

TOM MERRY & CO. WILL CURE YOUR "BLUES"!

The GEM

EVERY
WEDNESDAY.

2^D



GUSSY
THE
OPTIMIST!

"JOIN THE ST. JIM'S OPTIMISTS, AND CHEEAH UP!" SAYS GUSSY.

CHAPTER I.

Further Outlook—Awful!

"S... S... S...
"Eh?"
"Quiet!"
"What!"
"Praw don't make a noise for a few minutes, deah boys!"

"Well, my hat!"
Blake and Herries and Digby of Study No. 6 in the Fourth passage at St. Jim's fixed three distinct and separate glances on Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.
For nearly half an hour the trio had been working industriously at prep, while their noble chum tinkered about with a portable wireless-set which he had borrowed from Cardew.

During that period no sound had come from them save the occasional scratching of pens. On the other hand, quite a lot of sound had emanated from Cardew's portable receiver; the study had fairly echoed with shrieks and roars and buzzing noises which Arthur Augustus triumphantly informed his chums were programmes from Germany, Italy, Russia, and other distant lands.

Blake & Co. had stood it without complaint. They were late with their prep, and Arthur Augustus had finished his before they started; so they gave him his head.

But they certainly had not anticipated that half an hour's inanful forbearance and unbroken silence would end in D'Arcy seriously asking them to be quiet. At that naive request they sat up and took notice—and glared at the wireless enthusiast with wolfish glares.

"Hush, deah boys!" said Arthur Augustus innocently.

"Hush!" repeated Jack Blake, in a suppressed voice, apparently addressing the air. "Hush, you

Quiet!" said Digby sulphurously. "He wants us to be quiet! Ye gods!"

"After dead silence for half an hour!" said Herries bitterly.

"During which he had been tuning-in to earthquakes and hurricanes all over the world—" chimed in Digby.

"Weally, Digby—" "He calmy turns round and asks us to stop making a noise!" wounded up Blake, reaching a sort of crescendo of indignation. "You dummy!"

"Weally, Blake—" "You footling, howling dummy!" roared Blake excitedly.

"I suppose the scratching of our pens is annoying you?" "Precisely, deah boy!"

"You—you—" "It's vevy slight, of course, an' I don't mind it while I'm pottewin' about," explained Arthur Augustus genially.

"But I've just tuned in for the weathah an' news, an' I'm afraid it may pwove a little diswactin'. So, if you don't mind, for a few minutes—" "Well, we do!" snapped Herries.

"Weally, Hewies—" "Think we're going to stop prep because you want to listen-in to the weather and news?" hooted Blake. "After we've put up with you—" "It's vevy sporty of you not to have objected to the wov, of course!" acknowledged the swell of the Fourth gratefully. "But I particularly want to hear the weathah an' news."

"And we want to finish our prep, blow you!"

The swell of the Fourth had been reading the papers recently, and searched out everything guaranteed to make a fellow depressed, if he wanted to be. At the present moment his face was gloomy, and he looked so miserable that his chums were beginning to get fed-up with the sight of him.

"The futuah of the world is at stake," said Gussy dimly. "In the distwessin' times through which we are passin'—" "Can it!" roared Blake, Herries, and Dig, in wrathful chorus.

"But—!" Arthur Augustus adjusted his monocle and fixed his stare on his chums.

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THE ST. JIM'S
OPTIMISTS
SOCETY
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AND
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But he said no more, apparently deciding that listening-in to an accompaniment of pen-scratchings was preferable to not listening-in at all.

Blake & Co. went on with their prep while Gussy bent over the wireless-set.

"Look heah, deah boys!" Gussy was speaking again, after all. "Just listen to the weathah weport. If that doesn't convince you, nothin' will!"

From the loud-speaker came a voice:

"A deep depression is advancing from the Atlantic, and pressure is very low over Spain and the Azores. Rain will be general, with showers of hail and sleet. Further outlook: Very unsettled!"

"Can him!" hooted Blake. "Tune in to New York or somewhere, but put a stop to that merchant!"

Digby got up and switched off the set. Before he had sat down Gussy had switched it on again. This time Herries switched it off.

"Look heah!" stormed the angry Gussy. "I will not have you interfevin' with this wireless-set. Heah goes!"

And he switched on again. Blake, equally determined, switched off once more. Not to be outdone, Arthur Augustus jerked the little knob back again.

It became quite a battle. Herries and Dig were treated to a series of rapid alternations between silence and disjointed bits of foreign news. It was a treat which they did not enjoy, and eventually they decided to throw in their lot with Blake in his efforts to reduce the wireless-set to a state of passivity.

D'Arcy, who could be as obstinate as the most obstinate of mules, hung on to the switch like grim death.

"Pway leggo!" he gasped. "I insist—" "So do we!" grinned Herries. "Heave!"

"You feafuhl wottahs! Ow! Pway weleace my fingah!" "Heave!" sang out Herries again.

They heaved, while Arthur Augustus frantically tried to drag the entire set away from them. Cardew's portable suddenly jumped clear of the table and started swaying in mid-air in the grasp of the contending factions.

"Mind she doesn't drop!" gasped Jack Blake.

But the warning came too late. Even as Blake spoke, D'Arcy made a violent effort to recover the wireless-set.

Gussy's got another idea!
So has Skimpole! And so be-
tween the two of them—trouble,
trouble, TROUBLE!

READ THIS DANDY COMPLETE YARN, IT WILL CHEER YOU UP!

GUSSY THE OPTIMIST!

By
MARTIN CLIFFORD.



with such success that he jerked it away from his adversaries altogether—and, unfortunately, lost his balance in doing so!

With a yell, Arthur Augustus staggered and fell. Cardow's portable fell with him.

Crash!

"Yawwoooogh!"

"Oh, crikiey!"

"That's done it!" said Dig.

And it had! When Blake, to test it, bent over the set and switched on again, not a sound came from the loud-speaker—not so much as a suspicion of a buzz!

"Oh deah!" said Arthur Augustus.

"Now look what you've done!" said Blake severely. "All through your fatheaded obstinacy the thing's completely bust now!"

"Ow! Bai Jove! Then it's entially your fault, you wottabs!" gasped the swell of the Fourth. "If you hadn't interfoahed—"

"You mean, if you hadn't forced the blessed news on us—"

"Wats!" sniffed Arthur Augustus, scrambling to his feet again and surveying his reflection in the study mirror with considerable dissatisfaction. "It's all your fault. Look how wumped and dustay I am, too!"

"Not so rumped and dustay as you deserve to be, anyway!" remarked Blake. "What about making him a bit more untidy before we go, chaps?"

"Good egg!" grinned Herries and Dig.

"Bai Jove!" gasped Arthur Augustus, in alarm. "If you wuffians touch me—"

But Blake & Co. didn't wait to hear what terrible fate awaited them if they dared to touch D'Arcy's well-dressed person. They touched him, regardless! Blake ruffed his

hair. Dig jerked out his carefully arranged tie, and Herries sat him down on the floor with a bump.

After that, D'Arcy's cheery chums linked arms and strolled out of Study No. 6, feeling a little better. What Arthur Augustus felt they didn't stop to inquire.

CHAPTER 2.

Skimpole's Latest!

"**P**ROFESSOR BALMYCRUMPET—"

"Blow Professor Balmycrumpet!"

Thus Herbert Skimpole and the Terrible Three respectively.

Skimpole, the genius of the Shell, had just looked in at Study No. 10 in the Shell passage. Tom Merry and Manners and Lowther had obligingly stopped discussing football in deference to their eccentric, though well-meaning, guest. But at Professor Balmycrumpet's name they cast politeness aside and "blowed" him simultaneously.

Skimpole blinked at the Terrible Three in surprise. "I fail to comprehend, my good youths," he said mildly, "One blows at all sorts of things—candles, musical instruments, and so on. But I cannot imagine why one should blow a human being!"

The Terrible Three grinned.

"Pr'aps we'd better explain the word, then," remarked Monty Lowther. "When we say 'blow him,' old bean, we mean, 'dash him,' 'bless him,' or 'bust him.' Get it?"

"You mean you would like to see a commemorative bust erected in his honour?" beamed Skimpole. "Really, my good fellow, that is a truly excellent idea; but—"

"Help!" choked Monty, while Tom Merry and Manners, unable to suppress their feelings, fairly yelled.

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"Ha, ha, ha!" Skimpole stared at them, with a look of bewilderment on his serious face.

"I fail to observe any occasion for risibility, my good youths!" he remarked. "But time is precious, and I must proceed with the business which brought me here to-night. Professor Balmcrumpet—"

"Blow him!" chorled the Terrible Three, more emphatically than before.

"Professor Balmcrumpet has issued a warning to the intelligentsia—"

"The whopper?"

"The intelligentsia!" repeated Skimpole firmly. "The intelligent few like myself, you know!"

"Oh, my hat!"

"Anyway, my good fellows, he has issued a warning to the intelligentsia that the end is near—very near indeed!"

"The end of what?" asked Tom Merry, with a stare.

"If you're talking about the footer season—"

"I am not. I am talking," said Skimpole solemnly, "of the end of civilisation!"

"Eh?"

Skimpole smiled grimly.

"You are surprised, naturally; but I assure you, my friends, that I am in earnest."

"But—but—"

"The—end of civilisation?" stuttered Tom Merry.

"Look here, Skimmy, if you're not feeling well—"

"I am feeling in excellent health, my dear Merry! Now, to revert to the professor's warning—bacteriologists have recently discovered the specific germ known as typhentoroxia in wood-pigeons!"

"W-w-wood-pigeons!" stammered Manners.

"Specific germ?" babbled Lowther. "What the thump—"

"This dangerous germ," went on Skimpole solemnly, "is increasing at such a frightful rate that the entire race of wood-pigeons is likely to be wiped out within the next few months!"

"Very sorry for 'em!" remarked Tom Merry. "Though how on earth it concerns us—"

"Ah! Here we reach the crux of the matter!" said Skimpole, rubbing his bony hands excitedly. "Professor Balmcrumpet, let me tell you, has recently been studying the germ. The conclusion he has come to is that after the wood-pigeons have been annihilated the typhentoroxia will turn immediately to the human race!"

"Oh crumbs!"

"The human race," said Skimpole, "will be powerless to combat the germ. Except in a few instances, the human race will perish! That, my friends, is the danger that faces us to-day!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Skimpole fairly jumped. He had confidently anticipated that his bloodcurdling forecast of the approaching end of civilisation would fill his hearers with alarm and dismay.

Not for a moment had he imagined that they would actually laugh. But they did!

"Oh, great pip!" gasped Tom Merry. "Well, you've trotted out some rich ideas in the past, Skimmy, but this is the richest yet! Ha, ha, ha!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled Manners and Lowther.

"My dear, good fellows!" exclaimed the shocked Skimpole.

"The end of civilisation, you know!" gurgled Lowther.

"The wood-pigeons are going to conk out, and then—"

"And then we're going to follow suit!" gasped Manners.

"There'll be moss growing along the Shell passage, you know; buses standing in Courtfield High Street with cobwebs all round 'em!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"But—but, I am serious, my good youths!" pointed out Skimpole. "There is no cause whatever for hilarity!"

The Terrible Three evidently held another point of view, for they continued to laugh without restraint.

"Well, that's that!" remarked Tom Merry at last, wiping the tears of merriment from his eyes. "Any more funny stories, Skimmy? Are you going to tell us what to do in the emergency?"

Skimpole nodded.

"That, my dear Merry, was my purpose in coming to see you!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Professor Balmcrumpet, with characteristic foresight, has seen a way of escape for the intelligentsia, at any rate. He proposes to get together a party to emigrate to an isolated island in the remotest part of the Pacific!"

"Oh, my giddy aunt!"

"There the professor and his party will wait for civilisation to end," said Skimpole, as calmly as though he had

been talking about waiting for a shower of rain to end. "When it is all over, and the danger has gone, they will emerge once more and start building a fresh civilisation on new lines altogether. There!"

And the genius of the Shell paused to see what effect his pronouncement had on the Terrible Three.

The Terrible Three, to his disappointment, merely regarded him as though they wondered whether he was safe to be at large, and walked out of the study!

At the far end of the passage they noticed a crowd of laughing juniors gathered round the notice board.

"Hallo!" said Tom Merry. "Wonder what's up?"

"Let's see!" suggested Lowther; and the three chums made their way to the notice board.

It did not take them long to find out the cause of the merriment. On the board was pinned a notice which read:

"ST. JIM'S OPTIMISTS' SOCIETY.

An inaugural meeting will be held in the Junior Common-room at six o'clock this evening.

Speaker:

The Hon. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy."

"Hallo!" exclaimed Monty Lowther. "What's our noble idiot up to now? Got some mad ideas into his head, I suppose."

"St. Jim's Optimists!" said Manners. "What's the betting he's got some wild scheme for curing the world depression?"

"You're probably right, Manners," agreed Merry. "I suppose we are expected to attend this meeting? Not that I mind much."

"Mind!" exclaimed Monty Lowther. "I wouldn't miss it for worlds; it ought to be the show of the term. Can't you just imagine our delightful Gussy letting fly about his new idea!"

"Rather!" agreed Manners. "I'm with you there, Monty. We'll roll along right enough."

"Ha, ha, ha!" The Terrible Three laughed in concord, and then, arm-in-arm, returned to Study No. 10.

CHAPTER 34

Down with Pessimism!

BY six o'clock the Junior Common-room was filled with laughing juniors, certainly a good start for an Optimists' meeting.

At one end of the room a platform had been improvised by placing a small table on top of another larger one. The smaller table was draped with a St. Jim's flag, and upon it stood a water-bottle and glass. All very official!

As the clock struck the hour the door opened and the Honourable Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, second son of Lord and Lady Eastwood, entered the room, smiling cheerfully.

"Give him a cheer, you fellows!" yelled Blake.

"Hip, hip, hurrah!"

"Good old Gussy!"

"Attababy!"

From all sides came different shouts as Gussy crossed the room and mounted the "platform."

"Gentlemen of St. Jim's!"

"Hear, hear!"

"Hurrah!"

Whether or not Gussy said anything else just then it was impossible to say. For several moments there was a terrific noise in the Common-room. Everybody was shouting at once!

At last the noise died down.

"Gentlemen, chaps, and fellows—"

"Hurrah!"

"Hear, hear!"

Again the shouting arose. Gussy stood on his platform, banging his fist on the table, and getting purple in the face trying to drown the voices of his audience.

As the shouting died down again the voice of the Honourable Arthur Augustus could be heard.

"Gentlemen," he was saying, "you will agree that things are in a pretty wotten state all over the world to-day."

"What, again?" groaned Digby.

"I have evolved a great ideal for puttin' a stop to this sort of thin'. When it weally gets goin' ewythin' in the garden will be lovely again. A great ideal, what?"

"Depends what it is!" said Blake. "Trot it out and your uncles will give their giddy verdict."

"There is only one possible verdict, deah boys!" said Gussy confidently. "Now do you know what is w'ong with the world at present?"

"Is that a conundrum?"
 "Pway don't wot o'wah sewious mattahs! What is w'ong with the world, deah boys, if you want to know, is—Pessimism!"

"Oh!"
 "H'm!"
 "So that's it, is it?" grunted Hierries. "Well, you ought to know. After the way you've been moaning and groaning, the last week or so—"

Arthur Augustus coloured.
 "Apparently you have received the w'ong impression of me, deah boy. To say that I have been moanin' and groanin' is a gross exaggeration of the facts. So fah, I have been in the habit of tweatin' cu'wvent events with what I considered to be a fittin' sense of gwavity."

"Dear me!" said Skimpole, who had just arrived. "That statement is of great interest to me, my good youth. I have always been under the impression that the only individual in this scholastic establishment who took life with anything approaching seriousness was myself!"

"Then I'm afraid you have been makin' a little mistake, my dear Skimmy. For some time I have taken a serious view of the present condition of the world. But all that is goin' to change now. I can see my mistake."

"Hurrah!" yelled Jack Blako. "Give him a pat on the back to celebrate this, chaps!"

"What-ho!"
 Half a dozen grinning juniors surrounded the swell of the Fourth before he had time to protest, and began to indulge in a regular orgy of back-patting, or, to describe it more adequately, back-thumping.

Arthur Augustus let out a series of yelps.

"Ow-wow! Yooop! Whoop!" You silly ass—

"Good old Gus!" chortled Lowther. "Give him another for luck!"
 "Bai Jove! If you do—"

"Let him go. 'Nuff's as good as a feast!" chuckled Tom Merry. "Now let's hear all about it, Gus!"

"Ow! I've a jolly good mind to give you all a fearful thwashin' instead!" gasped the indignant swell of the Fourth. "Howevah, in the interests of the nation, I'll welvain, an' explain mattahs instead. Now, what is wanted to-day is a spiwit of optimism."

A gleam came into Skimpole's dreamy eyes.
 "Pardon me, my good fellow," he said, "but—"
 "I must ask you, Skimmy, to heah me out first," interrupted Arthur Augustus firmly. "The truth has come to me in a sort of blindin' flash. The world is depressed an' its peoples fed-up an' misewable. Ergo—"

"Eh?"
 "Ergo," said the swell of the Fourth, "which means 'thereof,' in Latin."

"Then why not say 'therefore' in English?"

"Ergo," repeated Arthur Augustus, with a glare at the frivolous Digby, "if pessimism can lead the world into the Slough of Despond, optimism can lead it out again. See?"

"H'm!"
 "Sounds easy enough," commented Manners. "Don't see exactly how it's going to work out in detail, though."

Arthur Augustus smiled.
 "Naturally you don't. But that's the beauty of the whole scheme. One doesn't have to see how it will work out in detail. Once we get optimism, things work themselves out, deah boy."

"H'm!"
 "Imagine us all with the spiwit of optimism flowishin'—"

once more," said Arthur Augustus enthusiastically. "Suddenly, instead of moanin' about bad trade an' what-not, everybody sees that things are goin' to impwore with a wush. What happens?"

"They don't!" hazarded Lowther brightly.
 "W'ong! They do!" corrected Arthur Augustus.

"Undah the influence of this sudden buoyant spiwit, manufactwahs start pwoducin' again. Undah the same cheezy influence, twadhahs start buyin'. Immediately, world depression begins to vanish."

The miserable look on the face of Arthur Augustus, in view of his remarks, raised a laugh.

"Ha, ha, ha!"
 "Weally, deah boys. I uttally fail to see any reason for laughin'!" snapped the swell of the Fourth. "To sum up my argument, I am firmly convinced that optimism, an' optimism alone, can solve the problem of the world's futwah prosperowity. Hence, I have decided to start a group of optimists at St. Jim's to set the ball wrollin'."

"Now we're coming to it!" grinned Dig. "What's the rule of the society—keep on laughin'?"

"Easy!" said Lowther. "Think this'll do, Gus? Ha, ha, ha!"

"You uttally fiviolous wottah—"



Mr. Ratcliff looked with bulging eyes at the woeeful figure of Dismal Jimmy. "Preposterous!" he snapped.

"Perhaps that's the wrong note!" suggested Lowther anxiously. "What about this? Ho, ho, ho! Or this? Haw, haw, haw!"
 "Ha, ha, ha!"

Arthur Augustus looked for a moment as if he was going to abandon that celebrated repose which is alleged to stamp the cast of Vere de Vere and wade in and commit assault and battery. But he nobly refrained.

"You are uttally iwwesponsible, Lowthah!" he remarked loftily. "Ignowin' your sillay remarks altogether, I have decided, as I say, to start a group of optimists at St. Jim's. That group will be the nucleus of a world movement."

"My hat!"
 "Pewwaps it sounds wathah a tall ordah; but it can be done. The St. Jim's group will set the example. Everybody else will follow."

