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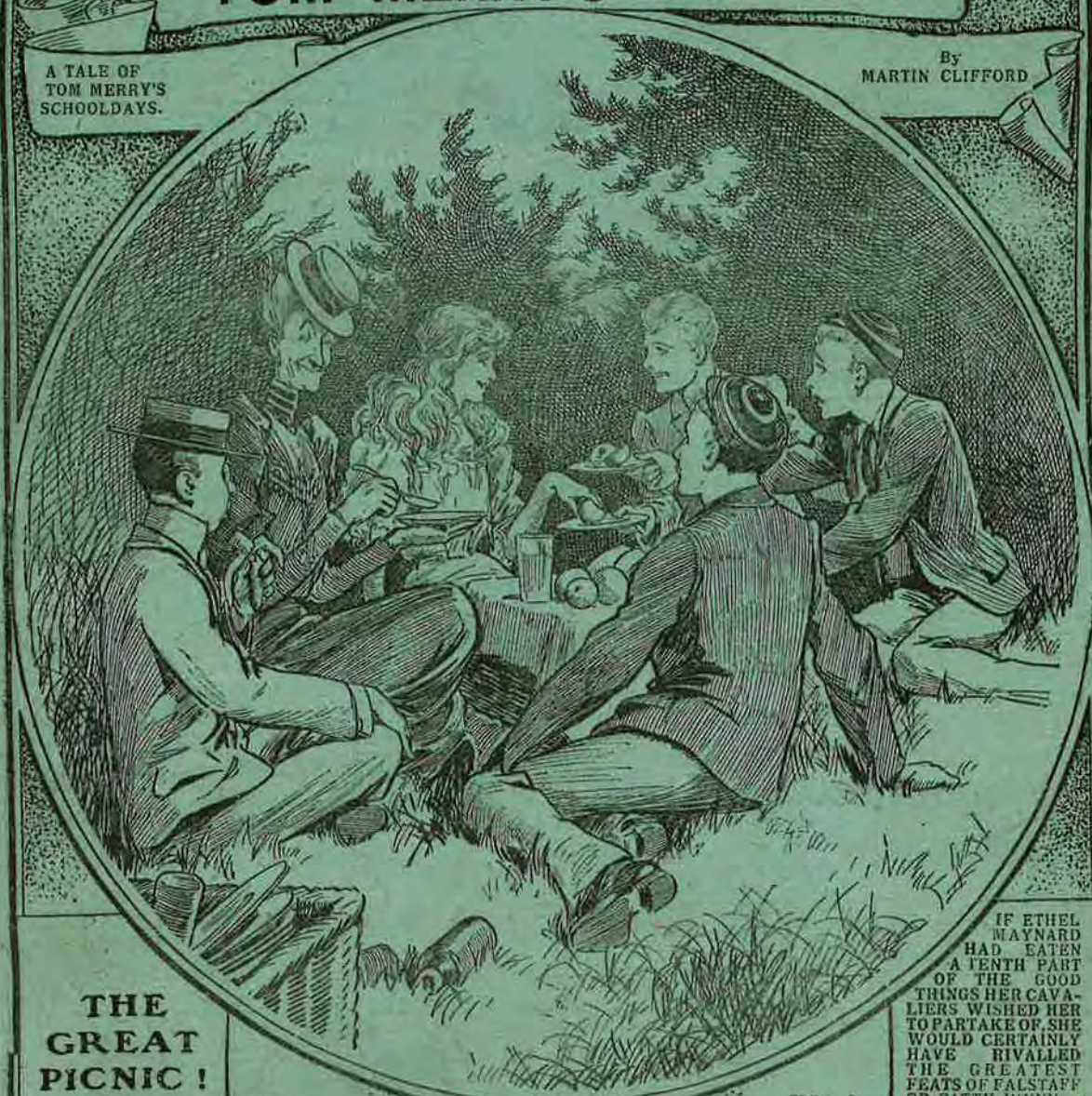
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TOM MERRY'S DAY OUT.

A TALE OF
TOM MERRY'S
SCHOOLDAYS.

By
MARTIN CLIFFORD



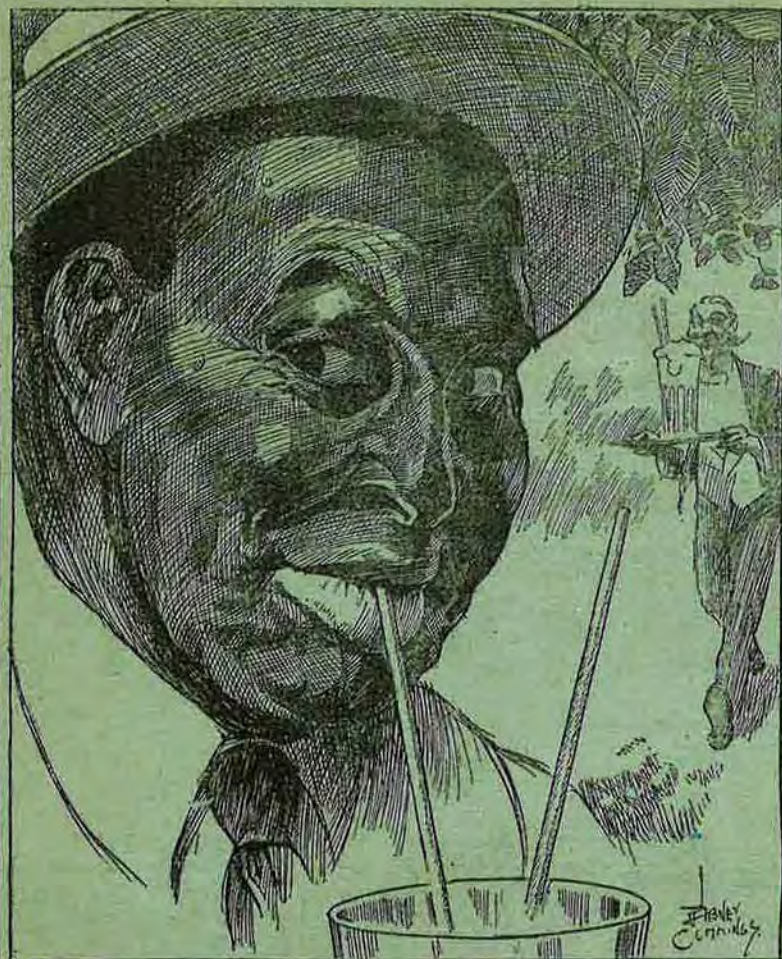
THE
GREAT
PICNIC !

(See page 12.)

NO. 20.

VOL. I.

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LIERS WISHED HER
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WOULD CERTAINLY
HAVE RIVALLED
THE GREATEST
FEATS OF FALSTAFF
OR FATTY WYNN. G



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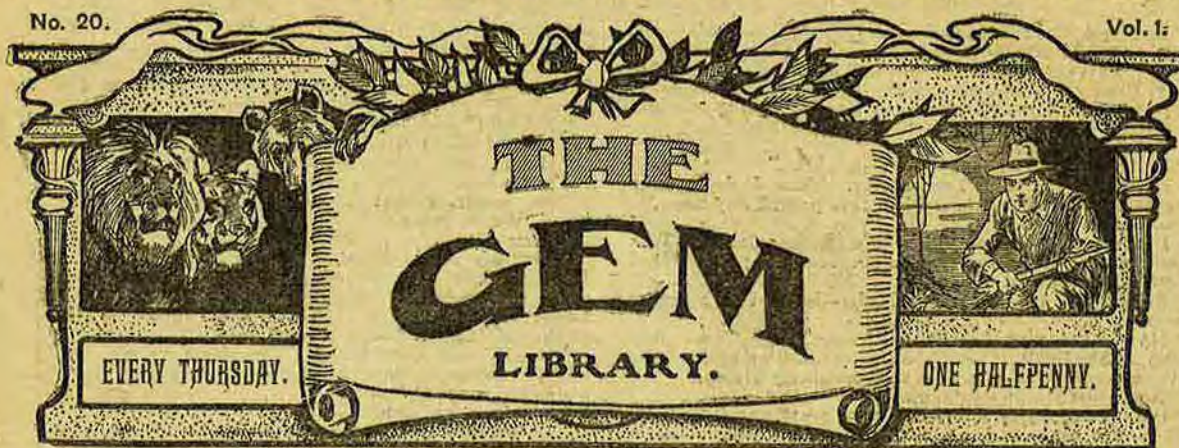
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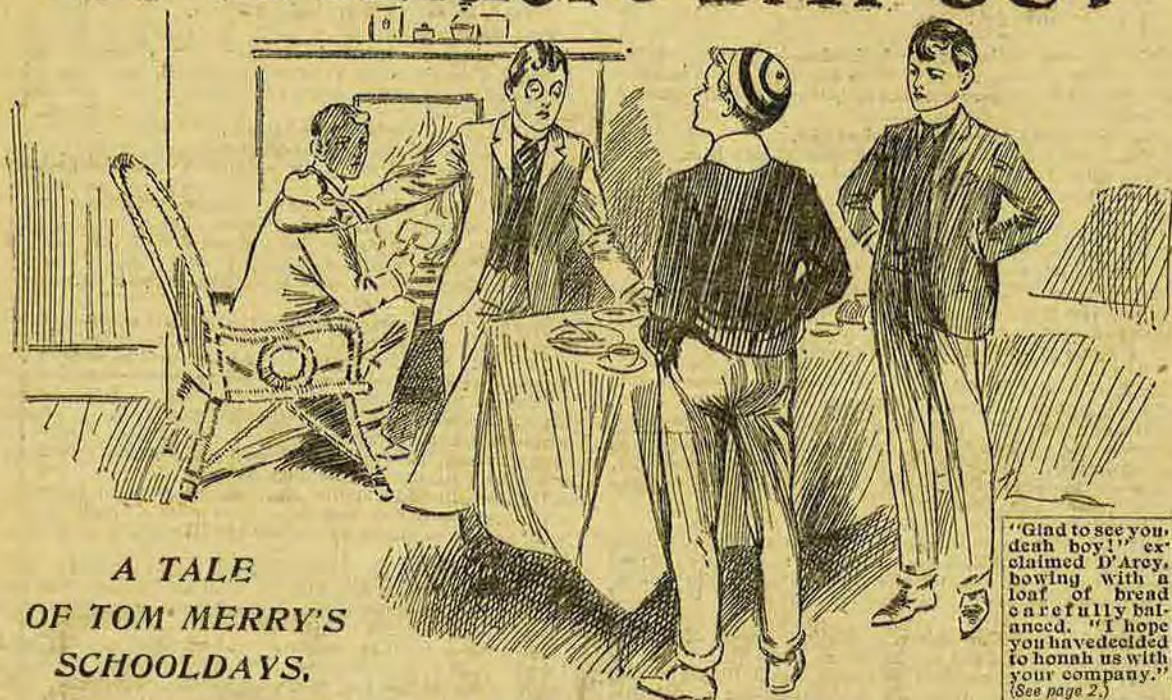
No. 20.

