's office, was no luckier. With a troubled look on his rugged face, Barry O'Rooney gazed across the harbour while waiting for the return of the launch, and Barry missed something.

"Phwat shifted out last night?" he asked a man beside him.

"Wasn't there a hooker moored north of the salvage-boats?"

"Yes. A Dutch tramp. But I don't know her name, mate," the man answered. "She must have picked up her mudhook pretty early, for I was on the slipway a bit after daylight, and she wasn't there then. Brought a cargo of iron rails I think it was, and couldn't get a cargo here, so I expect she's gone tramping in search of one. Hamburg, I think her home port is."

By asking the harbour-master, Barry O'Rooney could have found out the name of the steamer; but it never crossed his mind to do so, for he very naturally never dreamed of associating the tramp steamer with the absence of Val Hilton and David ap Rees. The launch came back and at once headed across the harbour for the wharf.

There was no news there.

"I don't like this a little bit, by honey!" said Prout anxiously. "There was a bit of wind and a strongish tide; but they were both as safe in a boat as a monkey up a tree, and couldn't have come to any harm that way."

"Bedad, perhaps they're only playing a bit of a joke on us!" said Barry hopefully.

"If they've given us the cut, souse me, why aren't they with Hal?" asked the bo'sun. "Both of 'em would be as keen as mustard to see what was doing at the wreck!"

Barry O'Rooney and Prout then adjourned to the Sign of the Saucy Kipper.

"By honey, boys, I'm fairly rattled this time, and don't know what to do," said Prout. "It seems early days to get the wind up and wire to the chief, for it may be only a jape. And as soon as we've wired they may turn up, and then all the fat would be in the fire!"

"How about telephoning to the prince?" suggested the bo'sun. "I don't see what good it would do, souse me, but—"

"Och, afther all, we may be grizzling for nothing at all, at all!" said Barry O'Rooney, as he drained his glass. "Bedad, we'll take ut asiy and give their hotel a call. Then we'll get back to ours and then away to Hal."

"And then if they don't turn up?"

"Then, bedad, there's only one thing for ut, and that's to wire the chafe and the prince as well," said Barry O'Rooney.

There was no news of the missing ones at either of the hotels. "I've a jolly good mind to go to the police!" said Prout, who was becoming desperate. "By honey, what's the good of trying to pretend there's nothing really wrong, when we all feel that there is?"

At that very instant the door of the coffee-room was forced open by a violent kick and Hal Honour strode in.

"Where are the two boys?" he asked. "Where's Val Hilton and David ap Rees? Where are they?"

For the engineer to speak at all was unusual, for him to use fifteen words in succession was almost a record. It filled Prout, Maddock, and Barry O'Rooney with alarm.

"We don't know, Hal," said Prout. "They went off in a boat last night to see if the buoy was in the right place, and we haven't seen them since. By honey, we've been chasing all over the show after them! Gosh, you've put the wind up us talking like that! What do you know, then?"

"Licensed Portsmouth rowing-boat number forty-three," said the engineer. "Bottom stove in and in the mud! And that!"

Prout took the little silver-gilt button, a button from the sleeve of Val's uniform, ornamented with the blue pennant in enamel and the name in raised letters: "S.Y. Lord of the Deep."

The scuttled boat must have drifted a long way with the undercurrent, for Hal Honour had found her lying in the mud close to the yacht.

Prout tossed the button down on the table, and with a sound that was half-groan and half-yell, he rushed out into the street.

Val Destroys the Wireless!

VAL HILTON could never remember quite clearly what happened during the next few minutes. He must have hurled himself at the German captain, for he had a confused sort of recollection that they tumbled down the bridge-ladder together and then strong hands parted them and he was pulled away and held firmly by several of the crew. In those few minutes grief, rage, and despair must have sent him fighting mad; but he was unarmed, and was quickly mastered.

Presently reason came back, and he saw the skipper pick himself up, swearing lustily in German, and Von Stolzenburg was bending over Dave. He gave some order, and two of the crew seized Dave by the arms and began to shake him roughly. The motor-launch had come alongside and somebody shouted up instructions, and the captain, after drinking something out of a black bottle, and wiping the blood from his face, climbed up the bridge-ladder.

"I am so sorry, Herr Midshipman," said the baron. "The fault of it is not mine, and I give many apologies!"

WHAT HAS HAPPENED SO FAR!