"Naturally," murmured Manners.

"Naturally, deah boy!" concurred D'Arcy innocently, and there was a roar from the juniors.

"Ha, ha, ha!"
 "Now, I've thought of a good way of givin' the

movement a weally spectaculah kick-off," continued Arthur Augustus unheeding.

"You are going to hold a meeting, my good youth?" suggested Skimpole, who had a weakness for meetings of any kind. "If you require any advice—"

"No, deah boy. That was not my intention. The plan I've thought of is more original an' much more stwikin'. Instead of holdin' a meetin', I'm goin' to hold a funewal!"

"What!" yelled the astonished juniors.

Arthur Augustus smiled.

"Not a weal funewal, of course, deah boys. A mock funewal, on the American pattern."

"What the thump—"

"In Amewicia, where they have also been expewiencin' depression, business men in many cities have got together an' solemnly buwied the spiwit of pessimism in the form of an effy."

"Dismal Jimmy!" grinned Jack Blake. "I've read about it in the papers."

"Just so, deah boy. Well, my ideah is to buwy a Dismal Jimmy heah at St. Jim's, as a symbol that fwom now on we have buwied depression an' intend to be optimistic—see?"

"My hat! That's a jolly good wheeze!" said Monty Lowther, becoming really interested at last. "We'll all give you a hand in this beanfeast, Gus; you can rely on me, anyway!"

"Same here!"

Arthur Augustus beamed.

"That is vewy gwatifyin', deah boys. I accept your ofahs of help with vewy great pleasuah. I wondah if there's one of you capable of makin' up a weally good guy?"

"I'm your man!" said Lowther promptly. "I'll get on the job right away, if you like, and we can hold the funewal before brekker—tomorrow and start the movement there and thed! All agreed?"

"What-ho!" grinned the juniors, who saw the prospect of quite a lot of fun out of a mock funewal.

"Weally, it's vewy decent of you fellahs to fall in with my ideah so quickly as this," remarked Arthur Augustus, in a state of great gratification. "At this wate we shall

westore the world to her pwospevity in no time! Pwaw proceed with the makin' of a Dismal Jimmy as soon as you like, Lowthah, deah boy; an' I entially withdrow the personal remark I made concernin' you just now."

"Don't mensh!" said Lowther. "I'm off now to fix things up."

"Wight-ho; I'll twot along to the Common-woom to get weccuits."

"And we'll come with you to see fair play," said Blake. "Comin', you Shellfish!"

"Wait!" broke in Skimpole. "Before you decide on this puerile scheme, I want to put to you Professor Balm-crumpet's views on mass psychology, and my own views on the coming catastrophe which we are powerless to avert. If you youths can spare an hour or so while I briefly explain—"

Herbert Skimpole suddenly found that he was talking to the Common-room door, the rest of the crowd having departed. After due reflection, it dawned on his mighty brain that Tom Merry & Co. were either unable, or unwilling, to spare an hour or so to listen to the views of the celebrated Professor Balm-crumpet.

And Skimpole, shaking his head sadly, returned to his own study to browse among the works of his brainy mentor.

CHAPTER 4.

Burying Dismal Jimmy!

"**B**EHOLD Dismal Jimmy!" Thus Monty Lowther, in the Shell dormitory on the following morning.

Rising-bell had not yet gone, but already most of the Shell were out of bed and partly dressed. Monty Lowther had been the first to rise. After spending ten minutes in the box-room putting the finishing touches to the effy he had created the previous evening, he had just returned, carrying the result of his efforts with him.

He held up the effy in the air as he spoke, and from the Shell came a roar.

"My hat!"

"What the thump?"

"It's Ratty—Ratty of the New House!" yelled Gunn.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The juniors roared. Lowther had kept his operations a deep secret, and nobody had known after what pattern, if any, he was modelling his Dismal Jimmy.

They soon knew when they saw. The effy, though a grotesque and libellous caricature, undoubtedly bore a marked resemblance to Mr. Ratchiff, the sour-tempered Housemaster of the New House at St. Jim's.

"Pretty good, don't you think?" grinned Lowther. "Of course, I haven't taken anybody in particular for my model."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"All I've done is to make the most miserable-looking boulder I could," said Lowther modestly. "It doesn't look like any living person, does it?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"There'll be a row if it's spotted, anyhow!" remarked Tom Merry. "Think Gus will stand for it? He may think it's taking a liberty with his wheeze, you know."

"Gus mustn't know," said Lowther coolly. "If we pretend not to notice any likeness, he won't, either! Hallo, Gus!"

"Good-mornin', deah boy!" said Arthur Augustus, amiably strolling elegantly in at that moment. "Dismal Jimmy is weady, then? Good! Bai Jove!"

"Anything the matter with it?" asked Lowther.

Arthur Augustus fixed a somewhat peculiar look on the effy through his monocle.

"It is a vewy fine effort, certainly, deah boy," he remarked. "I was only thinkin' that there was somethin' vaguely familiar about it."

"Reminds you of someone near and dear to you?" asked Lowther sympathetically. "Something like your Uncle Vere de Vere de Montmorency, or someone?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Weally, Lowthah! I suppose it's my imagination, but the thing gave me quite a turn for the moment. Does it remind you of anyone?"

Lowther examined Dismal Jimmy critically.

"Well, of course, if it had a monocle instead of specs, old bean, it might be you," he said thoughtfully. "On the other hand—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"



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"Get that young urchin, Tatters, kicked out of Greyfriars and I'll make it worth your while! He stands between me and a fortune! . . . And Carne, a prefect of Greyfriars, listens to the voice of the tempter, heedless of the unscrupulous task he is pledging himself to do. With Carne doing his worst for Tatters, the tempter waits in avaricious anticipation of the fortune the disgrace of Tatters will bring him. But there's many a slip 'twixt cup and lip! The fascinating manner in which this splendid yarn is unfolded by famous Frank Richards will bring readers untold pleasure.

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"Wats!" said the swell of the Fourth, with an indulgent smile. "Well, if you chaps are all weady—"

"Ready, ay, ready!" I'll wrot along an' tell Blake an' the wot an' we'll join you outside the House."

Arthur Augustus quitted the dorm. He was followed by a chuckle from the Shell juniors.

"Good old Gus!" grinned Lowther. "And now we've got to smuggle this guy downstairs. Got the bier, Tommy?"

Tom Merry nodded, and there was another laugh as he produced from underneath his bed the remains of an orange-box—this crude structure being evidently intended for the conveyance of Dismal Jimmy to his last resting-place.

"Better cover it with something black to make the picture look real," said Clifton Dane. "What offers?"

"You can have a black cloak I've got in my locker, if it's any good," grinned Gore. "We used it in the Shakespeare play last year, you know."

"Good enough! Yank it out!" Gore dived into his locker and fetched up from the bottom a long cloak of sombre black which was quite voluminous enough to cover the "bier." Armed with this, he joined the rest of the party in their trek downstairs.

The Shell men kept well together so as to conceal the presence of Dismal Jimmy and the orange-box, which would have undoubtedly aroused curiosity in any stray "beaks" who happened to be about at that early hour. Their precautions, as it turned out, were unnecessary, and none of the powers-that-were appeared on the horizon for some time.

They reached the steps of the School House, therefore, without being challenged. There they found that the Fourth-Form contingent had already arrived.

Arthur Augustus, dressed appropriately in a black suit and wearing his very best topcoat, came forward to greet them. "Erewhthin' weady, deah boys?"

"Everything, old bean—with the exception of black-edged handkerchiefs!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" "Don't worry; I've seen to that!" grinned Blake, and he untied a brown paper parcel he was carrying and started distributing black-bordered handkerchiefs.

"All we want now is tears!" remarked Kangaroo. "Has any other genius thought to bring along onions?"

"Ha, ha, ha!" "Bai Jove! It will be entirely unnecessary to shed tears," said Arthur Augustus. "Wemembah, deah boys, we are buywin' Dismal Jimmy; once he is buwid, the occasion will be one for weioicin'. I suggest we now form a procession!"

"Good egg!" "Trot out the 'corpse'!" "Where's that bier, Tommy?"

Tom Merry was already busy spreading Gore's cloak over the decrepit orange-box. When he had finished, Lowther dumped the "corpse" on that mournful resting-place, and there was a yell from the Fourth.

"My hat!" "Look who it is!" "The giddy living image!" roared Blake.

"Ha, ha, ha!" "Pwaw don't make so much noise, deah boys," said Arthur Augustus, with rather an anxious glance up at the staircase. "The mastahs will be brought into this movement in due course, but for the moment pwwraps it's as well to cawwy on without their knowlege or consent."

"Perhaps it is!" gasped Digby. "Especially as far as one of 'em's concerned!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" "Line up, deah boys," said Arthur Augustus, whose preoccupation with organising matters had left him no time, as yet, to discover that Dismal Jimmy was associated in the minds of the mourners with Mr. Ratcliff. "Will the beawwah kindly waise the biah on their shouldahs, as if it were a coffin!"

"Half a mo'! That'll prevent anyone seeing his face," objected Herries. "I suggest we raise him into a half-sitting position first. Then all the world can see who he is."

"Hear, hear!" Lowther and Tom Merry between them managed to fix the guy up in such a way that its face was recognisable. Then they raised the entire cargo, and Blake and Herries and Kangaroo and Clifton Dane joined them in the task of bearing the bier.

"March, deah boys!" said Arthur Augustus. They marched.

"What about the 'Dead March,' while we're about it?" suggested Digby.

"Good wheezes!" Clive of the Fourth gave the key, and the juniors solemnly began to hum the "Dead March." Not many of them knew much about singing, and fewer still knew the tune of the "Dead March." As a result, little emerged that was recognisable as music. But a mournful effect undoubtedly was obtained; in fact, the impression made by fifty juniors singing all sorts of different tunes in all sorts of different keys was far more mournful than the composer of the "Dead March" could ever have imagined in his most doleful moments!

"Dum-dum-dum-dum-dum-dum-dum!" sang one section.

"Mmmmmmmmmmmmm" hummed another.

"Ma-da-da-dudder-da-da-da!" wailed a third.

"My hat! Some tune!" gasped Monty Lowther. "Join in, everybody! If you can't sing, cry!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" "Don't laugh, fatheads, anyway!" said Blake. "This is a funeral, you know, not a giddy picnic!"

"Oh! Sorry!" The procession wound its way across the quad towards the gates, near which the enterprising Lowther had had a suitable hole dug in the ground overnight.

As they proceeded, windows were flung up on all floors of the School House and curious faces peered out. Surprised stares followed the procession on its slow and solemn journey.

At such an early hour there were naturally not many signs of life in the quad, and until they were half-way down to the gates, nobody else joined the "mourners."

Then there was a sudden rush of feet from the direction of the New House, and a crowd of juniors from that rival establishment, headed by George Figgins, arrived on the scene.

Figgins gave them a hail. "Hallo, hallo! What's the game, you School House wasters?"

"Sheer off, Figgy!" growled Blake. "This is a School House funeral. New House worms not wanted!"

"Half a minute, deah boy!" put in Arthur Augustus. "As a national movement, the Optimists cannot recognise House distinctions. Figgay an' his men can join in if they like. We're buywin' Dismal Jimmy, Figgay!"

Figgins stared. "You are, are you? Well, it's like your dashed cheek to model your rotten Dismal Jimmy after our Housemaster!"

"Arthur Augustus started and looked up at the "corpse." "Bai Jove! I knew that guy reminded me of someone!" he exclaimed. "Of course, it's Watty!"

"Palling our legs, eh?" snorted Redfern. "Well, we're not going to stand for this!"

"No fear!" came a yell from the newcomers.

"Ratty may be all kinds of a Dismal Jimmy," said Figgins grimly, "but he's our Housemaster, anyway, and we don't allow School House bounders to make a rag out of him!"

"Hear, hear!" "Well, stand aside, and let the funeral pass, anyway!"

grinned Lowther. "March, you men!"

"We'll see about that!" grunted Figgins. "Back up, you fellows! They don't go another step while we're here!"

"Not likely!" The New House juniors, looking very determined, stood in the path of the funeral procession. The "mourners," putting away their black-bordered handkerchiefs, marched forward.

"Knock 'em out of the way!" sang out Blake.

"Back up, School House!"

"What-ho!" The two forces met, and for a second or two, there was a struggle in which the bier and its burden rocked dangerously and most indecorously.

Then somebody hit out. A moment later, a wild and whirling "scrap" was in progress.

"Sock it into 'em!" yelled Tom Merry.

"Let 'em have it!" roared Figgins.

Both sides carried out instructions in the heartiest manner.

In the excitement of the battle, nobody noticed the approach of a grim figure in cap and gown. Then, suddenly, a harsh and all-too-familiar voice sounded above the din.

"Boys!" "Oh erikey!"

"It's Ratty!" "Mr. Ratcliff himself pranced on to the scene, his brow thunderous!

CHAPTER 5.

Cheer Up and Smile!

"DISGRACEFUL!" Mr. Ratcliff fairly snorted out the word.

"Oh!"
"Brawling in the quad before breakfast!" snorted Mr. Ratcliff. "Nicerly disgraceful, I say! What is the explanation of this brutal riot?"

"Hom!"
Some of the juniors smiled. It seemed a trifle far-fetched to describe their little tussle as a "brutal riot." But Ratty had an unhappy knack of putting the worst complexion on things.

"You see, sir—" began Blake.
"It's like this—" said Figgins.
"Hide the guy!" hissed Tom Merry, jerking Dismal Jimmy's bier to the back of the crowd. "Don't for goodness' sake let him see it!"

"What did you say, Merry?" barked Mr. Ratcliff.
"Oh! Nothing, sir!"
"You are hiding something! You are concealing a ridiculous effigy! Let me see it!"

"It's—it's nothing, really, sir—nothing you'd be interested in."
"Stand out of the way, Merry!" said Mr. Ratcliff harshly.

"Oh dear!"
There was nothing else for it. Tom Merry stood on one side and Mr. Ratcliff stared with bulging eyes at the woeful figure of Dismal Jimmy.

"Preposterous!" he snapped. "This would appear to be a reputation of a schoolmaster! Can it—can it—"

"Oh dear!" said Arthur Augustus. "It's not really meant to be you, sir! As a matter of fact—"

"What—what—"
"It's not really you, sir!" gasped the swell of the Fourth. "Pwey don't look at me like that, Blake! I twust I can explain matters tactfully. You see, sir—"
"Scandalous!" roared Mr. Ratcliff. "You tell me that this vile effigy—this obnoxious dummy is intended to be a representation of me—"

"Not at all, sir. That is precisely what I am tryin' to explain! It's not you at all, sir; it's Dismal Jimmy!"

"What? What?"
"Dismal Jimmy, you see, sir. We are holdin' a mock funeral of Dismal Jimmy as the wewpewentative of the spirit of pessimism—"

"You are endeavouring to conceal the truth, D'Arcy!" ground out Mr. Ratcliff. "You have already confessed unwittingly that the disgraceful effigy is intended to be me. You will accompany me at once to Mr. Railton, bringing the vile thing with you—all of you!"

"But we were goin' to bury it, sir!" objected Arthur Augustus. "If you have no objection, sir—"

"I have no intention whatever of allowing you to escape the punishment you merit in such a manner!" barked Ratty. "School House boys will return to their House at once. I will accompany you."

Arthur Augustus gave a hopeless shrug.
"Vewy well, sir. Natuwallly, I shouldn't think of bein' diswepwctful to a mastab. Undah the circs, deah boys—"

"Kindly refrain from speaking, D'Arcy!"

"Yass, but I was just goin' to toll these fellows that undah the circs the funewal may be considahed ovah, an' the weign of optimism may be wergarded as beginnin' heah an' now. Hurwah!" concluded Arthur Augustus, in a sudden burst of optimism. "Thwee cheeahs, deah boys!"

"Oh, my hat!"
"Cheeah up an' smile, you know!" beamed Arthur Augustus. "Hip, hip, hip—"

"Silence!" hooted Ratty, before the juniors could take up the cheer. "Come with me—at once! New House boys will return to the New House!"

"They're not concerned in it, sir," said Tom Merry quietly. "They only chipped in because they thought it looked like you."

Mr. Ratcliff blinked. He was rather taken aback by that unexpected news.

"Is this true, Figgins?" he asked, in considerably milder tones.

Figgins flushed.

"We don't want to dodge trouble, sir; if there's going to be a row about the rag, we're in it with the School House chaps."

"Dear me!" Mr. Ratcliff was evidently gratified by his pupils' unexpected loyalty. "Undoubtedly, Figgins, if that was your motive in attacking these School House boys, the contest was not altogether without justification. Perhaps—"
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them!—the School House boys may also have some kind of explanation to offer, impossible as it seems at the moment."

"Pweicely, sir," said D'Arcy eagerly. "That was exactly what I was twyin' to give you. You see—"
"Silence, D'Arcy! Who is responsible for the affair, to begin with?"

"I am entirely responsible, sir."
"Then what, may I ask, is the meaning of the preposterous business?" asked Mr. Ratcliff, glaring at the swell of the Fourth with deeply suspicious eyes.

"The meanin', my deah sir, is that we are buwyin' the spiwit of pessimism which is at the woot of the world's pweent twoubles."
"Preposterous!"

"Nothin' of the kind, sir! If you can give me your attention for a few minutes—"

"Absurd!" snapped Mr. Ratcliff. "But perhaps there is no need to go into the ideas behind this—this exhibition. What I am concerned about is—is this effigy intended to represent me?"

"Certainly not, sir! I will just explain—"
"There is no need to waste my time with superfluous explanations, D'Arcy. You are telling me the truth?"

"Arthur Augustus turned pink.
"If you suspect that I am fabwicatin', sir, pewwaps it would be as well to take me to the Head."

"Very well, D'Arcy," said Mr. Ratcliff hastily. "I accept your statement. The matter may be considered ended."

"Oh!" came a relieved gasp from the School House juniors.

"Figgys' touched his heart," said Lowther sotto voce. "Who'd have thought it?"

The juniors were surprised and considerably pleased with the unexpected termination of the incident. The probabilities were that if Ratty had known that the designer really had intended the effigy to be a representation of himself, the ending would have been very different. But he didn't know, and, in the circumstances, the juniors thought it wise not to enlighten him, and thanked their lucky stars that he had questioned the only one who was in ignorance of Lowther's intention.

Mr. Ratcliff, looking a little red and ruffled, turned on his heel and walked off in the direction of the New House.

Arthur Augustus, after a moment's hesitation, followed.

"If you can spare a moment, sir," he said.

Mr. Ratcliff paused.

"I have already said that the matter is at an end, D'Arcy."

"Yass; but now that you've heard about the movement, I was wonderin' whethah you'd like to join."

"Oh, my hat!" gasped Tom Merry faintly. "Gus, old chap—"

"If I may say so, without bein' diswepwctful, sir," went on Arthur Augustus, unheeding, "you are sometimes inclined to look on the dark side of things yourself, Mr. Watecliff. That habit will soon change when you join the St. Jim's Optimists."

"D'Arcy!" gasped the Housemaster, almost incredulously.

"Cheeah up an' smile, you know, sir!" said D'Arcy encouragingly. "Give yourself a pat on the back occasionally, and—"

"What—what!"

"Cultivate the habit of seein' the bwright side of life, sir. I would wecommend weadin'—pewwaps 'Chips,' or 'Comic Ads.'"

"Wha-a-ut!" howled the outraged Ratty, while a roar went up from the juniors. They simply couldn't help it.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Ha, a good laugh now an' again, sir," said Arthur Augustus earnestly. "It will do you a lot of good. If I might suggest it— Yoooop!"

