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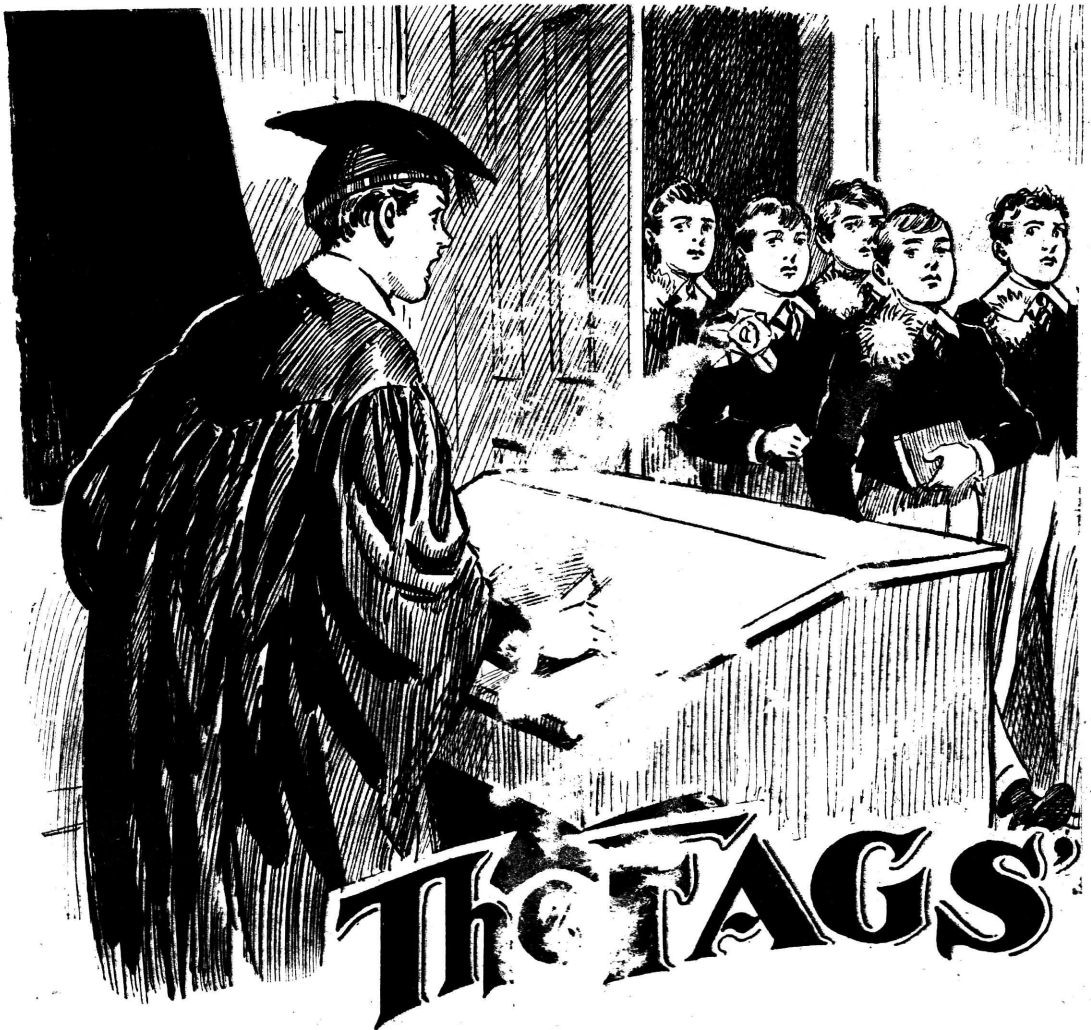
EVERY WEDNESDAY.

Week Ending December 30th, 1933.



**TEN MORE SUPERB
PICTURES**
*In full
Colour!*
GIVEN WITH THIS ISSUE!

'THE FAGS' FORM-MASTER!' Sparkling School Story of the Chums of St. Jim's—WITHIN.



Tom Merry, penniless and out of work, too glad to take charge of the Third Form at St. Jim's in the temporary absence of the Form-master. But when he tackles teaching the fags, he little knew what a tough job he is up against!

CHAPTER 1.

Disgusted With Gussy!

TOM MERRY here?" Wally—D'Arcy minor of the Third Form—looked into the Shell study as he asked the question.

It was the study that had belonged to Tom Merry when the latter was at St. Jim's, and it was crowded at the present moment with Tom Merry's old friends. Some of the fellows had no chairs to sit down on, and were leaning against the mantelpiece, or standing with their hands in their pockets.

Manners and Lowther, Tom Merry's old chums in the Shell Form, were sitting on the table, not without danger to the tea-things. Tea was ready in the study, and the kettle was singing on the hob—all waiting for the arrival of the guest of the evening.

Blake, Digby, Herries, and Arthur Augustus D'Arcy of the Fourth occupied various chairs.

Figgins, Kerr, and Wynn, also of the Fourth—New House fellows—had found room in the study somehow. Kangaroo, the Cornstalk junior, was sitting on the window seat. They were chatting—two or three at a time. But the buzz of talk stopped as Wally of the Third put his head in at the door with his usual cheeky expression.

"Is Tom Merry here?"

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"I am shocked and surprised at you, Wally! I suppose you've taken with your manna—"

"Come off, old son!"

"You see, I want to see Tom Merry. You know our Form master is away now, and we're having some high jinks in the Form-room, now Selby's off the scent. Where's Tom Merry?"

"He's not here," said Blake. Wally's keen eyes were gleaming round the Shell study. "I was told he was here!" he exclaimed. "Where is he? I suppose you're standing that feed for Tom Merry?"

"Yaas, wathah!" said Arthur Augustus. "Then you're off-side!" declared Wally. "We're standing Tom Merry a feed. As soon as I knew he was visiting St. Jim's, I made up my mind that the Third were going to take care of him in A1 style. After all, he used to be the king pin around here, and we'd like to see old Tom sitting pretty. That will be just jake, won't it, Gus?"

"Wally, why evah do you use those howwid Amewicanisms? I cannot undahstand a word you say!"

"You never could, old top! Anyway, Tom Merry's

—HE'S RAGGED BY THE FAGS IN THIS FULL-OF-FUN STORY!



FORM-MASTER!

By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

coming to the Third Form Room to feed with us. We've got sardines and jam."

"Together?" asked Monty Lowthor.

"Oh, don't be funny! Where's Tom Merry?"

"He's gone to see the Head."

"Blessed if I know what he wants to waste time on the Head for, when there's the Third Form to be considered!" said Wally peevishly. "Look here, it's understood, I suppose, that we're going to have him?"

"No fear!"

"Now, don't be an ass, Manners!"

"It will be understood that you're going to have a thick ear if you don't buzz off!" exclaimed Manners.

"You cheeky young bounder—"

"Yaas, wathah! I must say I agwee with Mannahs in chawactewisin' you as a cheeky young boundah, Wally!"

"Oh, ring off!" said Wally, at the door. "Chuck it, you know. The question is— Ow! Leggo! Chuck it, you blessed Kangaroo!"

Wally came into the study with a jump like a kangaroo himself, with the Cornstalk's grip on his collar.

"Chuck it!" he roared. "Ow—yow!"

Wally threw his arms around D'Arcy to stop himself, and major and minor rolled on the floor together.

"Ow!"

"Yawwooh!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Wally was undermost, but he soon altered that. He rolled his major off, and Arthur Augustus bumped on the carpet. The carpet, like most of the carpets in junior studies, was chiefly a receptacle for dust. D'Arcy's heavy bump upon it brought the dust up in clouds.

"Bai Jove!"

Wally scrambled up.

"You chump—"

"Ow! You awful ass! My twousahs will be wuined."

"Plenty more at the tailor's!"

"Wally, you young wuffian—"

"Oh, scram!"

"Bai Jove! I shall be vewy pleased if someone will kick that disrespectful young wuffian out of the study!"

"Certainly!" exclaimed several voices. "Anything to oblige!"

"Here, hands off!" said Wally. "Ow!"

A boot helped Wally into the passage. He turned in the doorway to tell the juniors his opinion of them. But the boot was rising again, and the hero of the Third Form scuttled down the passage instead.

Blake helped D'Arcy up. He helped him by the collar, with the natural result that the collar tore away from the stud.

"Oh, Jemima!" exclaimed Blake, in great astonishment.

"There goes the collar!"

"You feahful ass!"

"Is that what you call gratitude?" exclaimed Blake indignantly.

"Weally, Blake—"

"I think we all ought to observe that we're shocked at Gussy getting into a state like this, and creating disturbances on such a festive occasion," Monty Lowthor remarked.

"Weally, Lowthah—"

"I put it to all the fellows," said Lowthor; "are we disgusted with Gussy? Every chap in favour of the motion will signify the same by putting up his hand."

Every hand went up.

"You uttah asses—"

"Do we consider Gussy a dusty, disreputable bounder? Everyone in favour of the motion will signify the same by turning up his nose."

"Weally—"

Every nose was turned up. The facial contortions this led to were almost alarming.

"Weally, you feahful asses—"

"We're disgusted with you, Gussy."

"I wegard you—"

"We refuse to be regarded by a person who disgusts us," said Monty Lowther loftily. "The best thing you can do is to retire from the study and get a clean collar!"

And, under the circumstances, Arthur Augustus thought so, too.

CHAPTER 2.

Tom Merry—Form-master!

TOM MERRY was in the Head's study. The Head was speaking to Mr. Railton, the master of the School House—Tom Merry's Housemaster before the junior left St. Jim's.

Tom Merry stood silent.

As a matter of fact, his mind was in a whirl. Since the ruin of his fortunes, which had compelled him to leave St. Jim's, the junior had had no hope of returning to the old school.

He had come back there to-day in a footer match, but with no idea of remaining. He had been surprised and pleased when Mr. Railton had told him that a post had been found for him at St. Jim's, where he could earn his living while remaining at the school.

Needless to say, Tom Merry had gladly accepted the offer.

Mr. Railton took him to the Head's study, and Tom Merry was waiting now to hear what was the post that was offered him.

He could not imagine what it was.

But he was quite content to accept any position that Mr. Railton considered advisable for him. He knew that he could not have a truer friend than his old Housemaster.

The Head turned to Tom as Mr. Railton finished speaking.

"You are willing to accept a post here, then, Merry?"

"Yes, sir," said Tom Merry brightly.

"It will mean hard work."

"I'm prepared to work hard, sir."

"It will mean many difficulties."

"If you think I'm good enough, sir—"

"I think you can make the attempt at all events," said Dr. Holmes. "I will tell you what we have thought of for you, and if you care to attempt it, you can do so with my best wishes."

"Yes, sir."

Mr. Selby, the master of the Third Form, has been allowed leave for a short time, owing to ill-health. It would be necessary for me to take a substitute in his place while he is away. It has occurred to me that you might take his place."

Tom Merry started.

Mr. Selby, the master of the Form of which Wally was an ornament, was not a popular master, having a bad digestion, and a bad temper; but it had to be admitted that he had many trials in the Third Form. Wally & Co. were not what could be considered ideal pupils by any master.

"Now, I think you are quite sufficiently advanced to take charge of the Third Form temporarily," said the Head.

"You were top of your Form, and practically ready to pass into the Fifth. You could take charge of the Third, so far as instruction went, if you cared; and the question is whether you could get the juniors to respect and obey you. Would you care to make the attempt?"

"Certainly, sir."

Tom Merry's reply was without hesitation.

The task proposed to him might be onerous and very difficult, but Tom Merry was not one to shrink from it on that account.

He would make the attempt, at least, and if he failed, it would only be after he had done his best.

"If you are successful with the Third Form," resumed the Head, "I do not say that the same position here may be permanent, but I shall undoubtedly be able to get you a post in some such capacity. I shall be putting you to the test. It is not the career that you were intended for, but—"

"But it is a great opening for a fellow without resources, sir," said Tom Merry. "I can't say how much I thank you, sir, you and Mr. Railton!"

"Not at all!" said the Head. "I will have a notice put up to the effect that, from Monday morning, you will take charge of the Third Form, and will occupy the Third Form-master's place in every way. It depends upon yourself what success you make of the matter."

"I will do my best, sir."

"I'm sure of that, Merry. While in this post, you will

use the Masters' Room, of course, and you will use your judgment as to the degree of intimacy you keep up with boys in junior Forms."

"Yes, sir."

And the Head and Mr. Railton shook hands with Tom Merry, and he left the study, with his brain in something of a whirl.

To take the place of Mr. Selby was about the last thing he had thought of.

Tom Merry—Form-master of the fags!

He could not help smiling at the thought.

Master of the Third! He would be "Mr. Merry" now to the fags, and he wondered how they would take it.

After all, Wally and the rest were fond of him; he had always been popular with the fags. He was sure they would back him up. Doubtless, there would be little troubles, owing to the exuberant spirits of the fags, but he had no doubt that, with a judicious combination of kindness and firmness, he would be able to smooth matters down.

At all events, it was a great chance.

If he satisfied the Head, he would keep the position until Mr. Selby returned, and then he would be recommended to some other and similar post. The Head of St. Jim's had a far-reaching influence in such matters.

It might be the making of his future.

True, it was not the future Tom Merry had dreamed of. Like most boys, he had had all kinds of vague dreams of the future. He had expected to go to college, perhaps to get his "Blue," thereafter to travel in distant lands, or to take up flying, the career of the future—of many things that were not likely now to come to pass.

But he did not repine now that the visions were over.

To a lad who had tramped the streets of London without a copper or a crust, the position that was offered him was splendid.

And Tom Merry had not forgotten how to be grateful.

He made his way slowly towards the old study in the Shell passage.

He wondered how his chums would take the news.

They would be on a different footing in the future, of course. But for to-day they would be on the old lines, and he would be a junior among the juniors. Monday could take care of itself, for the present.

A youth with big spectacles and a bumpy forehead met him in the Shell passage, and extended a bony hand to grip a button and stop him.

It was Skimpole, the genius of the Shell.

"Dear me!" said Skimpole. "I am glad you are still here, Tom Merry. Before you leave the school, I wish to present you with a splendid volume which clearly demonstrates the truth of the great science of Psycho-Analysis. I wish you to keep it as a souvenir. It will comfort you in times of trouble. When small cares oppress a fellow, there is endless consolation in the great truths of science, in analysing oneself, observing whether one's state of mind can be traced to the unseen influence of the ductless glands—"

"I don't know about my jolly old glands, Skimmy!" said Tom Merry, laughing. "But something has been working in my favour. I'm not leaving St. Jim's."

"Dear me! I am very pleased. Are you coming back into the Shell?"

"No; I've got a post here."

"How good! Have you come into your money again?"

"No. I'm as poor as a church mouse still."

"It is very hard, Merry. But it is very fortunate that you are not leaving St. Jim's, as I want a long talk with you on the subject of Psychology in its relation to our ancestors. Surprising as it may seem, we inherit all our features, mental and physical, directly from our ancestors. Many people believe that we are descended directly from apes—"

"You can tell me about Tarzan some other time," said Tom Merry hurriedly.

"I have been trying to explain the matter to Gore," went on Skimpole, "and he says he's quite willing to believe that I descended from an apelike creature of prehistoric times, because he can trace a family resemblance in my features, but he denies the truth of it so far as he is concerned—"

"Well, I must be going—"

"When I pointed out the various low animal traits in his character, as proof of my statement, he became annoyed for some reason, and so violent that I left the study. As you see, I bumped my nose on the floor."

"I will show you some notes from Professor Balmycrumpet's latest works on Psycho-Analysis, showing that everything which exists in a certain state exists in that state and in no other until it changes its form in some manner."

And Skimpole, the scientific genius, went through his pockets carefully, pocket after pocket, searching for those valuable notes.



"Make a back, Gussy!" yelled the fags. "Tuck in your napper!" As Arthur Augustus stood, hardly knowing what he was doing after his struggle with the Third Formers, Wally took a flying leap over him. "Come on!" he shouted. "Follow your leader!"

He was several minutes finding them. "Here they are!" he exclaimed, looking round for Tom Merry again. "Listen— Oh dear! Merry, where are you? I really think it is almost rude of Merry to depart without warning while I am looking for my notes!" And Skimpole drifted away sadly. Tom Merry had hurried on to his study while he had the opportunity. Skimpole, like most persons who deal largely in "isms," was a portentous bore.

There was a shout of welcome as Tom Merry entered the study:

"Here he is!"

"Come on, Tommy; tea's ready!"

And half a dozen welcoming hands seized Tom Merry to push him into the seat of honour at the hospitable board.

CHAPTER 3.

Breaking the News!

"TEA for Tommy!"

"Pass the ham!"

"And the bacon!"

"And the eggs!"

"And the toast!"

"Help yourself, Tommy, my son!"

"Pile in!"

Tom Merry laughed.

"Oh, draw it mild!" he exclaimed. "I'm not going to lay in provisions for a siege, you know. Give a chap a chance!"

"You're going on a long journey, you know."

"I'm not."

"What?"

"I'm staying at St. Jim's."

The juniors stared at him.

They did not take in the full force of the statement for a moment, but when they did there was a rush for him.

Tom Merry had a cup of tea in his hand, but in their enthusiasm the juniors did not stop to think about that.

They collared the hero of the Shell and simply hugged him, and slapped him on the back, and shook his hands, and poked him in the ribs.

"Yaroo!" roared Tom Merry, as the hot tea swamped over his waistcoat. "Yaroo! Stop it! Yow! Help!"

"Good old Tommy!"

"Not out after all!"

"Hurrah!"

"Leggo!" roared Tom Merry. "Yaroo! Leggo!"

The study door opened.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, looking extremely spick-and-span in a new collar and a carefully dusted waistcoat, stood upon the threshold. His eyeglass gleamed upon the excited juniors.

"Weally, deah boys, it's not good form to wumple a fellow's clothes when he comes to pay you a visit," said Arthur Augustus disapprovingly. "Pway don't be excited! It's wathah wotten taste to get excited, anyhow!"

"He's staying!" roared Kangaroo.

"What?"

"Staying at St. Jim's!" yelled Figgins.

"Bai Jove!"

"My hat! We'll have to stand a splendid feed to celebrate this!" ejaculated Fatty Wynn.

"Yes, rather!"

"Hurrah!"

"Bai Jove, I congratulate you, Tom Mewwy, and you, too!" exclaimed D'Arcy. "I wegard it as wippin' good news! At the same time, I considah it wot to tffow a chap's tea ovah his waistcoat!"

"Rats!"

"Weally, Kerr—"

Tom Merry, very much ruffled, sat in his chair again, and dabbed his waistcoat with his handkerchief. He was ruddy and laughing.

"Well, I'm glad you're glad!" he exclaimed. "But don't ever be any gladder, or you'll ruin my clothes!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"But, I say, it's ripping!" exclaimed Monty Lowther, with beaming eyes. "You're really and truly staying at St. Jim's!"

"Really and truly!"

"Hurrah!"

"Yaas, I must wemark that I wegard it as wippin'!"

"It will be glorious to have you back in the Shell again, old chap!" said Manners affectionately. "Things have gone to pot in the Form since you left!"

"Yes, rather!" said Lowther. "Even those Fourth Form kids are beginning to get their ears up at footer!"

"Weally, Lowthah—"

"Oh rats!" said Figgins.

"But I'm not coming back into the Shell, kids," said Tom Merry.