FERRERS LORD, millionaire and world-traveller, and owner of a magnificent yacht, the *Lord of the Deep*, sets out to frustrate the plotting of a powerful Royalist party in Germany, whose object is to restore the ex-Kaiser to the throne. Ferrers Lord is firmly convinced that the peace of Europe is at stake, and, ably assisted by the loyal crew of the *Lord of the Deep*, the millionaire starts on his dangerous mission.

Under the command of his nephew, Midshipman Val Hilton, he despatches Prince Ching Lung, David ap Rees, Benjamin Maddock, Barry O'Rooney, and a number of ordinary seamen to land certain goods and assemble an aeroplane on the lonely island of Klarsfjargen.

With great difficulty Val carries out the first part of his instructions, but afterwards everything goes against him, for he runs foul of Baron von Stolzenburg, a German Royalist spy, and Val's party is forced to flee from the island. He rejoins his ship, the *Lord of the Deep*, and is reprimanded by Ferrers Lord for his failure. Later in the evening Val and most of the crew are on "shore leave," when a terrible explosion is heard, and the *Lord of the Deep* is seen to founder. Val and Dave immediately set out to investigate, but they are intercepted by Baron von Stolzenburg, their old enemy, and taken aboard a German steamer, the skipper of which—at the pistol's point—orders Val to pilot the vessel into Klarsfjargen. The young Britisher emphatically refuses, and as a warning, the Hun skipper fires at his companion. No sooner has Dave dropped to the deck than a motor-boat with a pilot aboard comes racing out from the sandbank.

(Now read on.)

Val hated Von Stolzenburg as much as he hated a poison snake; but at that moment he was only interested in Dave, for Dave seemed to be making an effort to stand on his feet as the two men kept pushing him forwards and dragging him backwards and shaking him.

"There was no bullet, Herr Midshipman," said the baron. "It was a gas-cartridge, a knock-out cartridge. I protested, and it was not my wish; but a command is a command."

Val did not answer, for he was watching his chum. Dave's limp legs were coming into action as the men pushed him along the deck. The vessel's engines were working, and she was following the pilot launch at a good speed into the dangerous shoals and channels.

The guard, who had at last discarded his axe, came up from below with a bottle of champagne and a glass. At a word from the baron, the two sailors who were holding Val let him go. He shook his head when Von Stolzenburg held out the brimming glass and invited him to drink.

"It is meant kindly, and you have had a great strain, and it will do you good," said the baron, who certainly did look ashamed of himself. "Ach, no, you will not drink! Give the wine then to Herr ap Rees, but not too much; only one glass. Herr Midshipman, I tell you again that the fault is not mine!"

"I'd prefer not to speak to you," said Val.

He ran aft to where Dave, very white and sick, was sitting on a coil of rope. He had swallowed some of the champagne. It was a good rich wine, and as Dave was quite unused to strong liquor it had a quick effect and brought the colour back into his pale cheeks and a sparkle into his dull eyes.

"What did they hit me with to knock me out like that, old man?" he asked. "My head's still buzzing round!"

"A dope cartridge—gas," said Val. "When you pitched down the bridge-ladder I thought it was a bullet, and I think I saw red. The dirty game was to terrify me into steering them in, but it wouldn't have worked. They've got a pilot now, and if they'd only sighted him a bit sooner you'd have missed all this. How do you feel?"

"Still a bit giddy and my eyes smart! Gee, what's that?"

There was a sudden jar and shouts and curses from the bridge, and then the engines were reversed. The ship was aground, and this did Dave more good than the champagne.

"My hat! I hope she's jammed her nose in it so fast that ten tugs won't heave her off," said Dave.

The propeller was churning the water, but churning it vainly, and the angry captain stopped the engines. Then the launch came alongside and took a line aboard, and orders were sent to the stoke-hold for every ounce of steam that could be raised. In a desperate hurry, a boat was lowered with an anchor and a wire hawser.

"They've got the wind up about something," said Val, "or else they wouldn't be in such a rush and tear."

"I wonder if they think they're being chased?"

"Who's to chase them?" said Val. "Even if the chief knew we'd been kidnapped he might chase you; but I don't think he'd chase me after the mess I made of his business. And besides, is it likely he'd know? We did make a sort of an appointment with Prout, but he wouldn't take much notice of that."

"He might hear at the wharf that we hadn't brought the boat back," said Dave.

"Perhaps; but I don't think it's that. It's more likely the tide," said Val. "If they don't get her off now she'll be stuck here for hours, and that may be a bit in our favour. Gosh, I hope she's absolutely nailed down!"