What had happened was a mystery for the moment to D'Arcy. The onlookers, however, were in a position to see that while he had been talking, D'Arcy had inadvertently stepped on the trailing end of Mr. Ratcliff's gown, with the result that when the Housemaster of the New House suddenly turned to go, the swell of the Fourth was jerked right off his feet!

Thud!

"Whooop!" roared Arthur Augustus.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Mr. Ratcliff, without another look round, rushed back to the House, and the juniors, almost helpless with laughter, assisted the hapless swell to his feet.

"Good old Gussy!" chortled Lowther.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Arthur Augustus rose dizzily to his feet, clawing wildly for his monocle.

"Owl! Owl! Oh deah!" he gasped. "What happened, deah boys? Gwooooh!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"
 "Now's your chance to put your own theory into practice!" roared Figgins. "Cheer up and smile, Gussy!"
 "Ha, ha, ha!"
 "Gwoooogh!" repeated the swell of the Fourth.
 And "Gwooooghs!" and "Ows!" and "Yows!" were all he seemed capable of uttering for some time after that. Apparently, there were occasions when even the leader of the optimists found it difficult to cheer up and smile.

CHAPTER 6.

Optimism—a la Gussy!

HIS adventure with Mr. Rateliff did not depress Arthur Augustus for long. He was smiling again at breakfast-time; he was beaming when he went upstairs to collect his books for first lesson; he was fairly bubbling over with joy when he walked along with his study mates to the Fourth Form room.

Blake and Herries and Digby also smiled. They had frequently found their noble chum entertaining in the past; but he had never been more entertaining than he was at present.

Nodding and smiling to all and sundry, Arthur Augustus pursued his optimistic path.

He was followed by stars from those who had not yet heard of the great Optimism Campaign. Some of them even looked a little suspicious, wondering, perhaps, whether D'Arcy's mirthful demeanour was in any way connected with peculiarities in their personal appearance.

Mr. Selby, the master of the Third, whom D'Arcy greeted with a particularly intense sort of smile, went so far as to stop him.

"You are laughing at me, D'Arcy!" he exclaimed, with a frown.

Arthur Augustus looked astonished.

"Nothin' of the kind, sir. I am merely cultivatin' an optimistic outlook on life. I certainly wasn't laughin' at you. Specially, sir, there is nothin' to laugh at!"

Mr. Selby compressed his lips.

"If I have your word of honour, D'Arcy—"

"Most decidedly you have, sir! I am surprised that such a thought should entah your head."

"Very well!"

And Mr. Selby went his way, looking as if, in spite of D'Arcy's assurance, it was very far from well.

Gerald Cutts of the Fifth passed by as D'Arcy and his chums drew near the Fourth Form room. Cutts, a somewhat gay dog, who was in the habit of taking occasional nocturnal excursions into the town after lights out, looked tired-eyed and distinctly peeved with life. D'Arcy gave him a thoughtful look through his monocle.

"Cheeah up, deah boy! Don't be down in the mouth! Give yourself a pat on the back!"

"What the thump—" ejaculated Cutts.

"There's no sense whatevah in bein' downhearted, deah boy!" went on Arthur Augustus generally. "Pwobably it's merely because you've been keepin' late hours. In that case, the wemedy is obvious."

"Why, you cheeky young sweep!"

"Keep smilin'!" concluded D'Arcy, as he departed.

Cutts didn't. He didn't even begin to smile. Instead, he took a short run after the optimistic swell of the Fourth, and swung him round by the shoulder.

"You insolent young cub!" he roared.
 Arthur Augustus stared at the black sheep of the Fifth in blank amaze.

"Pottay, deah boy?" he inquired.
 "I'm not potty enough to take cheek from a fag lying down, anyway!" growled Cutts. "Lemmo show you!"

What he intended to show was never known, for, before he could act, Blake and Herries and Digby had closed round him.

"This way to your Form-room, Cutts," said Blake affectionately.

And the Fourth-Formers simultaneously gave Cutts a push that sent him staggering far down the passage.

"Ow!" said Cutts; and before he could return to the fray Blake and Dig and Herries had dragged their optimistic chum into the Fourth Form room.

Mr. Lathom, the master of the Fourth, entered soon after, and Arthur Augustus bestowed a beaming smile on him.



A massive gentleman in uniform stepped forward. A moment later a pair of large hands descended on Skimpole and whirled him out of the lift!

"Good-morning, sir!" he remarked.
 Mr. Lathom registered slight surprise.

"I thought you had already bidden me 'good-morning' at breakfast-time, D'Arcy!" he observed mildly. "That being so, it is hardly necessary to repeat the salutation."

"Pewwaps not, sir, strictly speakin'!" admitted the swell of the Fourth. "But a bwright, cheewy gweetin' is worth repetition, don't you think?"

"On the contrary, D'Arcy, I am of the opinion that the repetition renders it absurd! Pray sit down!"

"With pleasuah, sir!"

D'Arcy resumed his seat, and Mr. Lathom proceeded to take his Form in Roman History.

By way of a preliminary canon, Mr. Lathom put a few test questions to the Fourth on the subject of the previous night's prep. The Fourth answered without enthusiasm. Roman History was not a favourite study with most St. Jim's juniors, and the Fourth were not deeply interested in the wars and conquests of the Roman dictators.

But Roman History on this occasion turned out to be really entertaining—thanks to Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

When it came to D'Arcy's turn to be questioned he rose with great cheerfulness and smiled brightly at Mr. Lathom, who was beginning to feel a little puzzled by his noble pupil's behaviour.

"What, D'Arcy, was the date of the birth of Julius Cæsar?" he asked.

Arthur Augustus paused for a moment. Then came his reply: and the Fourth sat up, electrified.

"Nineteen-hundred-and-nine, sir!" said Arthur Augustus, with a broad and beaming smile.

Mr. Latham jumped.

"What?"

"Nineteen-hundred-and-nine! Is that right, sir?"

"Right!" gasped Jack Blake. "Oh, ye gods!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The Fourth roared. Ignorance of Roman History was somewhat prevalent in the Fourth. But even the most ignorant in the Form knew better than to suppose that Julius Caesar was born in 1909.

"Silence!" snapped out Mr. Latham. "D'Arcy! Boy! Can it be possible that you are serious?"

Arthur Augustus smiled still more.

"Not at all, my dear sir!" he answered cheerfully. "I assure you that I am not a bit serious!"

"G-g-great pip!" stuttered Digby. "Gus, old chap—"

"It's quite all right, Dig! I know what I'm doin'! The fact is, sir—"

"You say you are not serious, D'Arcy?" hooted Mr. Latham. "In that case, then, you know better?"

"Naturally, sir. I am well awash that Julius Caesar was born in 102 B.C.!"

"Then in that case, boy, what induced you to give the ridiculous answer '1909'?" roared Mr. Latham.

Arthur Augustus regarded the irate Form master with perfect equanimity.

"The wozason was, sir," he replied calmly, "that I thought the answer I gave would be regarded as wathash funny, and bwrighten the Form up a little. Appawntly it achieved the desahed wozult!"

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

Mr. Latham blinked at his cheery pupil almost incredulously.

"You—y—" he gasped.

"Woman Histowy is inclined to be a bit depwessin'," explained the swell of the Fourth, "an' we can't afford to be depressed in these days, sir. Hence my attempt to introduce a lightash side to the lesson!"

"Oh, my hat!" breathed Blake. "For goodness' sake, Gus, sit down!"

Mr. Latham, almost overcome, sat down at his desk.

"Surely the boy must be ill!" he murmured. Aloud, he added: "D'Arcy, I can hardly believe my own ears. I will give you another chance. What important position did Sylla attain in the Roman State?"

The Fourth hung on D'Arcy's words. And they were not disappointed.

"He became an announcin' in a bwoadcastin' studio!" answered Arthur Augustus blithely. "Aftah that, sir, he became a p'roducal of 'talkie' films!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Announcer—producer—" babbled Mr. Latham, almost tearing his hair.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Aftah that—" began the swell of the Fourth, having evidently received another inspiration.

But that was as far as he got before the half-stupefied Form master came in with a thunderous:

"Silence!"

"Oh! 'Bai Jove!' gasped Arthur Augustus, while the laughter of the rest of the Form died a sudden death.

"How dare you!" hooted Mr. Latham. "I repeat, D'Arcy, how dare you!"

"My dear sir—"

"I refuse to listen to excuses!" snorted the master of the Fourth. "It would appear, wretched boy, that from motives which are beyond me you have chosen to treat the lesson in a flippant manner. Take two hundred lines!"

"Weally, Mr. Latham—"

"And I will put yet another question to you!" added Mr. Latham grimly. "Answer this in a humorous manner and I'll punish you! The question is—what was the effect on Britain of Caesar's invasion in 55 B.C.?"

"That is easily answered, sir," said Arthur Augustus. "By invadin' Bwita'in, Caesar paved the way for the Great Bwita'in of to-day."

"Boy!" gasped Mr. Latham, quite faintly.

"The thing for all patriots to do," said Arthur Augustus gravely, "is to cheeah up an' smile, in the first place, an' in the second place to buy Bwitaish goods!"

"Boy!" hooted Mr. Latham.

"Befoah you use an article, sir," went on Arthur Augustus cheerfully, "make quite suah that it is of Bwitaish manufactur' throughout. Havin' made suah of that, use it as quickly as poss."

A grim smile appeared on Mr. Latham's face suddenly.

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"So that is your answer to my question about the Roman invasion!" he remarked, in a suppressed voice. "Very well, D'Arcy. I happen to have on my desk at the present moment an article which I am quite sure is of British manufacture."

A grin went round the Fourth. But D'Arcy did not notice it.

"I am vewy pleased to heah it, sir!" he said.

"I intend to put your suggestion into practice and use that article as quickly as possible," went on Mr. Latham grimly.

"That is vewy vewy good of you, sir!" said Arthur Augustus, with an approving nod. "I congwatuulate you!"

"Thank you!" said Mr. Latham dryly. "Kindly step out in front of the class, D'Arcy, and I will now proceed to use it!"

"With pleesuah, my deah sir!" beamed the swell of the Fourth. "May I inqulah the natuah of the article, Mr. Latham?"

"You may!" smiled the master of the Fourth. "It is a cane!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

It was a yell from the Fourth.

D'Arcy did not yell. He simply blinked at Mr. Latham for a moment.

"I am waiting, D'Arcy!" said Mr. Latham.

"B—but, my deah sir—"

"Bend over, D'Arcy!"

"B—but—"

"Bend over!" hooted the master of the Fourth.

And D'Arcy abandoned further argument and bent over!

By the time Mr. Latham had ceased to wield his all-British cane on the elegant trousers of the swell of the Fourth, D'Arcy was quite convinced—if he had needed any convincing—of the excellent quality of British goods.

Logically he should have been delighted at the vigour which the Form master put into his performance. Judging by his yells, however, Arthur Augustus would have preferred, in spite of his anxiety to provide work for British manufacturers, that the cane-making industry, at all events, should go into complete bankruptcy!

"That will do!" gasped Mr. Latham, at last.

Arthur Augustus quite agreed. And for the remainder of the lesson he maintained utter silence concerning the need for optimism and the necessity of using British goods!

CHAPTER 7.

Gussy's Bright Idea!

"GOOD old Gus!"

"Three cheers for the giddy optimist!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

In this manner was Arthur Augustus greeted by the hilarious crowd which assembled outside the Form-room after morning lessons.

The swell of the Fourth smiled, though perhaps not so broadly as he had smiled before his encounter with Mr. Latham's all-British cane.

"Bai Jove! I wasn't awah that I had done anythin' to merit all this fuss!" he exclaimed. "It's true that I tried to bwrighten up lessons a bit—"

"And how—as Handcock would put it!" grinned Blake.

"Gus, old deah, you're the world's prize fathead—"

"Weally, Blake—"

"But you've jolly well added to the gaiety of Form-rooms this morning!" finished Blake. "All I can say is, may the fates preserve you if you go on running the optimism campaign on the same lines!"

"Weally, Blake, I considah you vewy ignowant. But nevah mind. We shall soon forget it. In the meantime, I've just thought of a vewy brilliant wheeze!"

"Bury it!" suggested Herries.

"When you've heard it, Hewwies, I'm suah you won't want to repeat that diswidesheaf remark! This is really a bwright an' original ideah! Bwiefly, the scheme is this— Where are you goin', deah boys?"

"Somewhere where we shan't have to listen to your crack-pot ideah!" snorted Blake. "Kim on, you men!"

"Look heah, you cheeky boundahs—"

"Rats!"

And with that short but expressive valediction Blake and Herries and Digby marched off.

Arthur Augustus stared after them for a moment with a withering stare. As that seemed to have no effect, he left them to their own devices and turned his footsteps in the other direction, which led to the Fourth passage.

Deep in thought, which was evidently concerned with his latest bright idea, the swell of the Fourth turned into Study No. 6.

There a visitor was waiting for him, in the shape of a

bony youth, with a bulging forehead and big spectacles.

"Good-morning, my good friend!" said Herbert Skimpole of the Shell.

CHAPTER 8.

Skimpole the Pessimist!

"GOOD-MORNIN', Skimmay, deah boy!" returned D'Arcy, with a nod. "Anythin' I can do for you?"

"I have come to do something for you, my friend!" answered Skimpole solemnly. "I have come to correct one or two misconceptions from which, as a result of your profound ignorance, you are at present suffering!"

"Why, you cheeky ass—"
"In a few minutes I shall be proceeding to Wayland, so I cannot go into the matter very deeply—"
"Bai Jove, if you're goin' to Wayland, deah boy, you can delivah an advertisement I want inserted in the 'Wayland Gazette.'"

Skimpole started slightly.
"What an extraordinary coincidence, my good youth! By a strange chance, I also am calling at the offices of the 'Wayland Gazette,' to offer the Editor an article on the impending destruction of civilisation."

"Bai Jove!"
"Which brings me to what I was about to say," went on the genius of the Shell solemnly. "I understand, from your remarks last evening, and also from certain happenings in the House to-day, that you are founding a movement based on optimistic principles."

"Quite wright, deah boy! If you are thinkin' of joinin'—"

"That, my good youth, is not my intention," said Skimpole loftily. "Rather than join such a futile force, I would crush it in its infancy."

"Look heah, Skimmay—" said Arthur Augustus, with a frown.
"Your movement, if I may say so," interrupted Skimpole, "is the result of the abysmal ignorance common to the so-called upper classes of to-day—common, unfortunately, to most classes. Luckily, one class happens to be exempt."

"What class is that, pway, deah boy?"
"I am referring," said Skimpole, blinking solemnly at his host, "to the intelligentsia—that exclusive class of intellectual thinkers to which I myself belong!"

"Bai Jove!"
"The intelligentsia, my friend, are not optimistic. They see before us nothing but disease, destruction, and desolation," said Skimpole, his mouth almost watering at that cheerful prospect. "Professor Balmcyrummpet—"

"I'm afraid I haven't much interest in Professor Balmcyrummpet's views, Skimmay. But you said you had come to do somethin' for me."

"That was a perfectly correct statement," nodded Skimpole, leaving Professor Balmcyrummpet for a moment. "I have come, in the first place, to disillusion you concerning your movement. Let me say at once that it is doomed to failure!"

"Wats, deah boy!"
"History will prove the accuracy of my forecast," said Skimpole confidently. "Apart from that, my dear D'Arcy, I have come to offer you a wonderful opportunity of saving yourself when civilisation crashes in utter ruins."

"So fah as I'm concerned, my deah Skimmay, you're speakin' gweek!"

"Very shortly," hissed the genius of the Shell, "civilisation will be utterly wiped out. Only a few will escape the general destruction. These few will be the chosen intellectuals who accompany Professor Balmcyrummpet to a remote island in the Pacific. I am offering you, D'Arcy, the chance of joining that party."

"Gweat pip!"
"In the circumstances, of course, I shall expect you to pay my expenses as well as your own. You are a fellow with resources at the back of you, and you won't find it difficult to raise a couple of hundred pounds!"

"Bai Jove! Won't I, though?" gasped the swell of the Fourth. "My deah Skimmay—"

"It is your one chance of surviving, anyway," said Skimpole. "Of course, you will jump at the offer. Very well, then. When can you raise the cash?"

"Nawah!" answered Arthur Augustus, with a laugh. "I'm afraid, deah boy, that you are sufficin' froom a vewy bad dose of pessimism. I have one sound piece of advice to offer you—join the St. Jim's Optimists!"

"Utterly impossible!" said Skimpole, with a shudder. "Do I comprehend you to infer, then, that you actually reject my offer?"

"Just that, deah boy."
"Almost incredible!" murmured Skimpole. "Accu-

toned as I am to the imbecility, I can hardly credit that brainlessness can go so far!"

"Look heah, Skimmay—" protested Arthur Augustus warmly.

"In the circumstances, I can only hope that the Editor of the Wayland paper will be so impressed by my article as to offer me a hundred pounds for it. Do you think he is likely to do that, my good youth?"

Arthur Augustus smiled.
"If that's what you think, Skimmay, then you must be an optimist atah all—the biggest optimist at St. Jim's, I should imagine! But one moment befoah you go, deah boy. While you are in the offices of the papah, would you mind handin' in an advertisement for me?"

"It always gives me gratification to assist my fellow-human beings in any way I can, my good youth," replied Skimpole solemnly. "If you will give me the advertisement you wish inserted—"

"I will do so as soon as I've w'ritten it out. Half a jiffay!" finished the swell of the Fourth; and he sat down at the table and produced a fountain-pen with which he proceeded to draw up his advertisement on a sheet of notepaper.

"Perhaps you require assistance, my good fellow?" suggested Skimpole.

D'Arcy ignored the offer and went on scribbling.

"Now, how does this read?" he said at last.

"Patriotic Purchaser wishes to see British-made school and sports equipment, with a view to selling on a large scale in a big Public School. Goods may be sent on approval to A. A. D'Arcy, St. James' School, near Rylcombe, Sussex."

Skimpole smiled a sceptical smile.
"Of what use can the purchase of British goods be when everything will come to an end so soon? But, since you appear not to possess the mental capacity to understand that, it is useless to talk. I will deliver the advertisement for you."

"Thank you, deah boy. Heah is ten bob to covah the cost of one insertion. Be suah that it goes in."

Skimpole nodded and quitted the study, leaving Arthur Augustus happily contemplating the enormous benefits that would accrue to British industry when he got busy selling British goods at St. Jim's.

Now, Herbert Skimpole, unfortunately, suffered from a characteristic which geniuses are apt to suffer from—he was absent-minded. So there was nothing to be surprised at when, on his way through Hall, he thoughtlessly threw D'Arcy's all-important sheet of notepaper on the fire.

Not till he was standing at the counter of the advertising department of the "Wayland Gazette" did he remember it again, and by that time it was, naturally, too late.

After a little hesitation, Skimpole decided to rewrite the advertisement from memory. Having dismissed D'Arcy and his ideas from his mind since leaving St. Jim's, the genius of the Shell found it a little difficult to remember the exact details. So when the advertisement was finally handed over the counter, it differed in several not-unimportant ways from the original.

This was Skimpole's version:

"Purchaser wishes to buy school and sports equipment, etc., on a large scale. Send goods on approval to A. A. D'Arcy, St. James' School, near Rylcombe, Sussex."

The elimination of the word "British" and the addition of "etc." was likely to make a considerable difference to the quantity of goods delivered in reply to the advertisement. But Skimpole was satisfied that he had given a faithful rendering, and that the results would be as expected.

He went up in the lift to the editorial department, where he explained to a gaping office-boy that he had brought an article on the approaching end of civilisation. The office-boy referred him to a junior assistant, and the junior assistant passed him over to a sub-editor.