"What! Passed into the Fifth?"

"No!"

"What then?"

"Bai Jove! It isn't poss that you have been put in the Fourth—weduced to the wanks!" exclaimed D'Arcy.

Tom Merry smiled.

"No."

"Then what do you mean?" demanded Blake.

"I'm not coming back as a pupil at all. I'm taking a job here."

"My hat!" gasped Lowther. "You don't mean to say you've taken on the job Binks chucked up when he came into his money?"

"Ha, ha, ha! No. I'm not going to be boots."

"Wathah not!"

"Then what are you?"

"Form-master."

"Hey?"

"What?"

"Which?"

"I'm temporary master of the Third Form while Mr. Selby is away for his health."

"My only hat!"

"Gweat Scott!"

"That's a sizzler!"

"Are you joking?"

"Serious as a giddy judge, my sons," said Tom Merry. "Temporary master of the Third. I'm going to have the unalloyed delight of instructing Wally. Don't you envy me?"

"Bai Jove!"

The juniors were silent. They could not imagine Tom

WHAT A HOPE!

Pilot: "What is it, sonny?"

Little Boy: "When you go up will you please look out for my balloon? It blew away yesterday."

Half-a-crown has been awarded to D. Thompson, 93, Crown Lane, Bromley Common, Kent.



Merry as a Form-master. They could only stare at him and wonder.

Monty Lowther broke the silence at last.

"Well, I'm blessed!" he said. "Have you got the nerve?"

"I hope so."

"You're really going to try it?"

"Yes."

"Wally was here a few minutes ago?" said Lowther. "He wanted to take you to tea in the Third Form Room. It seems that they're having high jinks there while their Form-master's away!"

"H'm!"

"He didn't guess that it was his future Form-master he was inviting!" grinned Manners.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Bai Jove, I shall have to give Wally some instructions in tweekin' Tom Mewwy with pwopah respect!"

"Why ask for the rag, old chap?"

"Weally, Lowthah—"

There was a kick at the door, and it flew open. The cheery, cheeky face of Wally D'Arcy looked into the Shell study once more. He grinned at the juniors, and gave Tom Merry a cool nod.

"Oh, here you are!" he exclaimed. "I've come back for you. We want you to come to tea in the Form-room. We're standing jam and sardines. Jameson's got a tip from his uncle, and we're blueing the lot. And I sold Curly Gibson's white rabbits. You'll come, won't you?"

"Weally, Wally—"

"Now, don't you begin, Gussy!"

"Weally, Wally, you young wascal, Tom Mewwy cannot possibly come. In the first place, he is engaged with us."

"Oh, you old fogies don't count! Besides, I suppose Tom Merry can eat more than one tea. I know I can!"

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"It is not only that—"

"We've got jam and sardines—"

"Weally, Wally—"

"Sardines and jam, you know."

"Tom Mewwy cannot possibly come, because it would be infwa dig for a Form-mastah to take tea with his pupils!"

"Off your rocker?" asked Wally pleasantly.

"It's a fact," said Tom Merry quietly. "On Monday I take up Mr. Selby's position temporarily."

Wally looked dazed.

"You—you mean it?" he said faintly.

"Certainly!"

"You're taking up old Selby's place?"

"Yes."

"M-m-m-my Form-master!"

"Yes, your Form-master, Wally!"

Wally stared at Tom Merry for some seconds in silence, then he burst into a wild roar.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Weally, Wally—" remonstrated Arthur Augustus, shocked.

"Ha, ha, ha!" shrieked Wally. "I must go and tell Jameson and Curly this! Ha, ha, ha! What a rag! Ha, ha, ha!"

And the fag simply staggered away, shrieking with merriment, and the last words the chums heard as he departed were:

"What a rag!"

CHAPTER 4.

Gussy Gets Ragged!

TOM MERRY finished his tea in the Shell study in silence.

His appointment to the post of Form-master of the Third had struck Wally in the sense of being wonderfully comical.

What a rag! That had been the worthy Wally's view of it. What a rag! It showed that the fag was not likely to take Tom Merry's Form-mastership in a very serious spirit.

And if Wally took it like this, what would the other fags be like?

Tom Merry wondered.

Wally liked him well, and would always back him up; he knew that. But Wally would back him up in his own way. That was equally certain.

And Wally's way would not be a way that "Mr. Merry" could approve of.

Tom Merry was silent and thoughtful.

The juniors left the study after tea, Figgins & Co. going back to their own House to carry the astonishing news there, much to the amazement and incredulity of Third Form juniors who belonged to the New House, and some of whom loudly declared at once that they would not stand it.

Blake & Co. went downstairs discussing the matter, leaving the Terrible Three alone in their study. Manners and Lowther were serious. There might be a humorous side to the matter, but naturally it did not appeal very much to Tom Merry, and his chums sympathised with him too much to take the matter in a light spirit.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was just as considerate and thoughtful as either of Tom Merry's chums in the Shell. The wrinkle in his aristocratic brow showed that he was thinking the matter over very seriously.

"You fellows wemembah what young Wally said as he went away?" the swell of St. Jim's remarked, after a long and thoughtful pause.

"Yes—the young bounder!"

"Yaas, I must admit that my minor is wathah a boundah; but you have noticed, of course, that I have a great deal of oldah-bwothahly influence ovah him."

"Can't say I have," said Digby. "He rages everybody—even old Selby, although Selby bites!"

"Weally, Dig—"

"Nor I, either," said Herries. "By the way, would you chaps care to come and see me feed Towser?"

"Rats!"

"Yaas, wathah! Wats, Hewwies!"

So Herries, with a snort, went off alone to feed Towser, and Arthur Augustus D'Arcy resumed the thread of his discourse.

"I have been thinkin' that it would be my duty to speak to Wally, and the Third generally, and impress upon them the fact that they ought to tweek Tom Mewwy with pwopah respect when he takes up the posish of Form-mastah on Monday. What do you think of the ideah, Blake?"

"Rotten!" said Blake, with cheerful frankness.

"Weally, Blake—"

"You'll only get ragged, you see."

"I should uttally wofuse to be wagged!"

"My dear ass—"
 "I decline to be called an ass!"
 And Arthur Augustus walked away in great dignity. Blake and Digby and Kangaroo joined a crowd that had gathered round the notice-board.

There was already a notice there in the Head's hand. It stated concisely that Mr. Selby's absence owing to illness would be prolonged, and that Thomas Merry would take his place, in charge of the Third Form, until further notice.

The whole School House was reading the notice in amazement.

A similar notice was posted up in the New House for the benefit of the Third Form fags who boarded in that establishment.

The school received the notice with wonder, but most of the fellows were glad that Tom Merry was staying, upon whatever terms he stayed.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy passed the interested crowd at the notice-board, and made his way to the Third Form Room.

He knocked at the door in his punctilious way. "Come in, fathhead!" sang out a voice, which he recognised as that of his younger brother.

With a heightened colour, the swell of St. Jim's entered the Form-room. It was crowded with fags.

Wally had related the wonderful news, and it gathered the Third Form together as of old the fiery cross gathered the Highland clans.

The general point of view taken was well expressed in Wally's own words:

"What a rag!"
 With a Middle School fellow for Form-master, the Third thought that they would be able to do as they liked.

While Mr. Selby was away they had been under the charge of prefects; and Knox, who had been in charge of them that day, was a most unpleasant fellow and a bully.

Knox would not be able to interfere with them when they had a Form-master again. And if their Form-master was Tom Merry, all would be serene. They did not think that the Shell fellow would inspire much terror.

Diggs declared that everything in the garden would be lovely, and Hardy had already gone to fetch his white rabbits into the Form-room. A game of leapfrog had been proposed, seconded, and passed unanimously, when the swell of the Fourth presented himself. He was greeted with a far from friendly glare.

"Blessed Fourth Former!" said Jameson. "What does he want?"

"Weally, Jameson—"
 "Want anything, Gus, old son?" asked Wally.

"That is not a respectful way to address your majah, Wally."

"Rats!"
 "Weally, you wascal—"

"I say, D'Arcy minor, we can't stand about listening to your relations," said Curly Gibson. "Let's play."

"Right you are!"
 "I insist upon your listenin' to me, Wally."

"Oh, do ring off!" said Wally indignantly. "It's rotten for me to have a brother in the Fourth, anyway, without the chap coming here to bore us."

"You young wagamuffin—"
 "Come on!" shouted Jameson.

"Pway listen to me!"
 "Will you play a game of leapfrog with us, Gussy?"

asked his minor.

"Bai Jove! Leapfrog!"
 D'Arcy's hair fairly bristled on his head at the indignity of the idea of his playing leapfrog with fags.

"Yes; we won't hurt you."
 "You young wuffians!"

"My hat!" said Curly Gibson. "I can't say you paid much attention to your brother's manners when you brought him up, young D'Arcy!"

"Shocking!" said Jameson.

"Bai Jove!"
 "Gussy, old man, you're too numerous—scram!"

"I refuse to get out. I came here to impress you with—"

"Apple sauce!"
 "Not with apple sauce, Wally; to impress upon you the importance of tweatin'—"

"Outside!"
 "Collar him!"

"Make him play!"
 "Ha, ha, ha!"

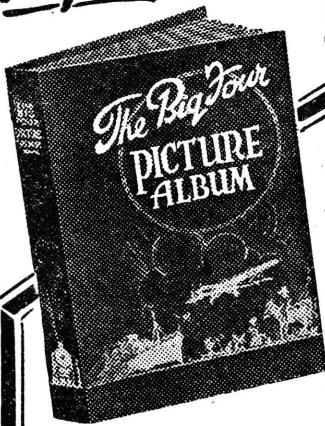
The fags, yelling with laughter, closed in a crowd round Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. The swell of the Fourth almost foamed with indignation.

"Hands off, you howwid young wascals—" he shouted.

"I came here to speak a few words—"

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"Well, you've spilled your bibful. Now make a back!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Make a back, Gussy!"

"Tuck in your napper!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Arthur Augustus struggled violently. To be told he had spilled his bibful, to make a back, and to tuck in his napper, was more than the blood of the D'Arcys could stand.

But the struggles of the elegant junior were futile against the overwhelming numbers of the Third.

They dragged him down the room, and he was bent over; and as he stood, hardly knowing where he was or what he was doing in his bewilderment, Wally took a flying leap over him.

"Come on!" shouted Wally. "Follow your leader."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Jameson followed. Arthur Augustus rose at the same moment, and Jameson went backwards instead of forwards, and sat down.

There was a roar.

"Yow!" howled Jameson.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Bai Jove! You young wottahs—"

"Yow! I'm hurt!" howled Jameson. "Bump him! He did that on purpose! Bump him! Bump the beast! Yow!"

"You howwid young wuffians—"

"Bump him!"

"Bump the cad!"

Arthur Augustus fought for his life. Fags scrambled

over him like ants. The uproar was terrific; and in the midst of it the Form-room door opened, and the furious face of Knox glared into the room.

CHAPTER 5.

Mr. Merry Gets Going!

KNOX glared at the fags, and the fags ceased their disturbance for a moment and glared back at Knox. They weren't afraid of the bullying prefect now. They had a brand-new Form-master to oppose him.

"You young villains!" roared Knox. "What do you mean by kicking up all this din?"

"Only a little fun," said Wally.

"Ow!" murmured D'Arcy.

Arthur Augustus was on the floor, and nine or ten of the fags were sitting on him to keep him there safely.

There was very little of the swell of St. Jim's to be seen—a red and dusty face, from which the eyeglass had disappeared, a hand, and a boot.

The rest of him had disappeared under the swarm of fags.

Knox strode into the room. Wally's cool reply had not diminished his temper by any means.

"Now then, you young rotters—"

"Cut it out, Knox! You're not in charge."

"What?"

"We've got a new Form-master."

The prefect stared.

He had read the notice in the Hall, and laughed a sneering laugh over it. Knox had disliked Tom Merry intensely while the junior was at St. Jim's, and the dislike had not been decreased by absence.

That Tom Merry should make a success of his mastership of the Third he did not desire in the least, even if he had considered it probable—which he did not.

He paused, and the scowl passed from his hard face, giving place to a grim and jeering grin.

"Oh!" he said.

"So you've done with us," said Wally. "You can report us to our Form-master, if you like."

Knox chuckled softly.

"Very well, I shall do so," he said.

And he went out of the Form-room, still chuckling.

If Knox could manage it, Tom Merry would have his hands full on the first occasion that he essayed to act as Form-master to the Third, and would make a ghastly failure of the whole business. That was the prefect's kindly hope and intention.

There was a chuckle of triumph in the Third Form Room, too, as the prefect went out.

The Third Form rejoiced.

"What a rag!" exclaimed Jameson.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Bai Jove! You young wascals, I ordah you to welcase me at once."

"No fear!"

"Weally, you feahful young boundahs—"

"Ha, ha, ha! Bump him!"

"Bai Jove!"

Bump, bump!

Knox heard the terrific din as he departed. He grinned cheerfully, and made his way to the Shell study, where Tom Merry was chatting with Manners and Lowther.

The Terrible Three looked up as Knox came in.

They were ready for trouble at once. But Knox had an extremely polite manner.

"I understand that you are master of the Third Form now, Merry!" he said.

"Yes," said Tom Merry.

"Then you had better look after your Form," said the prefect. "They are raising a shindy in the Form-room."

"Oh!"

"I leave it entirely with you, Mr. Merry," said the prefect, with a grin.

And he went out of the study before Tom Merry could reply.

"Phew!" said Manners. "You'll be beginning your duties early, Tom."

Tom Merry rose to his feet.

"I suppose I'd better go," he said.

"We'll come and back you up!"

Tom Merry shook his head.

"No, you'd better not," he said. "I shall go as a Form-master, but you fellows are only chaps in the Shell. They might look on it as a Form raid."

And Tom Merry left the study alone.

He hurried to the Third Form Room in a very dubious state of mind as to what he should do when he arrived

there. It was his first essay at keeping a disorderly junior Form in order.

The din from the Form-room was echoing up the passage as Tom Merry approached the door.

He opened the door and stepped in, and closed it again behind him immediately, to shut off the noise as well as possible from the rest of the House.

Clouds of dust were flying in the Form-room, and in the midst of it he caught sight of arms and legs and Eton jackets indiscriminately mixed.

"Bai Jove!" came a faint voice from the writhing heap of humanity. "Welcase me, you wottahs! You uttah young wascals, welcase me at once!"

"Gussy!" exclaimed Tom Merry.

"Bai Jove! Welcase me, Tom Mewwy! Welcase me, deah boy!"

"Boys!"

Tom Merry thundered out the word in the deepest tone he could assume.

It made some of the fags jump, and Wally looked round. "Oh, keep it up, kids!" he exclaimed. "It's only old Tom!"

"What a rag!" grinned Jameson.

Bump!

"Bai Jove! Wescue!"

"Stop that immediately!" exclaimed Tom Merry.

"Oh, rats!"

"Clear out, you Shell bounder!"

"We'll bump you, too!"

"Ow! Wescue!"

Tom Merry's mind was made up at once.

He strode towards the struggling group and grasped Wally by the collar. With a jerk of his strong arm he dragged the leader of the fags away and hurled him to the hearthrug. Then he grasped Jameson, and hurled him after Wally. Curly Gibson followed. But by this time the fags were scrambling round Tom Merry in an extremely warlike way.

"Hands off!" roared Diggs. "You Shell bounder—"

Smack!

A box on the ear caused Diggs to stop suddenly.

There was a threatening yell from the Third.

"Down him!"

"Bump him!"

Tom Merry faced the horde of infuriated fags with all the dignity of attitude he could muster at so short a notice.

"Boys!"

"Oh, rats!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Don't try to palm that off on us, old man!"

"Yah!"

"Boys!"

"Rats!"

"Scram!"

"Boys!" repeated Tom Merry firmly. "I am your Form-master now! Stand back! Mind, if anybody here should lay a finger upon me I should have to report him to the Head for a flogging!"

The fags drew back involuntarily at that.

Certainly, if Tom Merry was a Form-master now, any violence shown towards him would be followed by a flogging at least.

Even Wally hesitated.

"Oh, come off, Tom Merry!" he exclaimed. "You don't expect us to take that, do you? You can call yourself a Form-master, if you like; but, as a matter of fact, you're only Tom Merry."

"Mr. Merry!" said Tom severely.

"What?"

"You must call me Mr. Merry, in future."

"Rats!" yelled the Third.

Tom frowned.

"Order!" he exclaimed. "The next boy who interrupts me or speaks in a disrespectful manner will take fifty lines!"

"Oh, go home!"

Tom Merry flashed round towards the speaker.

"Who spoke?"

"I did!" said Jameson defiantly.

"Take fifty lines, Jameson!"

"Rats!"

"Take a hundred!"

"More rats!"

"Here, draw it mild!" whispered Curly Gibson. "Remember what was on the Head's notice in the Hall, you know! Don't be an ass!"

Tom Merry looked steadily at Jameson.

"Jameson, you will come with me immediately to the Head's study, unless you beg my pardon at once!"

"I won't!"

"Very well. I will take you!"

"Rescue, chaps!" shouted Jameson.

The Third made a movement forward.

"Very well," said Tom Merry quietly. "I will call in the prefects!"

And he stepped to the door and threw it open.

The Third Form stood astounded, dumbfounded for a moment.

Tom Merry stood with his hand on the open door, regarding them. His face was hard and set. Tom Merry knew perfectly well that if he was to have authority over the Third Form at all it must be established now.

The fags stood looking at him like young tigers. He might be their temporary Form-master, by order of the Head. But they could not disassociate him in their minds from the old Tom Merry of the Shell whom they had known, and whom they had cheeked often enough, thereby taking advantage of his good nature.

But it was a changed Tom Merry who stood looking at them now.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy had risen to his feet, very dusty and rumped. He stood looking on in amazement. His

"You are ready to come with me, Jameson, if I do not call in the prefects?" said Tom Merry quietly.

"Ye-es," stammered Jameson.

"Very well. If you prefer to ask pardon and to do your imposition"—Tom Merry very nearly said "impot," but stopped himself in time—"I will excuse you this once!"

Jameson looked dubious. He glanced at Wally for guidance.

"Beg pardon, you ass!" said Wally.

"But—"

"You ass! Beg his pardon at once. What do you mean by cheeking a Form-master, anyway?" muttered Wally.