Vol. 1:



A COMPLETE STORY FOR EVERYONE, AND EVERY STORY A GEM!

TOM MERRY'S DAY OUT.



A TALE
OF TOM MERRY'S
SCHOOLDAYS.

By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

CHAPTER I.

Founder's Day at St. Jim's.

TOM MERRY was sitting on the table, his hands thrust deep into his trousers pockets, and a frown of portentous thoughtfulness on his brow, when Manners came into the study.

"Hallo, Tom!" said Manners, staring at him.

It was not usual to see Tom Merry, the merriest junior in the School House at St. Jim's, so deeply immersed in reflection.

"Hallo, Tom! Are you trying to think out some awfully deep problem in mathematics, or have you got a pain in your gear-box?"

Tom gave a grunt.

"I'm trying to think out a plan for to-morrow."

"Ah!" said Manners, looking serious at once. "Founder's Day!"

"Yes, old kid. We shall have a whole holiday to ourselves,

and we must make the best of it. We want to do something really ripping—something that will take the shine out of these New House bounders. What shall it be?"

Manners looked properly solemn and thoughtful.

Founder's Day at St. Jim's was always a whole holiday, and, as it came but once a year, the juniors naturally wanted to make the most of it. For some time past the approach of Founder's Day had caused a good deal of excitement in both houses at St. Jim's, and many of the youngsters had their plans for the day settled a long way ahead.

But the Terrible Two of the School House had not yet made up their minds.

"There's the cricket," said Manners.

Tom Merry shook his head.

"We can have cricket any half-holiday," he said. "We get a whole holiday only once in a blue moon. On a special occasion like Founder's Day we have to do something special."

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"Figgins & Co. are going it pretty strong," said Manners, referring to the famous trio who were the leaders of the New House juniors in all their alarms and excursions against the School House. "Those New House bouncers know how to do things in style, Tom. Figgins and Kerr are going on their motor-bikes for a whole day out."

"What about Fatty Wynn?"

"He's going in a trailer behind Figg's bike."

"That's jolly!" said Tom Merry. "But I don't envy Figgins if his motor bursts and he has to pedal Fatty home."

Manners chuckled.

"I don't know what Study No. 6 are doing," Tom remarked. "But I fancy they've got something on. What are we going to do, Manners?"

"Blessed if I know. You're leader—lead," said Manners tersely.

"My old governess has written to me," said Tom reflectively. "She thinks it would be a good idea to go and picnic in the grounds at Laurel Villa at Huckleberry Heath."

"Not a bad idea," said Manners.

"Only Huckleberry Heath is a very great way from here, and we don't want to spend Founder's Day buzzing about in railway-trains," said Tom.

"That's so."

"I wish I knew what Blake—Hullo! Talk of angels." Jack Blake, of Study No. 6 in the School House, put his cheery face in at the door.

"Hullo! I see you're at home," he remarked. "I say, what are you chaps doing to-morrow?"

"Ask us another," said Tom.

"Haven't settled yet?"

"No."

"Good!" said Blake, with a look of satisfaction. "What do you say to joining forces with us for the day? That will make five, and, as there are six seats, that will leave one for the lady."

Tom Merry and Manners stared at him.

"What are you talking about?" demanded Tom. "Six seats in what? Are you thinking of having a brake out?"

"Not good enough," said Manners, with a shake of the head.

"A brake!" exclaimed the Fourth-Former scornfully.

"Who's talking about brakes?"

"Well, what's the idea, then?"

"A motor-car," said Blake—"a real, live, giddy motor-car! What do you think of that, my kids? What do you say to a day out on a motor-car?"

Tom Merry jumped off the table excitedly.

"Ripping!"

Manners looked suspicious.

"I say, you're not trotting, Blake?"

"Honour bright!" exclaimed Blake. "It's D'Arcy's motor-car—at all events, his governor's. Arthur Augustus has persuaded his governor to let him have it for the day. There's a chauffeur coming, too. But you know how to drive a motor, don't you, Tom?"

"Rather!" said Tom.

"That's what I was thinking. We'll shove the chauffeur into some ditch, and have the car out all on our own. These governors at home are ridiculous old chaps," said Blake. "They think we can't take care of ourselves. Which, of course, is—"

"Absurd!" said Tom Merry. "It's jolly decent of Gussy's governor, and it's jolly of you to ask us, Blake."

"My dear chap, we shall be happy," said Blake, with a wave of the hand. "We can't have any of our usual little rows on Founder's Day—it's not the thing—and so we may as well chum up, as we can't slog one another."

"Jolly good idea!"

"As for exes., we whip round and contribute equally, and appoint a treasurer to expend the cash. That's agreeable?"

"To a T."

"All right, then. Come along to Study Six, and we'll jaw it over."

Willingly enough the Terrible Two accepted that invitation to Study No. 6.

Herries and D'Arcy, Blake's chums, were there, getting tea ready. D'Arcy was laying the table, and Herries was toasting muffins and making tea. He looked up with a really beautiful crimson countenance to nod a welcome to the visitors. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy had a loaf in one hand and a butter-dish in the other, but that did not prevent him from making a really elegant bow.

"Glad to see you, deah boys!" he exclaimed. "I hope you have decided to hounah us with your company on Founder's Day. I weally think we shall have a wipping time in my governah's motah."

"Oh, yes, they're coming!" said Blake; "and, as Tom Merry can drive, it doesn't matter if anything happens to the

chauffeur. We shall make a nice little party, and I fancy we shall put Figgins & Co. in the shade this time."

"Yaas, wathah," said Arthur Augustus, with much satisfaction; "especially as we shall have a lady in the party, deah boys."

"My hat!" said Manners. "Who's the lady? You're not thinking of taking Mrs. Mimms, the house dame, are you?"

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled Blake. "I can fancy Gussy taking the house dame out for a ride."

"Oh, weally, Blake! Certainly not, Mannahs. What an idea! We are going to call at Cwessy Lodge for my cousin."

"Your cousin?"

"Yes, my cousin Ethel, a weally wipping girl," said D'Arcy. "She motahs, and knows all about exhaust tubes and carburettors and things. My idea was to get to Cwessy Lodge about lunch-time, and take Ethel in the car for the afternoon. Cwessy Lodge is about eighty miles from here."

"Good!" said Tom Merry. "We must all put our best bibs and tuckers on, then, as there's to be a lady in the party; and mind, you chaps, no larks."

Blake looked solemn.

"Do we ever get up to any larks?" he said reproachfully. "We'll be as serious and solemn as a funeral. When is the car to arrive, Gussy?"

"It will be here at eight o'clock in the mornin'," said Arthur Augustus.

"Good. I say," said Tom Merry, "which direction does your baronial hall lie in?"

"Stwaight towards Brighton ffrom here," said D'Arcy.

"Then it's on the way to Huckleberry Heath."

"Where on earth's that?" asked Blake.

Tom Merry smiled.

"It's where I come from. My old governess, Miss Fawcett, lives there at Laurel Villa, and she wants me to go down and picnic on the grounds for the holiday. We might do worse, chaps."

"Perhaps she won't want a crowd."

"Oh, that's all right. If I drop her a line to-day she'll have a ripping feed ready. It would be a run of a hundred miles from here, over some of the prettiest country in England. Shall we make that our objective?"

"Yaas, wathah!" exclaimed D'Arcy.

And the chums of Study No. 6 assented.

"I say," exclaimed Tom, stopping with a cup of tea half-way to his lips, "what's that thundering row? Sounds like a motor-bike with a bad cough."

Blake grinned as he stepped to the window and looked out into the sunny quadrangle.

"It's only old Figg trying his motor-bike," he said. "He doesn't look at all happy with it, either."

The juniors crowded to the window. Figgins had mounted his brand-new motor-cycle outside the New House, to give it a run round the quadrangle. Kerr and Fatty Wynn, his trusty chums, had helped him to start, and now they stood watching his progress with anxious looks.

The long-limbed Figgins was usually quite at home on a motor-cycle, but he had put on too great a speed to start with, and in the quadrangle it was not like riding on an open road.

He buzzed along the path across the quad, and looked as if he were going head-first into the wall at the end; but fortunately he turned the cycle upon a flower-bed, and ploughed across it, leaving ruin in his track.

Then the motor-bike seemed to take a fancy into its head for going on a little excursion of its own, and its taste lay in the direction of the Big Side cricket-pitch, where the Sixth Form were at practice in a scratch match.