The sub-editor, after listening patiently to the genius of St. Jim's for five seconds, referred him to the junior assistant, who referred him to the office-boy, who, in his turn, handed him over to the lift-boy.

Skimpole suddenly found, to his amazement, that he was back on the ground floor with his manuscript still in his hand.

Vaguely aware that his plans had miscarried somehow, Skimpole hopped back in the lift again.

"Kindly conduct me to the editor-in-chief at once!" he ordered.

"Oh, yeah?" sneered the lift-boy.

"I intend to remain here till I see him!" declared THE GENIUS.—No. 1,200.

Skimpole. "I shall see him if I have to stay here for the rest of the day!"

"You will, will you?" asked the lift-boy. Then he addressed a massive gentleman wearing a row of medals: "Bill, this 'ere bloke won't go!"

"Ho! Won't 'e!" remarked Bill grimly.

A moment later a massive pair of hands descended on Skimpole and whirled him out of the lift. He felt himself rushed out of the office at a dizzy speed, then the massive pair of hands left off supporting him, and Skimpole shot down the steps and crashed with a fearful impact into a seedy-looking gentleman who was picking up a cigarette-end from the pavement.

"Thud!"

CHAPTER 9.

Another Brainwave!

"W HOOOOOOOPH!"

"Thus Herbert Skimpole.

"Yooooooop!"

Thus the cigarette-end collector.

Then both sat up and looked dizzily at each other. "My blinkin' 'ead!" roared the seedy-looking gentleman. "My blinkin' 'ead! It's busted!"

"Ow! I have a distinct impression that I have sustained numerous injuries!" gasped Skimpole. "It was not my fault, my good man, I assure you. That the collision was actuated by extraneous forces will be patently obvious to you. Ow!"

"Crikey!" ejaculated the seedy one, looking as if Skimpole's flow of language was altogether beyond him. "A blinkin' furriner! Biffed by a blinkin' furriner! Crikey!"

"You are evidently under a misapprehension, my good sir! I am of English nationality, and belong to St. James' School; the name is Skimpole."

"Ho! A blinkin' swell, then!" remarked the seedy gentleman, whose vocabulary of adjectives seemed to be distinctly limited. "Well, my name's 'Obbs—Bert 'Obbs; and if I don't get compensation outer you, then it ain't Bert 'Obbs! See?"

And Mr. Hobbs got up on his feet again and surveyed Skimpole quite menacingly.

The genius of the Shell also scrambled up and blinked at Mr. Hobbs with great solemnity.

"I fear that I am not in the position to compensate you very considerably, my good man," he said, "but if you will give me your address—"

Mr. Hobbs, ever on the make, gave his address. "Ah, then I will communicate with you at the Three Tuns!" said Skimpole.

Mr. Hobbs made ready to depart. "One moment, my man," continued Skimpole, clutching the other by his arm, "you appear to be an intelligent individual. Let me confide to you some intelligence which is at present known only to a few people."

Mr. Hobbs pulled up sharply. "Crikey! You ain't goin' to tell me you know something about the winner of the Plungeborough 'Andicap 'Urdie Race?" he asked eagerly. "I've been told that Dirty Dick's good, but—"

"I am referring to something more important than the childish game of horse-racing, my good man," said Skimpole sternly. "I am referring to the destruction of civilisation!"

"Ow!" was the dubious reply of Mr. Hobbs, to whom that phrase evidently didn't convey a great deal. "Well, I suppose I'd better be off—"

"Have you read Professor Balmcyrumpet on 'Determinism in Germ-life, in its Relation to Human Survival'?"

"Crikey! 'Ow you talk!" remarked Mr. Hobbs admiringly. "Well, good-dey, sir!"

"Because, if you haven't— Dear me, the man has gone!" broke off Skimpole, in surprise. "He must have been under the impression that I had finished!"

In which conjecture the genius of the Shell was entirely wrong, for one of Mr. Hobbs' reasons for going was that Skimpole evidently had by no means finished!

In a state of considerable surprise Skimpole wandered back to the station and returned to St. Jim's, to receive a hundred lines from Mr. Linton for being late for dinner.

After dinner he ambled across the dining-hall and drew Arthur Augustus on one side.

"I have been wondering, my good youth," he began, when Gussy interrupted him.

"Did you hand in my advertisement, Skimmay?"

"Indubitably," replied Skimpole. "But, reverting to another matter, I met in Wayland a most unfortunate man. He appeared very depressed. Cannot something be done for the poor fellow?"

Arthur Augustus knitted his brows thoughtfully for a minute.

"Of course, I must cheeah him up— Bai Jove! Heah's a bwaiv-wave!"

"You mean, a scheme has formulated itself in your cerebral apparatus," asked Skimpole. "If it will help this fellow to be more cheerful—"

"Certainly it will, deah boy!" beamed the swell of the Fourth. "Heah's the wheeze; to invite this man and some of his friends up to St. Jim's for a feed—"

"Really, my good D'Arcy, I hardly see how a feed—"

"An' then delivah a bwiif lectuach on the Optimism Movement," said Arthur Augustus enthusiastically. "The result will be that he an' his friends will be cheeahed up. It is the vewy thing they need. Optimism will work wonders. Have you this fellow's addeess, Skimmay?"

"Yes, I have taken a note of it. But—"

"Vewy well, then; be a sport, deah boy, an' drop him a line askin' him to bwing a few friends to tea with me to-morrow atfahnoon, will you?"

"It is my principle to be obliging to my fellow humans," said Skimpole. "I will do so with pleasure, my good fellow, though I suggest it would be far better to lecture them on the approaching end of civilisation. Ow!"

The last as Monty Lowther gave him a friendly thump on the back.

"Still arguing it out, you two?" grinned Lowther. "Look here, Gus, I want you. Someone in the Sixth needs chearing up."

"Bai Jove! Who is that, deah boy?"

"Dear old Knox!" replied the humorist of the Shell. "He's suffering from toothache—fearfully depressed at the moment. Why don't you run along and give him a dose of optimism?"

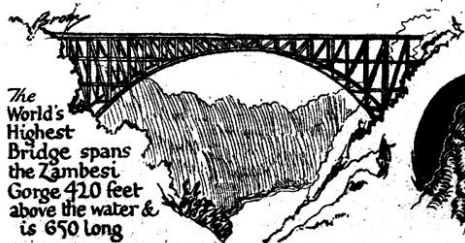
Arthur Augustus looked thoughtful.

"Knox is not a vewy good-temperah chap at the best of times, Lowthah. I should have thought it bottah to talk to him another day; but if you considah—"

"The more depressed a man is the more he needs the cheery optimists," said Lowther sagely. "My advice is, run along now and explain the aims and objects of the movement. Very likely he'll forget all about his toothache!"

"Bai Jove! It would be wathah a score to waks in Knox as a wewcut!" smiled the swell of the Fourth. "I'll try it, with pleasuach. Don't forget to w'ite your Wayland friend, Skimmay!"

Would You Believe It?



The World's Highest Bridge spans the Zambezi Gorge 420 feet above the water & is 650 long



The Barber's Pole is a relic of the days when barbers practiced surgery. The stripes represent bandaging.

James II, the only English Monarch since the Norman Conquest to abdicate

Lowther followed him. A dozen Shell juniors followed Lowther; and quite a crowd of fellows from other Forms brought up in the rear. Lowther's suggestion for converting Knox had already, apparently, gained a good deal of publicity, and there was considerable curiosity to see how the optimist of the Fourth would get on.

With a grinning crowd at his heels, Arthur Augustus went upstairs to Knox's study and tapped on the door. From within the study came a sound resembling the snarling of a caged tiger. It was Knox inviting the caller to enter.

Arthur Augustus entered, and beamed on Knox, whose face was swollen and bandaged.

"Cheeah up, deah boy!" he smiled. "Feelin' any pain?"

A kind of strangled gasp came from the Sixth-Former. Arthur Augustus deduced that the answer was in the affirmative.

"Nevah mind, deah boy," he went on. "Fah worse twoubles at sea, you know! Forget the toothache for a moment an' listen to the cheeahy news I've brought you." Knox's glare became a little less pronounced. For a moment he wondered whether he had been lucky in a lottery—the purchase of lottery tickets being one of Knox's little hobbies.

"Well!" he growled.

"It's weally wippin' news, deah boy," said Arthur Augustus enthusiastically. "You'll be feafully bucked when you heah—or, at least, I hope you will!"

"If you've any news for me—ow! Ugh!" said Knox, as his toothache gave him a sudden twinge, "then let's hear it, for goodness' sake—ow!"

"All serene, deah boy! Heah's the news: I've started an unofficial League of Optimists at St. Jim's."

"Ow! Eh!" gasped Knox.

"Pledged to cheeah up an' smile an' give themselves a pat on the back, an' that sort of thing," said Arthur Augustus genially. "Members of this society will be expected to rowckett the pvesent depressed state of the world by lookin' on the bright side of things—"

"Ooooooh! Ah! Ow!"

"An' generally smilin' through twouble till twouble disappears. Now, Knox, deah boy," concluded the swell of the Fourth, "what about joinin' it?"

"You—you—ow—woooooh!"

"Considah yourself a membah, then!" smiled the optimistic leader of the optimists. "My advice now, deah boy, is, forget the toothache!"

"Wha-a-a-at!" shrieked Knox.

"An' twot-wound spweadin' the good news, an' cheeahwin' up othahs, you know—yoooop!" finished Arthur Augustus feebly, as something flew across the study and crashed into his noble face.

"That's that!" hooted Knox, apparently referring to the heavy Greek lexicon which D'Arcy had stopped. "Take this at the same time—and this—and this!"

"Whoooop! Yawoooooh! Yoooop!"

A regular rain of books descended on the swell of the Fourth. Arthur Augustus stuck it for a few moments. Then Knox's supply of books came to an end and he picked up a stool. And that was the signal for D'Arcy to go.

With a yell, he turned tail and fairly leaped out of the study, slamming the door behind him.

Outside, Lowther and quite an enormous crowd of spectators were waiting. There was a roar as the luckless optimist flew into view.

"Any luck?"

"Convert him, Gus?"

"Looks as if Knox has converted Gus, instead!" grinned Lowther.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Ow! Bai Jove! Cwoooooh!" gasped Arthur Augustus. "That wotah is an enemy to Bwita'in's pwoopwity. I shall uttally wefuse to allow him in the movement now. Ow!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I weally fail to see anythin' to cackle at, deah boys! It's a wevy sewious mattah!"

But on that point the juniors apparently didn't agree with the swell of the Fourth, for they continued to roar for quite a long time after Arthur Augustus had departed.

CHAPTER 10

On Approval!

"HALLO, hallo!"

"What the thump!"

Tom Merry and Manners and Lowther, on their way down for a sprint round the quad before breakfast, stopped near the letter-rack and stared.

The morning delivery was in, and the letter-rack, as usual at that hour, was well-filled with letters. The unusual feature which had attracted the attention of the Terrible Three, however, was that letters were not only in the rack, they were also on a small table near the rack, and had even flowed into a big pile on the floor. For some reason an avalanche of letters seemed to have descended on St. Jim's.

"What on earth is it?" gasped Tom Merry. "Why, there must be hundreds of 'em—thousands, in fact!"

"I say, you chaps, don't touch 'em until I've looked through 'em!" ordered a squeaky voice behind them, as Trimble rolled on the scene. "I'm expecting a remittance from one of my titled relations. I dare say several of 'em have sent at the same time!"

"Well, if your titled relations don't number more than a couple of thousand, Eggy, it looks as if they've all come up to scratch at once."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Lemme have a look!" snapped Trimble, ignoring the flippant reference to his oft-mentioned but never-seen titled relatives. He made a dive into the pile that reposed on the floor. "Nothing 'ere mine—they're all for that silly ass, D'Arcy!"

"So are these!" remarked Monty Lowther, picking up half a dozen letters from the table. "And this."

"This, too!" said Tom Merry. "And all these! Well, my hat—"

"They're all for Gussy!" yelled Manners. "The whole giddy lot of 'em, by the look of it. What the thump—"

"Here he comes!"

Arthur Augustus himself, with Blake and Herries and Digby and a crowd of other Fourth-Formers, came down the stairs from the dormitory. They, like their predecessors, stopped and stared at the ocean of letters in front of the letter-rack.

"Hold me up, somebody!" said Blake faintly. "I'm seeing things!"

"Bai Jove!"

"Are they all real?" gasped Dig. "Blessed if I can believe it!"

"Come and look for yourself, then, old bean!" grinned Lowther. "Every one guaranteed genuine—and they're all for Gus!"

"What!"

Facts from Far and Near.



Fish with headlights
Banda Island
Dutch E. Indies,
Used by the natives as bait.

The World's Largest
Bell
is at Moscow
weighs 198 tons.
is 19 ft. high
& 60 ft.
round the rim.
Now used as
a chapel.



Can you draw this design
without moving the pencil from the paper or going over the same line twice?
(Answer on page 28.)
THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 1,200.

"Fact!"

"B-b-bai Jove!" stuttered the swell of the Fourth, regarding his record post in a state of something very near panic for a moment. "What—what on earth— It's a pvesactical joke—must be! But what— Bai Jove!" he exclaimed suddenly. "Of course! I wemembah now! These are answahs to my advertisement."

"En!"

"It's quits all wright, deah boys," said the swell of the Fourth, regaining his customary sangroid. "Tempowawly I had forgotten. That's what they are, of course. I confess I didn't expect quite so many weplies; but undoubtedly that's what they are."

"They're replies to an advertisement!" hooted Blake. "But what advertisement, for goodness' sake? Mean to say you've been showing adverts in the paper without consulting me!"

Arthur Augustus frowned.

"Pway don't woaah, Blake! I forgot to mention the matthah at the time, but I put a notice in the Wayland papah, askin' vendahs of school an' sports equipment to get in touch with me."

"You—you—"

"But what was the big idea?" asked Tom Merry, in astonishment.

"The ideah, Tom Mewwy, was, an' is, to enoowage twade. It is my intention to set up as an intermediary for Bwtiah goods in this school. With that intention, I requested Bwtiah manufactuwahs an' merchants to get in touch with me. Hence these lettahs!"

"M-m-m-my hat!" said Blake, almost overwhelmed, while from the rest came a chuckle that rapidly swelled to a roar.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Weally, deah boys, I am surprised to see you tweatin' this important mattah of bimzy in this manah!" said Arthur Augustus severely. "Pway stop cacklin', some of you, an' help me upstairs with my post. I'm wathah afraid I shan't have time to wead it all befoah breakfast!"

"Great pip!" gasped Digby. "I'm rather afraid you won't have time to read it before next Christmas!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, wats! Pway stop wotnin', deah boys, an' give me a hand. There's a lot of work to do, an' I want to be fwoce this aftnoon to deal with the samples I am expectin' latah on."

"You—you're expecting samples, too?" asked Herries faintly.

"Yaas, wathah! In considewable quantities, judgin' by the size of this delivewy of lettahs!"

"Why, you burbling, howling loony—" said Blake.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Pway don't talk so much, Blake, deah boy. An' giv me a hand up to the studay with my cowespondence!"

"Join in, chaps!" grinned Tom Merry. "Clear the lot out of the way before the masters come down. If Railton sees this lot, there'll be trouble!"

"All serene! We'll help!"

Willing helpers shovelled up handfuls of letters and began carrying them upstairs to the Fourth quarters, and very soon a long procession was trailing along, completely loaded with D'Arcy's correspondence. Many hands made light work, and before any of the masters had put in an appearance every letter had been swept up and transported to Study No. 6.

The difference made in that celebrated apartment by the arrival of the offers of sports goods, etc., was striking. The study table was swiftly covered; the mantelpiece was equally swiftly piled high; then D'Arcy's helpers started dumping their burdens on the window-ledge and the chairs; finally, even Cardew's portable wireless-set, which still rested on its pedestal, unrepaired, was used to support its quota.

By the time the juniors had finished their work, Study No. 6 looked as if it had been overwhelmed by a freakish kind of snowstorm.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, though a little daunted by the amazing response he had received, was in high spirits when he went down to breakfast.

Blake and Herries and Digby, and for that matter, the Terrible Three, and a good many other of D'Arcy's friends, on the other hand, felt agahst at the prospect. What would happen when the parcels delivery came, they hardly dared conjecture.

It duly came.

The Fourth were in the Form-room, grinding at Latin at the time, but Blake and one or two others saw through the open windows of the Form-room two big mail vans roll through the gates and start unloading consignments

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 1,200.

of parcels at the porter's lodge, while Taggles stood by staring, open-mouthed.

Lessons ended at last, and it being a half-holiday, the juniors were free for the rest of the day. With one accord, the Fourth made a rush for the gates, the Shell streaming out after them a couple of minutes later.

Arthur Augustus was first on the scene. He selected one of the parcels and calmly untied it to see what was inside.

It was a leather satchel. And stamped inside it was the words, "Made in Czecho Slovakia!"

"Bai Jove!" gasped Arthur Augustus. "It's foweign!"

"Never mind what it is, fathed?" hissed Blake. "What the thump are you going to do—about the whole business, I mean?"

"Wemarkable!" said Arthur Augustus, unheeding. "I distinctly stated in my advertisement that the articles must be entially Bwtiah. Pway untie a few more, deah boys, an' see wethah they're all wright!"

There were plenty of volunteers for that job. A score of grinning juniors started untying parcels of all shapes and sizes, and they quickly made known the results of their investigations.

"Made in Germany, this, Gus!"

"These pencils are Rumanian!"

"Japanese stuff here, Gussy!"

"The desk's from Sweden, old bean!"



Faster and faster arrived the miscellaneous merchandise with advertisement had attracted to St. Jim's!

Arthur Augustus allowed his monocle to drop from his eyes. He stared at the opened parcels in blank amazement.

"Something has gone w'ong, deah boys!" he gasped. "There must be a mistake in the advertisement. Who has a copy of the 'Wayland Gazette'? Taggles, deah boy!"

"Which I don't keep no papers in my lodge," snorted Taggles, eyeing the swell of the Fourth with strong disapproval. "An' wot's more, Master D'Arcy, these is nice goin's too, I must say! Which I'll ave to report yer!"

"Bai Jove! I s'imply must see the papah!" gasped Arthur Augustus. "I'll get out my jiggah an' wun down to the village for one. Keep an eye on these things while I'm gone, deah boys!"

Looking very worried, Arthur Augustus raced off, and in less than a minute he was speeding through the gates on his bike.

His departure seemed to be the signal for a regular bombardment of new deliveries.

First came a man trundling a barrow piled high with blackboards. He unloaded them at the porter's lodge and produced an invoice.

"Master D'Arcy! Sign, please!"

Taggles signed, looking as if he were on the verge of apoplexy as he did so.

Then a cartload of baths arrived. After that, half a dozen camp-beds. A few minutes later a truck filled with goal-posts, corner-bags, and other football equipment rolled up. Faster and faster arrived the miscellaneous merchandise which D'Arcy's advertisement had attracted to St. Jim's, until an unending stream seemed to be pouring through the gates.

Half St. Jim's had gathered at the gates by this time, and the faster the goods piled up, the greater grew the general hilarity.

Then the laughter stopped. Mr. Railton arrived on the scene, his eyes almost bolting out of his head.

"What—what—" he gasped.

"It's Master D'Arcy!" roared Taggles. "Which it's a plot to give a man more to do wot's got a lot too much to do already!"

"D'Arcy has ordered all these goods?" gasped Mr. Railton. "Impossible! Incredibly!"

But it was neither incredible nor impossible, as the Housemaster soon found out when he examined a few of the labels.