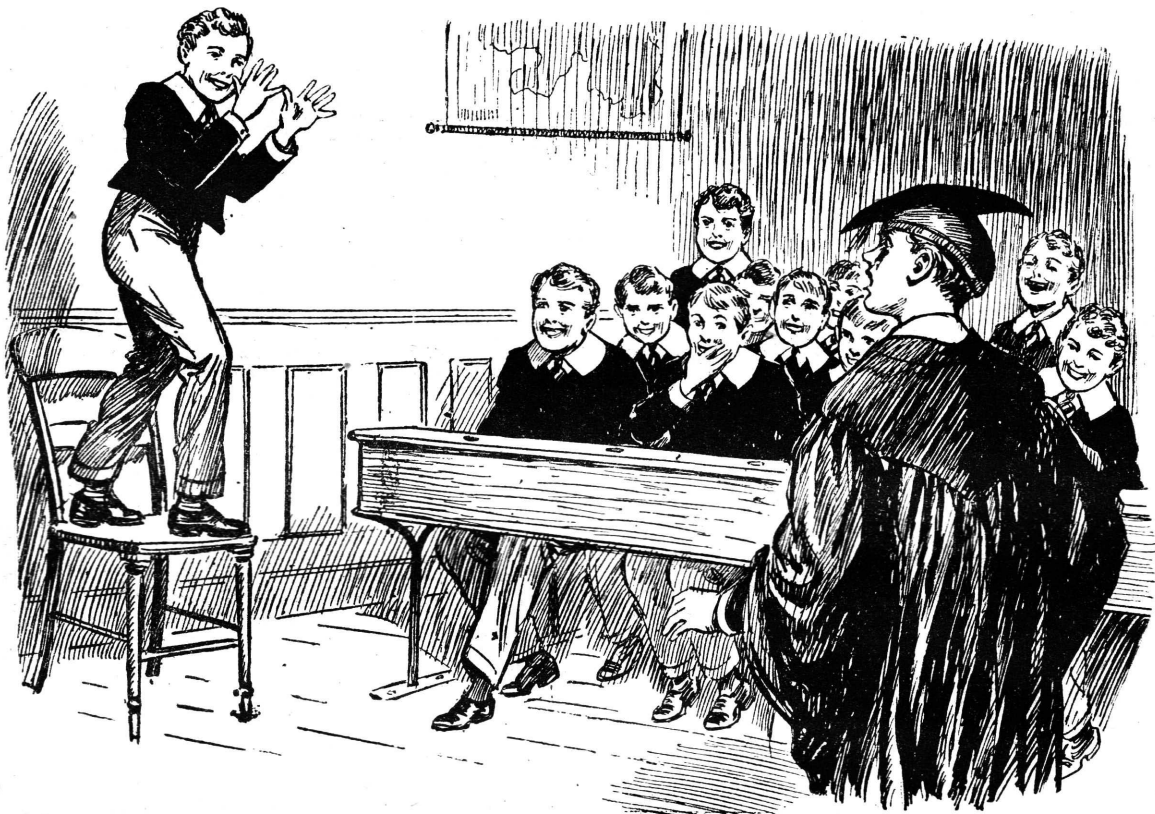
Jameson nearly staggered at that question.

"I beg your pardon, Tom Merry!" he muttered.

"Mr. Merry!" said Tom.

"I—I mean, Mr. Merry."

"Very well. You will show up your hundred lines on Monday, Jameson. Now, boys, all this disorder must cease at once!"



The suppressed giggles of the Third Form made Tom Merry look round quickly. He was just in time to see Wally D'Arcy, standing on a chair, with his fingers extended from his nose and stretched in his direction. "D'Arcy minor!" thundered the new master of the Third. "You disrespectful boy!"

eyeglass had been smashed in the scuffle, and he was groping in his pocket for another.

"Are you coming with me, Jameson?" asked Tom Merry quietly.

"No!" howled Jameson.

"Better go!" whispered Diggs.

"I won't!"

"Very well. Kildare! Darrell!"

As a Form-master, Tom Merry had a perfect right to call upon the prefects to aid in maintaining order in his Form. There was no doubt, when the Third came to think of it, that Kildare, Darrell, and Rushden would come to his aid at once. And the boldest of the fags fairly shivered at the idea of the Form-room being invaded by angry prefects with canes.

"I say, hold on!" exclaimed Wally quickly. "My only pith helmet! We don't want a row, you know!"

"I—I'll come with you, if you like!" gasped Jameson.

A voice called from the passage. It was Darrell's.

"Anybody want me?"

"It's all right!" called back Tom Merry.

And he stepped into the Form-room again, and closed the door.

The fags of the Third were looking very sheepish. They had felt the iron hand in the velvet glove already.

"Yes, Tom!"

"Yes, sir, please!"

"Yes, sir!" said the Third, with lamb-like docility.

"If I hear any more noise in this Form-room," said Tom Merry, "I shall come back, and then you will get impositions all round. D'Arcy, kindly leave before I do."

"Yaas, wathah!"

Arthur Augustus had found his spare eyeglass, and he jammed it into his eye. He gave the grinning Third an indignant look, and then fixed his monocle upon Tom Merry. "Thank you vewy much for wescuin' me, Tom Mewwy, frowm these extremely unpleasint young wascals—"

"That will do, D'Arcy!"

"What?"

"Please retire from the room."

"Certainly, deah boy!"

"You must call me Mr. Merry."

"Eh?"

"Now, please go!"

"Yaas, wathah!" stammered the swell of St. Jim's.

"B-b-but—"

"Come, come, go!"

"Bai Jove! I came here to speak a few words to these young bounders, you know, and to point out to them the necessity of tweatin' their Form-mastah with wespect—"

"Thank you, D'Arcy, but it was not at all necessary. I can manage my Form myself!" said Tom Merry severely.

"You may go."

"M-m-may go!"

"Exactly!"

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—"

"You must call me 'sir' when addressing me!"

"Bai Jove!"

And Arthur Augustus, in a state of great astonishment, moved to the door—and, so bewildered was he, that he walked right into the door instead of opening it.

"Bai Jove!" he ejaculated again.

Then he retired from the Third Form Room, leaving the Third grinning. But their grins faded away as Tom Merry looked at them with a severe face.

"Mind, no more disorder, or you'll hear from me!" said Mr. Merry.

"Oh!"

Tom Merry left the Form-room. The fags looked at one another in grim silence, some too astounded, and some too angry to speak.

"Talk of Hitler and Mussolini!" exclaimed Wally at last.

"It won't be such a rag, after all! Tom Merry—ahem, Mr. Merry—means business."

"The rotter!"

"The beast!"

"Rats! He's neither, and you know it. He's doing his job, and he's quite in the right, and you jolly well know it!" said Wally unexpectedly. "He's going to make us too the line, if he can."

"He can't!" said Jameson fiercely.

"He's jolly well made you do it!"

"Oh, shut up!"

"But we're not going to take this lying down," said

His new dignity sat very queerly upon him; but no doubt he would grow accustomed to it in time, and, as Lowther remarked, he would learn to make allowances for Mr. Selby's consistent bad temper towards the Third.

The Terrible Three took a quiet walk in the meadows after service on Sunday afternoon. There was frost on the grass and frost on the leafless trees. The afternoon was cold and the wind keen, but the Terrible Three felt very cheerful.

"It's ripping to have you back again, Tommy!" Manners remarked, for about the tenth time.

"And it's ripping for me to be here, old son!" said Tom Merry. "I jolly well wish I was coming back into the Shell! However, I hope I shall be a success as Form-master of the Third, that's all!"

"We'll back you up, old son!"

"I don't see what you can do, except to take the situation seriously, and keep the fellows from making fun of Mister Merry," said Tom. "I shall have to depend on myself in the Third Form Room."

"I suppose so."

"I think I shall be able to keep my end up. After all, the fags like me, and they'll toe the line when they find out that I'm in earnest. And I'm jolly glad to be back at St. Jim's on any terms! You don't know how I missed the old place!"

"I can guess, Tom!"

"I wish I could do something for that chap who helped me in London when I was on the rocks!" said Tom Merry wistfully. "You remember that little ragamuffin at Bluecher's Buildings—young Joe?"

"He was an awful-looking toad to look at!" said Manners.

"He was the only friend I found there."

"He introduced you to a pickpocket, didn't he, as a way of helping you on?" said Lowther, with a grin.

"Poor Joe! He was brought up among such things, and he never knew any better," said Tom. "That's what I'd save him from, if I could—show him a better way to live, and teach him decent things. But I suppose I shall never be able to help anybody now. It's all I can do to help myself!"

"Luck may change."

Tom Merry laughed.

"I don't see how. You see, all Miss Fawcett's money, and all mine, was swept away in that speculation which she invested in. Of course, she was led into it by that villain Crooke!"

"The respected parent of Crooke of the Shell, here at St. Jim's," Manners commented.

"I wouldn't say a word to Crooke about it," said Tom Merry hastily. "He can't help what his father does."

"I know jolly well he's a chip of the old block. He lends money at interest among the fellows."

"I'd jolly soon stop that if I were captain of the Shell again!" said Tom Merry, with a frown. "But never mind Crooke. His father ruined us, but I can't think it will do the man any good. Honesty is the best policy all the time!"

"Haven't you heard from Miss Fawcett's brother—?"

"Uncle Frank?"

"Yes. Surely—"

Tom Merry shook his head.

"No. He left England more than six months ago, as I told you, to go on an exploring expedition, and there has been no word from him since. He may not turn up for a couple of years, and there's no post office in the jungle to write to. Besides, if he came back—"

Tom Merry paused.

"Well?" said Manners.

"Well, I don't know that I could take anything from him," said Tom quietly. "You see, he's not really my uncle; he's my guardian's brother, though I call him Uncle Frank. I couldn't sponge on him when I'm able to earn my living."

"He would jolly well insist on doing something for you!"

"Well, he's too far away now, anyway, and not likely to return."

There was a short silence.

"Nothing heard from your uncle in India?" said Manners presently.

Tom Merry shook his head, with a dark shade crossing his face.

"No. They do not know in Simla whether he is alive or dead."

"It's rough!"

"I say, Tommy," exclaimed Lowther, after another pause, during which the three juniors strolled on quietly by the banks of the frozen Rhyl, "look here! I know you don't like a chap to meddle in your affairs—"

"I've never said that to you, Monty—"

"I know; but you might—"

"Never!"

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Wally decidedly. "He'll be as bad as old Selby if we let him get his ears up like this. I don't blame him—but we're not going to stand it!"

"Hear, hear!" shouted the Third.

"Are we downhearted?"

"No!"

"On Monday morning" said Wally impressively, "we'll start. We'll give Mr. Merry a regular frame-up. Before Monday morning is out, he'll be so hot and bothered he'll be ready to hand in his check. What do you say?"

"Hurrah!"

"You're telling us!" grinned Curly Gibson.

And the Third gave a cheer for Wally and the proposed "frame-up," and a deep, deep groan for Tom Merry.

CHAPTER 6.

Lowther Reveals a Secret!

SUNDAY was a very quiet day to "Mr. Merry." He spent it with his chums for the most part, attending service in the beautiful old chapel at St. Jim's, as in the old days.

For the one day he was Tom Merry again; for even the unruly Third were not inclined to give trouble on that day, and Tom Merry's real duties did not commence until the morrow.

To the morrow Tom looked forward with some little apprehension, which, however, he concealed very well.

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"If you know?"

"If I knew what?" asked Tom Merry, looking at Monty Lowther, in surprise.

"What I've done."

"What have you done?"

Lowther was silent.

"Blessed if I know!" said Manners. "You haven't told me, Monty. What's the giddy mystery?"

"I haven't told anybody," said Lowther.

"Well, what is it?"

"Look here, Tom! You remember the time you had a run over to the United States to visit your Uncle Poinsett in the Far West?"

"Yes, rather!"

"Mr. Poinsett is a millionaire."

Tom Merry frowned a little.

"Yes, Monty."

"He said when you were there that he was going to make you his heir."

"I remember."

"Well, then, why shouldn't he help you now that you're on the rocks?"

Tom Merry was silent.

"Well?" demanded Lowther.

"Well," said Tom Merry, hesitating. "You see, it's all very well. I know Mr. Poinsett would jump to help me if he knew. But—well, Miss Fawcett is provided for now. She has a home at Cleveland Lodge, you know, and now Laurel Villa is let she has an income large enough for her needs. I can look after myself. I don't feel like writing to Mr. Poinsett and asking him for help—I should feel so much like a cadger."

"But he's your uncle."

"Yes; but he's under no obligation to provide for all his nephews, I suppose. Uncles don't generally do it, you know."

"But he's fond of you."

"That's so, I know."

"And he'd feel hurt if you don't ask him when he comes to know about it."

"I should be sorry, but—"

"But what?"

"But I've never written a begging letter in my life, and I never will," said Tom Merry quietly.

Manners and Lowther were silent for a moment or two. They understood Tom Merry's feelings, though they believed that he was carrying it too far. It was the pride and spirit of an honourable lad, who shrank with shame from the mere thought of being looked upon as a poor relation begging for help. True, Tom Merry was a little too punctilious, considering his American uncle's great affection for him. But it was a fault on the right side.

"Well, I think you're an ass!" said Lowther, at last.

"Thanks, old chap!"

"What do you think, Manners?"

"I think he's an ass, too!"

"Thanks again!" said Tom Merry, with a smile.

"I suppose you'll be down on me," said Monty Lowther slowly.

"What for?"

"For what I've done."

Tom Merry looked uneasy.

"What have you done, Monty?"

"I did it weeks ago—in fact, a few days after you had your bad luck."

"But what?"

"I wrote to Mr. Poinsett."

"Oh!"

"You see, I knew you were a punctilious ass and wouldn't do it," said Monty Lowther. "I knew Miss Fawcett wouldn't if you didn't like the idea. I knew you wouldn't let me if I asked you. So I wrote."

"Oh, Monty!"

"I never said a word, even to Manners," said Monty Lowther. "When I found you in London at Christmas, I can tell you I was jolly glad I had written. Well, I had a reply from Mr. Poinsett."

Tom Merry was silent.

"He said that he was coming to England, and that he would be here soon after his reply," said Lowther.

"Oh!"

"And now," said Lowther, "you can punch my head for meddling in your affairs if you like, Tom, but I'm glad I did it."

Tom Merry smiled faintly.

"I won't punch your head, Monty, but I'm sorry you did it. But I know you meant to help me, and it's all right. Don't say any more about it."

"I won't," said Lowther, "except that I'm glad I did it, and that I think you'll be glad, too, in the long run."

And the subject dropped.

(Continued on next page.)



Do you know a good joke! If so, send it to "THE GEM JESTER," 5, Carmelite Street, London, E.C.4 (Comp.). Fine footballs are awarded every week for the two best jokes received and a half-a-crown is paid for every other joke that appears in this column.

TACT!

A customer sat down to a table in a smart restaurant and tied the napkin round his neck. The manager called to a waiter, and said:

"Try to make him understand, as tactfully as you can, that that's not done."

Said the waiter to the diner:

"Shave or hair cut, sir?"

A football has been awarded to C. Tapp, Castle Street, Holt, Wrexham.

* * *

QUITE.

Manager: "If customers come for pianos, flutes, mandolines, music or anything else, you know what to show them?"

Boy: "You bet I do, sir!"

Manager: "And if one should wish to see a lyre?"

Boy: "That's when I call you, sir!"

A football has been awarded to D. Fagg, 76, Beauval Road, East Dulwich, London, S.E.22.

* * *

SAVING PETROL.

Brown: "Do you know what the yellow caution light in an automatic signal is for?"

Green: "No."

Brown: "To give Scotsmen time to start their engines!"

Half-a-crown has been awarded to A. Paton, 22, Quality Street, Kirkealdy, Fife.

* * *

NO SYMPATHY.

Office Boy: "The cashier kicked me, sir."

Boss: "Well, dash it, I can't do everything myself!"

Half-a-crown has been awarded to J. Corby, 1, Baylay Terrace, Stanhope Lines, Aldershot.

* * *

ANYONE'S PROPERTY.

Jones: "I say, Bones, have you got that umbrella I lent you?"

Bones: "No; I lent it to a friend. Are you wanting it?"

Jones: "Not exactly; but the chap who lent it to me says the owner wants it!"

Half-a-crown has been awarded to "A Reader," 32, Warwick Street, Dunkirk, Nottingham.

* * *

TIME SHE KNEW!

A lady on a visit to Greenwich Observatory was told that the Astronomer Royal had to regulate the time by the stars.

"Why?" asked the lady. "Surely it is easier to get the time signal on the wireless?"

Half-a-crown has been awarded to A. Yoffe, 63, Kay Street, Carlton, Melbourne, Australia.

* * *

ONCE BITTEN—

Smith: "Why does McCash wear plus-fours now?"

Robinson: "Oh, he lost a shilling through a hole in his trousers pocket!"

Half-a-crown has been awarded to W. Butler, 11, Park Terrace, Deganwy, North Wales.

* * *

SOCCER SARCASM.

Tomkins: "How was Wilkins yesterday?"

Timkins: "He seemed to be labouring under a strange delusion."

Tomkins: "I thought he was playing football."

Timkins: "So did Wilkins!"

Half-a-crown has been awarded to P. Meuli, Okaiawa, Taranaki, New Zealand.

CHAPTER 7.

In Authority!

MONDAY morning!

Tom Merry rose from his bed in the room formerly occupied by Mr. Selby, now absent from St. Jim's.

The winter dawn was creeping in at the windows.

The School House boots had brought in a can of hot water, and strange enough was it to Tom Merry to have the House page bringing him hot water in the morning. He had been used to taking a cold bath in the Shell dormitory, or besieging a bath-room with the other fellows, towel on arm. This was a change, and it brought home to him quite clearly the difference in his position.

He was a master now.

Tom Merry was a little puzzled as to his attire. He could not very well dress in Eton's to take the Form.

He decided upon a dark jacket and grey trousers, the jacket borrowed from Manners, and the trousers from Lowther. Then he donned Mr. Selby's gown, which was a little large for him, and descended to the breakfast-room.

He had to take the head of the Third Form table in the School House. Two-thirds of the Third Form boarded in the School House, Wally and Curly Gibson among others, Jameson being a New House boy. Tom Merry took his seat at the Head of the fags' table with as much coolness as he could muster.

The fags grinned as they took their seats.

The general grin up and down the table did not inspire Tom Merry with very great confidence.

But he preserved an outward calm.

"Please, sir," said Wally, with exaggerated respect.

"Good-morning, sir!"

"Good-morning, boys!"

"It's a nice morning, sir!" said Curly Gibson affably.

"Yes," said Tom Merry.

"The rain is awfully wet, sir," said Diggs. "I mean, it would be if it were raining, sir, and it might be if the weather were wet."

Tom Merry did not apparently hear this remark. He could not help hearing the soft chuckle that swept down the breakfast-table.

"May I pass you the salt?" asked Wally.

"Thanks, no!"

"May I pass you the mustard, sir?"

"No."

"May I pass you the pepper, sir?"

"If you speak again, D'Arcy minor, I shall give you fifty lines," said Mr. Merry firmly.

Wally did not speak again. He winked at Curly Gibson.

"May I pass you the bread, sir?" asked Gibson, taking up the rag.

And the Third Form chuckled.

Tom Merry turned red. He realised now that it was a concerted thing among the young rascals.

"No, Gibson," he said.

"May I pass the butter, sir?"

"Certainly not!"

"May I pass you the bacon?"

"Silence, Gibson!"

"But, sir——"

"Another word, and I shall give you fifty lines!"

Curly Gibson assumed an expression of martyr-like patience.

"May I pass you the eggs, sir?" asked Diggs.

"Silence, Diggs!"

"Certainly, sir; but——"

"Silence, I say!"

"May I pass you the cruet, sir?" asked Wilson, from lower down the table.

Tom Merry breathed hard.

"No, Wilson!"

"May I pass you a plate, sir?"

"Listen to me, boys!" said Tom Merry firmly. "The next boy who offers to pass me anything will be caned in the Form-room after breakfast!"

"Oh, sir!"

The fags exclaimed in an indignant and shocked chorus.

"I mean it!"

"But, sir——"

"Silence! Go on with your breakfast!"

The fags went on with their breakfast.

The silence lasted, at the longest computation, two minutes.