Pup-pup-pup! Hoot-toot-hoot!

The cricketers looked up from their game in amazement, to see the long-legged chief of the New House juniors bearing down upon them in wild career.

"Hullo!" shouted Kildare, the captain of St. Jim's, who had the ball in his hand, about to bowl. "Where are you coming, Figgins?"

"Get off the ground!" roared Monteith, the head prefect of the New House.

"Stop!"

"Shunt!"

"Shift!"

"Bunk!"

These directions were yelled at Figgins from all sides, but the New House junior dashed right on without a pause.

"Stop!"

"Clear off!"

"I kuk-ka-can't!" gasped Figgins. "The beastly thing's gone wrong, and the brake won't work, and—"

"Clear out of the way!" yelled Kildare.

The fieldsmen scattered, and the motor-cycle tore on across the centre of the pitch, leaving its track on the green turf.

and pup-pup-pup it went on its wild career, Figgins sitting like a statue and clutching the handle-bars.

Littleside was the next spot to be visited. It was crowded with juniors of both houses at practice at the nets, and a yell of alarm went up at the sight of Figgins on his fiery steed.

"Take that brutal thing off, Figgins!"

"Stop, can't you?"

"Take that sniff-box away!"

"I can't!" yelled Figgins desperately—"I can't! Get out of the way, you asses!"

Right on tore the motor-bike. It was really a wonder that Figgins controlled the snorting monster as well as he did and kept his seat as it plunged onward.

He succeeded in turning it again, and went tearing away towards the School House. He was on the gravel path now, and the cycle was whizzing on as if it meant to dash up the stone steps and go into the house.

"My hat!" gasped Blake. "He'll be killed!"

"Jump!" yelled Tom Merry, from the window of Study No. 6. "Jump, Figgy!"

Figgy took no notice. He swerved splendidly and eluded the steps of the School House, and went grinding on over a lawn towards the New House. Kerr and Fatty Wynn were watching him with pale faces.

Gr-r-r-r! Figgins had at last succeeded in stopping the bike. The rear rim brake jammed on, and Figgy jumped to the ground, holding on to the bike, which had very nearly gone over him.

"My word!" gasped Kerr.

"My hat!" said Fatty Wynn.

"Hallo!" said Figgins coolly. "What's the matter with you?"

"Thought you would get your neck broken, that's all!" said the Co.

"What rot!" said Figgins. "It's a very simple matter. Lucky there's no damage done."

"I don't know whether the Head will agree with you when he sees his flower-beds!"

"Oh, blow the flower-beds!" said Figgins. "I don't mind an imposition, and it won't mean anything worse than that, kids. And it's jolly lucky I gave my new bike a trial before we started out to-morrow."

"Yes, rather!" said Fatty Wynn. "Why, I might have been behind it in a trailer! I say, Figgy, I really don't know whether you're safe."

"Oh, that's all right, Fatty," said Figgins reassuringly. "It would take a forty-horse-power cycle to run away with your weight behind it, and mine's only three and a half."

Fatty Wynn sniffed, and said no more.

"Well," said Tom Merry, turning away from the window of Study No. 6, and finishing his muffin—"well, if that's how Figgy is going to enjoy himself to-morrow, I think we shall have a quieter time in Gussy's motor-car."

"Yaas, wathah!" said Arthur Augustus.

CHAPTER 2.

Rival Motorists.

ALL St. Jim's soon knew of the projected expedition of the five juniors. The fact that the Terrible Two were chumming up with Study No. 6 showed that something unusual was afoot, and the School House soon learned what it was, and then the New House came to know.

"Rather rotten!" said Figgins that evening. "We were going to knock 'em with our motor-bike run, and now the bounders have got a grown-up car, and that puts us in the shade."

"They're always up to something!" grumbled Kerr.

"Well, we generally are, too!" grinned Figgins. "I've been thinking whether it wouldn't be possible to take a rise out of those innocent kidlets. Does either of you know the direction they're going in?"

"Rather!" said Kerr. "They're going to call at Gussy's governor's baronial hall for a lady cousin of Gussy's, and then moté on to Huckleberry Heath, the charming spot that Tom Merry comes from."

"And where is D'Arcy's baronial hall?"

"It's called Cressy Lodge, and it's on the road to Brighton."

"My hat!" said Figgins. "That's the way we were going. Kids, we're going to keep an eye on those School House youngsters. That chap Merry actually had the cheek to tell me that if I was killed on my motor-bike he would be glad to bring home the remains in the car, if I liked."

Kerr grinned.

"Yes," he remarked; "and they're going to start very soon after we do, Figgy, and they'll pass us on the road, and chip us no end. It is rotten!"

Figgy's brow contracted.

"H'm!" he said. "They're going to pass us on the road, are they? Perhaps it may happen that they'll start later than they intend."

"How could you fix that?"

"There are ways and means, my son," said Figgins, with a wave of the hand. "Gussy's car is coming in the morning, ain't it?"

"Yes, it's going to be here at eight o'clock."

"His lordship's chauffeur is to be in charge of it?"

"Exactly."

"Suppose when the time came to start the chauffeur was missing," said Figgins daskily. "What price the giddy excursion then?"

The Co. chuckled in chorus.

"But can you fix it, Figgy?"

"Leave it to me," said Figgins. "The School House kids are not going to pass us on the road, that's a dead cert. I think it very likely that when the dear boys are ready to start the chauffeur will be locked up somewhere where they won't find him in a hurry. We shall see what we shall see, my sons!"

Quite unaware of the dark schemes of Figgins & Co., the allies of the School House were joyously making their plans for the day out.

Funds had been pooled, and among the five they raised quite a respectable sum of money, the largest contributions being made by Tom Merry and Arthur Augustus, Tom Merry having just had a fiver from Miss Priscilla Fawcett, and Arthur Augustus being always in plentiful funds.

Tom Merry, who had had a great deal of experience in that line, assumed the role of caterer, and the supply of provisions he laid in seemed sufficient for fifty juniors, rather than five.

But the youngsters had a marvellous stowing capacity at feeding-time, and none of them thought that the hero of the Shell had overdone it.

Then there was the question of the rig-out. Motor-masks and goggles were to come with the car. Even Arthur Augustus was induced to forego his tall-hat for the ride, but he said that occasion might arise upon which he would desire to appear looking well-dressed, and so room had to be found for a hat-box with Gussy's silk topper in it.

"You can take the topper," said Blake severely. "I don't want to bring down your grey hair with sorrow to the crematorium, and so I won't part you from your topper; but I bar any boxes of fancy waistcoats, and you are strictly limited to one eyeglass."

"Oh, weally, Blake!" said Arthur Augustus.

"Yes, weally, fathend!" said Blake.

"You know, accidents may happen," said Arthur Augustus persuasively. "Suppose I got some mud on my waistcoat, and hadn't a clean one to change into?"

"Of course, that would be awful!" admitted Blake.

"Then I simply must have some clean collars, and—"

"Oh, let him put in anything he likes," said Tom Merry. "It will be easy enough to sling it out on the road when we're started."

"Ha, ha! Right-ho, Adolphus! You can pack in your whole giddy wardrobe if you like, and we'll pave the road to Huckleberry Heath with high collars and fancy waistcoats."

"Oh, weally, Tom Mewwy—"

"The most important thing," said Tom, "is the grub. That's all arranged, and I really don't think we shall go hungry. Have we got sufficient cutlery to go round? Miss Fawcett will provide everything we want at Huckleberry Heath, but we shall require two or three feeds before we arrive there. It's astonishing what an appetite the open air gives you."

"The knives are all right," said Blake. "We're rather weak in forks and spoons, but I've borrowed some out of Kildare's study. I forgot to ask him, but I'll mention it when we get back. Then there's old Darrel's spirit-stove. That will come in handy."

"Has Darrel lent it to you?"

"Yes. He doesn't know anything about it yet, but he has. I looked into his study, and borrowed it."

"As for crockeryware—"

"We're rather strong in that line," said Blake, "and I've borrowed a lot of things in the Fourth Form. I think we shall do pretty well. Hallo! Come in!"

The consultation was taking place in Study No. 6 just before bedtime. There had come a light tap at the door, and in response to Blake's invitation, Mr. Railton, the housemaster of the School House, walked in. He gave the boys a genial nod.

"I hear that you youngsters are going for a run in a motor-car to-morrow," the housemaster remarked.

"Yes, sir," said Tom Merry. "Founder's day, you know, sir. We're going to have a day out."

"H'm! Yes, that is a good idea in some respects," said

Mr. Railton, eyeing Tom in a very doubtful manner. "But an excursion in a motor-car is a little rash for lads of your age, unless in charge of a person of proper age and experience."

"Oh, I am going to look after these youngsters, sir," said Tom loftily. "Blake and the rest won't come to any harm while I'm with them, sir."

"Who are you calling youngsters?" demanded Blake, getting red in the face.

"You Fourth-Form kids!" said Tom.

"How much older are you than I am, you bouncer?"

"Two months and seven days!" said Tom severely.

"Ahem!" said Mr. Railton, coughing. "So you are going to look after the Fourth Formers, are you, Merry?"

"Yes, sir."

"And who is going to look after you?"

"Me, sir?" stammered Tom, a little taken aback by the question, at which the chums of Study No. 6 grinned joyously.

"Yes, you, Merry. From my experience of you, I shall be surprised if you do not get into quite as much mischief as any boy in the Fourth Form."

"Oh, sir!" said Tom reproachfully.

"And so—" said the housemaster.

"There will be the chauffeur," said Arthur Augustus. "He is quite a respectable man, and very steady and solemn, and I think my governor will have instructed him to keep an eye on us, sir."

"Ah, that alters the case," said Mr. Railton. "If the car is in charge of a competent chauffeur, there is no reason why you should not have a safe and enjoyable run."