He turned away from the huge pile of merchandise which was now stacked beside Taggles' lodge, and stared almost fascinated at the stream of vehicles advancing towards the school.

"Preposterous! Utterly ridiculous!" he ejaculated. "The thing must be stopped at once! Where is D'Arcy?"

"My horders is, air—" began the rustic gentleman. The remainder of his remarks were drowned in the noise of a big charabanc which followed him in at that moment. "Et, you!" called out the driver of the charabanc, apparently addressing Mr. Railton.

Mr. Railton jumped.

"What—what! My good man—" "Your name D'Arcy? Well, I've called to sell you this charabanc. Just the thing for takin' football teams to visitin' grounds; boys an' luggage to the station on breakin'-up day, and what-not. Just look her over! Fifteen hundred I want for her, an' dirt cheap!" "My—my good man—" stuttered Mr. Railton.

"Ha, ha, ha!" The juniors couldn't help it. Many of them felt more than a little sorry for Mr. Railton in the unenviable task he had taken on himself, but the humour of the situation outweighed their sympathy. They yelled.

Meanwhile, new arrivals were presenting themselves at the rate of several a minute. Three men arrived carrying a racing shell and oars between them. Soon after, a motor-tractor came rattling down the lane, trailing behind it a huge structure as big as a moderate-sized villa.

"What the thunder—" gasped Tom Merry.

"Hallo! Hallo! What's this?" roared Monty Lowther.

The tractor slowed down and came to a stop, and several grimy workmen dismounted and came through the gates.

"Mr. D'Arcy live 'ere?" asked one of them.

"Well, he does," smiled Talbot, to whom the question was addressed. "But what on earth have you brought with you?"

"We've come with the portable sports pavilion the gov'nor wrote 'im about first post to-day, sir. If you can tell us where 'e wants it put up, we'll—"

"Oh, great pip!"

"It's a sports pavilion complete," almost wept Figgins. "They'll be sending up a gang of men to rebuild the school soon."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Wonder if this aeroplane's for Gussy?" chortled Kangaroo, pointing to a small plane which had been circling overhead for a minute or so. "Since there seems to be no limit to this game, no reason why it shouldn't be—"

"It is!" howled Grundy. "It's coming down into the quad!"

"Surely it can't be—"

"Impossible," said Manners, with conviction.

But he had to revise his opinion soon afterwards. The plane, after circling lower and lower, finished up by gliding down to the quad, and came to a stop only a few yards from the gates. A cheerful-looking young man swung himself out of the cockpit and nodded calmly to the crowd.

"Mr. D'Arcy about?" he asked. "I've come to sell him this little machine. Just the thing for teaching boys something about the air. In first-class condition, and going for a paltry five hundred. Where is he?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

In the wild confusion that now prevailed, fresh newcomers were rolling up every minute, almost unnoticed. But one newcomer suddenly appeared on the fringe of the crowd whose presence was felt immediately.

It was the Head!

Dr. Holmes stalked majestically into the thick of it. And at his approach there was a sudden hush, the St. Jim's fellows quietening down as if by magic, and even the argumentative tradesmen's representatives abandoned their arguments for a moment.

"Mr. Railton! My boys!" The Head sounded inexpressibly shocked. "What is the meaning of this unseemly disturbance?"

Mr. Railton made a hopeless gesture.

"It is almost beyond me, sir. From what I have been able to hear, it would appear that somebody had perpetrated an astounding hoax. In some way, D'Arcy of the Fourth Form seems to be associated with it."

"Extraordinary!" exclaimed the Head. "I had always thought D'Arcy to be an exceptionally well-behaved lad." "He may certainly be regarded as such ordinarily. But undoubtedly he knows something of the reasons for this—this assembly."

"Where is he?" asked Dr. Holmes.

"Just what we all want to know, gov'nor," remarked the man with the charabanc. "I've come 'ere to sell him this charabanc."

"Impossible!"

"That's what I'm 'ere for, anyway."

"An' me this roller!"



CHAPTER 11.

The Invasion of St. Jim's!

BEFORE anybody could answer that question, there was a rumbling and a rattling through the gates.

The crowd gave a roar as they perceived what was responsible.

"Something else for Gussy!" chortled Gunn. "Look at it!"

"Oh, my hat! A giddy horse-drawn lawn-roller!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Master D'Arcy 'ore?" called out the rustic gentleman who was in charge of it. "Which the gov'nor says I'm to leave this for 'im!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

A strangled gasp came from Mr. Railton.

"Stop! There is a mistake! You must take it back to your employer!"

"Same with this boat!"

"We've got a sports pavilion 'ere, sir."

"About my little plane—"

The voice of the vendors' representatives rose to a crescendo of sound. Dr. Holmes put his hands over his ears to shut it out.

"Silence!" he hooted. "Silence, gentlemen, I beg of you! There has been a mistake!"

"My dear sir," interrupted the airman firmly, "there was no mistake about the advertisement in the Wayland paper I saw last night. In case you haven't seen it, here it is."

He handed over a copy of the "Wayland Gazette," on which a small advertisement was ringed round with blue pencil markings. Dr. Holmes took it and read through Skimpole's version of D'Arcy's advertisement in wonderment.

"Amazing! Incredible!" he gasped. "Had I not seen it with my own eyes, I should have said it was impossible. The whole thing is still, however, obviously a mistake. Perhaps one of the other boys can throw some light on it, Mr. Railton. Merry!"

"Yes, sir," answered Tom Merry, not very enthusiastically. "Do you know any explanation of D'Arcy's peculiar behaviour in inserting this advertisement in the local paper?"

Tom took the proffered newspaper and read the advertisement, with knitted brows.

"I can only say that the advertisement is not what D'Arcy intended, sir."

"You can perhaps explain what D'Arcy intended, then?"

"Hem! If you don't mind, sir, I'd rather leave it to D'Arcy himself to explain. He's bound to be back in a very short time now."

The Head nodded.

"Very well. In the circumstances, I will leave it to

D'Arcy himself to explain what at present appears to be inexplicable." He turned to the visitors again. "Gentlemen, I very much regret to inform you that a most unfortunate mistake has arisen. The person whose name appears in the advertisement to which you have responded is a junior boy at this school, who has no authority whatever for purchasing any of the goods you have brought here."

"Oh!"

"Wasting our time—oh?" roared the charabane man. "I like that, I do! Wasting a man's time! I like that!" Apparently his meaning was that he didn't like it at all. That seemed to be the meaning of his companions in misfortune also. A murmur of discontent went round, and for a moment the Head looked a little apprehensive.

"I agree, gentlemen, that the whole affair is most unfortunate," he said. "As you can see for yourself, however, the dimensions of the affair are too large to permit of any question of redress being raised. I can only request you to retire, with regrets that the name of the school should have been associated in any way with the distressing error."

It was the amende honorable, and, coming from such august lips as those of Dr. Holmes, it made quite an impression on the crowd, dissatisfied as they felt.

"Nothing else for it, I suppose!" grunted the owner of the charabane. "I'm going!"

He climbed back into his great vehicle and started back out of the gates again.

The man with the roller turned his horse's head round after him, and the rest, with many murmurs, also followed his example.

"Pray see that D'Arcy is sent up to me as soon as he returns. Kildare!" said the Head. "Since D'Arcy is expected back in any minute, Mr. Railton, perhaps you would like to return to the House with me?"

"Very well, sir."

And Mr. Railton joined the Head in his retirement to the House.

CHAPTER 12.

D'Arcy is Satisfied!

MEANWHILE, Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was pedalling speedily along a country road. Being in rather a hurry to get back to St. Jim's, he had attempted a short cut along a by-lane. The result, however, was not so good, for he very soon lost his bearings. After wandering about for some time he came out on to the main road again, some miles farther away from St. Jim's than where he had left it.

Unfortunately for Gussy, as he pedalled furiously along the main road a lorry came charging out of a side-turning. Before D'Arcy knew what was happening the wing of the swerving lorry had caught him and his bike and flung them both into the ditch. The lorry pulled up a few yards away down the road, and a man jumped out and ran back.

He was the driver of the lorry. He had hoped to find that the cyclist was not seriously hurt, but he had expected, at least, to have to help him out of the ditch. Instead, he saw, standing in the middle of the road, a dishevelled figure, in clothes which were now little more than rags, laughing uproariously and holding a bike, which was bent and buckled in all directions!

Gussy was an optimist!
And how! As Handcock would have said.
As the lorry-driver approached this weird apparition it spoke.

"Whippin' afternoon—what?" said Gussy cheerily. "Beastly wotten luck your vunnin' into me like that—eh? But nevah mind, don't be depress'd!"

For some time the driver was unable to find his voice, but at last he managed to get out:

"Very nice of you to take it like that, sir. Can I give you a lift anywhere?"

Gussy explained that he wanted to go back to St. Jim's, and, by good luck, it turned out that the lorry was passing the end of the lane which led to the school. The driver hoisted the remains of Gussy's bike on to the lorry, and promised to drop it at the cycle shop at Rylcombe later. The bedraggled Gussy seated himself beside the driver and chatted cheerfully as the lorry moved off.

Back at St. Jim's, the Head and Mr. Railton had scarcely entered the School House, when a mighty roar reached them from the quad. Hardly knowing what to expect, the two gentlemen retraced their footsteps.

The sight that met their eyes made them almost reel, for marching through the gates into the quad were some twenty rough-looking men!

At the head of this little band marched one who was more tattered, more dirty, and more disreputable than the others. Nevertheless, he was wearing a cheerful grin. It was the Honourable Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

When Gussy had told Skimpole to ask the depressed man to bring a few friends to tea at St. Jim's, Gussy had



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thought that possibly half a dozen might turn up. It came as a shock to the swell of St. Jim's when he discovered that twenty men expected tea from him!

Mr. Hobbs had lost no time, on receiving the strange invitation, in getting together all the tramps he knew, who were all only too willing to get something for nothing.

He had set out, therefore, with his happy band of followers. At the end of the lane they had met D'Arcy, and at first thought him to be another who wished to join the party.

It was through this that Gussy had discovered just who this ragged band were. He had welcomed them all, and was leading them into the school to have tea, realising that the tea was going to cost him something!

There was a gasp from the crowd, which was echoed by the Head and Mr. Raitton as they recognised the ruffianly leader as D'Arcy of the Fourth.

A dozen juniors swept down upon the dishevelled swell of St. Jim's.

"Gussy, you ass—"

"You fearful dummy—"

"Who are all these men?"

In a breathless burst of eloquence, Gussy the Optimist explained. Then, in turn, he listened to an account of what had happened during his absence.

Arthur Augustus turned quite pale. He had still a lot to hear when the Head spotted him. Dr. Holmes was looking quite dizzy by this time.

"D'Arcy—D'Arcy, you utterly foolish boy, what is the meaning of all this? Who are all these men?"

"Oh dear! I had no idea this crowd would turn up!" murmured the swell of the Fourth. "I invited a few gentlemen of Wayland to tea, just to cheer them up, sir. But this—"

"What—what!" gasped the Head.

"Again Gussy explained.

"The position is extraordinary," spluttered the Head. "Really, I am non-plussed! Something must be done!"

"Pardon me, my dear sir, but something will be done!" said D'Arcy eagerly. "As a gentleman of honah, sir, it is up to me!"

"My dear D'Arcy—"

"I invited them to partake of my hospitality, and I should be singularly lackin' in good mannaah if I failed to exahise my duties as host measly because there are more of them than I expected. With your permish, sir, I ppose to pprovide all these guests with a meal!"

"Impossible! I cannot allow them to enter the school premises!"

"That, pewpaws, will not be necessary, sir," said D'Arcy quickly. "You may already be awah that a numbah of parcels have awrived for me to-day. Among those parcels are a great many comestibles."

"Indeed!" muttered Dr. Holmes, who looked as if the affair was altogether beyond his control now, as, indeed, it was.

"I wpropose to dish out all the parcels containing food, sir, an' request my guests to share out down the road. Fewpaws it is not the most delicate way of treatin' one's guests, but, in the circes, the departure from convention may be excused. Are you agreeabla, sir?"

"You think you will thereby induce them to depart—"

"I have no doubt whatever of it, sir, an' I am suah that when I explain things to my governah, he will be vewy willin' to meet the bill!"

"Dear me! In that case, D'Arcy, you may do as you suggest. And kindly present yourself at my study as soon as the matter is arranged!"

And with that the Head fled, only too glad to see the back of the motley crowd which had invaded the sacred domain over which he presided.

D'Arcy's solution to the problem worked like a charm. His guests didn't feel a bit hurt at the departure from convention involved in their taking food away instead of consuming it on the premises. Mr. Hobbs and his friends departed in high fettle, loaded with gifts, and Taggles was able to lock the gates at last. He made up his mind that

they would remain locked to strangers for the rest of the day, and sternly kept to his resolution.

Thus the tumult and the shouting associated with D'Arcy's two brainwaves died at last. It was resumed on a minor scale afterwards in the Head's study.

Arthur Augustus and Skimpole, who insisted on accompanying him, put up a good show in all the circumstances, and easily convinced the Head that their motives had been perfectly sincere; but naturally they did not escape punishment altogether, and for a short time there was a weeping and a wailing and a gnashing of teeth.

Then, having exacted a promise that nothing of the kind should ever occur again, Dr. Holmes allowed them to depart.

"Duffer's luck, if you like!" was Blake's comment, when Arthur Augustus told the waiting crowd outside the Head's study how they had got on.

"Weally, Blake—"

"Dear, dear me!" ejaculated Skimpole, at that moment.

Skimpole never could resist reading for long, and while Arthur Augustus had been talking, he had been glancing through D'Arcy's copy of the "Wayland Gazette" to which he had helped himself. Something in the paper had evidently perturbed the genius of the Shell. He was staring at it in dismay.

"What's biting Skimmy?" gasped Tom Merry.

"It's a about Professor Balmeyerumpet's scheme!" gasped Skimpole. "It has completely fallen through my good youth. The paper says that the professor was unable to finance the enterprise owing to the high cost of islands in the Pacific."

"Ha, ha, ha!" "It is disastrous—appalling!" said Skimpole. "Our only hope now is that the professor was wrong in his prognostication. Perhaps, after all, civilisation will last a little longer than he anticipated!"

"Well, he may be a little way out," said Lowther hopefully. "Say a fortnight or three weeks, anyway."

"Ha, ha, ha!" Skimpole's solemn visage suddenly brightened up.

"Possibly," he murmured, "in accordance with Professor Kett-Wright's well-known laws of psycho-dynamics, the dangers which threaten us with extinction may even in time vanish altogether. Well, well! I will endeavour to be optimistic!"

"Huwah!" yelled Arthur Augustus unexpectedly.

"Why the excitement?" demanded Blake.

"Because I have succeeded in convertin' Skimmy, dear boy!" beamed Arthur Augustus. "When the Head ordered me to close down the movement, I felt a bit discouraged for a moment. But now I'm satisfied!"

"Oh!" "The seed of optimism has been sown at St. Jim's, dear boys," said the swell of the Fourth. "That seed will bear fruit—in fact, Skimmy's conversion shows that it has borne fruit already!"

"Rather!" "All sewene, then," said D'Arcy. "I wetiah, but I am satisfied! I have done nearly all I set out to, an' vewy soon you'll see, as a result, a happy an' pwpowsewous world!"

"All through you, I suppose?" grinned Lowther.

"Pwecisely!"

And for once nobody had the heart to contradict him. After all, there was no harm in allowing the optimist of St. Jim's to remain under the pleasant delusion that he had put the word on its feet. So, if nobody else at St. Jim's looked back with seriousness on D'Arcy's movement, Arthur Augustus himself, at least, continued to be completely satisfied!

THE END.

(Poor old Gussy! He's always getting into trouble! Next week George Grundy causes a stir at St. Jim's! And you know what Grundy's like!)

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THE night was comparatively calm. Only a freshening breeze ruffled the surface of the dark sea. Overhead, no moon shone, but the stars twinkled in their millions. Far away on the horizon to starboard was a black line, blacker than the shadows of night. Skipper Roscoe knew it to be land, and he eyed it with mild apprehension.

"I'd edge in and take a look at it," he told himself; "only how can a man risk the shallows when he don't know where he is!"

He gazed at the place where the binnacle and the compass should have been. All that he saw was the wreckage, the splintered glass, the broken needle, the crumpled card of the compass. The stars told him he was steering approximately south-sou'-west, and that was the utmost he knew.

The trawler *Sapphire*, of Lowestoft, was in something of a predicament. Her foremast had gone by the board, and a jury-spar now stood in its place rather uncertainly. The decks were littered with wreckage, most of the bulwarks had been smashed to splinters, and the superstructure was broken about; her smoke-stack battered and dented, and the wheel-house minus a roof and glass.

The owner and skipper, James Roscoe, was at the wheel. His nephew, Billy Roscoe, lay sleeping under the lee of the engine-room skylight, while Billy's pal, Frank Parkes, was down in the engine-room, close to the levers, in case he should be wanted, but dozing fitfully, as he deserved, being the only one aboard who knew much about engines.

These three formed the crew of the *Sapphire*, but there was another man aboard. He was Tom Roberts, the former mate of the *Sapphire*, but he lay in the fo'c'sle, trussed up and locked in—a prisoner.

Billy and Frank really belonged to the *Opal*, but there were very good reasons why they were aboard the *Sapphire* now.

Skipper Roscoe owned both the *Sapphire* and the *Opal*. In bad times he had borrowed two hundred pounds from Skipper Sims, of the *Opal*.

Sims was an unscrupulous man with evil ambitions, who stuck at nothing to get what he wanted, and what he wanted above all else was to own the *Opal*, the trawler he commanded. He had insisted that Roscoe should give him a mortgage on the *Opal* as security for the two hundred pounds. Then he had laid his plans.

Sims had bribed Roberts, the mate of the *Sapphire*, to bore a hole in her hull in the hope that she would founder

in the first storm she encountered. The crew would have a good chance of being rescued amongst the fishing fleet off Iceland, and Roberts had orders to time things carefully. The idea was that by this loss Skipper Roscoe would be unable to repay the two hundred pounds, and Sims would claim the ownership of the *Opal*.

But several things had happened to spoil that plan. The *Sapphire* had run full tilt into a storm that was not expected, and the *Opal* had been near at hand, with Billy and Frank aboard. They had butted in after the crew of the *Sapphire* had deserted her; and, getting aboard, had treated Skipper Roscoe's injuries and saved the ship.

Now they were fighting to bring her to port; and Sims, aboard the *Opal*, was anxious to stop them if he could.

Sims had made one determined attempt to ruin their chance, but they had fooled him and beaten him off. In that scrimmage Roberts had been left behind, senseless, and the pals had tied him up because they didn't trust him. There was quite enough danger without running further risks.

Their biggest danger was that they had no means of finding out where they were. Their wireless installation had been wrecked, the compass smashed, and the crew had taken the skipper's instruments with them when they had deserted the ship. Skipper Roscoe was proceeding to Lowestoft by guesswork, and it was dangerous.

He eyed that strip of land in the distance with dis- some idea of his bearings. The trouble was that land meant shallows, shoals, and rocks, and he might at any moment meet with disaster.

Fortunately the night was calm, even if it was dark. The skipper was at the helm with little to do. The engines were running rhythmically at half speed. To have put them at full speed would have meant more attention to the furnaces than they could afford, being so short-handed.

Then the skipper listened. He had heard something that mystified him.

Tap, tap, tap! It sounded as if someone with a limp was coming along the deck from the bows, but he could see no one there.

Tap, tap, tap-tap, tap-tap! He leant over the wheel and peered for'ard through the darkness, but there was nothing to be seen except the slope of the deck from the winch to the bluff bows, gently rising and falling in time with the monotonous swell.