Then Murphy, a merry-eyed, freckled Irish lad, recommenced the attack, but in a slightly different manner.

"If you please, sir——" he said.

"Yes, Murphy?"

"Will you pass me the salt, sir?"

"Certainly!"

"And please will you pass me the pepper, sir?"

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"Very well."

"And please will——"

"Silence, Murphy!"

"Faith, sir, I——"

"Not a word!"

"Sure, sir——"

"Take fifty lines, Murphy!"

"Faith!"

"Silence!"

"Please sir," said Cornish, "will you pass me the mustard, sir?"

"Yes, Cornish."

"And please will you pass me a plate, sir?"

Tom Merry's face was almost scarlet by this time.

Some of the fellows at the other tables were grinning, having overheard the rag, and Tom Merry was keenly conscious of a great many glances bent upon him.

The fags were grinning cheerfully.

They all liked Tom Merry, but, as Wally said, they had to consider the dignity and independence of the Third Form at St. Jim's.

Mr. Merry must be made to understand that the Third could not be imposed upon by him or anybody else.

"Might I ask you for a plate, sir?" repeated Cornish.

"No, Cornish."

"Oh, sir!"

Mr. Merry breathed hard through his nose.

"The next boy who speaks at this table will be sent in to the Head to be caned," he said. "Now, silence!"

And with that terrific threat silence was restored at last.

But if silence was restored, order could be scarcely said to be reigning, for the fags made a great pretence of wishing to speak, but not daring to do so for fear of their terrible Form-master.

When Wally wanted the salt—or didn't want it, perhaps—he would ask for it in dumb show, with many gesticulations.

Every now and then the fags would put their fingers to their lips, or make an appearance of just going to speak, and check themselves in a very dramatic way.

That breakfast was an ordeal to Tom Merry.

But everything comes to an end, and so did that breakfast, and Tom Merry rose from the table at last with great relief.

The fags crowded out, chuckling and gleeful.

"My only Aunt Jane!" said Wally, in the passage.

"Didn't we pull his noble leg a treat? What?"

"We did!" grinned Curly Gibson.

"Didn't we make him look pink?"

"Ha, ha, ha! Yes. Was it pink or purple?"

"Both, I think! We'll soon have him in good order," said Wally complacently, "and when we've got him eating out of our hands, and he sees things in their proper light, then we'll take him up and make a friend of him, and we'll have some high old times in the Form-room."

"O.K. with us, chief!" grinned Curly Gibson.

Which was a pleasant prospect indeed for Mr. Merry.

CHAPTER 8.

Master of the Third.

MR. MERRY took his place at the master's desk in the Form-room on the stroke of nine o'clock. Not a member of the Third Form had yet appeared.

Tom Merry waited.

The fags were entitled to another quarter of a minute, but it occurred to Tom Merry that they did not intend to turn up at all.

He wondered what he would do if they didn't come.

If the whole Form stayed out he would have to look for them, and it would be an endless task searching for fags in all the nooks and recesses of St. Jim's.

But just as nine boomed out the fags marched into the Form-room.

Wally & Co. did not mean to give their new Form-master an excuse for calling in the prefects by playing the truant in a body.

Besides, there were very few of them who would have cared to miss the fun they anticipated that Monday morning in class.

Tom Merry looked at the Third Form, and his heart sank.

For a moment, as the tramp of feet came in the doorway, he had hoped that Wally & Co. meant to be orderly and docile that morning, and to remain content with the way they had ragged their new Form-master at breakfast.

But it was evidently not the case.

The fags had all put flowers in their coats.

Now, there was no great harm in a fag putting a flower in his coat in itself. Fellows had turned up in the class-room with flowers in their coat before. It was not quite the thing, but so long as a fellow was moderate in it no special notice would be taken.

(Continued at foot of next page.)

PITHY PARS AND NEWS FROM—



Let the Editor be your pal! Write to him to-day, addressing your letters: The Editor, The GEM, The Amalgamated Press, Ltd., Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4.

HALLO, chums! Did you all enjoy yourselves at Christmas? You did? Splendid! As usual, the holidays went all too quickly; but there's one consolation—this tip-top number of the GEM seemed to come round quicker, too, and with it ten more ripping pictures for your albums!

I'm getting bags of letters from readers praising the present "Tom Merry" series. I cannot remember a St. Jim's series that proved so popular.

As you will read in this week's grand yarn, all Tom Merry's troubles come to an end—at least, after he retires from his temporary position of Form-master, for the fags give him little peace. But though Tom is now back in his old position, he still has a thought for the poor little waif who befriended him when he was down on his luck. Tom promised to help Joe, of Blucher's Buildings, if ever he regained his lost fortunes, and he sticks to his promise. In next Wednesday's great story,

"THE BOY FROM THE UNDERWORLD!"

—you will read how Tom succeeds in persuading the Head to let Joe come to St. Jim's, and of the fun and adventure of going to London to fetch the waif, and of the advent of the amazing newcomer. This is a story that you won't put down until you have read every word.

For sheer thrills, next week's gripping chapters of our popular serial simply cannot be beaten. It is undoubtedly the most exciting instalment that we have yet had—and that's saying something, for all the others have been packed with thrills, too!

Whipped away from her moorings by

But moderation was not half of the little game played by Wally & Co. Real flowers being unobtainable at that time of year, they had evidently taken the trouble to get a supply of gorgeous paper flowers.

Pretty nearly every sort of flower was represented on the Eton jackets of the Third.

Tom Merry guessed that Wally must have made some arrangement with old Isaacs, the Rylcombe theatrical costumier, to send down an assortment of stunning-looking blossoms in time for school that morning.

Jameson wore a geranium large enough for a flower-pot, and Wally wore a still larger one of a glaring red.

Curly Gibson had a chrysanthemum, and Cornish a red rose, and Diggs a bunch of violets, while several of the juniors had real vegetable leaves in their buttonholes.

Wilson, going farther than all the rest, wore a small cabbage, and one fellow had a cauliflower, and another a potato.

The whole exhibition was utterly absurd, but the fags walked into the room with solemn and serious faces.

Tom Merry looked at them.

He called a halt.

"Boys, stop!"

The Form stopped.

They faced Tom Merry with the solemnity of owls.

"Yes, sir!" chorused the fags. "Good-morning, sir!"

the hurricane, the Sky Wanderer and all the St. Frank's boys are at the mercy of the gale! What will happen to them? Can the airship possibly survive the might of the hurricane? You will learn the answers to these questions when you read next week's nerve-tingling chapters of

"THE WHITE GIANTS OF EL DORADO!"

In addition to another thrilling adventure of "Mick o' the Mounted!" and our other usual features, there will be Eleven more Coloured Pictures for your albums. As a result of our magnificent story programmes and free gifts, the GEM is selling like hot cakes, so if you have not a standing order with your newsagent for it, take my old advice and place one right away.

A CHARMED LIFE!

It seems that Mrs. Cooper really has a charmed life. On no less than three occasions death has seemed certain for her, but not only has she escaped it, but in two cases she has been unharmed.

When she was sixteen the house she was living in was smashed to pieces by a fall of the chalk cliffs. Mrs. Cooper was dug out with picks and shovels, and to the

To Irish Free State Readers.

Readers in the Irish Free State are requested to note that when free gifts are offered with the GEM, they can only be supplied when the article is of a non-dutiable character.

amazement of her rescuers she was completely unhurt!

Her second miraculous escape was when she was knocked down by a car in Hydo Park. The car passed right over her, but all she sustained were three crushed ribs! Then, finally, in America, at Albany, New York, she was standing under a maple tree when it was struck by a thunderbolt. The ground shook, and the tree was split from top to bottom; but Mrs. Cooper did not even suffer a shock!

THIS WEEK'S HERO.

Here is the story of a heroic deed performed by a doctor. Doctor Hugh Kendall, of Westerhope, Newcastle, heard that a boy working in a pit had been trapped. A gigantic stone weighing a hundred tons had fallen on the boy's hand, and all the efforts of his fellow workmen to release him had been unavailing. The doctor at once said that he would descend the pit and see what he could do. He was taken to the boy, and decided that the only possible hope was to amputate the boy's fingers, so that he could be removed. Despite the fact that there was grave danger of the vast stone rolling on top of him at any moment, the doctor quietly got to work; but unfortunately, before he had finished his work, the instrument he was using broke, owing to the awkward position in which it was essential that the doctor should work. However, the plucky doctor was not to be dismayed, and taking a hacksaw he proceeded with the operation and eventually finished it perfectly successfully. He was rewarded by the Carnegie Hero Fund Trustees.

A PLUCKY TEAM.

How's this for the pluckiest football team in the country? They call themselves Aldersgate United, and they play in the Holborn and District League. Their record at the moment reads like this:

Played.	Goals For.	Goals Against.
9	3	139

They lost their first match 26—0, their second 12—0, and their third 25—0. Then they did a bit better, and lost 18—1; they had scored a goal! Perhaps you wonder why the team troubles to go on playing football, but the answer is that the fellows are determined to win; and when they win, they will go on winning, they say. Good luck to you, Aldersgate United!

THE EDITOR.

"Good-morning! But—"

"It's a fine morning, sir."

"If it doesn't rain, sir!"

"Or snow, sir!"

"Or hail, sir!"

"Silence!" ordered Tom Merry, as sternly as he could.

"Now what do you mean by coming into the Form-room in this ridiculous way?"

"What ridiculous way, sir?"

"I mean, wearing those ridiculous things in your coats!"

"They're flowers, sir," said Wally innocently. "It's a festive occasion, sir. We felt that we ought to make some sort of a celebration on the occasion of having a new Form-master, Mr. Merry."

"Just so, sir."

"Precisely, sir."

"That's how it is, sir."

"It's in your honour, sir."

"We all admire you so much, sir."

Tom Merry gasped.

How to deal with the extremely humorous Form he did not quite know.

"Take those flowers out at once, and throw them into the passage!" he said sternly.

"Oh, sir!"

"If you please, sir—"

"Obey me instantly!"

"Very well, sir."

"Certainly, sir!"

The Third Formers marched to the door, and the offending flowers were obediently hurled forth into the passage.

Then they marched in again.

Tom Merry frowned.

"Wilson!" he rapped out.

The hero of the cabbage looked at him meekly and respectfully.

"Yes, Mr. Merry?"

"You have not obeyed me!"

"I, sir?"

"Yes, you!"

"What have I done, sir—I mean, what haven't I done, sir?"

"You still have that thing in your buttonhole!"

"Yes, sir."

"I ordered you to throw it in the passage!"

"Oh, no, sir, you didn't!" exclaimed Wilson, in great astonishment.

"Wilson, how dare you!"

"But you didn't, sir," persisted Wilson.

"You told us to throw the flowers into the passage, sir. I hadn't any flowers about me, sir."

"Wilson!"

"Yes, sir."

"Wilson, I—I—"

"Oh, you were referring to this buttonhole, sir!" said Wilson. "This isn't a flower, sir; this is a cabbage, sir. The cabbage isn't a flower, sir, it's a vegetable, sir."

"Throw it into the passage at once!"

"Oh, certainly, sir!"

The offending cabbage was hurled forth. Tom Merry fixed his eyes upon the carrot stuck on Murphy's coat.

"Murphy!" he rapped out.

"Yes, sir?"

"Throw that ridiculous carrot away at once!"

"Faith, and it's not a flower, Mr. Merry!"

"I was referring to vegetables as well as flowers—in fact, to all those things!" said Mr Merry, with a heightened colour. "Go to the door again, all of you, and throw away everything you have about you into the passage!"

Wally grinned at his chums.

"Very well, sir!"

The Third Formers marched to the door.

Crash, crash, crash!

They took Tom Merry's order literally—more literally, of course, than the new master of the Third intended them to take it. They hurled into the passage everything they had about them.

Books and papers and pens and marbles and tops and all sorts of oddments went into the passage in a crashing shower.

CHAPTER 9.

Latin!

TOM MERRY gasped for breath. How was he to deal with this Form?

The Third, keeping up an almost preternatural gravity, turned back into the Form-room after throwing everything they had about them into the passage.

"It's done, sir," said Wally seriously.

"Take your places!" gasped Tom Merry.

"Yes, sir!"

Tom Merry calmed himself down.

Excepting for an occasional chuckle, instantly suppressed, the Third Form were as grave as a bench of bishops or judges.

"Now, boys!" said Mr. Merry.

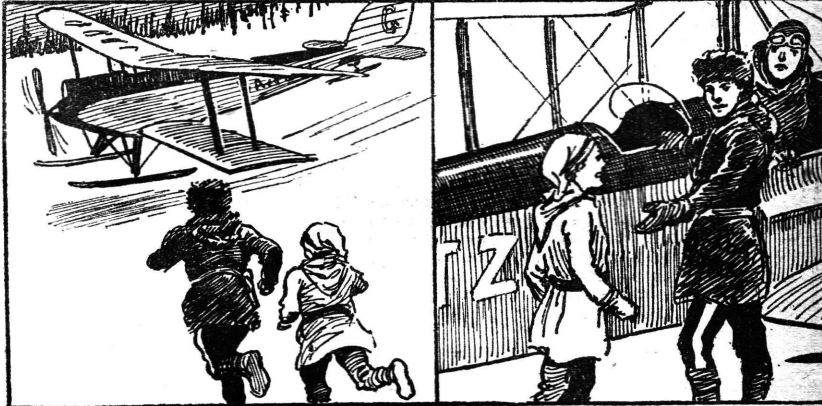
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Mick Ray is ordered to take Plug Kelly, a crook, down to headquarters for trial. The prisoner escapes on the way, and Mick is gold prospecting.



A moment of horror as the revolver jammed, and then Mick's brain worked like lightning. With all his strength he threw the weapon at the bear's muzzle, and the big brute recoiled. For a few seconds the bear was distracted and Mick, seizing the opportunity, grabbed his rifle from the sled. Crack! This time there was no hitch, and the creature crumpled to the ground—dead!



Soon it became evident that the pilot of the plane had seen Mick's message. The machine, fitted with skis, circled round, and then landed in the snow. "Hurrah!" cheered Jim, running forward. The pilot reported that he had seen Kelly making for Three Rivers, a northern post. "You fly to Three Rivers and keep an eye on Kelly when he arrives," Mick told Jim. "I'll follow with the dogs."



A brief rest for himself and the dogs, and Mick and Forster set out on Kelly's trail. Presently they saw a man crawling towards them, and obviously in an exhausted state: he was also snowblind. The Mounties rushed to the man's aid and built a hasty camp. "Made a strike up north," the man muttered. "I'm lost in a blizzard and blinded. My name is Bates—I'm looking for my son, Jim."

(Don't miss next Wednesday)



With them goes Jim Bates, of whom Kelly is the guardian while the boy's father and the boy are searching for him when a bear attacks them!



Mick and Jim continued their search for Plug Kelly, but a recent fall of snow had covered all tracks. "Reckon I saw a man heading north some hours ago," said a trapper who was questioned.



Later an aeroplane was seen cruising in the sky. "That looks like a Mounted Police machine," said Mick, and had a sudden brainwave. Hastily he scrawled the word "help" in the snow with his rifle.



Jim, very excited at the prospect of a fight over the frozen barrens, clambered into the cockpit and waved a cheery farewell to Mick as the plane took off and headed in the direction of Three Rivers.



But when Mick eventually arrived at Three Rivers a shock awaited him. Forster, the pilot of the plane, came to meet him with the news that Kelly had set fire to the plane and had then kidnapped Jim!



Mick could hardly credit his ears. This man was Jim Bates' father! Mick pushed on to look for Jim and Kelly, leaving the blind man with Forster. That night the latter saw the glow of a fire in the distance.



Forster crept steadily towards the fire. "Gee, it's Kelly—and he's torturing Jim!" muttered the Mountie. The boy was tied to the sled, and Kelly was menacing him with a red-hot bar of iron!

The class waited.
 "Where are your books?"
 "In the passage, sir," said Wally meekly.
 "In the passage?"
 "Yes, sir."
 Tom Merry snapped his teeth.
 "Go and fetch them at once, then," he said.
 "Certainly, sir."
 Tom Merry waited till the Third Form had brought their books in. It took them a considerable time, as might be expected.
 The time for first lesson was very nearly up now, and so far the Third Form had been eminently successful.
 But Mr. Merry's temper was beginning to rise.
 "We're drawing him a treat!" Wally whispered. "He'll be getting his rag out jolly soon now, my pippins!"
 "What-ho!" said Curly.
 Tom Merry frowned.
 "You were talking, D'Arcy minor."
 "Yes, sir," said Wally cheerfully.
 "Take fifty lines!"
 "Where shall I take them, sir?"
 Tom Merry breathed hard.
 "You will write out fifty lines, D'Arcy minor!"
 "Yes, sir. Whose?"
 "Virgil."
 "Yes, sir. Which book, sir?"
 "The first book," said Tom Merry, with considerable calmness.
 "Certainly, Mr. Merry. I dote on the first book of Virgil," said Wally blandly.
 "But if I take fifty lines from it won't it leave rather a blank in the poem, sir?"
 "One hundred lines, D'Arcy minor!"
 "Thank you very much, sir!"
 "If you are impertinent again, D'Arcy minor, I shall cane you!"
 "Impertinent, sir!" exclaimed Wally.
 "Yes, D'Arcy minor!"
 "I hope you don't consider me impertinent, sir. My brother Gus wouldn't like it at all, sir."
 "Never mind your brother now—"
 "Oh, I never do mind him, sir."
 "That will do, D'Arcy minor."
 "Yes, sir. I assure you that I never mind Gus, any more than I mind his friends in the middle school, those blessed Shell bounders that he chums up with."
 Tom Merry flushed.
 He was one of the Shell fellows who had been very friendly with Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, as, of course, the young rascals of the Third knew very well.
 "You need say no more, D'Arcy minor."
 "No, sir."
 "What is the first lesson this morning?"
 There was no reply.
 "You heard me, D'Arcy minor?"
 "Yes, sir. But you told me not to speak, sir," said Wally innocently.
 "You may answer that question."
 "First lesson's over now, sir," said Wally, looking at the Form-room clock.
 "It's time for the second lesson, sir."
 "What is the second lesson this morning?"
 "Latin grammar, sir."
 "Very good."
 Tom Merry armed himself with Mr. Selby's books.
 Tom had been head of the Shell in classics, and in that, at least, he would find no impediment when he came to his examination for the Remove into the Fifth. So he was quite able, as far as knowledge went, to take the Third in Latin.
 But learning a thing and teaching it are two very different matters, as Tom Merry soon discovered.
 Besides that, the Third were determined not to understand.
 The simplest thing might be explained

to them a dozen times over by Tom Merry, and to every explanation they opposed a wooden capacity to comprehend. "We were doing deponent verbs, sir," said Wally, in an injured tone, when Tom Merry began on adjectives of the Third Declension.

"Very well," said poor Tom, "we will take deponent verbs."

"Yes, sir, we're all fond of deponent verbs, sir," said Cornish.

"A deponent verb," said Tom Merry, "is active in form—I mean passive in form, but active in meaning."

"Yes, sir."

"Kindly tell me the form of a deponent verb, Jameson."

"Third Form, sir."

All the class giggled.

"Jameson!"

"Yes, sir?"

"A deponent verb is passive in form."

"Yes, sir. So are we, sir."

"What?"