Tom Merry breathed again. For the moment he had feared that the projected expedition was to be tabooed, but Gussy's explanation had saved the situation.

"I hope you will enjoy yourselves, my lads!" said Mr. Railton. "Good-night!"

"Good-night, sir, and thank you!" said the juniors, in chorus.

The housemaster quitted the study.

"Good old Aubrey!" exclaimed Tom Merry, slapping Arthur Augustus on the back with a force that made him drop his monode. "You've saved us!"

"I wish you would not be so dweadfully wuff, Tom Mewwy!"

"But, I say," said Blake dismally, "what we said to Railton amounts to a promise. We can't get rid of the shover on the road, as we thought of, now."

Tom Merry nodded.

"No, I suppose not. But perhaps he may break his leg, or something," he said hopefully.

The juniors went to bed filled with joyful anticipations of the morrow.

Tom Merry was first out of bed in the Shell dormitory in the morning. A bright and sunny dawn was shining in at the tall windows, and the heart of the hero of the Shell rejoiced within him.

"Wake up, Manners!"

Manners snored. Tom stepped to his bed and jerked off the bedclothes. Manners started and shivered.

"Get up, lazybones!"

"Gr-r-r-r!" said Manners, who wanted a little more sleep.

"It ain't time yet. Lemme alone!"

Tom picked up his sponge and dipped it into his water-jug.

"Are you going to get up, Manners?"

"Ye-es!" gasped Manners. And he scrambled out of bed. He knew what was coming if he remained there.

The chums were soon dressed. The rising-bell had not yet gone, and the Terrible Two felt correspondingly virtuous as they gazed at the long line of beds tenanted by slumbering forms.

"There's a shocking lot of laziness goes on in this school," said Tom. "The Fourth Form are not stirring yet."

"Shocking!" said Manners. "Just like those little pigs to stick in bed till the last possible moment! What are you grinning at?"

"Nothing. Let's go and see that Blake doesn't oversleep himself. As we're so chummy now, it's only friendly to do him a good turn!"

Manners chuckled.

"Right-ho! Take your sponge!"

The Terrible Two made their way to the dormitory where the Fourth Form slept, and where Study 6 were still happy in the arms of Morpheus, unconscious of the kind intentions of their new allies.

Tom Merry looked into the dormitory. A sound of heavy breathing mingled with snores greeted him. Not one of the Fourth-Formers was awake yet.

"Lucky we thought of giving them a call," said Tom. The lazy bouncers might have slept on till noon if we hadn't

been so thoughtful. Will you wake up Gussy, Manners, while I attend to Blake?"

"Rather!"

Arthur Augustus was in the midst of a blissful dream, in which he fancied himself clad in a waistcoat containing twice as many colours as the rainbow, when he was suddenly startled from the joyful vision by the bedclothes being jerked off him.

He sat up, rubbing his eyes.

"Oh, weally—wooroo!"

A wet sponge squelched in his face. He gave a yell and hopped out of bed. At the same time there came a roar from Blake, who had been awakened in the same gentle way. Startled by the noise, Herries sat up in bed.

"Hallo, there, what's the matter?" exclaimed Herries.

"What are you making all that giddy noise about? I—gr-r-r-rooh!"

Tom Merry squeezed his sponge over the head of Herries.

"Gr-r-r-r—you beast!"

"Ha, ha, ha! Is that what you call gratitude? We came along to wake you, because we thought you might oversleep yourself."

"This outwage is weally inexcusable!" shouted Arthur Augustus. "Tom Mewwy, I no longah wegard you as a friend!"

"Oh, don't say that!" exclaimed Tom Merry, falling upon D'Arcy's neck and clasping him affectionately, and sobbing violently on his shoulder. "Don't say those cruel words, Gussy!"

"Let me go, you boundah!"

"Oh, don't be so cruel, Aubrey! Don't be so harsh. Adolphus. Don't—"

"You're tweeding on my toes," wailed the unhappy D'Arcy. "You wuff bwute, let me go, or I shall get angry and stwike you!"

Tom Merry released the swell of the School House so suddenly that Arthur Augustus sat down on the floor with a shock.

"Let's get out, Manners," said Tom. "D'Arcy is getting angry, as he is going to stwike us. Let's bunk before we get damaged."

And the Terrible Two rushed in alarm from the dormitory. Blake grinned. The rising-bell began to clang just then, so the Fourth-Formers had not lost much sleep.

"We may as well get dweased, I suppose," said D'Arcy, getting upon his feet again. "I think Tom Mewwy's taste for pwaetical jokes is most wepwehensible, and some day I shall lose my tempah and do somethin' weally violent."

The chums of Study No. 6 were first down of the Fourth thanks to Tom Merry's thoughtfulness in awakening them.

"Thanks awfully, Merry," said Blake, as they met at breakfast. "We'll do as much for you and Manners some time!"

And Blake said that in an extremely significant way.

CHAPTER 3.

The Start.

BREAKFAST was a free-and-easy meal at St. Jim's on Founder's Day. The boys stayed as long as they liked, as there were no lessons. But the five comrades did not linger long. The snorting of a motor-car in the quadrangle called them out.

"That's my governor's car, dear boys!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus. And the excursionists rushed out to view the vehicle in which they were to spend their day out.

It was indeed the car belonging to D'Arcy's "governah." It was a splendid Daimler, six-seated, and of the most luxurious construction throughout, and had cost Lord Eastwood well over a thousand guineas. The chauffeur had brought it to a halt outside the School House. He touched his cap to D'Arcy, greatly impressing thereby the crowd of juniors who were gathered round to look at the car.

"How do you do, James?" said D'Arcy affably. "Any message from the governor?"

"Only that I am not to leave the car, sir, all the time that the excursion lasts, sir," said James.

"That's just like my governor," said D'Arcy. "He thinks we don't know how to take care of ourselves. We don't want to bothah you so much, James. Tom Mewwy knows how to dwive a motah."

"Beg pardon, sir, I must obey his lordship's instructions," said the chauffeur, touching his cap again, but evidently as firm as adamant.

"Well, vewy well," said D'Arcy. "What do you think of the motah, chaps?"

"Ripping!" exclaimed his four comrades enthusiastically.

"We shall have a jolly run and a high old time!"

"Yaas, wathah! Let's go and get weady!"

The excursionists were soon busy preparing for the start. The chauffeur descended and stood by the car, much admired for a time by a crowd of small boys, who were soon, however, drawn away by other interests, and the chauffeur and the big car were left alone in their glory. It was just then that Figgins & Co. came along.

"Hallo," said Figgins affably, "you're Lord Eastwood's chauffeur, aren't you?"

"Yes, sir," said James, touching his cap.

"Ah, I thought you were the chap! You're going to take some kids for a run, aren't you? Dr. Holmes is rather anxious about their safety. He's nervous about motor-cars. I suppose you'll see 'em all safe, won't you?"

"Yes, sir," said James, with a smile. "Does Dr. Holmes wish to speak to me?"

"That's what I came to tell you," said Figgins. He jerked his thumb towards the New House. "You'll find him in there."

And Figgins & Co. strolled carelessly on. James, the chauffeur, glanced at his car, hesitating to leave it by itself. Just then Arthur Augustus came out of the School House.

"We shall be ready in a minute or two, James."

"Yes, sir," said James. "Dr. Holmes wants to speak to me, sir. Would you mind keeping an eye on the car while I'm gone, Master Augustus?"

"Certainly, James; it would not be safe to leave it alone, with so many small boys about," said Arthur Augustus.

The ghost of a smile flitted over the chauffeur's stolid face.

"Thank you, sir!"

He walked away towards the New House. D'Arcy rather wondered to see him take that direction, but he concluded that the Head must be there, as James had said that he was going to see him. D'Arcy was not given to reflecting very deeply, except upon the subject of personal attire. He stood by the car now, thinking out the pattern of a new waistcoat, while the chauffeur walked into the porch of the New House.

Figgins gave a chuckle.

"Got him, kids!"

He joined the chauffeur in the porch.

"This way," he said. "Shall I show you the way?"

"Thank you, sir!"

The chauffeur followed Figgins up the stairs, and Figgins politely knocked at a door, and in response to an imaginary "Come in," opened it, and stood aside for James to pass.

James entered the room, cap in hand. He expected to see the form of the doctor, but he was disappointed. He saw nothing round him but bare walls and old boxes. There were two windows in the room, both high up out of reach. James looked round in amazement, and was still more amazed when the door shut sharply behind him, and he heard a key click in the lock.

He swung round towards the door. It dawned upon him at last that this was a little joke of the juniors, and that he had walked into a trap. James was a good-tempered man, and he took it calmly. He went to the door and rapped on it.

"Hallo, youngster!"

"Hallo!" responded Figgins, through the door of the box-room.

"Let me out!"

"Can't."

"I must return to my car."

"It can't be did, old chap. It's no good kicking the door or making a row, because this is Founder's Day, and we can make as much row as we like, and you won't be able to make yourself heard. We're not going to hurt you—"

The burly chauffeur grinned at this kind assurance from the junior.

"Thank you kindly, sir!" he said. "I'm not afraid of that; but I must go back to my car."

"Be patient, James, old dear, and I'll explain," said Figgins. "This is a little game to prevent those School House kids from starting for an hour after us. We're going on a little run, and we want to get ahead. In an hour's time Pratt will come and let you out."

"Then it wasn't true that the doctor wished to see me?" exclaimed James.

Figgins chuckled.

"I never said the doctor wished to see you, did I?"

"You said—"

"I said that you'd find him in here, and so you will, if you come at the proper time," said Figgins. "I didn't say when. He'll be in this house some time during the day."

"Look here, just let me out."