The water slapped the sides of the *Sapphire*, the engines purred gently, the wind sighed fitfully. All these things were familiar enough to Skipper Roscoe, but that continued tapping was all wrong. There should be no tapping.

BILLY AND FRANK ARE THE CREW—

But they crew too soon!

it was coming nearer—nearer—louder!
Tap, tap, tap-tap-tap, tap!
It was more than the skipper could stand, and he bawled at the top of his voice:
"Hey, who's there?"
His stentorian voice echoed and re-echoed across the waste of waters. Billy Roscoe came out of his sleep with a start, and was on his feet in a flash, looking around for some sort of weapon.

"What the dickens?" he snapped.
Frank Parkes poked his head up out of the engine-room hatch.

"What's all the row about?" he cried.
"Listen!" barked the skipper. "Can't you hear it?"
"Hear what?" asked Frank.
"Shut up and you'll find out!" retorted the skipper.
Billy heard it, and grew tense.
"Yes, I've got it!" he whispered, one hand raised, signalling for caution. "Listen!"

Tap, tap-tap, tap-tap!
They all heard it and wondered. Skipper Roscoe leant over the wheel, his head twitching with suspense.
"Can't see a soul," he said.

Frank came up out of the engine-room, frowning with perplexity.

"I don't believe in ghosts!" he said.
But the noise sounded louder. Tap-tap, tap, tap!
"Who said anything about ghosts?" said Billy tersely.
"What else can it be?" asked Frank.
"Somebody walking on the deck," said the skipper, "but I can't see anybody."

Tap-tap, tap-tap—
Billy grabbed a marlin-spike from the deck.
"If it's a human being I'll meet him!" he said grimly.
"And if it's a ghost?" asked Frank.
"I'll lay him—"
"Ay, Billy," cried the skipper, "lay him out!"
"I'll go aft and look that way," said Frank, seizing a heavy wrench and heading for the low stern.

Billy went forward cautiously, peering this way and that through the darkness that enshrouded everything.

At intervals he halted and listened, and almost from under his feet he heard the tap, tap, tapping going on.

It was weird, mysterious. He could see nobody. He could see nothing in any way unusual. Then a sudden thought struck him and he began to run along the heaving deck towards the fo'c'sle. Before he reached it, however, something happened.

The Sapphire seemed to lift her nose right out of the sea. She came to an abrupt halt, with a jerk that shot Billy face downwards on the deck. Her engines raced, her screw roared, lashing the water astern to creamy foam. Then the ship quivered and lurched forward again, while the skipper bellowed with all his might.

"Stop her! We're aground! Stop!"

CHAPTER 2.

Fast on a Bank!

IT would not have been so bad had Frank been in the engine-room, instead of ghost hunting in the stern. He came rushing back, his face bleeding where he had crashed against the splintered trawl boom, when the ship first struck.

He dived down into the engine-room and swung the great levers back. The engines stopped, and the Sapphire began to settle down as if in a bed.

Billy scrambled to his feet, dazed and shaken. The mysterious tapping, and the possibility of a ghost, were completely forgotten now in the more serious danger that confronted them.

"What's happened?" he asked.
"Sandbank," said the skipper. "Get up for'ard and see how she lays! Hey, you, Frank! Stand by to go astern when I yell!"

"Ay, ay!" called Frank.
Billy went up to the fo'c'sle and peered over the bows. He saw that the sands were covered by barely two inches of water. The night was calm. If there had been more wind the waves would have been considerably higher and would have broken in white foam over the banks. The skipper would have seen the danger ahead and have steered clear of it. Now they were fast on the sands, the ship sinking deeper with every roll.

"How far on are we?" bellowed the skipper.
"Looks like we've driven up as far as the trawl irons!" shouted Billy. "Try her with the engines. If you leave it she'll roll herself deeper!"

"Hang on, then," said the skipper. "Hey, Frank! Full astern, and give her all the steam you've got!"
"Full astern it is!" yelled Frank. "But what about the fire?"

"Billy's coming! Hi, Billy! Stoke-ho!"

Billy rushed back to the stoke-hole and shoveled coal on the furnaces until the perspiration poured from him. The old engines rattled and roared, the screw threated the water, the Sapphire trembled and shuddered in every plate and bolt; but she stuck fast and refused to budge.

Frank was toiling like a demon at his engine, coaxing all the power he could out of them, but it was hopeless.
"Spell-ho!" yelled Billy, coming up from the stoke-hole.
"Same here!" said Frank, poking his oil-smothered face out of the engine-room hatch. "We're stuck like a fly on a flypaper! And if I get these cylinder heads much hotter something else is liable to happen."

"Give 'em a rest, then!" growled the skipper. "Gosh! but it's an unlucky trip one way and another."

They halted, all three, by the wrecked wheel-house and mopped their brows, and then they heard again that weird noise—tap, tap, tap, tap—

"That ghost!" hissed Frank.
"Confound the ghost!" blustered Skipper Roscoe.

"Haven't we got something else to think about?"
"Besides, I don't believe in ghosts!" said Billy.

"Neither do I," put in Frank. "But I'd like to know what it is, all the same."

"It can wait," said the skipper. "Let's see these sands." He went on the fo'c'sle and peered over.

"The water's dropping!" grunted the skipper.
"That's caused it!" snapped Billy.

It was true. The water had gone lower and the sands were clear, stretching away into the darkness, a danger to shipping.

"Seems like we'll have to stay here till next high tide," said Billy.

"What about getting a tow off?" asked Frank.
"How?"

"Some sort of craft astern there—about two miles away. I can see her lights!"

"And she can stay there!" rasped the skipper. "We've brought the old hooker this far without help and we'll carry on without help. We don't want to pay salvage now, after fooling Sims and getting this far!"

"But what can we do?" asked Frank. "Suppose the wind freshens? She'll labour on the sand and start the leak again. And if a storm breaks—well—"

"You can try digging her off," said Billy. "I'm game to try it."

"You took the words out of my mouth," said the skipper.

"Get the shovels, boathooks, anything like that. We'll take turn and turn about—two digging and one on deck just in case she slides off too quickly. Come on, boys! Hustle, now!"

They got shovels from the stoke-hole, and then Billy and Frank got a line over the bows, down which they swarmed to the wet sands. The trawler, by her gentle rolling, had already formed a bed in the yielding sand for her bows. The tide was falling, and her stern was dropping lower. The weight forced the fore part of her keel deeper into the sand.

But there was one hope they had. If, by dint of digging, they could widen the scooped-out sandbed in which the ship lay, giving her more room to roll, and if the tide dropped still more, tilting her up, she might slide into deep water. If that failed they would have to wait until the next high tide to be floated off.

Feverishly the pala dug. It was a thankless sort of task. The sand was soft and yielding. They sank almost up to their knees in it, and it was hard work in consequence, almost as bad as trying to sweep the water back. As fast as they shoveled sand away from the ship's plates it trickled back again.

To make things worse it was dark and difficult to see. As a matter of fact, they did succeed in widening the scooped-out trough in which the bows of the Sapphire were perched, but the ship did not stir.

The skipper stood over the rails and yelled at them.

"Come on up and we'll try the engines again."

The pala swarmed up the line to the high prows and gained the littered fo'c'sle. The three of them went aft to get busy, all very intent on the job in hand—naturally enough, seeing that it was almost a matter of life and death.

Then, suddenly, Billy pointed over the rail and cried out with alarm:

"Look! That's a Lowestoft boat!"

They looked, and sure enough, barely a cable's length astern was a trawler showing no lights, her bulk looming black against the star-studded sky.

"If that's the Opal—" the skipper began.

He said no more, for men rushed from behind the ruins of the wheel-house, and before the pala realised what was happening they were attacked and bowled over.

Billy couldn't worry about Frank and the skipper. Sims was on top of him, slashing out savagely with his fist.

Billy fought back just as savagely. Again and again he struck out at Sims' scowling face and had the satisfaction of seeing the man wince with pain.

Sims was strong and powerful. Billy was almost exhausted after his strenuous efforts at digging a channel for the Sapphire to refloat herself. The skipper of the Opal forced him off his feet. They grappled together, and went down with a crash. Billy was underneath. His head hit the deck with a crack and his senses swam dizzily. He was powerless to help himself.

Sims reached for a rope, and before Billy could recover himself he was bound hand and foot, his wrists secured behind his back.

"That settles you!" snarled Sims, scrambling to his feet. "Brought enough to help you, haven't you?" retorted Billy.

Sims' only answer was to kick him brutally in the ribs, and Billy bit his lip to stifle the cry of pain that sprang to his lips. He realized that Sims had gained the upper hand at last, and it might be safer to keep silent.

CHAPTER 3.

A Diabolical Plot!

BILLY rolled over to get a better view of what was happening. The Opal had drawn nearer the stranded Sapphire, and a lantern in her fore rigging shed fitful rays of light on the scene.

Billy could see that Roberts and another man had overpowered Skipper Roscoe and were binding his ankles together. Frank was still on his feet and fighting, his heavy wrench doing great damage to his opponents. But as Billy watched he saw the danger. Sims was creeping up behind him.

"Look out, Frank!" yelled Billy. But the warning came a split second too late. Sims sprang as Frank spun round. The diversion helped the foe. Frank found himself borne to the deck beneath the combined weight of three men. The odds were too great. Still struggling, they held him down. Sims managed to tie his ankles, then they rolled him over on his face, not too gently, and secured his wrists behind his back.

"Now who's boss?" sneered Sims. "What's your game, anyway?" asked Skipper Roscoe hoarsely.

"All in good time!" retorted Sims. He turned to his men. "Put 'em in the fo'c'sle!"

The skipper and his pals were carried to the fo'c'sle and deposited on the floor with a bump. Sims marched in with a swagger. The men went out on deck, but Sims perched himself on the edge of a bunk and laughed at them.

"Thought you could fool me all the time, eh?" he sneered.

"You're crowing too soon!" snapped Frank. "This game isn't finished yet!"

"It soon will be!" retorted Sims, with a fierce scowl. "I'm making no mistakes this time!"

"What are you going to do?" asked Billy, as if he didn't care a lot what did happen.

"I'm going to make things dead certain," said Sims. "You butted in on my affairs and spoilt all my plans. But you don't do it twice!"

"You want the Opal?" snarled Skipper Roscoe. "And I'll get her!" cried Sims, working himself up into a frenzy. "I'd have had her by now if those brats hadn't been so clever!"

"Roberts tried to scuttle the Sapphire!" snarled Skipper Roscoe. "It wasn't his fault if she didn't sink!" sneered Sims. "But don't worry. I'll fix it so that she does sink this time. There'll be no mistake!"

"And you'll leave us aboard trussed up?" asked Billy, with a tremor in his voice. "The sea keeps its secret if the water is deep enough!" chuckled Sims. "We're fast on a bank!" put in Skipper Roscoe. "She'll slide off!" replied Sims. "And it's deep enough there to sink a battleship. Don't you fret! I've got it all planned."

Billy began to feel worried, but he wouldn't let Sims notice the fact.

"You had it planned before, but it misfired!" he said. Sims turned on him with a snarl.

"Your fault," he snapped viciously. "And this is where you pay for it."

"You're going to send us down with the ship!" asked Frank.

"Why not?" retorted Sims. "You know too much to stay alive after she's sunk."

"You skunk!" snarled Skipper Roscoe. "You forgot

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you've got the crew of the Sapphire aboard the Opal! Couldn't they give you away?"

"They could, but they aren't!" sneered Sims. "Didn't they desert the ship? Weren't they bribed by Roberts just as I bribed Roberts? They're as much in this business as I am, and they'll keep their mouths shut to save their own skins. Don't you worry! I've got this all worked out. You've fooled me and escaped me, but I've been following you down from the North and now I've caught you. Mighty convenient for me when you sailed slap into this bank."

"We had no compass or it wouldn't have happened," said Skipper Roscoe. "There's no man alive knows more about the North Sea than I do."

"You don't say!" cried Sims, in mock surprise. "Well, you're going to learn some more about the North Sea mighty soon because you're going to the bottom of it."

He laughed uproariously at his own joke and went out, slamming the door to after him, leaving his prisoners in darkness.

"Sounds healthy for us!" said Frank dismally. "He's top dog after all!" groaned the skipper. "But I don't know—if the old Sapphire has to go to the bottom I'd rather go down with her than stay alive to see him lording it on the Opal, the dirty skunk!"

"Strikes me," said Billy, "the old Sapphire is too sturdy to be sunk by a crook like Sims. That sounds silly, p'raps, but that's just how I feel about it."

"Sounds silly to me all right!" sneered Frank. "We can't do anything to stop him sinking her."

"How will he do it?" said Billy. "That's easy!" put in the skipper. "He'll stave in one of her bow plates, and when she floats at high tide she'll fill with water faster'n a sieve!"

"Yes," agreed Frank. "Sims has got us whacked!"

"Wait a bit, though," said Billy. "Staving in a bow plate will take time. Dare he risk it? He'll want this job done with before daylight, or he stands a chance of being seen at it, and that would ruin everything for him. If he bores a dozen holes in her hull with an auger she'll take time to fill and sink, and there are plenty of boats in the North Sea that might come this way and rescue us, if not salvage the Sapphire."

"What are you getting at?" asked the skipper huskily. "If you've got a plan let's hear it—quickly."

"I haven't got a plan," said Billy, "but it's plain to me that Sims will have to work quickly. He doesn't even wait for the flood tide, because it will be daylight then. He'll have to sink her within half an hour or not at all."

"Well!" queried Frank breathlessly. "Well, we've got to get out of here inside half an hour—that's all."

"Talk sense!" said Frank. "Here we are, bound hand and foot—how the dickens are we to get out of here if—"

He broke off because Billy had rolled towards him. It was pitch dark in the fo'c'sle with the door shut, and Billy was apparently doing a lot of rolling about. It was obvious to Frank that his pal was up to something, and when Billy rolled close up behind him and he felt his chum's hot breath on his bound hands, he began to understand.

"Keep still!" said Billy. "I've got you," said Frank huskily. "Chew the cords! But can you do it in the time?"

"I'm going to try," said Billy. "Still, now!" He tried with a will. He got his strong teeth on the cord that bound Frank's wrists, and he chewed. It hurt him and lacerated his gums, but he made no complaint. He hurt Frank. At times his teeth slipped and Frank felt the jab in his flesh. But he made no complaint. He lay as still as a mouse, enduring the pain and discomfort, knowing that Billy was enduring just as much, if not more.

There was no sound there, save Billy's laboured breathing. At times Frank jerked his wrists and the cords began to loosen. It was a long job in the darkness. The skipper could see nothing. He knew what was going on, though, and he waited with what patience he could muster.

"Will it be long?" he whispered. "They're giving!" said Frank, through his clenched teeth.

Up on deck came the sound of scuffling feet as men ran for'ard, then came silence. If the skipper's guess of staving the bow plates had been correct, they ought to have heard the clanging of hammers and axes long since. But there was not a suspicious sound, certainly nothing to suggest that Sims was sinking the Sapphire. It was difficult to see how he could sink her quickly while she lay with her bows wedged on the sandbank, and the tide had fallen until half her hull was clear of the water.

The skipper had another idea.

The skipper had another idea.

"The Opal will tow us off," he said.

"Bat we can't sink," grunted Frank, "unless he holes the Sapphire first. Can you bear 'em at work on our hull?"

"No," said the skipper, and lapsed into silence. He gave it up as a bad job. The problem was beyond him. "Spell-ho!" gasped Billy, taking a rest. "Shan't be long!"

He lay there panting for a moment, then he returned to the attack. His lips were bleeding, his jaws were aching, but he kept at it. They had no other chance but this, and life was sweet, to say nothing of their fierce desire to outwit Sims.

Then Frank blurted out:

"I'll manage it! Look out!"

Billy rolled away a bit. Frank wrenched fiercely with his arms, and the cord parted with a snap.

"Done it!" panted Frank.

Billy was panting, too far gone to say a word just then. Frank clawed at the ropes that bound his ankles and freed himself. He felt around on the floor for a bit, hoping to find a knife, but failed. The skipper guessed what he wanted.

"One in my pocket, unless that skunk took it," he said.

Frank fished in the skipper's pocket and found a clasp knife. The rest was simple enough. He freed Billy and the skipper and they stood up, chafing their numbed limbs.

"Now what?" asked the skipper.

"Got to be careful," whispered Billy. "Not a sound. We've got to find out what they're up to. Come on!"

Cautiously they crept from the fo'c'sle. It was still dark outside. The Sapphire lay wedged on the sandbank at a precarious angle, her bows tilted high, her stern down in the water. She rocked and rolled gently, and with every roll she jarred as if it wouldn't take much to send her sliding off into deep water.

That discovery pleased Billy in a way. It would be fairly easy to refloat the ship. On the other hand, it worried him because it would be just as easy for Sims to sink her, provided he had time to hole her. But there was not a sign of anybody else on the deck of the Sapphire.

The Opal had sheered off a bit. They could see her lights, two cables' lengths off the starboard rail. They crouched low in the shadow of the bulwarks, or what was left of the bulwarks, and waited, listening intently. They saw no one. The Sapphire seemed utterly deserted again. They heard nothing at first, but presently the sound of whispering voices reached their ears, almost drowned by the soft lapping of the water against the trawler's stern, and the cries of the wheeling seabirds that were heralding the coming of dawn. In the east the sky was just tinged with the first rays of daylight. Sims would have to be quick.

Those whispering voices were not aboard the Sapphire. That much was obvious. Billy guessed where they came from, and, motioning to the others to follow him, he began to crawl forward up the fo'c'sle head, towards the bows, taking advantage of every dark shadow.

He came to the prows and peered over to the sandbank. Then he understood. Two men were walking laboriously over the soft, yielding sands towards the Sapphire. One was Sims, and he carried a lighted lantern. The other was Roberts, and he carried a keg on his shoulder. The Sapphire was perched on the edge of the bank, and it

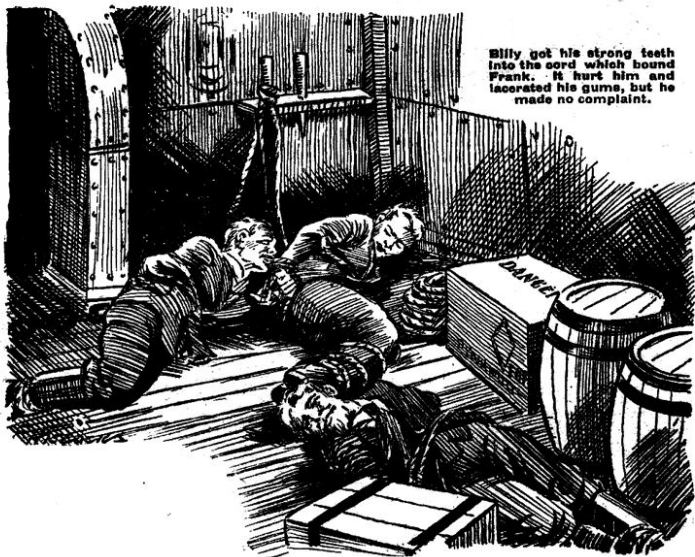
wouldn't need much of a jar to send her sliding into deep water.

Sims planned to provide that jar with a keg of gunpowder. The explosion would not only send the stranded ship off the bank, but would blow a hole in her bow plates, and she would go down like a stone.

Billy's blood ran cold at the vile scheme. He wanted to leap from the bows of the stranded trawler and attack Sims there and then, but he hesitated. Daylight would give him a chance. They must not act too hurriedly. Sims could call up his men to help him. On the other hand Sims must not be allowed to set a light to the gunpowder under the bows of the Sapphire.