"I'm sure I'm very passive in Form, sir," said Jameson innocently. "Wally is sometimes active in Form, sir, but I'm always passive."

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled the Third Form.

Tom Merry could hardly help smiling himself.

"You must not make puns in class, Jameson," he said, as severely as he could. "The formation of a deponent verb is passive."

"Yes, sir."

"But the meaning equals that of an active verb."

"Quite so, sir."

"Now, Cornish, define a deponent verb."

"Yes, sir."

"I'm waiting, Cornish."

"A deponent verb, sir?" said Cornish reflectively.

The FIGHTING FORWARD



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"Yes. Go on!"

"It is active in the Third Form, sir——"

"What?"

"And passive in the dormitory, sir."

And the Third Form giggled.

"Cornish, take fifty deponent verbs—I—I mean fifty lines!" gasped Tom Merry.

And then the Third yelled.

"How many deponent verbs, sir?" asked Cornish.

"Fifty lines, Cornish—lines, not deponent verbs."

"I'm sure I don't mind which, sir."

"Silence!"

"Yes, sir. Quite so, sir. Which kind of lines am I to take, active or passive, sir? I always prefer taking an active line myself."

"A hundred lines, Cornish, to be copied from the first book of Virgil in good handwriting," said Tom Merry explicitly.

"Oh, sir!"

"We will now take a deponent verb," said Tom Merry.

"Where, sir?"

"Fifty lines, D'Arcy minor."

"Oh, sir!"

"Not another word! Silence! The first boy who speaks will be caned!"

And silence settled in the Third Form Room, and Tom Merry opened his book with as businesslike an air as he could assume.

CHAPTER 10. More Trouble.

A PIN might have been heard to drop in the Third Form Room.

The juniors were silent; so silent that the silence could be felt.

That they were mentally preparing another rag Tom Merry knew perfectly well, but he had to pretend to be unaware of it.

He looked rather confusedly through Mr. Selby's book, which he had taken up for the instruction of the Third.

The marks in the book in pencil were unknown signs to him, and his brain was in a somewhat confused state from what he had been through already.

But he stuck nobly to his task.

His voice sounded quite hollow as he began to speak in the dead stillness of the Form-room.

"We will take the verb hortor——" he began.

Silence!

"D'Arcy minor!"

No reply.

Tom Merry raised his voice.

"D'Arcy minor!"

Grim silence.

The red came into Tom Merry's cheeks again.

Wally sat looking directly at him, evidently hearing, but with a solemn expression on his face, and his lips dramatically set and sealed.

Wally evidently didn't mean to speak.

"D'Arcy minor!" said Tom, crescendo.

Still silence.

"D'Arcy minor, answer me at once."

"But you told me not to speak, sir!" exclaimed D'Arcy minor.

Tom Merry bit his lip.

"You said that the first boy to speak would be caned, sir," said Wally. "I hope you don't mean to cane me for answering you, sir."

"I shall cane you if you are impertinent, D'Arcy minor."

"Oh, sir! Impertinent, sir! Why, sir, we never used to be impertinent even to Mr. Selby, sir, though you told us never to mind him."

"That will do, D'Arcy minor."

"Oh, very well, sir, but I shouldn't mind going on!"

"We will take the deponent verb hortor, to exhort."

"Certainly, sir, if you like."

"Hortor, hortatus, sum, hortari——"

"First-rate, sir!"

"D'Arcy minor!"

"I can't help admiring you, Mr. Merry. You remind me so much of Mr. Selby when you open your mouth like that, sir."

And the Third Form giggled.

Tom Merry felt helpless. He had been piling lines upon the fags till he had quite forgotten how many lines were due from each junior, but there was no doubt that a record crop was due.

But the lines did not seem to have any extensive effect upon the impudent Third Form.

He was loth to revert to the cane. But how else was he to keep order, when the fags, instead of listening to the pearls of wisdom that fell from his lips, were only watching his mouth to see if he opened it like Mr. Selby on a Latin vowel?

"D'Arcy minor, stand out before the class," said Mr. Merry.

"Yes, sir."

Wally came meekly out.

"Now, Wally—I mean D'Arcy minor—"

"You may call me Wally, sir, if you like," said the junior amicably. "I always let my friends call me Wally, sir."

Tom Merry coloured.

"I shall be compelled to cane you, D'Arcy minor."

"I hope not, sir."

"You compel me to punish you."

"I'm sure I don't mean to, sir. If it's all the same to you, sir, we'll call the matter settled, sir."

"Stand in the corner, D'Arcy minor," said the harassed Form-master. "Stand in the corner on a chair at once!"

"On a chair, sir?"

"Yes."

"In the corner, sir?"

"Yes, I tell you!"

"Which corner, sir?"

Tom Merry grasped Wally by the collar and led him to the corner, and planted him on a chair there.

Instead of being abashed by his position, Wally winked at the class and sent them into convulsions of laughter.

Tom Merry rapped on the desk with Mr. Selby's pointer.

"Silence!" he roared.

Silence was restored.

Tom Merry opened his book again with a crimson face. The peculiar looks of the Third Form in the direction of Wally, and their suppressed giggles, made him look round quickly at that cheerful fag.

Wally was standing on the chair with his hands up to his face, the fingers extended as far as they would extend.

His thumb was against his nose, and the extended fingers were stretched in the direction of the new Form-master.

It was certainly a most disrespectful attitude, and one that Arthur Augustus D'Arcy would never have approved of under any circumstances.

Wally jerked his hands down as Tom Merry turned round; but not before the new master of the Third had seen him.

"D'Arcy minor!" thundered the Form-master. "You disrespectful boy! Turn your face to the wall immediately."

"Certainly, sir!"

Wally turned his face to the wall. Tom Merry turned to the class again.

But a chuckle in the Form made him glance round.

Wally was in his old position, and Mr. Merry frowned angrily.

"I told you to turn your face to the wall, D'Arcy minor!" he exclaimed.

"Well, I did it, sir," he said.

"You—you—I mean you to keep it turned to the wall."

"Oh, sir! Did you, sir? You didn't say so, sir!"

"Turn it to the wall at once, and keep it there!"

"With pleasure, sir!"

And Wally turned to the wall.

Tom Merry went on with the lesson, with a worried look upon his crimson and perspiring face.

Crash!

Bump!

He swung round again towards Wally.

Wally sat on the floor, and the chair was overturned. Wally was groaning deeply, as if in great pain.

Tom Merry ran towards him in alarm.

"Wally, are you hurt?" he cried.

Groan!

"How did it happen?"

Groan!

"Wally, old man!" exclaimed Tom Merry, forgetting for the moment that he was Form-master.

"I—I fell down," murmured Wally. "It—it must have been through pushing the chair over with my feet, I think. Ow!"

And he groaned again.

Tom Merry frowned darkly. He realised that he had been the victim of another jape on the part of the untiring hero of the Third.

"Are you hurt, D'Arcy minor?" he exclaimed sternly.

"Oh, no, sir!" said Wally cheerfully.

"Then what are you groaning for?"

"I've been told it's a good exercise for the chest, sir."

The Third Form simply shrieked.

Tom Merry was speechless for a moment. Then he grasped the pointer.

"Hold out your hand, D'Arcy minor!" he exclaimed.

"M-m-my hand, sir?"

"Yes, at once!"

"What for, Mr. Merry?"

"I am going to cane you."

"Oh, my only Aunt Jane! You're not going to lick an old chum, Tom Merry?" exclaimed Wally reproachfully.

And at that appeal Tom Merry almost melted.

But he had his dignity as Form-master to maintain, and his authority with the unruly Third to think of.

"Hold out your hand!" he repeated.

Wally held out his hand.

Tom Merry gave him a cut, so light that it seemed no more severe than the touch of a fly settling on the skin.

"Now go back to your place, D'Arcy minor!" he said severely.

And D'Arcy minor grinned and went.

CHAPTER 11.

Herr Schneider is Angry.

BUMP!

"Mein Gott!"

Tom Merry had resumed that eventful Latin lesson when the sudden fall and the sound of an emphatic German voice in the passage without interrupted him.

He knew the far from dulcet tones of Herr Schneider, the German master of St. Jim's. Tom Merry had had enough interruptions, but he could hardly suspect the Third of having enlisted the aid of Herr Schneider in their little "rag."

Tom Merry remembered the things that had been cast in the passage from the Form-room, and he guessed what had happened. The German master was an exceedingly short-sighted gentleman.

The Form-room door was flung open, and the fat German

SARCASM!

The artist was very pleased with his latest picture.

"I shall never excel that," he said.

"Oh," replied the friend, "don't lose heart!"

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bounced into the room in a rage, his face very like that of a turkey-cock.

"I tinks dat it is infamous, ain't it!" he roared.

"Yes?" said Mr. Merry.

"I gone along mit meinsel, and I falls over all sorts of tings scattered in de passage, ain't it, pefore?"

"I am sorry—"

"I tink tat it is ein trap laid for me, after."

"Not at all, Herr Schneider."

The German waved his hands furiously. He had barked his shins, and he was in a towering rage. Herr Schneider was of a suspicious turn of mind, and he had had a great deal of trouble with Tom Merry when the latter was a pupil in the Shell Form at St. Jim's.

The first thought that leaped into the German's suspicious mind now was that Tom Merry was taking advantage of his position as Form-master to the Third, which placed him on a level with the other masters, to pay off old scores.

It was not in Tom Merry's mind to do such a thing, of course, and, in fact, such a proceeding would never have entered his thoughts at all.

But Herr Schneider was not a reasonable man.

He waved his hands and raved, half in German and half in English, while he hopped with the pain of his leg.

"It is ein drick!" he roared. "I tink tat you blay vat you call ein shape on me, ain't it, after?"

"I never intended to jape you, sir—"

"I tink it is ein rotten shape, pefore."

Tom Merry was silent. It had certainly been a little thoughtless to have the things thrown into the passage, but he had not expected the fags to add books and things to the flowers when they hurled them out. Nor would anybody but Herr Schneider have fallen over such obstacles.

But it was evidently useless to attempt to reason with the German master.

He advanced towards Tom Merry, his fat face red with rage.

"I tell you vat I tinks!" he exclaimed. "I tinks you vas an imbudent young rascal, ain't it, Merry, pefore!"

"Sir!"

"You dricky rascal, after!"

"I hope you will remember that I am here in the position of a Form-master, Herr Schneider!" said Tom Merry, with dignity.

"Ja, ja whol! But vy you play dricks, tell me tat? Is it because I am a Cherman? I am a Cherman who lofts to

keep der peace. And for tat—vat? You fight wit me—nein?"

"I assure you that, whatever rags there may have been, nobody feels any disrespect for you, Herr Schneider," said Tom Merry. "I did not play any tricks on you."

"Mein Gott! Dat is not true!"

Tom Merry flushed red.

"Herr Schneider!"

The German waved his fat hands furiously.

"I say tat is not true. I hear you peforetime. Last week I hear you call me fat old fighting cock!"

"That was not I, sir—"

"It was you, or it was Lowther—it matters not! You call me names, you laugh at me. And now you take advantage of your new position to play ein shape on me!"

"Sir!"

"You dalk to me! You pad poy!"

For a Form-master to be characterised as a bad boy before his class was altogether too much!

The meekest of Form-masters could not possibly have stood it; and Tom Merry had been so exasperated that morning that he was not in a meek mood.

He pointed indignantly at the door.

"Leave my Form-room, Herr Schneider!" he exclaimed.

The fat German simply jumped.

"Vat?"

"Leave this room!"

"Mein Gott!"

"I am Form-master here. Leave the room at once!"

Herr Schneider stood rooted to the spot.

Anger and amazement mingled in his crimson face. He seemed hardly able to believe his ears, though they were really large enough to be depended upon.

He was fat and elderly and irritable, though he could never understand that it was only those unpleasant qualities which made him unpopular at St. Jim's, and that the Saints would not worry about anybody's nationality if they were a good sort.

Tom Merry was Form-master now, certainly, but Otto Gottfried Schneider had meant to treat him as if he were still a junior in the Shell.

The master of the Third was not so to be treated, however.

His eyes were flashing, and his finger pointed to the door.

"Mein Gott!" gasped Herr Schneider.

"Go!"

"Himmel!"

"You hear me!"

The German gave a roar of rage.

"I hears you, and I tinks I trashes you for your sheek. Ain't it? I tinks I knocks you into small pieces after!"

And he rushed right at Tom Merry.

The master of the Third backed away.

"Hands off, Herr Schneider—"

"I tinks I licks you pefore!"

He grasped the junior master.

There was a yell from D'Arcy minor.

"Rescue, the Third! Don't let the German sausage rag our Form-master! Rescue!"

The Third gave a roar.

They had been ragging their master all the morning themselves, it was true.

But that was no reason why they should sit quiet and see him ragged by anybody else. Besides, the temptation to make a pretext for rushing the German master and bumping him over as if he were a junior was too strong.

Wally rushed on first, and the Third followed him in a crowd.

They fairly hurled themselves upon Herr Schneider.

"Down with Sauerkraut!"

"Bump the German bounder!"

"Hail, Hitler!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Down him!"

As a matter of fact, it was fortunate for Tom Merry that the Third came to his aid, for the German master was in a furious temper.

Tom Merry was a Form-master in dignity, but he was not a Form-master in size, and he would have put up a very poor tussle against the big German.

But the rush of the Third changed the aspect of the matter completely. The fags fairly swarmed over the fat German.

Herr Schneider yelled as they clutched him, and roared as he was dragged over by main force and bumped upon the floor.

"Down him!"

"Bump him!"

"Nasty old Nazi!"

Tom Merry staggered back, gasping for breath. The fags rolled over Herr Schneider, who rolled over on the floor, panting and yelling.

"Ach! Help! Murter! Help! Mein Gott! Ow!"

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"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Bump him!"

"Down with him!"

"Stop!" shouted Tom Merry.

"It's all right, sir!" beamed Wally. "We're rescuing you, you know!"

"Stop! Oh dear!"

"What is this? Bless my soul! What is this?"

There was a gasp of dismay from the juniors, and a groan from Tom Merry. Dr. Holmes, the Head of St. Jim's, stood in the open doorway looking in upon the scene.

CHAPTER 12.

A Difficult Position!

"BLESS my soul!"

Dr. Holmes gazed at the wild scene in amazement.

Tom Merry stood quite still.

Tom's crimson face had gone quite pale. He felt a terrible sinking at the heart. He realised that all was up.

On the first morning of his essay as Form-master to the Third the experiment had proved to be a failure.

Tears of vexation came into his eyes as he thought of it.

"Bless my soul! What does this mean?"

The fags scrambled off Herr Schneider as if he had suddenly become red-hot.

They crowded back to their places, looking decidedly sheepish under the sharp, stern eyes of the Head.

Herr Schneider jumped up.

He was collarless, tieless, and red with wrath and exertion. He was stuttering so furiously with rage that he could not speak.

"Herr Schneider!"

"Ach! Ach! Mein Gott!"

"Merry!"

Tom Merry met the Head's glance bravely.

"Yes, sir?"

"What does this mean?"

"I am very sorry it has occurred, sir. The boys saw Herr Schneider attack me, and they took it upon themselves to come to my help."

"If you please, sir," piped Wally meekly, "we considered ourselves bound to back up our Form-master, sir."

"Herr Schneider!"

"Ach! Mein Gott! Ach!"

"Why did you come here?"

"I falls mit meinself over tings in de passage!" roared Herr Schneider. "I gomes in to box dat Merry—"

"What?" thundered the Head. "You forget yourself, Herr Schneider! Merry is here in the position of master of the Third Form! You had no right to do anything of the sort."

"Ach!"

"Kindly leave the room at once, Herr Schneider."

"But he haf blayed ein trick on me!" roared the German.

"You did not play a trick on him, Merry?"

"Certainly not, sir!"

"Pray go, Herr Schneider! You are very excited. I shall speak to you about this matter later. For the present, please retire."

And Herr Schneider, boiling with rage, retired.

"I depend upon you to keep order here now, Merry," said the Head quietly. "I am sorry you have been interfered with."

"Thank you, sir."

And Dr. Holmes went out and closed the Form-room door.

Tom Merry turned to his class. The Third were grinning.

"Will you be quiet now?" said Tom Merry. "You've very nearly got me into serious trouble."

Wally looked remorseful.

"Oh, certainly, sir! It's all right, sir! If anybody rags again I'll punch him into a jelly, Mr. Merry!"

Tom Merry smiled, and lessons were resumed in the Form-room.

At intervals the fags showed signs of breaking out, but the time of dismissal was near at hand, and Tom Merry steered his class safely through the rest of the morning's work.

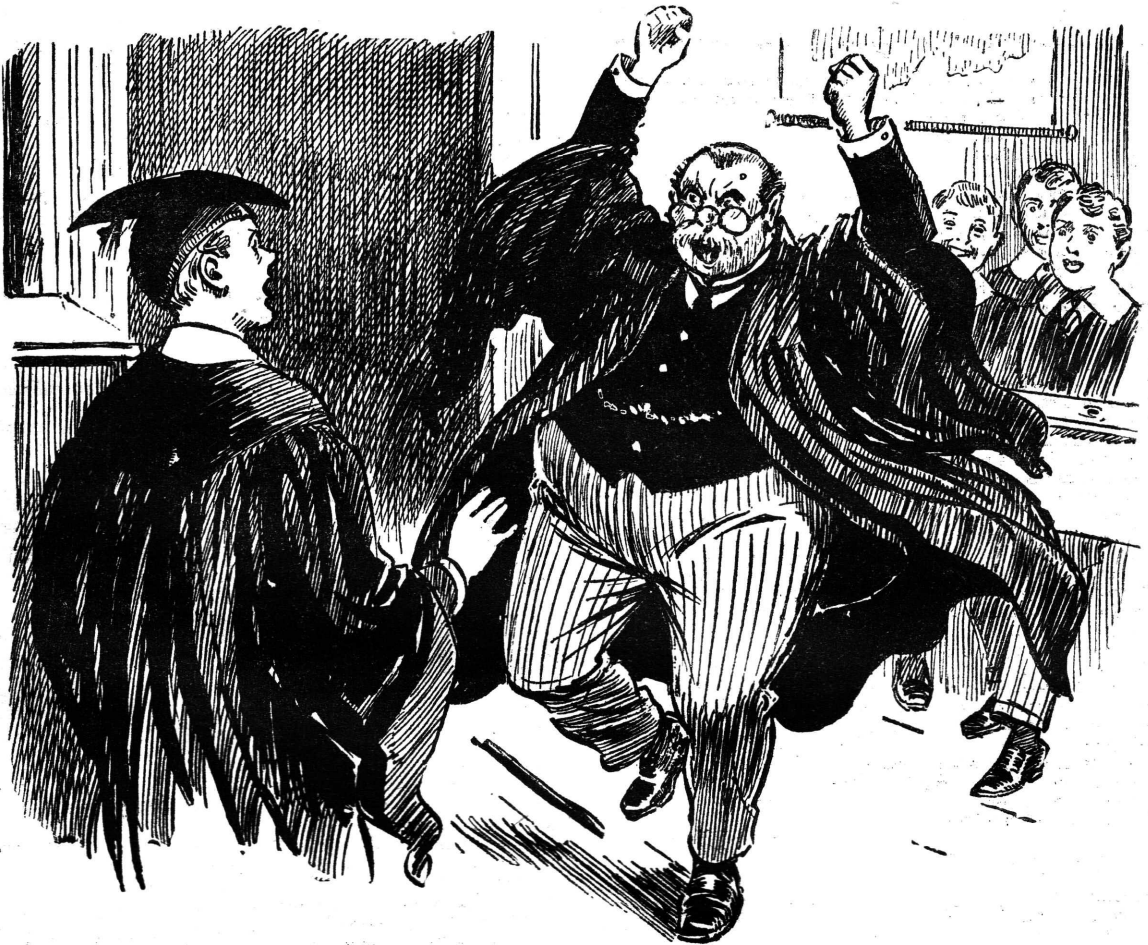
He breathed a deep sigh of relief when he finally dismissed the class.