"Can't old dear. Now, we're not going to be hard on you. There's a bottle of ginger-beer and some sandwiches on one of the boxes, and all you've got to do is to sit down and enjoy yourself. You'll find a five-shilling-piece on the same box. That's a tip—compensation, you know. I think we're treating you well."

James grinned.

"You must let me out, sir."

"Anything but that, Jamesy, my pippin. Those School House kids can't start without you, and we're going to get ahead of them on the road. Understand?"

"I'm sorry, sir, but I must really come out," said James.

"Oh, rats, you're like a giddy parrot. You keep on saying the same thing over and over again," exclaimed Figgins. "Can't you think of something original?"

The chauffeur began to kick at the door. He thought he would soon make noise enough for a master to hear and then he would be speedily released from durance vile. But, as Figgins had said, on Founder's Day the juniors could make pretty nearly as much noise as they liked without hindrance.

A score of the New House juniors had entered gaily into Figgins' little plot, and some of them were in a group under the box-room windows, singing loudly the old St. Jim's boating song, while the rest were in the passage with Figgins, and as soon as the chauffeur started kicking the door, they started playing leap-frog in the passage, and the din made by the prisoner was lost in the din made by the juniors.

The chauffeur shouted, and the juniors shouted and sang, and James soon realised that he would never succeed in making himself heard by anyone who would be likely to come to his rescue.

Then, like a wise man, he accepted the inevitable, and found out the box Figgins had spoken of, pocketed the five-shilling-piece, and commenced operation on the sandwiches.

"Good!" said Figgins. "He's safe for an hour. Mind you let him out in an hour, Pratt."

"Right-ho!" grinned Pratt.

"Now, kids, it's time we were off."

Figgins & Co. had their cycles ready. The trailer was standing attached to Figgins' machine for Fatty Wynn. They were soon ready to start.

Meanwhile, Arthur Augustus was still keeping watch over the motor-car, and waiting for James, the chauffeur, to return. The others of the party came out and joined him, and their various belongings, including D'Arcy's invaluable hat-box, were deposited in the car.

"Where's that giddy chauffeur?" demanded Blake.

"Where has he disappeared to, Gussy?"

"He's gone to speak to the Head," said Arthur Augustus.

"Has he? I didn't see him, then. I just came past the Head's study, and I noticed that Railton was there."

"He went to the New House to see the Head."

"What's that?" exclaimed Tom Merry, smelling a rat immediately. "He went to the New House? That looks fishy. Who brought him the Head's message?"

"I didn't see."

"Was Figgins anywhere around?"

"Yes; I think I noticed him talking to Kerr and Wynn, dear boys."

"Aha, I sniff a mice!" exclaimed Blake. "Hallo, there go Figgins & Co.!"

The New House trio were mounted and making for the gates.

"Going for a little run on the cricket-pitch, Figgys?" bawled Blake.

Figgins did not deign to take notice of the inquiry. He steered for the gates, with the trailer behind, and Kerr at his side. They passed out, and disappeared from view.

"Hallo, they've gone our way!" Tom Merry remarked. "They've got off first. I shouldn't wonder if Figgys has fixed up the shover somehow so that we can't get off."

"Looks like it," said Blake.

It did look like it. Several New House juniors were gathering round, politely inquiring when the School House boys were going to start, and whether they had lost a chauffeur.

The chums looked at one another. A merry twinkle came into Tom's eyes.

"Look here, kids," he exclaimed, "we were going to put up with the grandmotherly care of the shover all day, just to please Railton! But now the chap's gone and buried himself somewhere, we're not called upon to wait till doomsday for him, are we?"

"Rather not!" exclaimed Blake. "You know how to drive a car, Tom. I believe I could do it, too. I've never tried, but it looks easy."

"It may look easy," said Tom; "but it's a good idea not to try on a thousand-guinea car. A hundred-pounder is good enough to turn into scrap-iron."

"Look here, Tom Merry—"

"Oh, rats, don't start rowing now!" said Manners. "The question is, what are we going to do? Shall we start without the shover?"

"We'll do the fair thing," said Tom Merry, taking out his watch. "We'll give him five minutes to turn up in. If he doesn't reappear then, why, we'll consider ourselves entitled to do as we like. Is it a go?"

"It's a go!" responded three voices unanimously. And Arthur Augustus chimed in:
"Yaas, vatsoh!"
They waited. They had donned motor-goggles, and Tom Merry, in a mask and leather coat, looked quite business-like enough to pass for a chauffeur.
"We might find the chap if we looked in the New House for him," Manners suggested.

Tom Merry gave him a withering look.
"There isn't the slightest reason to suppose that the chap may be found in the New House!" he said severely. Manners stared.

"Why, you yourself said—"
"Never mind what I said. There's no reason to suppose that the chap is in the New House. Why should we suspect Figgins of doing these things? It's not charitable. We can't take it for granted that Figgins & Co. have kidnapped a chauffeur, can we? Certainly not! The chap has wandered off, and in two more minutes we'll be off too."

"Good!" said Manners.
The two minutes elapsed. Still no sign of the chauffeur.
"Time's up," said Tom Merry. "It's impossible to exceed the time limit, so we shall have to draw the stumps—I mean, start the motor."

"They took their places in the car, Tom Merry in the chauffeur's seat.

Tom Merry, boy as he was, knew every wheel and cog of a motor, inside out, and he was quite as capable of taking care of a car—if he chose—as any chauffeur on the road. Tom had a turn for mechanics, and a relative who possessed a car, hence his knowledge.

Tom Merry seized the starting-handle. There was a shout from the New House. The chauffeur was standing on a box in the box-room, and looking out of the window. He saw Tom Merry's action from the distance and shouted. But a crowd of juniors were shouting, too, and the chauffeur's shout was lost in the rest.

Pip-pip-pup! Hoot-toot!
Dr. Holmes glanced out of his study window. He saw the motor-car gliding down the drive to the gates, and noted the figure in the leather jacket, cap, and mask on the driver's seat, his hands on the steering-wheel.

"Yes, Mr. Railton, the boys will undoubtedly be quite safe in the charge of Lord Eastwood's chauffeur," said the Head. "I hope they will enjoy their holiday."

But the Head of St. Jim's would have said something very different if he had recognised Tom Merry in the guise of the chauffeur, and known that Lord Eastwood's driver was a prisoner in the box-room of the New House.

But he did not know. And soon it was too late. For the big Daimler buzzed out of the gates of St. Jim's and took the southern road. Tom Merry was fairly started on his day out!

CHAPTER 4.

The Rivals on the Road.

PARP-PARP-PARP!
Figgins & Co. heard the sound behind them as they dashed along the wide, white country road.

Parp-parp-parp!
"Beastly motor!" growled Figgins. "Some fellows want all the road! What's he want to keep on parp-parp-parping like that for, the silly owl!"

Parp-parp-parp!
Parp-parp-parp!

"Here, look out, Figgy," said Fatty Wynn, who wasn't wholly at his ease in the trailer behind Figgins's motor-bike. "Why don't you get in?"

"I've got in!" called back Figgins, drawing to the side of the road a little. "I'm not going to run into the blessed hedge for any beastly motorist that ever moted!"

"You ain't in far enough."

"Yes, I am."

"What's that chap keep on tooting for, then? You're in the way of his car!" exclaimed Fatty Wynn nervously.

"That's all right!" cried Figgins. "We've left him plenty of room, and if he runs into us it's his own fault, and he's responsible for all damage done!"

Fatty Wynn gave a howl.

"I don't care a rap who's responsible! That won't mend my bones, will it, fathhead, if I get smashed up to a jelly!"

"You haven't any bones. You're all fat."

"Look here—"

"How can I look there, silly, when I've got to keep my eyes ahead?"

It was evident that Figgins was not to be reasoned with. Parp-parp-parp!
Parp-parp-parp!
The horn of the pursuing motor was sounding closer and

more threateningly. Fatty Wynn turned his gaze backward in alarm.

A big Daimler was rushing along the white road, and a boyish form in leather coat and mask was in the chauffeur's seat. Behind him four juniors were standing, waving their caps.

Fatty Wynn uttered a startled exclamation:
"It's those School House cads!"

"What?" yelled Figgins.

"It's Tom Merry and Blake and the rest!"

"Impossible!"

Figgins did not care to look back just then, much as he wanted to do so. But he soon received proof that Fatty Wynn's statement was correct.

"It can't be!" he howled. "I tell you the shover was shoved into the box-room, and he's still there! He can't have got out!"

"Well, he's driving the car now, anyway, and there's Blake!" exclaimed Fatty Wynn.

Parp-parp-parp!
Parp-parp-parp!

"Where's Tom Merry?"

"He's not there—no—yes—he is—it ain't the chauffeur at all—it's Tom Merry driving the blessed car!" exclaimed Fatty in amazement.

"Well, of all the cheek!" gasped Figgins.

Parp-parp-parp!

"Here, give us room, you kids on bikes!" shouted Tom Merry, slowing down to pass the cyclist. "What do you mean by wobbling over the road in that fashion?"

"We ain't wobbling!" yelled Kerr.

"You are! I thought it was some kind of a snake at first, when I caught sight of you; and I do really think you kids ought to learn how to ride before you start on the road."

"Yah, School House cads!"

"Figgins, why don't you leave the road clear?" Tom Merry was keeping pace with the New House party, handling the big Daimler as if he had been born to it. "Figgy, Figgy, why didn't you stick to the old bike, and not try those dangerous things? Figgy—"

"Oh, shut up!" yelled Figgy. "Get on, if you're going to, and take your face away with you!"

"I'm keeping an eye on you. I'm afraid you're running into danger, Figgy. I should be so sorry if anything happened to you, Figgy. What should we do without you, Figgy?"