Five minutes later the skipper made his great effort with the steam winch, dragging at the anchor that the boat had dropped astern, the propeller at full speed, and the launch doing its best. To the joy of Val and his chum, the ship would not budge an inch, though her furnaces were roaring and her pressure-gauges threatening to blow up with the pressure of steam.

The Hun skipper, in a furious temper, was hurling strong language over the stern-rail at the occupants of the launch, and the occupants of the launch were returning the compliment. Van Stolzenburg calmed the man in the billycock hat to some extent, and then another effort was made to haul the ship off. It was a supreme effort, for another anchor was put out, and every man who could be spared was called up from below to haul on it, for they had no steam-power that could be used. Von Stolzenburg seized the end of the cable, the burly baron being as good as three men, and the others took their places and waited for the signal.

When it came there was a hissing of steam and a clanking of machinery, a lashing of propellers, and the grunting of straining men, and, distinct above all, the voice of the captain as he howled encouragement from the bridge.

"Here's my chance, old son," said Val quickly. "Sit tight!"

Without giving Dave a hint of his intentions, Val slipped away unnoticed. He was back again and sitting on the coil of rope before the hopeless struggle was abandoned. The ship did not appear to have stirred a quarter of an inch, and her perspiring crew blew on their blistered hands and Von Stolzenburg panted like an overstrained cart-horse.

"I've done it, Dave," said Val. "So look out for squalls!"

"What have you done, kid?"

"Had a sort of heart-to-heart talk with their wireless," said Val. "They'd fetched up their operator to haul on the rope, or I guessed they had, though I don't know which of them was their intelligence department. Anyhow, when I found the gadget, there was nobody in charge, so I was quite rude to the poor, unprotected thing. If they haven't a spare set anywhere, this old hooker is as dumb as a carrot, for I don't think even Hal Honour could put the thing right in six hours. And what would take Hal Honour six hours would take most people six years. That's a nasty one for Von Stolzenburg's supreme command!"

"Good man!" said Dave. "That was quite a smart idea; but if it gets their goat too much, I'm thinking we shall know all about it. I'm glad you thought of it, for it's got a bit back for our side. I expect that pale-faced chap with the frizzy hair is their sparks, the chap the baron is talking to. Look! Von's writing something down for him—the glad news to the merry old supreme command that there's a lot too much sand about to let this hooker turn up at Klarspfargen. Didn't I tell you?"

The frizzy-haired youth took the paper from the baron and went below.

"I'll bet you a shilling he's back again a lot faster than he went down, old scout," said Val calmly.

The operator's hair was actually bristling when he came tearing up from below.

The baron listened, and then, with his big hands clenched, he strode towards the prisoners.

"All's fair in war, Herr Baron, as I think you told us yourself," said Val, standing up to face him.

The baron gulped. He was in a towering passion, but he managed to master himself.

"Get below!" he ordered.

He followed Val and Dave down to their cabin and then stood in the doorway, his big frame almost filling it, gnawing at his lower lip and staring sullenly at the two boys.

"I to you will send towels and water," he said, "and to-night I will prove that you mistake yourself, Herr Midshipman, for the three of us shall go to Klarspfargen. I am proud of myself that I have overcome my great anger that you have done this, and over myself I have exercised great restraint."

He banged the door behind him and bolted it.

"How now, kid?" asked Val.

"How's the head?"

"Pretty good. But I don't want to get in the way of one of those gas-cartridges. And if the guy who invented them is still alive, he deserves to die a long and lingering death! I don't know how I look, but you look considerably ruffled after the shemuzzle, and not the dandy middy you ought to be. But that wash and brush-up the baron promised us will improve things, unless they save us the trouble by lynching us because you spoil their wireless!"

"There's not much risk of that," said Val. "My idea is that Stolzenburg is going to cart us away in the launch and leave that beast of a Hun in the little billycock hat to pull his tramp steamer out of the mud the best way he can. I wish I hadn't told Stolz about that fog!"

"How do you know there's going to be a fog?"

"I don't know; but if there's no wind, there's sure to be a fog in this hole of the earth!"

Forty Minutes Too Late!

THE baron himself brought towels and hot water and brushes and a tin of boot polish and went away again without speaking. Very quickly the prisoners made themselves look quite respectable, if not very spruce. They were left to kick their heels for about half an hour, and then Baron von Stolzenburg appeared once more.