The Third went out chuckling.

They had had what they regarded as a glorious morning, and they were anticipating an equally glorious afternoon. Everything in the garden, as Wally remarked, was lovely.

The Third Form were as cheery as could be. But the new master of the Third left the Form-room with a shadow upon his face.

The Head had been very kind. But Tom Merry realised, from the expression upon Dr. Holmes' kind face as he had turned away, that it would not do.



Herr Schneider waved his hands and raved as he hopped on one leg. "It is ein drick!" he roared. "I tink tat you blay vat you call ein shape on me, ain't it!" "I never intended to jape you, sir," said Tom Merry. "I tinks you vas an imbudent young rascal!" roared the German master.

If he were to be master of the Third, order would have to be kept in the Third Form Room. And Tom Merry looked forward to the afternoon with a doubting mind.

Monty Lowther and Manners met him in the passage.

"Good-morning, sir!" said Lowther.

"Good-morning, Mr. Merry."

Tom Merry smiled.

"Don't play the giddy goat," he said. "Come to my room and have a jaw."

"Right-ho!"

In the Third Form-master's room, Tom Merry sat in Mr. Selby's chair while Lowther sat on the table and Manners in the window.

"How did you get on with the Third?" asked Lowther.

"Rotten!"

"Trouble, I suppose?"

"Heaps of it."

"We heard a bit of a row in the Shell-room," Monty Lowther remarked. "I thought I distinguished the dulcet tones of Herr Schneider."

Tom Merry explained.

The chums of the Shell chuckled.

"But it won't do," said Lowther at last. "It's a difficult position, Tommy, and I don't see how you're to manage it. You see, the Third persist in considering you as Tom Merry, and not Mr. Merry."

"And they won't change their point of view in a hurry, either," said Manners, with a shake of the head.

"That's the trouble," said Tom Merry.

"If Wally could be induced to take a different view of the matter," Monty Lowther remarked thoughtfully, "he's got a lot of influence in the Third."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"If things were explained to him properly——" Manners suggested.

"My hat, yes!" exclaimed Lowther. "Look here, I've got an idea! Come on, Manners! You wait till you hear from us, Tommy!"

"But I say——"

"It's all right! Come on, Manners!"

And Monty Lowther dragged his chum to the door.

Tom Merry started to his feet. He was a little anxious as to what steps his chums might take to help him. They did not understand the difficulties of his position as Form-master really much better than the Third Form fags did.

"Monty——"

"It's all right!"

"But come here——"

"We'll come back."

"I say, old man——"

But Lowther and Manners were gone.

Tom Merry stood in doubt and dismay. He could not rush down the passage after the chums of the Shell—that would not be in accordance with the dignity of his position. But what was Lowther going to do?

Manners was equally puzzled.

"What's the little game, Monty?" he demanded, as his chum rushed him out into the quad. "What are you up to, you ass?"

"We're going to look for Wally."

"What for?"

"To explain to him."

"But he won't listen."

"Then we'll bump him till he does."

"Well, I don't know——"

"I do! Come on!"

Wally, as it happened, was near the School House door. He was chatting with his major, Arthur Augustus. D'Arcy major was very curious to know how matters had gone in the Third Form Room that morning, and he had prepared a little lecture for his minor.

"Here he is!" exclaimed Monty Lowther.

Arthur Augustus turned his eyeglass upon the Shell fellows.

"Pway don't intewwupt me, deah boys," he said. "I'm talkin' to my minah."

"It's all right," said Wally. "You've finished, Gussy."

"I am not finished, Wally."

"Yes, you are, as far as I'm concerned," said Wally coolly. "If I never hear another word from you, I've heard too much!"

"Weally, Wally——"

"We want to talk to that young rip," said Lowther.

"Now, then, Wally, I hear that you have been playing the giddy goat in the Form-room this morning."

Wally eyed him warily.

"Nothing to do with a Shell bouncer," he replied.

"We take a fatherly interest in you," explained Lowther.

"We're going to point out to you exactly what you ought to do."

"Applesauce!"

"And you're going to promise, honest Injun, to do as we say."

"You're telling me!"

"If you don't——"

"Weally, Lowthah——"

"Can it, Gussy. If you've any objections, Wally, we're

going to bump them out of you—and you'll get tired first. *Comprez?*"

"Oh, breeze along!"

"I wegard it as a good ideah, Lowthah. I shall be vewy pleased to assist you in bumping that young wascal, if he refuses to pwomise not to wag Tom Mewwy!"

"Do I have to listen to all your jawbone solos?"

"Weally, Wally——"

"Now, then, what's the verdict, young shaver?" demanded Lowther.

"Rats!"

"Look here——"

"Bosh!"

Manners and Lowther made a simultaneous grab at Wally.

But Wally was about as easy to catch as an eel. He dodged the outstretched hands, slipped under Lowther's arm, and ran.

"After him!" shouted Lowther.

"Bai Jove!"

The chums of the Shell dashed in pursuit.

Wally was cut off from the open quadrangle, but the door of the School House was before him.

He dashed up the steps and in at the open doorway.

Manners and Lowther tore in after him at top speed.

Wally reached the foot of the staircase, with the Shell fellows hot on the track. Kangaroo of the Shell appeared above, just coming downstairs, and Lowther yelled to him.

"Stop him, Kangy!"

The Cornstalk grinned.

"What-ho!" he replied.

Wally stopped.

Escape up the stairs was cut off, and Manners and Lowther were close behind. Wally ran along the line of study doors, stopped at that of the Third Form-master, tapped at it, and dashed into the study, escaping the outstretched hands behind by a quarter of an inch.

CHAPTER 13.

Wally Comes Round!

MR. MERRY jumped up. Wally had dashed breathlessly into the Form-master's study, and his sudden appearance there startled Tom Merry considerably.

Manners and Lowther glared in at the doorway of the study after him.

It would hardly have done to chase Wally fairly into the study. They did not wish to bring ridicule upon the master of the Third by disregarding the dignity of his position.

"The young rip!" murmured Lowther.

"The cheeky young bouncer!"

"Bai Jove!"

"Shut the door!" Lowther muttered.

Manners drew the door shut.

Wally was shut up in the study with his youthful Form-master. Tom Merry was looking at him in astonishment.

"What does this mean, Wally—D'Arcy minor?" he exclaimed.

Wally panted.

"Excuse me, sir," he said. "Would you mind telling me exactly how many lines I am to do? You gave me so many this morning that I've forgotten."

Wally asked the question with perfect calmness.

Tom Merry drew a deep breath as he looked at the cool, innocent face of the scamp of the Third.

He had seen Manners and Lowther in the doorway, of

course, and knew perfectly well that Wally had dashed into the study to escape their pursuit.

He could hardly help smiling.

As a matter of fact, he did not remember how many lines he had given Wally, nor how many he had given to any other member of the Third.

He knew that the aggregate of lines he had imposed upon the Third Form must amount to some thousands, but the precise total, and how they were distributed, he could not have told for the life of him.

"I know there were less than a million, sir," said Wally, with glib frankness, "but I don't know exactly how many, sir."

Tom Merry coloured.

He felt that he was caught.

"Very well, D'Arcy minor," he said quietly. "You may take a total of five hundred, and you will write them out to-day and to-morrow."

"Yes, sir. Thank you, sir."

"You may go, D'Arcy."

Wally did not go. He had a feeling that Manners and Lowther were waiting for him in the passage.

"If you please, sir, am I to write out Virgil?" he asked, to gain time.

"I think I told you that."

"First book, sir?"

"I told you that, too."

"From the beginning, sir?"

"Exactly."

"It's—it's a nice day, ain't it, Mr. Merry?" said Wally desperately.

Tom Merry smiled. He knew perfectly well why Wally wanted to linger a little longer in the study.

"Yes, Wally," he said. "It's a nice day. Sit down, Wally. I want to talk to you for a few minutes."

"Thank you, sir."

Wally sat down, looking very demure.

There was a grave expression upon Tom Merry's face.

"Wally," he said quietly, "you and your friends caused me all the trouble you possibly could this morning."

"Oh, sir!"

"You did, Wally."

"You gave us lines for it, sir," said Wally, as if that made the matter quite right.

"I am speaking to you as Tom Merry, not as Mr. Merry, Wally," said Tom gravely. "I'm going to speak to you frankly, as a fellow you know, not as a Form-master. I believe you used to like me when I was at St. Jim's, Wally."

Wally melted at once.

"Of course I did," he said. "So did we all."

"Well, then, I want you to think a bit before you have any more ragging in the Form-room. I've taken part in rags myself in my time," said Tom Merry; "but the case is a bit different here. I'm trying to run the Third Form, and if I succeed I stay at St. Jim's. If I fail I have to leave."

"Oh!" said Wally.

"You didn't look at it like that?"

"No."

"I know it's a lot of fun to you, ragging a boy master," said Tom Merry. "But I know you're a decent chap, kid, and you don't want to cause me real trouble."

"Of course not!" said Wally uneasily.

"Then chuck it, and give me a chance," said Tom Merry. "I'm bound to keep order as a Form-master, but you'll find me a better-tempered master than Mr. Selby, all the same. Won't you back me up in the Form-room, Wally?"

The fag was silent.

"You can do as you please, Wally, but I shall keep order at any cost; and if I fail I leave St. Jim's," said Tom Merry quietly.

Wally rose to his feet.

"I didn't look at it like that before, old kid," he said.

"Of course, we'd do anything to keep you at St. Jim's."

Tom Merry's face lighted up.

"I thought you would, Wally."

"I'll back you up. If any chap breathes a word about ragging, I'll give him a lift under——"

"A lift under what?"

"A lift under the chin!" grinned Wally. "You can rely on me!"

Tom smiled.

"It's all right, old cock!" said Wally. "Only don't you come too much of the 'Mr. Merry,' you know."

"You won't have anything to grumble at, Wally."

Tom Merry opened the study door. Manners and Lowther were waiting outside. Their fell intentions towards the fag who had balked them were reflected vividly in their faces. They recoiled and looked a little sheepish at the sight of Tom Merry.

"H'm!" said Lowther.
 "H'm!" said Manners.
 "Let Wally get clear, and then come in and have a jaw," said Tom Merry. "I've got some toffee here."
 Wally scuttled off down the passage.
 The chums of the Shell entered the study.
 "Better have let us bump the young bouncer," Monty Lowther remarked.
 Tom Merry shook his head.
 "I think Wally will back me up in the Form-room after this," he said. "I had a quiet talk with him."
 Monty Lowther looked sceptical.
 "The spirit is willing, but I'll wager that the flesh is weak," he remarked. "But I hope it turns out all right. Where's that toffee?"
 "Here you are!"
 And Tom Merry, ceasing to be a Form-master for the nonce, shared out chunks of toffee with the chums of the Shell.

CHAPTER 14.
Law and Order!

AFTERNOON classes commenced at St. Jim's. There was a hush in the Third Form Room.
 Evidently Wally had been talking to his Form-fellows. Wally's influence was extensive in the Third. He had a doughty pair of fists, and was always willing to use them—willing and ready. That gave him weight in the Form.
 But Wally's lead was not always unquestionably followed—especially when Wally ranged himself on the side of law and order, an uncommon happening.
 There were mutinous faces in the Third Form. Jameson and some others had arranged a little rag for the afternoon, but Wally had let it be known that he was against it.
 But Jameson meant business this time. Jameson wasn't going to knuckle under to a Form-master of fifteen just because the chap had talked Wally over. Mr. Merry couldn't have soft-sawdered him, Jameson declared. He wasn't going to give up all the anticipated fun for nothing!

Not if Jameson knew it! And so, although the leader and chief of the Third was now on the Form-master's side, and ready to back him up through thick and thin, still there was a possibility of trouble in the Third Form Room that afternoon.

The lessons commenced in the midst of an unusual silence. Tom Merry felt hopeful. His appeal to Wally had evidently not been made in vain, and the virtuous expression upon Wally's face showed that his good resolutions were at boiling point. But in the midst of second lesson there arose a strange sound from the back of the class.

Buzz!
 Someone was imitating the buzz of a bee, and Tom Merry looked across the class instantly in search of the culprit.

Buzz-z-z!
 Tom Merry set his lips.
 Trouble was beginning again, he knew. He was still sufficiently a junior to know the beginning of a rag when he saw it.

"Stop that noise instantly!" he exclaimed.
 Buz-z-z!
 "Stop it, Jameson!" whispered Wally fiercely. "I'll jolly well punch your head if you don't!"

Wally's stage whisper was heard all over the Form-room. Tom Merry could not help hearing it, but as Wally was virtually backing up authority, Tom affected to hear nothing.

Buz-z-z-z!
 Louder and more frequent grew the buzzing.
 "Will you stop it!" shouted Tom Merry.

Which of the boys were buzzing he could not tell, though he guessed. He could stop the rag, perhaps, by punishing the whole class, innocent as well as guilty. That would have been very rough on Wally and his friends, who were backing him up.

Wally rose in his place.
 In his virtuous indignation he did not remember the sedate manners that were due to the class-room.

"Stop that row!" he shouted. "I know you, you rotters! Jameson, I'll punch your silly fat head!"

Buz-z-z-z!
 "Sit down, D'Arcy minor!"
 Wally looked round in astonishment at Tom Merry.
 "Well, I like that!" he exclaimed, "I'm keeping law and order, sir."

"Please sit down!"
 "But, sir—"

"Boys, you must be quiet," said Tom Merry. "I shall have to be very severe with you if you are not quiet."
 Buz-z-z-z!
 "Jameson, that was you!"
 "Oh, sir!"
 "Was it you, Jameson?"
 "You said so, sir. Of course, I couldn't contradict you, sir. I respect you too highly, sir."
 Buz-z-z-z!
 "Take a hundred lines, Jameson!"
 "Thank you, sir!"
 Buz-z-z-z!
 Wally jumped up again.
 "Let me handle the cads, sir!" he exclaimed. "I'll jolly soon stop them! Jameson, I told you what I'd do!"
 And, without heeding Tom Merry's exclamations, Wally left his place and rushed at Jameson.
 "Yah!" roared Jameson. "Come on!"
 "Now, you rotter—"
 "Now, you cad—"
 "Take that!"
 "Yah! Take that!"

Wally had one arm entwined round Jameson's neck, and he was pommelling away at him with the other hand. Jameson struggled desperately, pommelling away with equal vigour. They rolled out before the class, staggering and punching and gasping, and making a terrific uproar.

Tom Merry rapped on a desk with his pointer. He did not know what to do. To "wade in" and thrash both the juniors with the pointer was the obvious course. But Wally was fighting his battle, backing him up, though in a way that was likely to lead to more trouble than if he had backed up the ragers instead.

"Stop that instantly!" shouted Tom Merry.
 "Yah! Take that! Groogh!"
 "Ow! There, you beast!"
 "I shall cane you both—"
 "Jameson, you pig—"
 "Wally, you rotter—"

Tramp, tramp! Punch! Gasp! Whoop!
 The Third Form were yelling with delight, and cheering on the combatants. Every vestige of law and order had vanished.

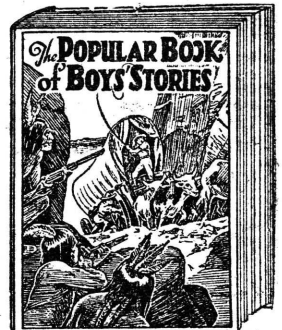
Tom Merry was inclined to tear his hair.
 He rushed at the two fighting juniors, and strove to tear them apart. But that was not so easily done.



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Jameson, either by accident or design, punched Tom Merry as much as he punched Wally, and some of Wally's blows were misdirected, and took effect upon the unfortunate master of the Third.

Tom Merry staggered away as a heavy fist was planted in his ribs, and he caught on to a desk and gasped.

"Go it, Wally!"
"Go it, Jimmy!"
"Hurrah!"

The Form-room door opened.

"This is the room!" said the Head of St. Jim's. "Your nephew is here, Mr. Poinsett. He is taking charge of the Third Form, as I explained to you—"

Dr. Holmes broke off.

Tom Merry stared blankly at the Head, and at the handsome, bronzed gentleman in the slouched hat beside him.

"Uncle!" he exclaimed.

CHAPTER 15.

The American Uncle!

MR. POINSETT gazed into the Third Form Room. The big, bronzed American gentleman seemed taken quite aback.

Truly, it was a scene to surprise anybody.

The Form-rooms at St. Jim's during classes generally presented a scene of busy order and earnest quietness.

The Head turned quite red.

He was proud of St. Jim's, and he liked to take a distinguished stranger about the school, pointing out this and that to him, but especially the Forms at work.

The Third Form Room was not a thing to be proud of just then.

Two fellows were out before the class, fighting like heroes of the ring, and the rest of the Form were yelling like a troupe of Red Indians.

No wonder Mr. Poinsett was astonished.

No wonder a slight smile crept over his bronzed face, as he gazed in upon the peculiar scene.

"Thunder! Tom?" he remarked. "Is this how you keep order here, Tom?"

"Uncle!"

"Yes. Give me your fist, my lad!"

Tom Merry shook hands with his uncle.

He had not been pleased by Monty Lowther's action in communicating his misfortune to the American rancher.

But now that he gazed upon the kind, bronzed face of his uncle, he was only too glad to see it, and to feel that he had a friend to stand by him and back him up once more. His heart leaped at the sight of the rancher.

"Oh, uncle!"

Mr. Poinsett gripped his hand hard.

Wally and Jameson had left off fighting. The Third Form had left off yelling. The heroes of the fistical encounter crept back to their places, looking very dishevelled and sheepish.

Wally had a black eye, and Jameson's nose was streaming red, and their collars were torn out, most of the buttons gone from their waistcoats, and they seemed to have scraped up nearly all the dust there was in the Form-room.

The Head looked at the Form sternly.

"This is disgraceful!" he exclaimed

"We're sorry, sir!" said Wally.

"You should be, indeed!"

"I—I was trying to back up Mr. Merry, sir, and keep order."

"Then you chose a most peculiar method, D'Arcy minor. However, I shall not go into the matter. A prefect will be sent to take charge of the class. Merry, your uncle wishes to see you now."

"Yes, sir."

And Tom Merry left the Form-room with Mr. Poinsett.

"My hat!" said Wally, with a whistle. "That's Tom Merry's American uncle—the rancher millionaire! Wonder what brings him over?"

"Good thing for Tom Merry," grinned Jameson, caressing his nose.

"What-ho!" said Wally. "I suppose the old boy's forgotten me—or perhaps he doesn't know me in this eye. I'll freshen up his memory for him after lessons."

"Cave! Here's Kildare!"

The captain of St. Jim's entered the class-room.