The exasperated Figgy would have given a week's pocket-money to be within hitting distance of Tom Merry's features at that moment.

He set his teeth and accelerated his bike, in the vain hope of escaping the car. A very vain hope, for the big Daimler could have passed like a flash of lightning if Tom Merry had chosen, and it was easy for the scapegrace of the School House to keep pace.

"Get on, can't you?" howled Figgins. "What are you sticking alongside us for?"

"Looking after you," replied Tom Merry. "Is that what you call gratitude, Figgy? Oh, Figgy!"

"I'll give you gratitude, when I get you in the quad at St. Jim's again!" growled Figgy.

"Oh, Figgy! Don't be cross, Figgy!"

And the four School-House juniors in the car chimed in, imploringly:

"Oh, don't be cross, Figgy!"

Or, to be more absolutely exact, Blake, Herries, and Manners said that, and Arthur Augustus D'Arcy said:

"Don't be cross!"

Figgins breathed hard.

"Ha, ha!" yelled Blake. "Hear me smile, Figgy? Who kidnapped a chauffeur—eh, Figgy? I say; Merry, it would be only a kind action to get a little ahead of these kids, and keep the wind off them. Figgy looks very hot."

"Good!" chuckled Tom Merry.

The car buzzed ahead of the New House cyclists.

Parp, parp, parp!

Now the motor-car drew a little to the left, and drove along the white, dusty road, just in front of the motor-bikes, Tom Merry skilfully keeping at the exact speed necessary.

The result was not to keep the wind off, as Blake had humorously suggested, but to send a cloud of dust, mingled with the smell of petrol, into the faces of Figgins & Co.

Figgins and Kerr sniffed and snorted. The four juniors in the car faced towards them, making various mocking gestures, and passing all sorts of rude remarks upon Figgins & Co.

"I say, Blake, don't you think Figgy looks warm?"

"Looks as if he's going to have a fit."

"Perhaps he's in a bad temper. Are you in a bad temper, Figgy?"

"It isn't that; he's got a prize porker in the trailer, you know, and weight tells."

"The road's rather dusty for cyclists, isn't it?"

"Oh, Figgy doesn't mind that. See how he's snuffing in the dust. He likes it."

Figgins was almost in a homicidal frame of mind by this time. To see the School House juniors sitting there, cool and comfortable, while he sweated in the haze of dust and petrol-smell, was distinctly exasperating.

"Get on!" yelled Figgins. "What are you slacking for?"

"We're looking after you, Figgy."

"We are afraid you will come to some harm if we don't look after you, Figgy. You New House kids ought not to be trusted out alone."

"I think it's kind of us to look after you, Figgy."

"Yaas, wathah."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"It's no good!" growled Figgins. "Slack down, Kerr."

It was evidently the only thing to be done. The New House cyclists slackened pace, and the car went ahead. The School House juniors were loth to lose their fun, but they had a long run to make, and did not wish to lose time.

The distance between the motor-cycles and the car increased. Blake waved his hand in farewell.

"Good-bye, Bluebell!" he shouted. "See you again, sometime, Figgy. I hope our next meeting won't be in a mortuary. Good-bye, ducky!"

Figgins & Co. made no reply. They were only too glad to get rid of their tormentors.

"Well," growled Figgins, as the big Daimler disappeared in a cloud of dust ahead. "Well, kids, I don't want to waste Founder's Day going on the warpath; but I'd give forty whole holidays to get level with those bounders for this little jape."

"Rather!" said Kerr. "We'll keep on their track, anyway, and perhaps our time will come."

The big Daimler buzzed on. The School House party were enjoying their run immensely. Tom Merry handled the car splendidly, and it was evident that there was no danger, unless Tom should get reckless, which, of course, might happen.

They passed all kinds of vehicles on the road, and greeted them with good-tempered chaff as they passed; chaff that was not always received as good-temperedly as it was given. However, that did not worry the School House juniors. They were out for fun, and fun they were determined to have.

The morning was bright and sunny, the country, green, and fresh and beautiful, and the car buzzing along at a fine speed without a hint of any mishap.

What more could five healthy lads require to make them merry? And merry they were. But presently Blake looked at his watch.

"Half-past eleven!" he exclaimed. "I thought I was getting empty."

The others confessed that they were rather empty, too.

"Hallo, chauffeur!" exclaimed Blake. "Are you hungry?"

Or will you keep on while we have our lunch in the car?"

Tom Merry's reply took the form of a question.

"Are you looking for a thick ear, kid?"

Blake grinned.

"Then we'll stop, and have the first instalment of the picnic."

"Good idea!"

Tom Merry looked for a suitable halting-place. The car slowed down, and finally came to a halt in a lane branching off the road, close to a high hedge. There was a gap in the hedge, and within the field was grass and clover, with a shady tree near—an ideal spot for a rest and a feast.

"Halt!" exclaimed Blake. "Now, out with one of those hamper."

CHAPTER 5.

The Stolen Motor-Car.

TOM MERRY descended from his seat. He removed his mask and joined the other juniors, and between them they soon had a feast prepared on the inward side of the hedge. It was luxurious to lie on the thick grass, and hear the birds sing, and the insects buzz, and eat cakes, and drink lemonade and ginger-beer.

"This is all right," said Blake lazily. "That's the best of a giddy motor. We've come a spanking long distance, and don't feel a bit tired."

"Right-ho!" said Tom Merry. "I think I shall become a chauffeur when I grow up. We must keep an eye on that car, though. It might get stolen."

"Rather a big thing for anybody to snatch up and run away with, ain't it?" Blake suggested.

"Somebody might get in and drive off, stupid."

"Yaas, wathah," said D'Arcy.

"We'll keep a watch on it, then," said Manners. "I can see it where I'm sitting."

But Manners presently changed his position for a more comfortable one, and lost sight of the car. The hedge was high and thick, and could only be seen through where the gap opened in it. And it must be confessed that the juniors, under the influence of the excellent lunch, grew careless.

They did not know that two pairs of keen eyes were watching them through a little gap in the hedge further up the lane, or that whispering voices were passing comments on the situation.

Two ragged-looking figures were crouching in the hedge. They might have passed for Weary Willie and Tired Tim, without making up for the parts. They were in tatters, and their ragged clothes had never fitted at the best of times. Their boots were aged and worn, and their hats would have disgraced any self-respecting dust-heap. Their faces were shaggy, and their hair unkempt. They were dirty, and they were lazy; that could be seen by a single glance at them. Yet there was something humorous in their unshaven faces and little, twinkling eyes.

"Them young gents is enjoying themselves, 'Erbert," remarked the shorter and stouter of the two tramps, watching the feast with envious eyes.

Herbert sighed as he heard the sound of lemonade gurgling into a glass.

"They is, 'Erby."

"I could do with some of that tommy."

"So could I."

"I say, 'Erbert,"—Henry lowered his voice mysteriously—"they came in a motor-car."

"Yes; there it are in the lane."

"You used to drive a motor, 'Erbert."

"That was a long time ago, 'Erby. When I was respectable—afore I knew you," said Herbert.

"Now then, 'Erbert, don't be nasty. I was thinking that them young gents have forgotten all about the car, showin' a child-like faith in human natur', and I was thinking—"

Herbert's fishy eyes sparkled.

"My word, 'Erby! It would be as easy as winking to get away with the car," he murmured.

"That's the hidea!"

"But what would we do with it, though? Not much good a couple of chaps like us trying to sell a car," grinned Herbert.

"I dessey we should find a lot of valuables in it; a good many things worth our while, at any rate."

"My word! It's a good idea!"

"Let's 'ave a go at it, anyway."

"I'm on."

The two rascals withdrew from the hedge, and crept down the lane towards the stationary car. The lane was a lonely one, and no one was in sight, and the high, thick-set hedge hid the five juniors from St. Jim's front view.

The boys had not the faintest notion of the proximity of the tramps. Tom Merry glanced at his watch.

"Time we were on the road, kids, if we're to get to Cressy Lodge in time for lunch!" he exclaimed.

"Oh, that's all right," said D'Arcy. "They'll expect us when they see us, dear boys; and I was thinking that I would like to stretch my legs wound the field a bit before we get into the motor again."

"Jolly good idea," agreed Blake. "I'll race you across the field, Gussy."

Arthur Augustus shook his head.

"I don't think I am quite equal to such a wuff exhaicise," he replied. "I will take a little twot, if you like."

"Gussy, old kid, I promised a long time ago to make an athlete of you," said Blake solemnly. "I can't let you get into these lazy habits. You must take that run."

"Too much fag, dear boy."

"Manners, take Gussy's left arm, will you, and I'll take his right," said Blake. "If he's so fagged we must help him along. Herries, you can bring up the rear, and if Gussy lags, you know what to do with your feet."

"Right-ho!" said Herries.

"Oh, weally!" said Arthur Augustus.

"Stay, and look after your car, chauffeur," said Blake to Tom Merry. "Come on, Aubrey!"

"Oh, weally!"

"Come on!"

Blake and Manners took D'Arcy by either arm, and ran him off. There was no help for it, the swell of the School House had to go. Herries ran behind, keeping pace, and launching out his right foot to help D'Arcy whenever he showed signs of slacking down.

Tom Merry stood watching them, and laughing heartily. Every now and then, Study No. 6 became "fed up," as Blake expressed it, with the languid ways of Arthur

Augustus, and then it was their custom to give him some violent exercise, and see that he did it.

Away went poor Gussy, gasping, between Blake and Manners.

"Getting on all right, Adolphus?" asked Blake.

"Yaas, wathah!" gasped D'Arcy. "It is not at all weally necessary for Hewwies to kick me in flat wuff way; and besides, he is soiling my twousers."

"Ha, ha, ha! Keep it up, Herries, unless he leaves you behind."