Billy waited, wondering what to do. It began to dawn in upon him that Roberts must have got away somehow. Roberts had been secured in the fo'c'sle of the Sapphire before the Opal had been sighted—before the Sapphire had hit the sandbank. Billy began to remember that strange tapping, and he wondered many things.

But his wonderings were interrupted. Sims and Roberts came close to the bows of the Sapphire. It was hard ground for them. They sank eighteen inches deep in the sand at every step. Roberts set the keg down barely twelve



Billy got his strong teeth into the cord which bound Frank. It hurt him and lacerated his gums, but he made no complaint.

feet from the stem of the stranded trawler, and heaved a sigh of relief.

"Not sorry to get here," he said.

Billy raised his head and saw that the Opal dinghy was drawn up on the edge of the bank some distance away. That showed how they got there, and how they meant to get away after the explosion.

"Well, don't waste time," snarled Sims. "Stave the top in!"

Roberts turned the keg on its side and kicked the top in. A little of the gunpowder trickled out on to the sand. Sims set the lantern down.

"We've got to do the job properly," he said. "Put it right under the keel and lay the fuse out here—understand? Pack the keg in with sand so that it explodes the right way, and does most damage. She's got to slide off with a hole in her hull big enough to take a ton of water."

"Trust me!" snarled Roberts.

He stooped to pick up the keg again. Billy forgot everything in his blind rage at the diabolical plot. He came to his feet, yelling.

"You skunk! I'll—"

He leapt from the high bows of the Sapphire, landed

on the soft sand, bounding up to his knees, hauled himself out and plunged forward. He saw red then.

Hurling himself full at Sims in his mad fury, he crashed his fist in the rogue's face, and sent him sprawling. The lantern flew from Sims' hand, and dropped close to the keg. Roberts saw it and fled, howling a warning.

"Look out!"

Sims came to his feet and ran, horror on his face. Frank bawled from the fo'c'sle of the Sapphire.

"Billy, back!"

Billy heard the spluttering, and leapt back the way he had come. The spluttering grew louder, fiercer. The glass of the lantern had broken, and the flame had touched the gunpowder that had been spilt on the sand.

A line dangled from the bows of the Sapphire—the line up which the pals had swarmed, after their attempts at digging their boat off the bank. Billy saw it and clutched at it. His hand tightened on it just as, behind him, came the roar of the explosion.

The impact dazed him. He felt as if his clothes were scorched. He was flung violently against the plates of the Sapphire, and half-stunned, but he kept his grip on that rope. Then he became dimly aware that he was being hauled along. He seemed to fall and was being dragged through the sand, then he was lifted and the water came to his waist—a swirling maelstrom of water that sucked at him, trying to draw him under.

As if from miles away he heard Frank's voice yelling to him.

"Hold on! She's off! Hold on!"

Then he was being pulled up—up clear of the water, dangling over the high prows like a fish on the end of a line—up until Skipper Roscoe grabbed him under the armpits, and hauled him aboard over the rail.

"Gosh!" cried Frank. "A near thing!"

"Can't stand arguing!" roared the skipper. "Full astern!"

Frank rushed to the engine-room to set the engines in motion, and the Sapphire moved rapidly from the sandbank. Billy lay on the deck recovering his scattered wits. He pulled himself together with an effort and understood.

The explosion had come a trifle too soon for Sims. It had been too far away to do much harm to the Sapphire, but the vibration of it had been sufficient to jar the stranded trawler off the sandbank. Now she was afloat and speeding away astern.

Skipper Roscoe was at the helm, twirling the spokes merrily.

"Stop!" he roared.

"Stop, it is!" yelled Frank from the engine-room.

"Full ahead!" bellowed the skipper.

"Full ahead!" said Frank, slamming the levers over.

The screw raced, and the Sapphire forged ahead. She passed the Opal a quarter of a mile away. But her crew could not give pursuit immediately. Sims and Roberts were in the dinghy rowing furiously to their ship which had to wait for them. By the time they were aboard, the Sapphire had a two-mile lead, and was heading south. So far, the pals were safe, having outwitted Sims.

"Done it!" gasped the skipper. "Thought we were done for that time. Better be born lucky than—"

He broke off lamely, listening intently. Frank was in the alleyway bandaging Billy's burns and bruises. They heard it, too—tap, tap, then a queer scraping—tap, tap, not quite so loud as before, but still a tapping that sounded weird in the grey light of early dawn.

"Sink me!" cried the skipper. "I had an idea— Hey, you lads! That ghost again!"

"Put it can't be!" said Billy. "That other tapping was Roberts breaking out of the fo'c'sle into the forehold. I've seen the hole he made in the bulkhead. That was no ghost!"

"Then what's this?" asked Frank.

They listened to it—scraping, tapping along the deck. Then round by the winch came a large gull, one wing broken and drooping, scraping on the deck. It walked painfully, its feet tapping.

"Sink me!" cried the skipper. "And I was scared of that! Better put the poor thing out of its misery."

"Not much!" said Frank. "May be a mascot! I'll see to it!"

The gull had obviously been injured by the explosion, and had fallen on the deck. Frank took it up. He set the broken wing in rough splints, and placed the bird on sacking just inside the fo'c'sle, giving it fish from the hold for food.

"Let's hope it will bring us luck," said Billy. "Not that we've done so badly up to now. I'll bet Sims feels sore in more ways than one."

"True enough," said the skipper. "But we musn't crow yet. The fight's not over."

Billy and Frank realised only too well the truth of Skipper Roscoe's statement. Certainly they had outwitted Sims for the time being, but the arch-villain would strike again later. Sims was not the man to throw in the sponge after going so far. To fail in his purpose now would mean a long stretch of imprisonment for him and his rascally associates.

The Sapphire had certainly succeeded in showing the Opal a clean pair of heels, but Skipper Roscoe and his crew were by no means out of the wood yet. Another thing, Skipper Roscoe had not the slightest idea of his bearings—minus compass, the journey to port was fraught with danger. Nevertheless, the skipper, Billy, and Frank were in the best of spirits.

"While there's life there's hope," said Billy, as the Sapphire forged ahead.

THE END.



Billy forgot everything in his blind rage. With a yell he leapt from the high bows of the Sapphire on to the soft sand below.

ALL QUESTIONS ANSWERED HERE!



Things are going from bad to worse! Whiskers has asked for a room to himself—to allow space for his head! You fellows simply must do something about this! Find the question he CAN'T answer!—Ed.

I WAS deep in thought when I strolled into the Editor's sanctum on Monday morning, chums, and I heard a voice from behind the desk call out: "Good-morning, Oracle, old boy! How are you this morning? Father all right? Sit down and have a cigar. Make yourself quite at home. Behave just as though you were in your own little kitchen, only more so!" When I heard all that, and a lot more in the same strain, naturally, I sat down, collared the cigar, and began practicing "The Stein Song" on my new mouth-organ.

I was half-way through the cigar and the second verse of the song when I was rudely interrupted. "What d'you think you're playing at?" roared the Ed., and, looking up, I saw him towering over me, with a frown like a steam-roller on his face.

"I'm playing the mouth-organ," said I, shaking like a jelly.

"You're smoking one of my cigars!" roared the Ed. "How dare you smoke one of my cigars?" "I couldn't very well smoke two of them," said I—"at least, not at once. Anyway, you asked me to, so there." Then the horrible truth flashed across my mighty brain. The voice I had heard behind the desk wasn't the Ed.'s voice at all. It was that giddy parrot's!

When I explained to the Ed. that the parrot had been taking him off, he told me that I had better take myself off, and then he changed his mind, or what he calls his mind, and called me back. "Sit down!" he snapped in a Skye-terrier voice. "Answer these questions. First of all, something about cats. George Bush writes to ask whether Manx cats are the only cats in the world without tails."

"Tell George Bush that there are cats in Russia without tails," I told the Ed. "There is a popular belief that cats without tails came originally from somewhere in the East—Japan probably. There are very few cats out East with much of a tail. In New Mexico there used to be a tribe of cats that had no hair on their bodies. They were as bald as—well—"

"As your noddle," put in the Ed. "No wonder the office-boy's dog starts growling when you take your hat off! Never mind! And now," chortled the Ed., "here is a poser about dogs. First of all, let us know what a lurcher is."

"A lurcher is a cross-bred dog, used in poaching."

"I see. What does a lurcher look like?"

"A lurcher has the general shape of a greyhound," I explained, "but its body is heavier, and it has a rougher

"Another question while we're on the subject of dogs. What's a setter?"

"A setter is a sporting dog, and there are many breeds of setters in England. An English setter has a silky coat, with wavy hair, bushy legs, and a bushy fringe on his tail."

"What's a dugong?" fired the Ed., looking up from another epistle.

"Dugongs are found in the seas of the tropics," I answered promptly.

"They're a fish, then?"

"No, sir, they're aquatic mammals, like whales. To catch a dugong you have to get hold of its tail first of all, and when you've lifted its tail out of the water, the dugong is done for. All the cleverest dugongs keep their tails well down, believe me!"

"What's the good of them, anyway?" asked the Ed.

"They're good eating. Taste like beef, so I've been told. And useful oil is obtained from their fat—like cod liver oil, but not so nasty."

"What are the doldrums?"

"That is the name given to a region of the sea near the equator, where the trade-winds die away. In the old days sailing-ships would lie becalmed in these parts for weeks on end."

"Joe Hill wants to know something about giants? F'rinstance, who's the biggest giant that has ever lived, old son?"

"Well, sir, there have been a good many tall stories about giants, and we have to be careful what we believe, because some of the old tales were the height of exaggeration. But there have been some very tall fellows turn up in various places from time to time. Take, now, the famous Irish giant as he was called. His name was Charles Byrne, and he stood 8 ft. 4 ins. His skeleton is still in existence. Another Irishman, Patrick Colter, who died at Bristol over a hundred years ago, was 8 ft. 7 ins. high. Then a gentleman named Chang-woo-goo, who was on show in London during 1880, stood two inches over eight feet. Taller even than that was a chap named Winkelmaier, an Austrian, who stood 8 ft. 9 ins. Twenty-five years ago, in 1905, a Russian named Machnow was also exhibited in London. His height was 9 ft. 3 ins.

"Dear me!" said the Ed. "And I suppose he would be just the same length when he was in bed? Well, I can't say that I admire these very tall fellows myself, Whiskers."

"No, sir," I agreed. "But we have to look up to them in a sense—what, what?"

"You're right there," chortled the Ed. "And now, my learned friend,

perhaps you can tell Will Capps, of Harrow, what ghee is?"

"Ghee? Let me think," said I. "That sounds like an expression from the 'talkies.' Ah, yes, of course! Ghee is Indian butter. They eat it a lot out there, and keep it for ten or twenty years."

"Very well, my lad," said the Ed., "just explain to Stanley Gibbs what an estancia is!"

"An estancia, O sir," I replied, "is the name in the Argentine for a cattle ranch."

"The same reader wants to know what a gaucha is, and also what an asado might be? He says he has read about gauchos on estancias holding asados. You speak Spanish, so p'raps you can sort that out."

"Simple enough, Ed.," said I. "I'm hot stuff at Spanish. Used to eat it when I was a lad. But to come to the questions—I'd better have a shot at answering them, or you'll be cutting my pay down. A gaucha is a cowboy. The word is sometimes written 'gauchó,' but that's wrong. The word gaucha is pronounced 'gow-oh,' and the men who are known by the name are of mixed European and Indian blood, as a rule. They're great riders, and cover no end of ground. What was the next?"

"Asado, my lad. What's an asado?"

"An asado is another Argentine expression—it's a kind of blow-out, or beanfeast, with a sing-song, held by the cowboys round the jolly old camp fire at night. They play guitars, roast a whole ox over the fire, and after a slice of beef all round, they sing old Spanish songs."

"P'raps you could sing us a few of the songs yourself," the Ed. put in, "since you're such hot stuff at Spanish."

"Sorry, sir, I didn't have any bird seed this morning," I explained.

The old Ed. picked up another letter.

"About copra. Know anything about copra, Whiskers?"

I smiled behind my hairy appendage, well knowing that once again the old Ed. had failed to bow me out. "Yes, sir," I told him. "I do. Copra is the dried inside of the coconut. In Hindustani they call the coconut khopra, and the Spanish traders made the word copra from that. Copra is pressed to produce coconut oil."

"How do humming-birds get their name?"

"From the noise their wings make when they fly."

The Ed. scowled and looked for a real teaser.

"Can you tell a 'Gemito' on what occasion the 'March of the Men of Harlech' was written?" snapped the Ed.

"The 'March of the Men of Harlech' celebrates the fine defence by Dafydd Iwan ap Iwan in 1468, when Harlech was besieged by the Earl of Pembroke, a Yorkist. The Welshmen who stood for Lancaster, fought to the last, and then matched out with the honours of war."

"Well, I think that will do for this morning, my lad," said the Editor. "You can get on now giving the parrot his French lesson."

"Very good," said I. "Parley voo Fransay?" "Shut up!" said the parrot. "Go home! You're old enough to know better!" So, of course, I vamoosed, toot sweet!



The RANGERS' RECRUIT!

On the Spot!

BILL HARTLEY thrilled at the words, and manfully restrained the impulse to look at the three prize specimens.

In company with Locke he strode briskly to the station.

Buxton's three followed at a convenient distance. Locke's quick eye observed the three as they lounged on to the platform. But he said nothing. He was not surprised when he entered a compartment of the train, in company with Bill, to find the three shadowers following hard at his heels. They settled down in their seats and prepared to play cards.

With an expressive glance at Bill, Locke made a pretence of studying his paper.

The train drew out of Bidstead and soon gathered speed. With the passing of the moments the trio seemed to lose interest in the game of cards. At a signal from their leader they simultaneously rose to their feet, and the light from the bowl in the roof glimmered on the automatics that appeared as if by magic in their hands. Even so, Ferrers Locke was quicker. He took the war into the enemy's camp. There was a shattering roar as his gun spoke first and the leader of the trio fell back with a howl. His gun clattered to the floor of the compartment.

"Drop those guns!" commanded Locke. Deprived of a leader—thrown out of all composure by the unexpected intervention of a stranger who apparently knew their game—the remaining two found themselves dropping their guns to the floor.

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They gaped in unconcealed astonishment at Ferrers Locke, who coolly signalled to Bill to collect the automatics. Like one in a trance, Bill obeyed.

"Now shove these handcuffs on them!" snapped Locke. "No, you don't, gov'nor!" exclaimed one of the ruffians hoarsely; and with the swiftness of light he jerked at the door of the compartment, threw it open, and took a flying leap into the night.

The roar of the wind came back to Locke and Bill. The train rushed on. "I don't think we need worry too much about him," said the former curtly. "If he escapes it will suit me better than having him here."

Bill marvelled at Locke's casual behaviour. He could hardly realise as yet, that the three desperadoes had intended him to be their victim.

"Now, Scarface Philip," said Locke, addressing the moaning ruffian with the damaged wrist. "Who's hired your Chicago methods over here?"

The crook cowered back. His companion, now with the bracelets on his wrists, sank down on the seat and with philosophical indifference awaited his fate.

Scarface ceased moaning. He eyed the Baker Street detective venomously.

"You doggone cuss!" he snarled. "Who in blazes told you my name?"

"You wear it on your face, Philip," returned Locke easily.

"You've been in London exactly a fortnight, but I'd know you among a thousand. You see, the police in England aren't so sleepy as some of you cheap Chicago crooks seem to think. You've been allowed enough rope, but I've saved you a hanging."

"Say, fellah," jeered Scarface, "you're too cute for this earth! But I'll sure raise Cain for shootin' me. You've

broken your own fool laws, you smart guy! You pulled a gun on me for nuthin'!"

Locke smiled.

"Well, we'll let it go at that, Philip," he replied. "But you'll find it difficult to tell an English judge that you and your two pals pulled guns in this compartment for the fun of the thing. Why, there was murder in your eyes just as much as there's murder in your yellow soul now. Come clean and you'll get off light!"

"Sez you!" sneered Scarface. "I guess you'll waste your goldarned time questioning me. Try the other mug."

RED-HEADED BILL HARTLEY
is white all through! Buxton is a
yellow dog, but his black treachery
doesn't make Bill feel blue!

Locke smiled.

"Well, it's in your favour, Scarface, that you've never squealed yet," he said. "But that's the best I can say for you."

"Thank you for nothin', smart Alec. But might a fellah ask who you are?"

For answer Locke handed the Chicago gunman a visiting-card.

Scarface started, and an oath prefaced his next remark. "Marchant Buxton?" he exclaimed. "But you sure ain't him! You—"

He broke off, and his vicious face screwed up in perplexity as he stared hard at the detective.

"Now, what's the tarnation game?" he resumed. "There ain't two Buxtons, is there?"

Locke's face set in a grim smile.

"So it was Buxton who hired you, what?"

Scarface fell back, biting his lip. Bill Hartley, hardly knowing whether he was on his head or his heels, looked from one to the other.

"You fell into that trap with both feet, Scarface," said Locke. "That's hardly up to Chicago standard. So it was Buxton who hired you, what?" he added smoothly.

"Aw! Stow it, smart Alec!" snarled Scarface. "You sure ain't gettin' the dope from me."

The detective laughed, and, taking the card from the gunman's fingers, replaced it in his pocket.

"Quite a useful trick that. I always make it a practice to keep a suspect's card about me. It doesn't matter what you say now, Scarface; you've satisfied me at least that it was Buxton who asked you to do this job for him."

"Don't know Buxton," said Scarface sullenly. "Never heard of the cuss. Say, you yap too much, mister!"

"You don't know Buxton, eh?" chuckled Locke. "But you knew enough about him to realise that I wasn't him. And how long have you been in England? Two weeks? Yet out of the millions of people in England you happen to know Marchant Buxton. That's real good. You'll be sorry, Scarface, that you ever did know him!"

All this time Bill Hartley had not uttered a word. The whole thing seemed like a horrible nightmare; but a glance at the loaded automatic he had collected and idly examined, proved to him conclusively that he had, indeed, experienced the escape of his life.

Locke next turned his attention to the second gunman.

"Now let's have a look at you. A new hand at the game, eh?"

The handcuffed prisoner, a man in the early twenties, scowled up at his inquisitor.

"Don't waste your breath on me, cocky!" he snarled through tobacco-stained teeth. "I ain't been brought up to talk like that Chicago stiff. If that ain't plain I'll make it plainer; i. e., and namely, I knows nothin'—nothin'! Absobloomin' luteley nothin'!" And he relapsed into unconcern with an expressionless face.

"Nothing much to gain from you, my beauty?" said Locke pleasantly. "I can tell by the cut of your jib that you're not a squealer. Buxton has trained you or paid you well."

If the detective hoped to gain anything from that further mention of Buxton's name he was disappointed. The handcuffed man showed no sign of recognition by even the slightest tremor.

"Mr. Locke—" began Bill.

"Locke—Ferrers Locke!" swore Scarface furiously. "Say, is that your dooplate?"

"My name certainly," said the detective smilingly, and watched the Chicago gunman's jaw drop.

WHAT'S GONE BEFORE.

The Man Behind the Scenes.

WELL, if this ain't the antelope's back teeth!" said Scarface. "Say, mister, it's a real pleasure to know you, but I'm sayin' that I'd have laid off this shoot if I'd sure known you was on the job."

"You flatter me!" returned Locke; and then crisply:

"Here we are! Sorry our acquaintance has been of such short duration."

The train was drawing into a station, and while the brakes screeched their protest, Locke jumped nimbly from the running-board, leaving Bill to guard the prisoners.