He gave the Third Form a grim look.

"You young rascals!" he said. "You'll toe the line now. Mind, if there's a whisper in this room this afternoon, I'll make you jump. Mind that!"

And Kildare looked so much in earnest that the fags decided to keep on their very best behaviour for the rest of that afternoon, and their conduct was most exemplary till the time came for dismissal.

Meanwhile, Tom Merry had gone out into the quadrangle with his uncle.

The rancher had a quiet smile upon his face. Tom Merry was silent, not knowing exactly what that smile meant.

"So you have been playing Form-master, Tom?" said Mr. Poinsett.

"Yes, uncle," said Tom. "Dr. Holmes was kind enough to give me a chance."

"I guess you haven't made much of a success of it."

Tom Merry laughed ruefully.

"The kids don't quite catch on yet," he admitted. "You see, their only idea was to have some fun out of the thing. They're good little chaps, you know, but a bit wild and thoughtless."

Mr. Poinsett laughed.

"They haven't reached your years of experience, Tom."

Tom laughed again.

"Well, I'm older than the fags, of course," he said.

"Besides, I've been through such a lot of queer experiences lately, that it makes a fellow feel older, you know."

"How do you like being Form-master?"

"I hardly know yet."

"Do you think Dr. Holmes would be likely to keep you in the job?"

"I—I don't know."

Mr. Poinsett halted, and faced his nephew squarely.

"Now, then, Tom, I've a bone to pick with you!" he exclaimed, in his earnest manner.

"Yes?" said Tom.

"You haven't treated me well, Tom."

"I—I'm sure I've never meant to treat you badly, uncle," said Tom Merry. "You've been too kind to me for that. What have I done?"

"It isn't so much what you have done as what you haven't done."

"But I—I—"

"Some time ago," said Mr. Poinsett, "I sent for you to visit me on my ranch out in the West."

"Yes, uncle."

"When you came there, how did I treat you?"

"Splendidly!" said Tom Merry.

"Did I give you as good a time as possible?"

"You certainly did."

"Did I make you understand that you were to look upon me as a friend?"

"Yes, indeed!"

"Did I tell you that you were going to be my heir and inherit a cool million, with the best ranch in Arizona thrown in?"

"Ye-es!"

"Then what do you mean by it?" demanded Mr. Poinsett.

"By—by what, uncle?"

"By treating me as you have done—neglecting me, sir, in the most outrageous way," said the rancher.

"Oh!"

"Yes, sirrah! You let an old lady invest all your money in a Stock Exchange swindle, and lose it."

"Miss Fawcett wasn't to blame, uncle," said Tom Merry hastily. "I don't want you to think I blame her for a minute. She was spoofed—I mean, swindled!"

"I suppose she was. But that doesn't excuse you. You were left on your uppers, weren't you—stony broke?"

"Yes, uncle."

"And you didn't cable to me?"

"N-no."

"You didn't write to me?"



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(Continued on page 28.)

THE ST. FRANK'S AIRSHIP IS CAUGHT IN THE GRIP OF A HURRICANE!

THE WHITE GIANTS OF EL DORADO!



By EDWY SEARLES BROOKS

THE OPENING CHAPTERS.

In a super airship, the Sky Wanderer, a big party of St. Frank's fellows, under Nelson Lee and three other masters, set off on an educational tour of the world. With the party also are Lord Dorrimore and his black friend, Umlost. The airship is brought down in Arzacland by a powerful ray, and the whole party fall into the hands of Professor Cyrus Zingrave, ruler of a race of White Giants. The St. Frank's boys escape, however, and take refuge in Az, a rebel city opposed to Zingrave. In the night Nelson Lee is horrified to learn that the town is about to be attacked by a tribe of wild giants!

The Attack by Night!

THE menace of the Ciri-ok-Baks was an unexpected and alarming complication. The primitive tribes, to whom Surnum Mentius had made friendly overtures so successfully, were now massing for an attack on the city!

Nelson Lee thought of the sleeping boys; he thought of the crippled airship, lying helpless, practically unguarded. Something would have to be done, and done quickly.

"Can I see Surnum Mentius at once?" he asked, swinging round on the red-headed Captain Cane.

"Why not? He is in council with his chief officers."

"An opportune moment, then," said Lee, striding towards the door.

"What are you goin' to propose?" asked Dorrie eagerly.

"Come with me, and you will hear," replied Lee.

They passed across a wide, stone-floored corridor, and a moment later they were in the Council Chamber of Surnum Mentius. The ten-foot giant was at the moment talking earnestly to a group of richly uniformed officers. But he paused at once as Lee and his companions approached.

"Our coming to your territory has had an unfortunate result, I understand," said Lee quietly.

"To blame you would be wrong," replied Surnum Mentius. "The Ciri-ok-Baks are but heathens; they have the minds of children. They take heed of signs, of omens. Their actions are not dictated by reason, but by impulse."

"Yet the danger is acute, nevertheless," said Nelson Lee. "You are proposing, I believe, to defend the city against attack?"

"There is no other way, my friend," replied Surnum Mentius, with a shrug. "When the Ciri-ok-Baks attack they

do so blindly, fanatically. For when the war-fever gets them it also robs them of reason."

"You know from which direction the attack will come?" "Roughly, yes."

"Then I urge you, with all the earnestness at my command, to send your forces out to meet this friend who has turned enemy," said Nelson Lee. "I will go with them, and Lord Dorrimore and Captain Cane, and others of us, too. We will carry deadly weapons—"

"You are proposing to leave the city unprotected?" broke in Surnum Mentius.

"An adequate force can be left behind," replied Lee. "Yet, if we meet the Ciri-ok-Baks before they reach the city, no protection will be necessary. I am hoping that we shall be able to convince the heathen men that they are mistaken. Perhaps we can induce them to join us. In other words, I am suggesting that the march on El Dorado should begin to-night—at once!"

"It is a daring, dangerous plan," said Surnum Mentius doubtfully.

But Nelson Lee was not to be put off. He could see that if the Ciri-ok-Bak hosts were allowed to attack the city it might remain besieged for weeks—perhaps months. Nelson Lee was all for the bold move; he shrewdly foresaw that the aborigines, meeting the formidable Arzac force, would be nonplussed, even demoralised.

As Surnum Mentius listened to Lee his expression changed; his officers, too, became flushed and eager.

To advance at once—to commence the march on El Dorado—before the Ciri-ok-Bak heathens could gather their full strength. That was the plan which Nelson Lee urged.

In doing so, Lee was not entirely selfish. He was thinking of the St. Frank's schoolboys, it is true; he was thinking of the crippled airship, too. But he was convinced in his own mind that this bold attack would be the very best kind of defence.

"Enough!" exclaimed Surnum Mentius, at last. "My friend, you are a man of genius. It shall be as you say. The march of the rebels on El Dorado shall start to-night!"

There were murmurs of approval from the officers, and their eyes were glowing with enthusiasm.

Briskly, now—for Surnum Mentius had made his decision—he gave orders to the officers, and they, in their turn, went hastening out of the overlord's palace to make the necessary arrangements. The whole city of Az was blazing

with flaring torches, alive with men moving here and there. It was a hive of feverish activity.

Lee, for his own part, gave instructions to Mr. Stokes; and presently Barry Stokes was setting out post-haste for the airship, taking with him a number of St. Frank's seniors. They were to send back the Arzacs guarding the Sky Wanderer, and look after the vessel—protect it against any possible enemy attack. They could handle firearms, which would be more useful against the Ciri-ok-Baks.

Optimistic as Lee was of a quick getaway, he knew that the army of Surnum Mentius could not be ready before dawn.

"We have got them moving, Dorrie," said Lee, with satisfaction, as he took a breather. "We are now committed to take an active part in Surnum's rebellion. We must go forward—right to El Dorado itself!"

"And conquer Zingrave," said Dorrie happily. "By glory, it's goin' to be a hot time, Lee! Even hotter than now," he went on, dabbing his face. "Have you noticed this infernal sultriness? The weather has changed amazingly during the last few hours."

"We have no time to concern ourselves with the weather conditions," replied Nelson Lee. "I am convinced that we are taking the best course by precipitating the advance. Surnum Mentius is a powerful overlord, but, like most of the other White Giants, he is content to wait. Time means nothing to these people. Left to themselves, they would allow things to drag on indefinitely. But we cannot wait, Dorrie. We must move, and move fast."

"An' make our hosts move with us—eh?" asked Dorrie cheerfully. "That's the ticket! I believe you're right about the Ciri-ok-Baks; I believe that if we meet them in the open they will realise their mistake, an' join forces with us. By the way, what are you goin' to do about the airship? Do you think she's safe in her present anchorage?"

"We must leave her there; it would be sheer folly to make any attempt to move her," replied the detective. "Only Manners and his men can make the necessary repairs. That is why we are taking part in this rebellion, Dorrie—so that we may go forward and rescue the airship men who are in Zingrave's hands."

"Well, we're showin' these White Giants somethin' new in energy," said his lordship dryly. "Even all the boys are awake an' as lively as crickets. They want to do their bit, Lee, and, if you ask me, we shall have to take them along. Safer, too, to have them under our eyes."

They were attracted by a mighty tumult of voices from the great open space outside the building. It was the central square of the city, and when they emerged upon a balcony they found that Surnum Mentius was occupying another balcony close at hand.

It was the overlord's appearance which had caused the uproar. The great square was packed with soldiers—thousands upon thousands. They had been gathered together at their leader's command, for it was his intention to address them personally.

"This is going to be interesting, Mr. Lee," said Captain Cane, as he joined Dorrie and the detective. "You've performed wonders. I've been with these people for a long time, but I have never succeeded in arousing them from their characteristic apathy. You've done the trick in a few hours. Look at them!"

The White Giants, massive and sturdy, were massed in incredible numbers, and it was plain to see that they were in a state of wild excitement.

Then, as the deep, mighty voice of Surnum Mentius arose, the soldiers fell silent. But soon they caught one expression of Surnum Mentius, and they repeated it again and again.

"What are they saying?" asked Nelson Lee, turning to Captain Harry Cane. "Do you understand their language?"

"Perfectly—I've had plenty of time to learn it," replied the airman. "They are shouting 'On to El Dorado—on to victory!' By Jove! I've always believed Surnum Mentius to be a kindly, slow-moving old chap. You have completely changed him. You have imbued him with your own fire."

Surnum Mentius was talking, and his strange words, in the Arzac language, meant nothing to some of his listeners. The St. Frank's boys, crowding on the balconies, were watching and listening breathlessly.

Then, suddenly, there was a dramatic change. Nelson Lee caught a glimpse of something which gleamed in the night air; he saw Surnum Mentius stagger, clutching at his great chest. The next moment the overlord sagged down, and for some seconds there was deadly silence.

Nelson Lee was the first to act. Taking a great risk, he leapt from the balcony on which he stood—across to the other balcony. He found Surnum Mentius struggling to rise, and from his chest protruded a long, quivering shaft.

"The Ciri-ok-Baks—they are here!" gasped the overlord, as blood surged from his wound, discolouring the richness of his white tunic.

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There was tumult below, subdued at first, but it was swelling to a mighty roar.

With a supreme effort, Surnum Mentius rose to his feet, and he clutched at the stone balustrade of the balcony. Yet it was plain to see that he was a stricken man.

"Forward—on to El Dorado!" he shouted, his voice like a croak. "My friend Lee will take my place. Obey him in all things."

In a moment, Captain Harry Cane had leapt upon the edge of the balcony! And at the top of his voice he was shouting to the multitude of soldiers, repeating the words of Surnum Mentius.

The soldiers took up the cry! They acclaimed Nelson Lee as their new leader—for Lee had been named by Surnum Mentius himself.

Meanwhile, Lee had skillfully plucked the deadly shaft from the overlord's chest. With Dorrie's help he gently laid the wounded man flat, and Lee's examination was brief and satisfactory.

"Have no fear, my lord," he said. "The wound is deep, but not dangerous."

"Yet I am stricken—I am unable to lead my army!" muttered Surnum Mentius. "It is for you, my friend, to do that."

Lee scarcely heard; he had turned in a flash to Captain Cane, and he was instructing Captain Cane to tell the vast crowd that Surnum Mentius lived, and that he would continue to live.

"Tell them that their overlord will live and become king of all Arzacland!" said Lee. "Tell them that; let them know that they have a great objective for which to fight."

Captain Harry Cane's voice boomed out, and it was while he was speaking that Nelson Lee saw a movement on the outskirts of the city—a shadowy, mysterious movement, only just visible in the feeble light cast by torches.

"Guv'nor—look!" came a yell from Nipper, who was standing at an adjoining window with Tommy Watson and some others.

Farther along, on the balcony of another house, Handforth sent up a mighty yell. He, too, had seen.

Beyond the outskirts of the city, the very ground itself seemed to be a moving, creeping mass! The sight, at first, was mysterious—baffling. But Nelson Lee, at least, knew just what it meant.

The Ciri-ok-Baks had come—they were on the point of attacking!

They had arrived many hours before the Arzacs had expected them. As silently as shadows in the darkness the aborigines had entirely encircled the city, and now they were advancing in a solid ring of grim humanity.

Handforth's Peril!

NELSON LEE caught his breath in with a sharp hiss. For he could see that the situation, from the Arzacs' point of view, was hopeless. The soldiers in the square had gathered to listen to their overlord; they had come here weaponless, and they were packed like sardines. There was no room for them to fight, and unless something was quickly done, the heathen enemy would achieve complete triumph. Indeed, Lee was expecting a dreadful massacre to commence then and there.

He bitterly resented the slackness of the Arzacs in failing to warn him of this possible danger. Even Surnum Mentius himself had said that the Ciri-ok-Baks could not gather their forces until dawn. Yet here they were, already storming the city! And they had caught the Arzacs unawares.

"It's characteristic enough of the beggars," said Captain Cane gruffly. "They are too easy going—they've no idea of time or distance. They just let things drift. That's why Zingrave has found it so easy to set himself up as king, and run the country."

There was only one space in that whole great square which was clear; and that was the ground immediately in front of the overlord's palace. Suddenly, from between the buildings, an immense man strode into the open. His skin was bronzed, and his face was covered with a mass of coarse, black hair. His only clothing consisted of dried grasses, plaited into a sort of coarse material, and hanging loosely on his great frame.

"Aryl!" he thundered. "Aryl!"

"He's calling on us to surrender," muttered Cane.

"Aryl abti Azi!" bellowed the Ciri-ok-Bak leader.

Boldly, he was telling the Arzacs to give up the city. He was striding insolently towards the palace, confident of his own security. And it chanced that he walked immediately beneath the balcony which held Handforth and a number of other St. Frank's juniors.

"By George!" muttered Handforth tensely.

With characteristic impulsiveness the leader of Study D swarmed over the balcony rail and dropped. Church and McClure, his faithful chums, who were with him, tried in



Shouting at the top of his voice, the mighty Ciri-ok-Bak leader caught Handforth by his feet and swung him round like a pendulum, with the intention of dashing him against the wall! But quick as a flash, Nelson Lee's automatic was levelled at the Ciri-ok-Bak. On his aim depended Handforth's life!

vain to clutch him before he released his hold. But they had no chance. Handforth was gone in a flash.

Down he dropped, and landed fairly and squarely on the shoulders of the aboriginal leader. So great was the shock for the man that he crumpled up and went sprawling, Handforth on top of him.

"Got him!" yelled Handforth triumphantly. "Now, then, you chaps! Back me up! Come on, Remove!"

Before the excited Removites could take any action, the Ciri-ok-Bak leader had leapt to his feet. He had been jarred, but that was all. With mighty hands he seized Handforth. The plucky junior was like a mere infant in his arms.

He tossed Handforth into the air, caught him by the feet, and swung him round like a pendulum. While doing so he was shouting at the top of his voice, more like an animal than a human being.

Round went Handforth, and, suddenly, the other juniors on the balcony gasped with horror. For they saw the Ciri-ok-Bak's object. There was an abutting wall here, and it was the giant's intention to dash Handforth's brains out against the solid stonework.

The Arzaes seemed to be paralysed; they were stricken and dumb. From every corner the Ciri-ok-Baks were hemming them in.

Crack!

Nelson Lee's automatic spat fire—and death.

Notwithstanding the acuteness of the situation, the detective's aim was as steady as a rock. The bullet bored its way into the Ciri-ok-Bak's brain, and Handforth's life was saved by a hairsbreadth!

Even as his head was about to come into contact with the wall with such force that his skull would have been cracked like an eggshell, the giant collapsed, and Handforth thudded heavily to the ground. Bruised, but otherwise unhurt, he staggered up.

Any hesitation at that moment might have been fatal. But Nelson Lee was never the man to hesitate. On the heels of the shot, he grasped the balcony rail, swung himself over, and dropped. The next moment, gun in hand, he was striding right amongst the bearded giants who had come crowding about their fallen leader.

"Hold!" thundered Lee.

That word meant nothing to the Ciri-ok-Baks; but the tone of Lee's voice meant a lot. Furthermore, there was still a trace of smoke circling the barrel of Lee's gun.

With a terrible shout, one of the more daring Ciri-ok-Baks swung an immense wooden club as he leapt at the detective.

Crack!

In full sight of all the others, Lee took aim and pulled the trigger. The giant sent forth an awful scream, and crashed at Lee's feet. That exhibition of Lee's power was his guarantee of safety. For the other Ciri-ok-Baks, awed, frightened, backed away from him, their eyes wide open, staring.

Never in their lives had they seen such a man as this—never had they seen death so swift, so mysterious.

"Fools!" shouted Lee scathingly. "Why do you come here to attack your friends?"

By this time Lord Dorrimore, Umlosi, and Captain Harry Cane had reached Lee's side. In a flash Cane interpreted Lee's words, shouting them, in turn, in the Arzac language—which was used, also, by the Ciri-ok-Baks.

"Are you mad that you should kill the great Surnum Mentius?" continued Lee. "He lives again, for, by my magic, I have restored his life. See?"

He thrust a hand outwards and upwards, and Surnum Mentius, understanding, stood upright on the balcony, as though unharmed. It cost him a great effort, for he was weak from loss of blood. The Ciri-ok-Baks stared in terror, and they muttered amongst themselves.

"Did you not see the omen in the sky?" continued Lee, whilst Cane repeated the words in the Arzac tongue. "The great ship which flies is a sign of liberty. We are here to help you. Surnum Mentius is your friend. I am your friend. We advance against the evil King Yoga, and you can serve well in the great cause."

"On! On to El Dorado!" shouted the Arzac soldiers, fired with renewed enthusiasm. "Victory to King Surnum Mentius!"

"The king—the new king!"

"On to El Dorado!"

On all sides, the Ciri-ok-Baks were pressing through the ranks of the Arzaes, and there was no fighting. The very fact that the soldiers of Surnum Mentius offered no resistance was, in itself, a great thing.

"It is for you to choose, you men of the forests and the swamps!" continued Lee impressively. "Fight now, as you intended, and you will fall dead by the hundred—even as your leader fell dead. For we have weapons of deadly power. But we wish to be your friends, and if you join us in the advance on El Dorado, you will have everything to gain under the rule of King Surnum Mentius."