"Right-ho!" said Herries.

Away they went. Arthur Augustus did his best, and really put up a good run. Right across the field they went, and at the opposite side Blake stopped, panting.

"Feel better, Gussy?"

"Certainly not. I feel extremely exhausted."

"He wants another run," said Blake. "Now back again, at the same pace. We're going to keep him going till he feels better. That feeling of exhaustion only comes from lazy habits, Aubrey. When we've run you to and fro about fifty times, you'll feel as fresh as a daisy."

"Blake, I insist—"

"Come on!"

"Hallo!" exclaimed Manners. "Where's Tom got to?"

They looked towards the far-off hedge. Tom Merry had disappeared. The pop of the starting motor could be heard through the clear, sunny air.

"He's starting his smell-box," said Blake.

"Hallo! What's that?"

It was a shout ringing across the field.

"Help! Help!"

It was Tom Merry's voice!

"Help!"

"Something's wrong!" gasped Blake. "Come on! Run like the dickens!"

Blake was off like a shot. Manners and Herries were close behind, sprinting across the field for all they were worth. And even the swell of the School House ran well, too, forgetting in the excitement of the moment that it was too much for it.

"Help! Help!"

Blake burst through the gap in the hedge into the lane. Tom Merry was crawling out of a bed of nettles at the bottom of the ditch—fortunately a dry one. The car was vanishing in a cloud of dust down the long, white road.

"Hallo! What's happened?" gasped Blake, seizing Tom by the collar and helping him out of the ditch.

"They've collared the car!"

"Who have?"

"A pair of beastly tramps!"

"What?"

"I heard 'em trying to start it, and came through the hedge," explained Tom. "Then one of them knocked me into the ditch, and sat on me while the other started up."

"My hat!"

"Then he left me and jumped into the car. They're gone. So is the car!"

"That much was evident."

The car disappeared in the far distance, sending back a faint pip-pip from afar.

The five juniors looked at each other in blank dismay.

The big Daimler was gone!

They were stranded on foot in the heart of an apparently uninhabited country.

"What was to be done?"

"My only panama hat!" exclaimed Blake. "This is a giddy fix, and no mistake! Gussy, your governor will get his rag out over this."

"Yaas, wathah!" said D'Arcy.

Arthur Augustus seemed really the least disturbed of the quintette.

"We've got to do something," said Tom Merry desperately. "Telegraph, or something, and get the police to stop the brutes."

Blake looked up at the telegraph wires along the road.

"I don't see how you're going to wire from here," he remarked.

"Fathead, we shall have to walk to the nearest town."

"Know how far it is?"

"Three miles."

"My hat!"

"I say, I've heard of people tapping the telegraph wires," said Herries, staring at the wires overhead. "If we had the things they use—I don't know what they are—we could do it, you know."

Blake slapped him on the back.

"By Jove, Herries, you are the chap to have with one in a difficulty!" he exclaimed. "You make such jolly useful suggestions!"

"Oh, don't rot, Blake!"

"We shall have to walk on to the next town," said D'Arcy.

"It is weally a feahful fag, deah boys, but there's nothin' else to be done. Now, I think we ought to let the police know as quickly as poss., so that they may have a chance of catchin' the wascals. Come on."

"That's unusually sensible for you, Gussy," said Tom Merry. "Let's hoof it. The thing's got to be done, and the sooner the quicker."

So the five juniors started off on foot along the dusty road.

It was rather a change after the delightfully smooth run in the big Daimler.

The sun was hot, the road dusty, and the anxiety as to the fate of the car was troublesome. The tramps could not sell it, and they were not likely to damage it more than they could help. Probably they would rifle it of all the valuables they could find and abandon it in some deserted lane. But it might be a long time before the owner recovered it. And, meanwhile, what of Tom Merry's day out?

"Oh, it's rotten!" said Tom. "They'll be expecting us to lunch at Cressy Lodge, and it's another twenty miles yet. And Miss Fawcett will be expecting us at Huckleberry Heath in the afternoon, and we shall never arrive there at all."

"My cousin Ethel will laugh," said Arthur Augustus. "She's an awfully whipping girl, but she does laugh at a fellow!"

"Well, we shall look pretty funny, crawling in on foot, covered with dust, and perspiring from head to foot," growled Blake. "It will be enough to make Cousin Ethel laugh."

"Can't something be done?" demanded Herries.

"What can be done?"

"You're leader."

"No, I'm not; Tom Merry's leader to-day. Tom Merry, think of something."

"The only thing I can think of," said Tom, after some reflection, "is for you to shut up, and keep your breath for walking."

"Jolly good idea," agreed Blake. "Step it out, kids."

They tramped on.

"It wouldn't be so bad if it wasn't for those rotten motors!" exclaimed Herries presently, as a hoot was heard behind them. "The hogs want all the road, I think."

"Yes," said Manners; "and what a beastly niff of petrol they leave behind! And look at the dust they make! What are you cackling about, Blake?"

"Your remarks struck me as funny, that's all. I dare say Figgys thought motors very nasty and smelly a little way back."

"Oh, that was different!"

"Of course it's different, my son; it's always different. It depends upon whether you're in the motor, or tagging along behind it. If you're in the car, it's the latest wonderful triumph of mechanical genius, and if you're biking behind it, it's a fearful, nasty, noisy, smelly infernal machine, taking up all the road and ruining the landscape. A lot depends on the point of view."

"Hoot, hoot, toot!"

"Hallo, that's a motor-bike," said Herries, looking back, and mopping his perspiring brow. "Why, my hat! If it isn't Figgins & Co.!"

"Figgins & Co.!"

"As large as life!"

It was true.

Two motor-cyclists, one with a trailer behind, came buzzing along the road. The five School House boys stood in a group to watch.

Figgins and Kerr were tooting their horns for all they were worth. Fatty Wynn was leaning comfortably back in the trailer, taking his ease.

"Hallo, there!" shouted Figgins. "Get out of the road! What are you blocking up the way for? Why, carry me home on a stretcher if it isn't that School House gang?"

"Hallo!" shouted Kerr. "Where's the giddy motor?"

"Ha, ha, ha!" bawled Fatty Wynn. "Has it run away and left you to walk?"

Tom Merry waved his hand to Figgins.

"Stop!"

"What for?"

But Figgins had already slowed down. Keen rival of the School House juniors he might be, but he had a generous heart, and he saw at once that the five were in distress. And a true motorist is always own brother to another motorist in misfortune.

"We want you."

"Well, that's pretty cool," said Figgins, jumping off his machine. "What do you want?"

"The car's been stolen!"

"My Aunt Matilda! Won't Gussy's governah be pleased!"

"Two beastly tramps boned it while we were lunching in a field."



A big Daimler was rushing along the white road, and a boyish form in leather coat and mask was in the chauffeur's seat. Tom Merry was fairly started on his day out. (See page 6.)

"You School House chaps always did pay too much attention to your grubbing."

"Oh, don't be funny, Figgins! You look funny enough, without saying anything to enhance the effect," said Tom. "Are you going to help us?"

"Of course we are, if we can do anything," said Figgins. "What can we do?"

"Lend us your motor-bikes to go after the thieves."

"Yes, I can see us doing that," said Kerr, grinning. "I can see myself trusting my cycle to one of you School House kids, and hoofing it back to the school!"

"I tell you what," said Figgins, "we'll go after the rascals ourselves, if you'll tell us all you can, and see if we can catch them."

"Good idea!" agreed Kerr. "We'll do that."

"It's jolly good of you, Figgy," said Tom Merry gratefully. "You'll know the car when you see it. There's two tramps in it, and I heard 'em call each other 'Erbert and 'Enry. They are a pair of horrid-looking wasters, but one of them knows how to drive. If you can't catch the car, you can inform the police in the next town, and they can wire round for everybody to be on the look-out for the Daimler."

"I don't see why we shouldn't catch them," said Figgins. "They won't go at top speed, and they won't suspect anything when they see two motor-bikes after them. Jump out, Fatty!"

"What for?" demanded Fatty Wynn.

"You don't think I'm going to carry your weight along in a race, do you?"

"But—"

Figgins uncoupled the trailer.

"You kids will have to drag that along between you," he said. "Ready, Kerr?"

"Rather!"

"Then off we go."

Pup-pup-pup!

Away went Figgins and Kerr with a whiz, leaving the School House juniors behind, looking and feeling a great deal more hopeful.

CHAPTER 6.

Herbert and Henry Have Bad Luck.

FIGGINS kept a keen look-out ahead as he dashed on, keeping the motor-cycle right up to its fullest speed.

Kerr, whose machine was of equal power, kept pace with him.

The New House juniors, in spite of their late experience at the hands of Tom Merry and his party, had thrown themselves whole-heartedly into the chase.

At home they might be foes and rivals, but outside the walls of St. Jim's, New House and School House ever stood shoulder to shoulder against all comers.

Figgins had not calculated upon spending his holiday chasing a stolen motor-car along a dusty road, but he was quite ready to do it.

Pip-pip-pip!

Car after car came into view, some slow and some fast, and as they sighted each, the hearts of the pursuing pair bounded.

But the big Daimler was not to be seen.

The summer sun was blazing down upon the road, and the heat and dust were intense, but Figgins and his comrade never faltered.

A mile—and another mile!
The hedges seemed to flash by.
They had passed no road into which a big motor-car was likely to have turned; the chances were that so far the thieves had kept to the main road, but how far ahead were they?

Crack!
Crack!
"There's another!" gasped Kerr. "It's back-firing, Piggy! Look at it; it's about the size."
Crack—crack!

Figgins looked hard at the motor in advance, which was back-firing merrily as it tried to climb a steep incline in the road. He gave a gasp of relief.