It was twilight, and the sea was as flat as a slate. Angry faces looked down at them when they were aboard the launch, and the skipper shook his fist and spat. Val took a look at the ship and could not help grinning.

"She's well in it, Dave," he said, "and it's the quicksand stuff! I don't mean it's likely to bury her; but even at high water she may not be able to back off without a tug. Tugs cost a bit, and though it wasn't really our fault, the skipper, by the look on his ugly face, is blaming us for it. Somehow, nobody here seems to love us!"

The launch was comfortable and speedy. The crew consisted of three men, all young and well dressed. The man who steered was quite a dandy, who wore gold-rimmed glasses and white spats. They evidently belonged to the upper classes, and were well supplied with cigarettes, and talked to the baron as if they were his equals in rank.

At last the steersman checked the speed and stood up as if puzzled.

"Can you tell us where we are, Mr. Hilton?" he asked in English. "I've knocked up and down here in my yacht a good deal; but the channels change so, and all the buoys were removed during the War and never replaced."

"No, I haven't a notion where we are," answered Val truthfully. "The Baron von Stolzenburg destroyed a very useful mark when he blew that old mill flat. You don't think I'd tell you even if I knew, do you?"

"I don't see why not, Mr. Hilton, for you'd be more

When his helmet had been fixed the engineer moved to the ladder, walked down it and disappeared, for Ferrers Lord had no use for air tubes and pumps or lifelines.

(See page 23.)



comfortable than adrift all night," said the German. "We'll take it easy then, and trust to luck. Her head's right if we hit nothing, and I rather pride myself on my luck!"

He was astonishingly lucky, for the launch went on at a steady speed without any mishap. Sandwiches and biscuits and steaming hot coffee from a large vacuum flask were passed round. Von Stolzenburg talked very little; but the pilot chatted with Dave and Val, though he was careful not to mention that they were prisoners or discuss anything about the condition of affairs which had made them so.

It was quite as dark as it was likely to be on a cloudless, starry night, but the fog Val had foretold was beginning to creep up over the sea. Several times the pilot flashed an electric torch into the gloom, and at last Dave saw an answering flash, and the pilot laughed in a pleased way and opened out his engine.

"We're for it, Val, old thing—sure as a gun we're for Klarspfargen!" Dave said. "They're signalling!"

"Rotten!" sighed Val.

Dave was not mistaken. The launch ran up the north channel, and through the haze the boys made out the shape of the mill. Then they heard the baron's deep voice asking them politely to step ashore. He walked between them towards some shadowy object that suddenly revealed itself as an aeroplane. There was a quick, rasping challenge, to which the baron replied in German. "What's this? A giddy flower show?" asked Dave. "They've got a marquee up."

There was another sharp challenge and the clanking of a sword, and then a sheet of canvas was pulled aside, showing the interior of a brightly-lighted marquee. Several men, wearing military cloaks, stepped aside; but the baron went on to where one man stood alone beside a table on which lay a naked sword.

"All Highest," said the baron, sinking on one knee, "here are

my prisoners—Mr. Midshipman Hilton, nephew of Herr Ferrers Lord, and his friend, Mr. David ap Rees."

Val and Dave were face to face with the ex-Kaiser and War Lord of Germany! As they looked at the man with the grey beard and white hair, who was still pursuing the phantom of the throne and crown that four years of bitter war had wrested from him, Dave and Val saluted, not out of any feeling of servility, but out of respect for a former foe who had fought and lost.

The ex-Kaiser did not even look at Dave, but he looked very searchingly at Val.

"You speak German, Herr Midshipman?"

"Very badly—only a few words of it," said Val.

"No matter; we all speak English," said the ex-Kaiser, still watching Val with curious eyes. "And you are the nephew of Herr Ferrers Lord. Ach, a great man—an amazing man! Gentlemen, Herr Midshipman Hilton will dine with us. Baron, this is fine work, and when the day comes, it will not go forgotten and without a word! Baron, I congratulate you!"

Another table was brought in, the cloth spread, and some cold dishes and bottles of wine placed on it. Evidently it was to be a hasty meal. Val sat down opposite the ex-Kaiser, and three of the officers took their seats; but Baron von Stolzenburg was not invited. The others sat standing, helping themselves from a smaller table.

Then came an alarm. The young German who had piloted the launch brought it.

"There's an aeroplane coming up from the west," he said. "It's a long way off, but it can be heard quite plainly on the detectors."