The wild men did not understand a word Lee uttered; they were compelled to wait until Cane interpreted. Yet it was not so much the words, as Lee's manner, which did the trick. His forceful personality impressed them. And

at the back of their fickle minds, too, they remembered the sudden and mysterious death which had overtaken their leader. It turned out afterwards, as a matter of fact, that the dead man was not the Ciri-ok-Bak leader, but merely the man who had been placed in charge of this attack upon the city.

The bearded giants were easily swayed, for they had the minds of children. They were not naturally warlike, and the assurance that the Arzaacs were friendly did much to turn the tables. Nelson Lee himself did the rest. Soon the Ciri-ok-Baks were flinging their weapons down, waving their arms, and shouting with joy. Once they were satisfied that the "monster of the sky" was not a sign of evil towards them, they were ready enough to turn friendly.

The crisis passed.

Enemy became friend once more, and the Ciri-ok-Baks mingled freely with the Arzaacs. The rebel force of Surnum Mentius had been nearly doubled, and there were thousands of other Ciri-ok-Baks in the forests, collecting and preparing for the warpath. These bands could be collected as the advance progressed—together with bands of Arzaacs from the villages. Thus the great advance upon El Dorado would be increased as the column went on its way.

"Phew! That was a mighty near thing," said Dorrie, mopping his brow, when Nelson Lee had a minute's breathing space. "How on earth do you manage these things?"

"We're lucky, Dorrie—that's all," replied Lee, his voice revealing the effects of the strain. "Have you heard anything further of our host? Is he comfortable?"

"I think you'd better go and attend to him," replied Dorrie. "It's a nasty wound, an' poisonin' might easily set in. We've got plenty of antiseptics and things on the air-ship—"

"We shall have to fetch some," interrupted Lee. "Surnum Mentius must live, so that he may become king of Arzacland."

"Meanwhile, you're in full charge of this crowd," said Captain Harry Cane. "By St. Peter, there couldn't be a better man for the job! I've heard a lot about you, Mr. Lee, at one time and another, but you've given me a big surprise to-night. The way you handled those bearded brutes was just marvellous. You reminded me of a little destroyer daring destruction against a whole fleet of battleships."

"I am not satisfied that the Ciri-ok-Baks turned against the Arzaacs merely because of the airship," said Nelson Lee, frowning. "There's no doubt in my mind that Zingrave has known for months of this friendly spirit; and he has had Arzac spies in the Ciri-ok-Bak country, inciting the natives to rise—poisoning their minds against Surnum Mentius. That, I think, is the true explanation of this sudden and unexpected rising."

"Well, it's all over now—the Ciri-ok-Baks are on our side," said Captain Cane. "There's no danger of treachery. They'll be as faithful as dogs; and when it comes to fighting, they're indomitable."

They went out into the open square; for Lee was determined to send somebody at once to the airship. The vessel was lying only two miles outside the city, and medicinal supplies could soon be obtained. Surnum Mentius was badly hurt, and he needed careful attention.

"Rain!" said Dorrie.

A raindrop had splashed on the back of his hand—a drop nearly as big as a saucer. It splashed with a loud plop, and it was distinctly warm to the touch. Dorrie looked up into the sky, and it was as black as ink.

All about the Arzac soldiers were active. Their new allies were obeying orders meekly, for they recognised themselves as the inferiors of the Arzaacs. They were indeed like enormous overgrown children.

Torches were flaring everywhere, and the air was filled with the tumult of voices. Boyish shouts sounded, and in a moment Lee and Dorrie were surrounded by a crowd of Removites and Fourth Farmers.

"Bravo, Mr. Lee!" shouted Handforth enthusiastically.

"I want a word with you, young man," said Lee, his face becoming stern. "Are you hurt?"

"Who? Me, sir?"

"Yes, you!"

"Why should I be hurt, sir?"

"It's little short of a miracle that your brains were not dashed out, Handforth," said Lee. "What madness possessed you to leap out from that balcony upon the shoulders of—"

"Here, steady, sir!" broke in Handforth indignantly. "Cheese it! I'm the chap who saved the whole situation!"

"What!" ejaculated Lee.

"Well, isn't it a fact, sir?" demanded Handforth, who generally liked to take all the credit for himself. "I jumped on that boulder's back; you shot him, and the rest of the brutes were so scared that they made no attack. I'll admit that you talked to 'em like a Dutch uncle; but you can't deny that I started the whole thing. I'm the chap who saved the situation."

Nelson Lee's eyes twinkled.

"In that case, Handforth, we'll say no more about it," he said dryly. "Well done! It was you who turned the tide at the crucial moment."

Handforth spun round, his eyes gleaming.

"There you are, you chaps!" he roared. "What did I say? I don't want to boast—"

But he got no chance of boasting, for his voice was drowned in a roar of laughter.

In the Grip of the Gale!

WILLIAM NAPOLEON BROWNE and Horace Stevens of the Fifth volunteered to hurry out to the airship for the necessary surgical and medicinal supplies. When they came back they reported that everything was well. No Ciri-ok-Baks had been seen, and the Sky Wanderer was resting quietly at her moorings. The two seniors were drenched with perspiration, for the night had become hotter than ever.

Yet this had no effect upon the Arzac soldiers. Preparations were going on apace—in readiness for the great advance which was to begin at dawn.

The Ciri-ok-Baks, now easy enough to handle, retreated to the open country outside the city, where they made a rough camp. From this point they would join the main columns with the first coming of daylight.

Nelson Lee made a good job of Surnum Mentius' wound. He cleaned it, dressed it, and the Arzac overlord was made comfortable.

"You are a man of many skills, my friend Lee," said the patient, with a weak smile. "I leave my soldiers in your hands with confidence. I know that you will achieve a great victory. But there are many difficulties to be overcome, many dangers to face. The country through which you must march is an enemy in itself."

Later, when Lee was conferring with the Arzac officers, he heard more of the difficulties of the country.

El Dorado was a hundred miles distant; and sixty miles had to be covered before the great protective wall was reached. Sixty miles of wilderness, of tangled forest, of fever-ridden swamp.

There were treacherous valleys to negotiate, snake-infested jungles to penetrate.

"And in many of these deeper valleys, I understand, there are strange monsters," said Cane. "You've encountered some of the brutes, I understand? We shall do well to avoid such danger spots. It's only fair that you should know, Lee, that this march is going to be hectic."

"We must go on," said Lee quietly. "Either Zingrave attacks us, or we attack Zingrave. The advantage is always with the man who forces the pace."

Some of the officers hinted at further dangers; but they were vague and uneasy. It was as though they did not like to give voice to all they knew. But not one of them expressed a desire to remain behind. Peril or no peril, they were eager for the great march.

"I wonder why those fellows were so reluctant to talk of the dangers?" asked Dorrie, when he and Lee and Cane went out on a balcony for a breath of air. "They seem scared of something, an', judgin' by what I've seen of Arzacland, they're not scared without reason."

"No doubt Zingrave himself has refrained from sending a punitive expedition to Az because of those self-same dangers," said Nelson Lee shrewdly. "The inhabitants of this part of the country are in closer touch with the dangers, whatever they are. But in El Dorado the men, the soldiers, are more civilised. They are townsmen, and I suspect there has been much opposition to Zingrave's plans. Well, all the better. If we can catch him unprepared, then—"

Craash!

Lee was interrupted by a shattering, ear-splitting detonation which seemed to rock the entire city. It was like the explosion of an ammunition dump—an appalling, nerve-shattering concussion. And in the same second the entire

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city was illuminated by a vast sheet of flame which filled the sky from horizon to horizon.

"Good glory!" gasped Dorrie, blinking. "What was that?"

His ears were singing, and below he saw men running madly in all directions.

"It was thunder," said Captain Harry Cane calmly.

"What!"

"Look!" said the other.

Rain was falling heavily now—the same enormous drops, splashing down in myriads. Nelson Lee had guessed the truth, but never in all his life had he heard such a clap of thunder as that. It took a great deal to startle him, but he was startled now. He had experienced storms in the tropical jungles of the Amazon; they were violent enough, but could not be compared with the storms in the southern region of Arzacland.

"Fortunately they are very rare," said Cane, staring up at the sky. "I'll admit that this one is the worst I've ever heard. Generally the infernal storm gets right overhead, and then it breaks with a devastating noise. Sometimes there's a great wind, but it generally comes a bit later."

"Wind?" broke in Lee sharply.

"Oh, terrific!" said Cane, nodding. "Sometimes it lays the whole town flat—"

But his voice was drowned now by the noise of the rain. In the space of seconds, it had increased to a downpour which was well-nigh incredible. Lee and Dorrie could not see three yards in front of them. The square had vanished; every torchlight had been blotted out. Utter darkness had swept down upon the city of Az. The rain was like a solid flood.

Nelson Lee's first thoughts, and Lord Dorrimore's, too, were for the airship. For over an hour past, Lee had been expecting a thunderstorm; but he had visualised just an ordinary tropical downpour. This terrible storm alarmed him.

He dragged Dorrie into the building, and Cane followed. In a great chamber, where lights were still burning, all the St. Frank's boys were gathered—to say nothing of Professor Tucker, the science master, who was as helpless as a baby. Mr. Wilkes, normally the Housemaster of the Ancient House, was trying to keep order.

"Is everybody here?" sang out Lee sharply.

"Yes, sir," went up a yell.

"Then come at once—we're going to the airship!" went on the detective. "This storm might be dangerous—and you boys know something, at least, of the airship's controls. Are you game to run for it through the rain?"

They answered in chorus, eager and excited.

The night was still young—in fact, the evening was not far advanced—and Lee had already come to the conclusion that it would be a good thing for the boys to spend a night on the airship, in their own dormitories. They needed a change of clothing, too, so that they would be fully equipped for the big march. Also, there were weapons and ammunition to be obtained. A return to the airship was necessary—so they might as well go now as later on.

Craaaaaaash!

There came another clap of thunder, which shook the building to its foundations, and which even seemed to set the walls rocking. A dazzling brilliance filled the chamber, half-blinding everybody who stood there.

"Crumbs!" muttered Reggie Pitt. "I'm scared! I don't mind admitting it, either. It's not like a storm at all."

The boys were glad enough to get out of the building, even though they were soon soaked to the skin. For within the building they had had the feeling that the walls were about to crash in upon them.

So heavy was the rain that it beat down upon their shoulders like something solid, pressing them to the ground, and making walking difficult.

Underfoot, floods were flowing, swirling round their feet.

"Keep together!" shouted Lee, above the uproar. "Better hold one another, to make sure that none of you stray."

In that darkness it was a wise policy, and they plunged on, out of the town. There could be no mistaking the direction, for the country was open, and, more than once, as the sky was flooded with blinding lightning, the airship could be seen in the near distance—resting calmly, majestically.

Before the journey was half completed, the boys were wading through deep floods, which dragged at them, seeking to swirl them away. But they pressed on, and the rain, hurtling down upon them, drowned every other sound. Any kind of conversation was impossible.

As they slowly advanced nearer the airship, a sudden thought occurred to Nelson Lee, and he turned to Captain Hurricane, who had accompanied them. Shouting at the top of his voice, he asked Cane to return, and bring out with him at least two hundred Arzaacs. The airman agreed readily enough, and set off back to the city.

Next Week's Star Number

"THE BOY FROM THE UNDERWORLD!"

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For Lee had suddenly thought of the wind. There was no wind yet, but it might come at any moment. He would set the boys to work with the ropes, staking the airship down; but the White Giants would be able to do that work much better. The grapnel claws were effective, but in such a storm as this—

At last they got aboard. Those who had gone first—Mr. Stokes and the seniors—had seen the approaching boys in the lightning flashes. They were ready. The ladders were down.

Under the shelter of the great hull the boys were out of the rain; but they could hear it drumming on the fabric sides in a mighty, ear-splitting tattoo. Under the airship, the flood water was running deeply. But still the air remained absolutely still, and there was something oppressive and terrifying in that rain-laden atmosphere.

Nelson Lee waited until the last of his companions had gone up the ladder. Then he went up himself, and found the entrance deck gleaming with lights. Passing into the great central lounge, he found the boys there, each standing in a pool of water. They all looked like drowned rats.

"By the Lord Harry!" exclaimed Lord Dorrimore. "It's like coming suddenly back to realities. The carpets, the furniture, the electric lights. She's weathering the storm well, Lee. She'll come to no harm."

"I'm taking nothing for granted," replied Lee. "Boys, there's work for you to do—hard work!"

"We're ready, sir!" went up a chorus.

"Fortunately, we are all aboard—the entire party of us," continued Lee. "Soon, help will arrive from the city. Captain Cane is bringing two hundred men. But until then we must do what we can. The ground beneath us is softening fast, and I do not trust the grapnel claws. We have a plentiful supply of rope aboard, and—"

"Listen, sir!" interrupted Nipper.

On the instant they were all silent. And above the thunderous tattoo of the rain, they heard something else. It was a whining, screaming shriek, thin at first, but swelling in volume.

"The wind!" shouted someone.

Nelson Lee made a dash for the control-room, but before he could reach the corridor, the hurricane struck the Sky Wanderer broadside. She heeled over, rocked, and in a flash the grapnel claws were dragged out of the ground.

A yell went up from the boys. The lounge heeled over, and they were sent hurtling in all directions. Mercifully, they could not see what had happened; but the airship had been picked up like a feather, and in the grip of a two hundred miles an hour gale she was hurtling over the forest, a plaything of the storm!

(The St. Frank's adventurers are in a perilous plight now! What will happen to them? Don't miss next week's big-thrill instalment of this great serial.)

THE FAGS' FORM-MASTER!

(Continued from page 22.)

"N-no," faltered Tom Merry.

"You didn't let me hear a word or a whisper of it?"

"N-no."

"Then what do you mean by it?" demanded Mr. Poinsett, in a voice that would have rung for a mile or so on his wide ranchlands in Arizona, and which now awoke every echo in the old quadrangle at St. Jim's.

Tom Merry was silent. He was sorry to see his uncle angry, and he began to feel that he had perhaps neglected the old gentleman, as he said, in not asking him for help.

"I'm sorry, uncle," he faltered.

Mr. Poinsett's face broke into a smile. His eyes twinkled merrily.

"It's all right, Tom," he said, laughing. "I'm not really angry, you know. I felt a bit mad when I first heard it, that's all. I should never have known anything about it if your friend Lowther had not written. I'm going to buy that young fellow the best pony that money can buy in England, sir."

Tom Merry looked relieved.

"I'm glad you're not waxy, uncle. I—I suppose I ought to have told you, but—but I—I didn't want to look like a cadding, poor relation."

"You'll never be a poor relation, Tom," said Mr. Poinsett quietly and kindly. "You are as much to me as if you were my own son. And you are my heir—heir to ten times as much money as you have lost, my boy. I had intended to come over and see the Old Country again, and when I had Lowther's letter I determined to come at once. I'm here to take you in hand, my lad."

"Oh, uncle!"

"I'm going to settle enough cash, sir, upon you to keep you on your feet," said Mr. Poinsett. "I shall look after Miss Fawcett, too, but without allowing her the control of the money. She might invest it again, you know." He smiled. "Do you want to come back to St. Jim's, Tom?"

Tom Merry's eyes danced.

"Oh, uncle!"

That was all he could say. But his tone, and the look upon his flushing face, was eloquent of what he felt.

Mr. Poinsett smiled.

"You haven't begged my pardon yet, Tom."

"For what, uncle?"

"For not cabling me instantly you lost your cash."

Tom Merry smiled.

"I beg your pardon, uncle."

"I guess that's all serene, then," said Mr. Poinsett, satisfied. "Now I'm taking you in hand. I expected to find you starving in some goldarned slum in London, instead of watching a prizefight in a Form-room here. I've talked to the Head already, and it's arranged. You start again to-morrow morning in your old Form at the school."

"Oh, uncle!"

"You like the idea?"

"Oh, it's ripping! It's splendid! What a row the fellows will make when I tell them," said Tom Merry, his eyes dancing.

"You'll stay here a bit, uncle? You're going to let us see you now you're in England?" Tom Merry exclaimed eagerly.

The rancher laughed.

"Dr. Holmes has asked me to stay the night," he said.

"Hurrah! We'll have a celebration—a feed in the study in the old style! You'll come, uncle?"

"I guess I will! But you mustn't feed me up to the chin. Dr. Holmes has asked me to dine with him."

"Never mind. Tea comes before dinner, and we shall have first innings," said Tom Merry, laughing.

"Now you show me round the place for a bit," said the rancher. "I guess it's an interesting old show, Tom."

And Tom Merry, in the gayest humour in the world, showed his uncle up and down the old school till the time for the dismissal of classes came, and the boys poured out in the quadrangle in shouting crowds.

"Manners! Lowther! Blake! Gussy! Figgins! Kerr! Kangy! Here you are! Here's my uncle! I'm coming back to the Shell!"

"Hurrah!"

"Jumping crackers!" exclaimed Lowther.

"Great Scott! You wemabah me, I suppose, sir?" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, shaking hands with the rancher.

"I remember the way you rode that bucking broncho, and the way you came off it, head first!" grinned the rancher.

"That's Gus all over," chimed in Wally. "You remember me, sir—what? I was the fellow who picked Gussy up."

"And me, sir?" said Skimpole, blinking at the rancher through his big spectacles. "Some day, sir, I hope to come out to Arizona again and psycho-analyse some of your cow-boys for the 'Psycho-Analytical Bi-Weekly Review,' to which I hope to contribute—"

"Oh, ring off, Skinny!"

"Yaas, wathah! I wufuse to allow Mr. Poinsett to be psycho-anised—I mean, anised-balled—weally, I mean—"

"Never mind what you mean, Gussy," grinned Tom Merry. "Write Mr. Poinsett a postcard."

"My word!" said Fatty Wynn. "We're going to stand a jolly good feed to celebrate this. A jolly good feed is the only way to show how much we feel what we feel—and all that! Where shall we have the feed, Tom Merry?"

"In my study, Fatty," said Tom Merry, laughing.

"Right-ho!"

"Yaas, wathah! I'll come with you to the tuckshop and help ordah the things," said Arthur Augustus. "I've just weived a fivah from my governah, and—"

"Come on, Gussy!"

"Oh, good!" exclaimed Mr. Poinsett, his frozen face beaming with pleasure. "Have all the lads I know, Tom—all who came to visit me on the ranch, and Buck Finn, too, who came back to St. Jim's with you. Let them all come!"

"Yes, rather!" said Tom Merry.

"Attaboy!" murmured Wally D'Arcy, too quietly for Mr. Poinsett to hear. "I'll bring Curly and Jameson—"

"Weally, Wally—"

"Shut up, Gus!" said Wally, as Mr. Poinsett moved away towards the House with Tom Merry and his friends. "I ask you—is old Poinsett a trump, or is he a trump?"

"Wally, if you use even one of your hogwid Amewicanisms in Mr. Poinsett's pwesence, I shall have no alternative but to box your ears!"

"You're telling me?"

They all came, and Wally came, too. But perhaps in atonement for the trouble he had caused Tom Merry, Wally was very, very good.

All the juniors were happy, and Tom Merry, needless to say, was the gayest of the gay. Form-master of the fags was a dream of the past; and Tom Merry was his old self again.

And for long, long afterwards Tom Merry remembered that as the happiest day of his life.

THE END.

(Watch out, chums, for next week's star story of the chums of St. Jim's, entitled "THE BOY FROM THE UNDERWORLD!" It features an amazing newcomer to the school in Joe, a pickpocket!)

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