The detective returned in less than two minutes, accompanied by the stationmaster and two railway policemen.

"I'll leave these two fellows in your charge, officer, until the local police arrive."

"Very good, Mr. Locke. But the charge—" began one of the constables.

"That's seen to. I've been on the phone to Inspector Treluce. He'll do the necessary. By the way"—he turned to the stationmaster—"have you had a message through that a man fell out of the train between here and Bidstead?"

"I have not!" retorted the stationmaster, somewhat peevishly. "And I must remind you, Mr. Locke, that I have already kept this train three minutes over her time."

"You are pardoned in the circumstances," replied Locke humorously. The stationmaster snorted. With him punctuality came before all things. Even a volcanic eruption provided no worthy excuse for keeping a train late, let alone two miserable-looking gangsters, who appeared to be anything but dangerous at the moment.

"You can get moving again!" said Locke cheerfully, climbing into the compartment. "My farewells, Scarface! We'll meet again very shortly."

Scarface, in the custody of a burly policeman, voiced some offensive reply, but it was lost in the screech of the whistle as once more the train got under way. Leaning back in the corner seat, Locke eyed Bill with some amusement.

"Events moved too fast for you, Bill?"

"That they have," returned Bill, with a dry grin. "I can't believe it all yet. But how did you get on to the track of those scoundrels in the first place?"

Locke shrugged his shoulders. "One can hardly call it luck," he replied, "although a great element of luck entered into it. In the first place, I got the shock of my life seeing Scarface Philip hanging around the Bidstead Wanderers' ground."

"But—"

"You see, I recollected reading about Scarface Philip's attempt to land in England, and remembered his peculiar brand of face. Now, wouldn't you be mighty surprised to see a Chicago gunman, with a gilt-edged reputation for shooting, only a fortnight in England, hanging round a football enclosure long after a football match?"

"I suppose I would if I were a 'tec," admitted Bill.

"Recognising him was a trifle lucky," resumed Locke. "Observation of smaller details provided the certainty to a theory. You see, it was very obvious that the three were waiting for you; that became still more clear when they entered our compartment. That each of them carried a gun in his pocket did not require a very practised eye to see. Lastly, Scarface had Chicago written in his clothes—"

"I didn't notice that," said Bill. "His clothes looked English enough to me."

"Maybe," said Locke, with a smile, "but when he tossed his hat on the seat he left the lining uppermost. And the tab in the lining offered the information that it came from 'Sam Whittaker's Stores, Chicago.'"

"Oh!" ejaculated Bill. "But didn't you take an awful risk when you fired at Scarface? Supposing—"

"I know what you mean," broke in Locke. "But I had to take a risk, or they would have bumped you off, and myself as well. I will admit, however, that I didn't intend to wing Scarface."

"You didn't?"

"Certainly not," Locke said quietly. "It was my intention only to knock his gun out of action. It was bad shooting on my part to hit him."

"Well, I'm 'blowed!" grinned Bill. "You're the first detective I've ever met who admitted making a mistake of that nature."

"Never mind that now, Bill," said Locke, and his face grew serious. "We've got to watch Mr. Buxton. Several things are becoming clear to me now."

BILL HARTLEY, a six-foot edition of brawn and muscle, with flaming red hair, is "sent down" from Oxford. Arriving home, he quarrels with his father and goes to London to find work. There he meets Major Carrstairs, an old friend, who is chairman of the Cashdon Rangers F.C. After a trial Bill is signed on by the club, only to find that their centre-forward is Marchant Buxton, who has brought about his dismissal from the 'Varsity. Buxton, who is also the leader of a gang of crooks, is determined to ruin Bill, but Ferrers Locke intervenes. Later, owing to an inglorious display in the match against Bidstead Wanderers, Bill is openly accused by his club-mates of selling the match. At half-time, however, Ferrers Locke discovers that he has been duped. A doctor soon rectifies matters, with the result that Bill pulls the cover of his life and pulls the team through. On leaving the ground the Rangers' recruit is called aside by Ferrers Locke, who informs him that a bunch of crooks are on his trail.

(Now read on.)

"But are you sure Buxton's got anything to do with all this?" asked Bill, in amazement. "Why, he shook me by the hand in front of all the fellows this afternoon, and we more or less agreed to let bygones be bygones."

"Afraid Buxton's too cunning for you, Bill," said Locke quietly. "It was a chance shot of mine—trying that visiting-card on Scarface, but it worked. Buxton's got something to do with this villainy, and what it is I'm going to make it my business to find out."

"I can't believe it!" Bill shook his head. "Plenty of time to convince you yet," smiled Locke. "I've got nothing definite up against Buxton, but I'm relying on that chap who jumped from the train to lead me on to more clues."

"You didn't seem over worried when he leaped out of the train," observed Bill. "I was tempted to pull the communication cord—"

"That would never have done," broke in Locke. "I wanted the fellow to escape."

"The dickens you did!" Locke nodded.

"You see, I counted on his making a getaway and getting in touch with his employer."

"The villain who hired him to bump me off?" asked Bill.

"Right on the wicket, Bill. I counted on him phoning or telegraphing his employer with the news of his failure, of the capture of Scarface and the other crook."

"Blessed if I can see the reason for that," confessed Bill ruefully.

"It's quite simple. Moreover, it's fairly obvious that the chap who escaped did not know me. He will, unless I'm mistaken, inform his employer of my intervention—of a stranger's intervention. Again, unless I'm mistaken, his employer will be as Euston, when we arrive, to find out for himself who he was exactly who upset his plans."

Bill whistled.

"Bill gather what you mean," he said. "If Marchant Buxton happens to be at Euston when we arrive, you'll be convinced that he's the ratter who schemed this shooting."

"You are improving, Bill," said Locke, with a smile.

And with that he settled down in real earnest to peruse his newspaper, just as if nothing untoward had happened, what time Bill tried to sort into shape the welter of confused thoughts that hummed dizzily through his brain.

He was all agog with excitement when Euston was reached.

And sure enough there appeared Marchant Buxton, debonair as usual, chatting unconcernedly with a stranger. Yet Bill was conscious, despite the distance separating him from his enemy, that Buxton's eyes roved continually in his direction.

It seemed that Ferrers Locke's theory was correct.

The Fatal Messenger!

THE scene was the panelled dining-room of Sir Raston Billenter's house in Park Lane. Once more the Buxton gang was in secret conclave. There was a strained look on the faces of the six crooks that grew more intense when Buxton, rattling a wooden box that contained counters, rose to his feet. With the exception of one disc, marked with an "X," the counters were blank.

"Gentlemen, it is our unpleasant duty to find which of us shall be elected to rid this combine of a very dangerous foe."

The scene to be enacted was a not uncommon one among the Buxton gang. When their paid underlings failed to "bump off" their men, the gang cast lots among themselves to find the next would-be assassin. Albeit, the ceremony of drawing lots told on their equanimity and composure.

Silently, and with a poise that seemed incongruous with the setting of the room, Buxton passed round the group. Each member withdrew a disc from the box and hurriedly looked at it. Simultaneously murmurs of relief broke the tension. But Gustave Lamont, pale and distraught, was obviously the unlucky gambler who had drawn the fatal disc bearing the "X." He licked his dry lips and fidgeted in his seat.

"Well, gentlemen"—Buxton drew the last disc himself and looked at it disdainfully—"who is the lucky member among us?"

His eyes travelled from one to the other. They rested on the ghastly countenance of the Frenchman.

"Is it you, Gustave?"

"Mon Dieu!" The Frenchman rose to his feet and waved his long arms excitedly. "I am the one unlucky, Mon Dieu!"

Buxton smiled at him pityingly.

"Well, Gustave," he said easily, "so far, you have never been called upon to perform what your brothers have done before you. This time it is your turn."

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Gustave Lamont looked round the room like a hunted animal.

"It is one shame!" he cried. "Mon Dieu! It is impossible! It is murder!"

Panic stared out from his cunning little eyes.

"You know the rules of this game," said Buxton, losing some of his sulkiness of manner. "You have watched us draw lots before. You have rejoiced in the bumping off of McDougarty, for instance. You didn't think it murder then. I and Haverswood did that little affair. Did we shrink from it? Come, man, pull yourself together!"

"Hear, hear!" came a murmuring encouragement from the rest of the gang.

"We have seen what an expert forger you are," pursued Buxton. "You have plenty of nerve for that. Now prove to us that we have not been mistaken in you."

"But Ferrers Locke—" babbled Gustave Lamont. "I could not! I know I could not!"

"You must!" The command cut through the momentary silence like a knife. Buxton's lips bared in a snarl. "It is the rule of this company. You must!"

Gustave gazed at the impassive faces round him pleadingly. His heart was small and his soul was mean; but to do him justice, murder was beyond him. He stretched out his hands in an eloquent appeal.

"I ask you, comrades, am I the right weapon of vengeance? Mon Dieu! Is it possible that I could perform what you ask?"

"You must!" Buxton was growing impatient. "Ferrers Locke is on our trail now. He is dangerous. He must be bumped off, taken for a ride, poisoned—"

"Poisoned!" Gustave leaped at the word. "Poisoned! Ah!" Then his face fell. "No, no! I could not do it!"

Buxton snarled an imprecation.

"You know what to expect if you refuse—"

Gustave glanced about him nervously.

In the hands of his five accomplices in crime appeared five silenced automatics.

"You know what to expect, Gustave," said Buxton significantly. "For the last time."

The poor wretch saw Buxton's merciless eyes fixed contemptuously upon him, watched fascinatedly the guns of his accomplices rise to the level of his ribs, and gave in wretchedly.

"No, no!" he screamed. "Not that! I will do it! Mon Dieu! I am in the toils. I will serve you as you wish!"

He sank back in his chair and wiped the beads of perspiration that stood out on his forehead with a trembling hand. Five automatics disappeared into the pockets of their owners, and Gustave Lamont's hand trembled less. He had pledged himself to the cause; Ferrers Locke was a marked man for that moment.

Sharp to time the Rangers turned up for ball practice and track running under the eagle eye of Sandy Ferguson two days later. The unpleasant rumours that had circulated at the time of the fixture with Bidstead had died a natural death, thanks to very decisive action and inquiry by the powers in the football world. And Bill emerged from that inquiry with credit. Once again in harmony the Rangers were training assiduously for their meeting with Stapleton Town on the coming Saturday.

Even Jennings, who had been quick to accuse Bill of treachery, was now thoroughly convinced that he had been the victim of foul play, and he had been one of the first to come forward openly and ask Bill's forgiveness.

Of the attempted attack on his life, and of Ferrers Locke's discovery, Bill said nothing. Not even Tich Freeman was taken into his confidence, for Locke had imposed implicit obedience to his orders—namely, silence.

Despite it all, Bill found it difficult to believe that such villainy could exist. Only that morning he had received a letter from his father—the first words exchanged since their parting—and, as a consequence, Bill was feeling tremendously bucked with life. Something of that glamour evaporated, however, when Buxton lounged into the dressing-room. Yet there was nothing in Buxton's approach which Bill could quarrel. The fellow seemed friendly enough.

"Hallo, boys!" he said boisterously. "Hallo, Bill! Feeling fit?"

Bill found himself replying in the affirmative, and at the same time fostering a doubt of Ferrers Locke. Could this smiling, debonair young man be the arch-villain the Baker Street detective thought him to be?

"Hallo, Sandy!" exclaimed Buxton, catching sight of the trainer. "You see I've not deserted you, old misery. I'm here for practice with the boys. Want bracing up a bit?"

"Humph!"

Sandy's laconic reply was shorter than ever, indicative that he was none too pleased at seeing Buxton present. But the amateur passed it by. He stripped with the rest, and went through the full practice lightly. Major Carstairs, who had dropped in to see how the Rangers were progressing, eyed Buxton with approval. When the players came off the track for a shower and a rub down, he drew Buxton on one side.

"Look here, Marchant," he said, "the Board are hoping that you and Bill Hartley will fit in better, so they're giving you a match on Saturday, if you want to turn out."

"That's fine, Major!"

"But we want none of that nonsensical jealousy stuff, my lad," cautioned the old soldier, without beating about the bush. "Football is football. With you two playing in harmony, why, the Rangers will soar to the top! D'you hear?"

"Sure thing, major," grinned Buxton. "You leave it to me. I'll not let you down."

He dressed with the "boys," laughing and chatting the while, seeing which Bill Hartley found it still more difficult to believe that Buxton was the brains behind the attempt to bump him off. But what Bill did not know at that stage, however, was the very important fact that the Duke of Stapleton, a keen sportsman, and one of Soccer's devotees, had arranged to hold a reception at his mansion after the match with Cashton Rangers. It was a bi-annual affair, but Bill being fresh to the Rangers' eleven knew nothing of it. To the two teams and the respective managements was the invitation extended, and right royally did



Ferrers Locke's eyes took on a glassy stare and flecks of foam appeared at the corners of his mouth. The next moment he collapsed in his chair.

Locke took the card Sing Sing handed him and studied it.

"Pierre Duprez,

"Private Inquiry Agent,

"Paris."

"Show him up, Sing Sing," said the detective, at "One must treat a member of one's own profession with courtesy."

The Chinese bowed himself out and returned with a stocky gentleman with an impressive head of grey hair and a pointed beard.

"Monsieur Duprez?" smiled Ferrers Locke engagingly, his sharp eyes taking in at a glance the agitation of his visitor. "Sit down."

The Frenchman offered his hand in greeting, but Locke seemed not to pay heed to it. But for a flash his eyes had gleamed as he noted the peculiar shaped ring on his visitor's right hand.

"Monsieur Locke!" beamed the visitor. "You do me one favour! I am honoured! What you say, greatly? My mission it is very unfortunate—y's. But I will not keep you long."

So arrived the unhappy member of the Buxton gang, whose task it was to rid his associates in crime of a dangerous enemy.

Gustave Lamont, expert forger and engraver of counterfeit notes, had plucked up enough courage to run his head into a noose!

THE GEM LAMARY.—No. 1

his Grace entertain. It suited Buxton's plans admirably to be included in that invitation, and it seemed that the luck was with him.

Back at his flat with Haverswood he confessed arrogantly that he had worked the trick.

"I'm too good a man to leave out for that fixture, Adolph," he said. "And it suits our book down to the ground."

"It's a stroke of luck, old bean," grinned Haverswood, pouring out for himself and his companion a liberal portion from the decanter. "With that coup nicely brought off, and Ferrers Locke safely out of the way, I shall be more inclined to rest comfortably in my bed."

"Ah!" Buxton's eyes narrowed. "Ferrers Locke. To-day Gustave Lamont's time limit is up: If he doesn't—"

His further words were drowned in the furious ringing of the telephone bell.

Adolph Haverswood crossed to the instrument lazily.

"Hello!" he drawled, and at the answering voice he winked significantly at Buxton. "Yes, he's here. You're going along now? Good luck, old bean!"

He replaced the telephone receiver and crossed to Buxton. Seating himself on the table and swinging his elegantly clad legs, he grinned broadly.

Hois' With His Own Petard!

Pierre Duprez, alias Gustave Lamont, eyed his victim wolfishly, albeit not a bit unconcealably. Ferrers Locke's reputation, his comely personality, forsook him to drain the steaming "Freemintan" courage. Could he have read the thoughts that were passing in the mind of the criminal investigator, Gustave Lamont would have made sudden tracks for the door. But there was no visible trace of what Ferrers Locke's quick eye and active mind had detected.

He welcomed his visitor with rare composure. "I am a monsieur perhaps you will tell me of your business. I have invited cordially, offering the Frenchman a box of Havanas."

Pierre Duprez licked his dry lips. "I am in an all what you say—excitement," he began, gesturing freely with hands and arms. "My client, in Paris, he is in despair. Monsieur Locke, you see this ring I have on finger—"

He thrust forward a delicately-shaped right hand, the youthfulness of which belied the age indicated by the grey head of hair. Locke, however, did not betray any feeling of surprise, but the suspicion which had taken root in his mind now became a certainty.

"It certainly is a weird ring," he drawled casually. "Of Chinese origin, if my knowledge of such things is to be relied upon."

"You are right, monsieur," agreed Duprez, with a fawning smile. "But take care you see this ring, it is a wonder, monsieur, and examine it—"

Very gingerly he withdrew the ring from his finger, and, with elaborate care, handed it to the detective. Then, leaning back in his chair, he fastened a pair of unusually bright eyes on his victim.

"I have been in the habit of wearing this ring," he said, "and I know beneath lowered lids Ferrers Locke observed those things and inwardly mused. There was death in that ring of that he was now certain."

"It is a very quaint, Monsieur Duprez," he remarked. "I am glad to see that my client informed," continued his visitor, "that this ring holds in it a compartment secret. Ah, in that compartment, it is my conviction, which will prove an interesting story, there is the whole world which will lead to a discovery that will be of great value."

"Indeed," began Ferrers Locke, smiling. "I have tried to open it myself, but I am, what you say, baffled. I trust that the experts of Paris to open you ring, for my client, who is an official of State, says that they not to be trusted. You are the right person, say you to Monsieur Ferrers Locke, he is one fair man; he is to be trusted."

"You are very flattering," laughed Locke easily. "I'll certainly see what I can do."

With a cunning twist drooping his lips, the Frenchman watched the detective twist the ring round in his fingers in an apparent effort to discover its secret. One tiny scratch from that ring was sufficient to kill Ferrers Locke.

It seemed a certainty that Gustave Lamont's murderous mission would triumph in singularly easy fashion; an assumption that enlarged into a certainty when the watching gangster saw Ferrers Locke start suddenly and involuntarily drop the precious ring to the carpeted floor.

"How careless of me, monsieur," muttered Locke, sucking at his thumb. "There are sharp points on that ring, and I scratched myself—"

"Ah!" A hissing intake of breath escaped the assassin's lips as he heard the statement. "Next moment," obeying an instinct, he stooped down to retrieve the ring from the carpet.

It was a move upon which Ferrers Locke had gambled. And as the Frenchman's fingers closed eagerly over the quaintly-fashioned ring, Locke stooped as if to view the same object in mind. His outspread fingers entered those of the Frenchman and squeezed slightly.

In the mumbled apology that followed the gloating Frenchman completely lost the significance and peril of the incident. With elaborate care he dropped the ring into his waistcoat pocket, and again his wolfish glance returned to Ferrers Locke.

That individual appeared to feel ill. From a standing position he suddenly plunged into his chair, and passed a hand across his forehead.

"Jove! You must excuse me, monsieur—I feel dizzy—I—"

"Yes, yes," The Frenchman's excitement was so great that his fear had gone. "Ferrers Locke was as good as a dead man. It had been so ridiculously easy—so ridiculously easy."

Ferrers Locke collapsed. His eyes took on a glassy stare; flecks of foam appeared at the corners of his mouth.

Pierre Duprez dropped his mask. It was safe to do so now.

"You interfering dog," he snarled viciously. "Look at me! Ah! In-five—ten—fifteen minutes you will be gon'—poof!"

A groan escaped the detective.

"It was me they picked up to put you away," said the Frenchman, pounding his chest in astonishment. "I never dreamed it would be so easy. So—"

"His arrogance underwent a sudden change. A pall spread across his face; his whole frame shook. Then, like Ferrers Locke, he collapsed in a chair and trembled as if with the ague.

"So easy!" The change in Ferrers Locke was remarkable. Goad was his languor. Now he was on his feet; his keen grey eyes bent sternly upon the Frenchman. "And yet not so easy, my friend!"

Ferrers Locke's too old a hand to be caught by a cheap gangster—what say you, chums? Be sure you read next week's instalment, there's a thousand and one thrills in it!

See How It's Done!



Answer to Puzzle on page 13.

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