Val did not understand what the man had said, but it created an instant bustle. The next moment he was sitting alone at the table, and the marquee was empty except for himself, Dave, and Baron von Stolzenburg.

"What's the stunt, Dave? What's fluttered the pigeons?"

"An aeroplane up and heading east," said Dave. "They've got a detector, and they can hear the beggar whizzing. And there's more whizzing, for they are getting away in their own plane."

"Let 'em go, then!" said Val. "What about some dinner, kid? For it's a pity to waste good food! What about it, Baron?"

"I am sorry we cannot wait, Herr Midshipman, but I promise you a dinner. Come!"

The aeroplane had gone roaring eastwards, but the crew of the launch had not gone in her. The Kaiser's table was left with the food and wine on it, and the baron did not even stay to turn out the portable electric lights.

Some half an hour after the launch had left Klarspargen, an aeroplane slid out of the grey sky, circled above the sandy island, and then descended within twenty yards of the marquee.

"Forty minutes too late, bhoys!" said the voice of Barry O'Rooney, as he swung himself down after Prout and Maddock into the sand. "That's the whin she went up, for Oi heard her as plain as plain. Och, an' we'd only had that plane that that Hun of a baron blew up we'd have had the whole bag of them!"

Prout, Maddock, and O'Rooney, each armed with a revolver, strode into the marquee.

"By honey, they were packed up and out of it quick!" said Prout. "A Hun must be in a desperate hurry when he leaves his grub and drink behind! Wine and lobsters and cold chicken, eh?"

"Lobsters and cold chickens, wheres?" asked an eager voice.

"Where's the cold chickens and the lobsteres, hunk?"

It was Gan Waga, the keen-eyed Eskimo, who had come down from London by aeroplane and piloted them.

"Get back to your perch!" roared Prout. "Who gave you leave to shift? Get back to your perch, I tell you!"

"Don't be shirty, old dears!" grinned the Eskimo. "I going backness, Tommy; only, I takes a chicken and a lobster to keep me from feelings loneliness. Yo' no minds that, hunk, Tommy?"

"Oh, take what you like and get out of it, souse me, and don't trample the place flat with your big hoofs!" growled the bo'sun.

"By the footprints, I don't think one plane could have taken the whole crowd, Tom. There was only one."

"No, bedad, there'd be a boat," said Barry O'Rooney dismally. "Forty minutes too late! Och, the luck of it!"

The Coming of the Chief!

PROUT'S message to Ching Lung had been answered without delay, but no answer came from Ferrers Lord. No answer had been received from the millionaire by the time the prince and Gan Waga reached Porthampton. The prince listened politely to the steersman's hurried story, and began to piece things together for himself.

"Try Klarspargen," he said. "If there's nothing doing, it will only be a run out and a run back, and my plane's here for you. It's that boat that cleared out that makes me suspicious! Is it right that she would have got a cargo if she had stayed another day, Tom?"

"By honey, that's what I'm telling you, sir!" said Prout. "Mind you, we didn't know that until about an hour ago, and it's made us as suspicious as an old rat when he sees a baited trap. Hal's certain that they weren't drowned when the boat was scuttled, or he would have found them. Fancy a Hun tramp clearing out empty when a cargo was promised and coming! She must have been well paid to do that. But Klarspargen isn't so easy, sir. There aren't many skippers who

could take a craft of her size in there. And you'd think we'd have scared them out of that!"

"Try it," said Ching Lung. "They may think they've scared us out of it, too! You can easily carry enough petrol for the double trip, and as Hal Honour built my bus for me, you can be sure she's the best. You'd better let Gan drive her. I've got a spare wireless with me, so I'll hang around here and let you know if any orders come from the chief."

"But why that dusthole of an island, sir?" asked Prout.

"For the love of Mike, tell me where else then you'd look! If you know, talk up quickly and give it a name!"

This floored Prout. At the aerodrome a faulty stay delayed them some time. Hal Honour was back at his work, for, however anxious the burly engineer may have felt, his orders were to raise the Lord of the Deep—not to search for the missing youngsters. And that is why the ex-Kaiser was interrupted and had to beat such a hasty retreat after having invited Lieutenant Val Hilton to dine with him.

"Souse me!" remarked the bo'sun, as Gan Waga came into the light, gnawing the bone of a chicken. "It strikes me that we've been asking for it, and are still asking for it! We just dropped down as if there wasn't such a thing as a Hun in the world. Of course, we heard their plane scuttle off. But that doesn't mean that they all went, does it? What if we'd dropped down into about a score of them?"

"Of'm thinking they'd be very sick Huns by this toime, bhoys!" grinned Barry O'Rooney. "Very sick and sad and toired. They had a sound-detector, you can bet, and when they heard our little bus trekking in their direction they moved. And if there are any left, they must be down in the old submarine coal-hole, and Oi hope they're enjoying the smell of it!"

"Ben's right," said Prout. "We were too eager and rash, by honey, so we'll keep that part quiet. It's not so easy for three men and an Eskimo to make twenty Huns look sick and tired, though we'd have had a good try. Anyway, it was a bit too careless, so don't you mention it, Gan!"

"All rightness, olds ducks!" said the Eskimo. "I not tells tales outs of schools!"

It was decided to send the Eskimo down to inspect the submarine chamber.

"It's sure to be open from the sea, for that blaze of petrol must have played Old Harry with the machinery," said the bo'sun.

"Swim down till you see a square hole in the bank, blubber-biter, and then use your ears and those cat's-eyes of yours. If all's quiet, come back; but make sure of it, or somebody might crawl out and snipe us!"

Prout and Maddock remained near the plane, and Barry walked down to the edge of the sea with the Eskimo. Gan Waga slipped noiselessly into the calm water and vanished without a sound. All was so still that O'Rooney could hear the watch ticking in his pocket, and at last, swimming like a seal, the Eskimo came back.

"All quietfulls in there, Ben," he said, giving himself a shake.

"All quietfulls and darkfuls and awfulness smell. I not think anybody could stop in that niff of burnt petrols and not choke dead. The most worse I smells any time!"

"If you think it's bad, then it must be horrible; for I've known you stand aromas that would kill a cat," said the bo'sun. "Now you've got to do a bit of tracking, my lad. I want you to see if you can pick out the trail of Master Val and Master Dave—not that I'm saying they've got particularly small feet, but I reckon they're not in the running in hoof-sizes with any Hun! So collar a lamp and get your snub nose down to it!"

Gan obtained a flash-lamp, and, rejoining Prout and Maddock under the wing of the aeroplane, Maddock watched the light bobbing about a few inches above the trampled sand.

"The blubberbiter reports that there's nothing in the coal-hole except darkness and a horrible smell," said the bo'sun.

"The prince hasn't whistled up yet, has he, Tom?"

"All quiet," said Prout. "If Gan don't find the boys, they must be aboard that hooker we glimpsed. She must be tight aground there, and, though we can't be sure, it's banknotes to buttons that she's the boat that sheered out of Porthampton Harbour without a cargo, and the brute, too, that scuttled the Lord of the Deep. If this draws blank, and the plane had floats, the four of us would tackle and search her; but this bus won't swim, so that settles it, by honey."

The light that had been zigzagging about was getting nearer to the water. It stopped, went forward a few yards, came back, stopped again, and then went on again.

"Coo-eee! Yi-hi! Come along and keep wideness to the lefts!" cried Gan Waga.

"By honey, that blubberbiter's found something!" said Prout. "You stop here, Barry, in case we get a call on the wireless, and I'll go down with Ben and see what sort of oil Gan Waga has struck, for he wouldn't ch-i-ke for nothing."

Keeping to the left as told, the steersman and bo'sun of the Lord of the Deep walked across the sand.

"They've been ashore and gone again," said Gan Waga.

"What, the boys, souse me?" asked Maddock.

Gan Waga nodded.

"Of course, I not sureness," he said, "fo' a lots of peoples walks about. A boats lands just here, Tommy, and pushes offs just here and six peoples come ashore and six peoples go aboards. And one of them got awful big feets. Yo' looks, Tommy!"

"By honey, some slipper," said Prout, examining the footprint. "Nearer size fourteen in men's than twelves, Ben! See it?"

"That's about the size that hulking great German, Baron von Stolzenburg took!" said the bo'sun. "Going back to the boat, wasn't he?"

"This isn't in my line," said Prout, "so I'll leave it to Gan. He's got a natural gift for this sort of thing."

"Then you stand stillness and not spoils things!" said Gan Waga. "I tells yo' lots in two or three years!"

Gan Waga meant minutes. He moved higher up the beach and back again.

"Olds big feets comes off the boats and walks up in the middles of two little feets," he said. "They not such littles feets, but littler than mosts of the others. I think big feets got little feets by the arms. They go up to the tent, and then it all so trampedness, I loses them. After, they come backs to the boats and big feets he walks behindness!"

"Souise me, what are we to make of all that rigmarole?" grunted the bo'sun. "It's all feet, yards of 'em!"

Gan Waga shook his head.

"I nots know, Ben," he answered. "P'raps the little feets are Val's and Dave's. I not able to tells that by looking at a few marks in the sand. By the ways they walks up, I thinks the big chaps hold them like prisoners."

"That's good enough; but it's not satisfactory, Gan," said Prout. "And we can't expect you or anybody else to do more. But it isn't worth while talking through the phone about double footprints!"

Barry took the flash-lamp and went down to examine the trail for himself.

"Och, Oi'm half inclined to balave that Gan's foight," he said. "But that only makes us want to kick ourselves for being late. There's nothing we can do, and another sea-fog threatening. An' the boys were taken away in a boat; they can't have been taken far. But af nt's only a moile, ut's a moile too far for us. We're bate, that's plwat-clane bate!"

A thin, droning whistle sounded from the cockpit of the aeroplane.

"That's the prince," said the bo'sun. "I hope that our wave-length is clear, for about this time of the day every wireless on earth is working full blast!"

He climbed up after Prout, who switched on the lights, put on a pair of headphones, and slipped back a little mahogany panel that protected the microphone. The prince's voice came through quite clearly.

"That you, Tom?"

"Ay, ay, sir! We're here on Klarspargen right enough, but no luck, sir," said Prout. "They heard us coming and left full sail. Dimmer on the table in a tent, only just started and all left, wine included, by honey. Wind up and gone!"

"Any trace of the boys?"

"Footprints in the sand, sir, nothing else," said the steersman. "Gan thinks he recognises Master David's, and we're fairly certain that big Baron von Stolzenburg has been about—at least, Barry, Gan, and Ben are, for I didn't see him. If it was Master Dave, we can take it that Master Val was here, too, and that they left the island by boat. Not much to go on, sir. We flew over a stranded hooker, and we think it's the boat that sneaked out of Portsmouth. No floats, so we couldn't go down and search her."

"Perhaps it's just as lucky you had no floats," said the prince. "They might have objected very strongly to being searched. Nothing from the chief as yet, though I've tried three times to call him on the Lord of the Deep's wave-length!"

"Then I suppose there's nothing to do, sir, but come back?" said Prout. "By honey, it's heart-breaking, but there's nothing else for it. You can guess how worried I am about it. If I'd have had the sense of a mule, I'd have stuck tight and gone out to the wreck with them."

"If Mr. Hilton hadn't ordered you to bed," said the prince. "All I've heard fresh is that Honour has patched up the leak and is pumping air into the yacht, so she may be afloat before morning. I think you may as well come back. As there's nothing at Klarspargen, I can think of nowhere else. I'm in my bedroom at the hotel, so come straight there. Anything else?"

"Nothing else, sir!"

Prout removed the headphones and scowled as he felt for his pipe and tobacco-pouch.

"We're quitting, Ben," he said. "Not a word from the chief, though I sent telegrams all over the show, and the prince can't get him on the wireless. Hal thinks he'll have the yacht afloat at dawn."

"Some lustler, old Honour," said the bo'sun admiringly. "Souise me, he'd shift the Rock of Gibraltar quicker than a mad bull would shift a crowd! If we're going, I'll give Barry and that greedy blubberbiter a hail!"

At that instant another droning whistle sounded, and as Prout put on the headphones, Maddock saw him purse his lips. It was not Prince Ching Lung's voice this time, but a deeper and steadier one—the voice of the chief, Ferrers Lord.

"Are you listening, Prout?"

"Ay, ay, sir!"

"I am very close, but the mist is puzzling. Have two white lights clear where I can land."

"Two white lights, quick, Ben, for the chief! He's well on us," said Prout. "Quick, man, quick!"

A few minutes later the bo'sun and O'Rooney, each holding a flash-lamp, were staring up at the dark sky. They saw nothing, but they heard a drowsy buzzing. Then something misty and grey slid between them with a faint thud and a creak, and a man in evening-dress, with a cape thrown over his shoulders, climbed down the side of the shadow and sprang lightly to the sand.

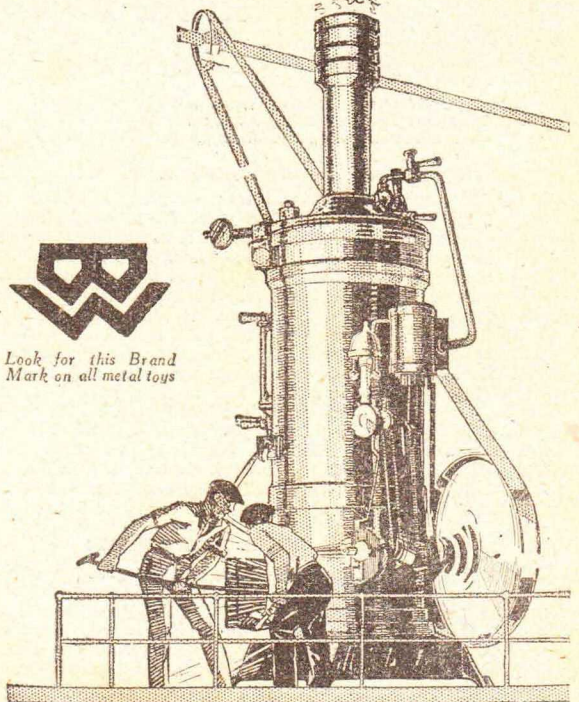
The chief had come!

(Look out for the concluding chapters of this powerful story next week, chums.)

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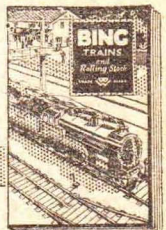
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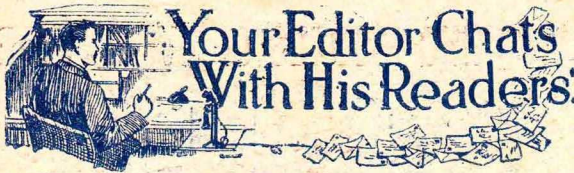


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THAT announcement will interest you, I feel sure, for it means—as doubtless you have already guessed—that the first of the special Free Gifts I have promised you will make its appearance. And take it from me, chums, this first GEM Free Gift is something out of the ordinary; something that will be much sought after; something that will last. I can say at this stage, without letting too much out of the bag, that this Free Gift is a novelty of a particularly attractive sort. Every boy and girl likes a novelty, and the grown ups, too, will extract just as much amusement from this coming Free Gift as any of you youngsters. That's made you real curious, I know, but you must possess yourselves in patience, for the two weeks will soon flit by. Next week's chat, by the way, will tell you all there is to know about the first of the special GEM Free Gifts and something about No. 2. Therefore, keep your eye open for next week's Chat.

A NEW SERIAL AND A NEW SERIES!

It's only right and proper, as a certain gentleman remarked, to kick off this first Free Gift Number with an extra-special programme of stories, and I've not lost sight of the fact. "Gemites" can look forward, then, to the opening chapters of a brilliant new serial staged in the wild and woolly West. It introduces a typical young

Britisher who has to pack his grip and sail for Mexico, "toot-sweet." When he arrives at his destination he feels like a lost sheep. But Tom—that's his name—soon makes friends. You'll follow his adventures amongst a crowd of Indians with bated breath. Now for the school stories. Mr. Martin Clifford has piled in with a topping series of St. Jim's yarns dealing with an extraordinary new boy who lands amongst Tom Merry & Co. He is extraordinary, believe me, and you'll find him all the more entertaining on that account. Look out for this excellent series—starts in a fortnight's time!

MONTY LOWTHER IN LOVE!

A reader from Hampshire writes me a topping little letter, and after saying a heap of nice things about the GEM, suggests that perhaps Martin Clifford could give us a story dealing with Monty Lowther falling in love. I'll see what can be done in the matter.

NEXT WEDNESDAY'S PROGRAMME:

"THE SPOOFER OF THE SILVER SPRAY!"

By Martin Clifford.

This is the last story in the ripping holiday series which has proved so popular, and should not on any account be missed. Knowing the members of the Silver Spray just as well as I do, you'll guess quickly enough that the "spoofer" is none other than Baggy Trimble.

A PHANTOM THRONE!

There will be another long instalment of this amazing serial story by Sidney Drew, and as it concludes his narrative "Gemites" will be certain to read it. Also the Tuck Hamper column will be found in next week's issue, which means that one of you has bagged a delicious hamper of tuck, and others a half-crown apiece. Order next week's GEM early, chums.

YOUR EDITOR.

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