"That's it, Kerr. That's the motor we want!"
"Good!" said Kerr. "I can recognise it now. They don't seem to be managing it very successfully."

"No. Something's gone wrong with the works, perhaps. All the better. We shall be alongside in a couple of minutes, Kerr."

"And then, Piggy?"
"Then we'll get ahead and stop in the road. They won't dare to run into us, you know. They'll have to stop, and then—"

"I say, that's risky."
"Can't be helped."

The cyclists shot past the hunted motor-car.
"Erbert, in Tom Merry's seat, had put on the coat and cap Tom had left in the car, and so passed, without close examination, for a chauffeur. 'Eary was keeping well down in the tonneau, so as to escape observation. It was likely, of course, to rouse suspicion, even in a country policeman, if he saw two tramps in possession of a thousand-guinea car."

Right ahead went Figgins and Kerr, leaving the motor behind. It was true that at one time in his chequered career 'Erbert had been employed at a garage, and had even driven a car. But his knowledge of automobiles was limited, and he was far from easy with his new possession. He dared not let her "rip," and he was not quite sure of his knowledge of the mechanism. Consequently, the stolen motor had not covered very much ground, though, of course, it had easily left the owners far behind.

Figgins and Kerr dashed on a little distance ahead of the motor, and then jumped off their bikes. They stood with them in the middle of the road, waving their hands to the big Daimler and shouting.

It was certainly a risky proceeding, though, of course, if the Daimler had come on they could have jumped aside in time, leaving their bikes. But as the Daimler could not have run down two motor-bikes without a serious accident to itself, 'Erbert had no idea of resorting to such a desperate device to clear the road. He shouted to the two juniors:

"Clear off! Get out of the way!"
"Danger!" bawled Figgins.
"Stop!" yelled Kerr.
"Danger!"
"Stop!"

'Erbert knew not of any connection between the two motor-cyclists and the party he had robbed of their car. At the cry of "Danger!" he jammed on both foot and hand-brakes, and the car came to a halt.

Figgins and Kerr left the cycles and ran towards the halted car.

"Wot is it?" demanded 'Erbert.
Figgins did not reply. Without a word he jumped into the car and hurled himself upon 'Eary. The rascal was taken entirely by surprise.

Kerr was backing up his leader in a second, and before the astounded 'Eary knew what was happening he was hurled forth into the ditch beside the road. He disappeared from sight into a bed of stinging-nettles, whence arose a wail of anguish the next moment.

'Erbert swung round in amazement. He came near starting the car again, but Figgins had planted a loving clasp round his neck from behind.

"If the car starts," said Figgins, "you'll go under the wheels, old dear. Mind that!"

"Who are you?"
"Don't ask questions. Are you giving in, or are you going to give me the trouble of throttling you first?"

"I'll break your neck!"
"I look a good deal more like breaking yours," said Figgins. "Give him a clump on the head with that spanner, Kerr."

"No, don't!" gasped 'Erbert. "I give in. It was all 'Eary's idea. I didn't want to bone the old thing."

"Get out, then," said Figgins.
'Erbert got out—with Figgins's assistance. He alighted in the road on his head, and then reclined at full length in the dust, gasping like a stranded fish. He sat up in the dust and

blinked at 'Eary, who had just got his head out of the stinging-nettles.

"Well, my word!" gasped 'Eary.
"My word!" sputtered 'Erbert.
Figgins waved his hand.

"If you scoundrels cut off at once you may be able to leg it before the police get hold of you!" he exclaimed. "It's a chance you don't deserve."

'Erbert and 'Eary looked at Figgins and then at one another. They saw that they had only a couple of lads to deal with, and 'Erbert was rather inclined to show fight. But the stinging-nettles had taken all the fun out of 'Eary.

And just then the toot of a motor horn came along the road, and another car came into view. There was assistance at hand for Figgins, if the tramps showed fight, and so 'Erbert and 'Eary decided to accept Figgins's kind offer.

"Come on, 'Erbert," gasped 'Eary.
"I'm a-comin', 'Eary." 'Erbert picked himself up out of the road. "Mebbe, I'll see you agin, young shaver."

"I dare say you will, when I identify you in a police-court," said Figgins cheerfully.

'Erbert scowled, and disappeared through the hedge with 'Eary.

"Good enough," said Figgins, with satisfaction. "I don't know how we should have handled those two chaps, Kerr, if they had had the nerve to show fight. Lucky for us that motor was coming along."

"Better try and get this one out of the road, Piggy."
Hoot-toot!

The oncoming motor-car slackened down, and a tall man in goggles, who was driving it, shouted to the two juniors:

"Hallo! What are you blocking up the road for? Any thing wrong?"

"Yes," said Figgins.
The stranger brought his car to a halt.

"Can I help you?"
Figgins explained.

The motorist listened with amazement to the tale, and burst into a laugh when Figgins had finished.

"Well, you are a couple of plucky youngsters!" he exclaimed. "I'll tell you what I'll do. Get the car out of the way—or, rather, I'll do it for you—and then I'll run back and pick up your friends. I'm not in a hurry."

The car was drawn up to the hedge. Then Figgins and Kerr stood by their cycles, waiting, and watching the car, while the good-natured motorist turned his Darracq and buzzed back the way he had come.

"I say, I never bargained for this," said Figgins. "Tom Merry and his lot are making a big hole in our holiday, Kerr."

"We're returning good for evil," grinned Kerr. "Makes me feel quite good. Never mind. We may get a chance of returning them something else before the day is out."

"Wouldn't be a bad idea to empty their petrol into the road, and leave 'em to push the thing along," Figgins remarked thoughtfully.

"They'd borrow some of that chap."
"So they would. It would be a joke to do it at Huckleberry Heath, though, if we could get a chance."

And Figgins and his trusty comrade chuckled gleefully at the idea. They were still chuckling when the Darracq car came into sight again, and buzzed to a halt, and six juniors bundled out into the road. The kind-hearted motorist descended and unfastened the trailer, which he had brought on behind his car.

"Anything more I can do?" he asked.

"No, sir. Thanks very much," said the juniors in chorus. The Darracq buzzed away, and Tom Merry looked at Figgins.

"Figgys, you're a good old sport!" he exclaimed. "You've done us a jolly good turn this time, and no mistake."

"Yaas, wathah," said Arthur Augustus. "I say, Figgys, will you come on with us to Cwessy Lodge, and lunch with us, and be introduced to my cousin Ethel?"

"We'd slacken pace and keep with you," said Tom Merry, donning his leather coat. "We wouldn't mind losing a bit, Figgys."

Figgins shook his head.
"You've lost enough time already," he replied. "You've got no more to lose, if you're going to get to Huckleberry Heath to-day."

"Many thanks, but we won't come," said Kerr. "Off with you."

"Right you are, kids."

DAILY MAIL

Tom Merry climbed back into his accustomed seat. The four School House boys took their places in the car.

"Good-bye!" said Figgins. "Perhaps we'll see you again at Huckleberry Heath."

The School House boys laughed. They did not think it probable that the motor-cyclists would get so far.

"Good-bye!" said Blake, waving his hand; and the car hummed off down the road.

Figgins attached the trailer to his cycle again. He mounted his machine, and Kerr followed his example. Fatty Wynn lolled back luxuriously in the trailer. The walk had not lasted long, but it had tired the fat boy of the New House. And off went Figgins & Co., following the big Daimler at a more moderate pace than that kept up by Tom Merry.

CHAPTER 7.

Cousin Ethel.

"CRESSY LODGE!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus.

Blake looked at his watch.

"Time, too!" he said. "I'm ready for lunch kids."

"So am I," said Tom Merry, as he "tooled" the big Daimler into the gateway, and buzzed on up the wide gravel drive. "We're not very late, after all."

"That's all right," said D'Arcy. "Hallo! There's my cousin Ethel. Isn't she a ripping girl, dear boys?"

A girl of about Tom Merry's age was standing on the lawn near the house, and she looked up as the motor-car came up the drive.

The juniors all took off their caps at once, as if moved by the same spring.

The girl smiled. She was an extremely pretty girl, with rosy cheeks and blue-gray eyes and sunny brown hair, and her smile was bewitching.

Tom Merry halted the car. D'Arcy sprang out and made his most elegant bow.

"I've awvived, you see, Cousin Ethel," he said. "I know it's howwid had form to be late for lunch, but we had a slight mishap on the road. Allow me to introduce my friends. This is Tom Mewwy, and this is Mannahs. Blake and Hewwies, two of the vewy best. Chaps, this is my cousin, Miss Maynard."

The juniors bowed.

"I am very pleased to meet you all," said Miss Maynard, with a sweet smile. "Lunch is waiting, and I have waited, too. But where is James, the chauffeur?"

"Weally, Ethel, I don't quite know."

"He hasn't been hurt?"

"Oh, no! We left him at the school; but whethah he's still there, of course, I cannot say for cert. The probability is that he is in a twain."

"You see, Miss Maynard," explained Tom Merry, "some of the fellows belonging to the other house at St. Jim's kidnapped the chauffeur, and shut him up somewhere, so that we shouldn't be able to get off."

"So we had to start without him," said Blake.

"Which, of course, we wegwetted very much," said Arthur Augustus.

The young lady smiled.

"Yes, I suppose you did," she replied. "I don't know what your papa would say, Arthur. He would be full of fears for you."

"Oh, no; not if he knew how Tom Mewwy can dwive!" said Arthur Augustus. "Tom Mewwy is weally vewy useful, and I think he would make a vewy good chauffeur. But, I say, I hope the governah isn't down here, Ethel."

"No; he is still in town."

"Thank goodness!" said D'Arcy, with a sigh of relief. "Grown-up people are so unweasonable. He might think we weren't safe in the car without the chauffeur, which, of course, is all wot! I was afraid for a moment that he had come home, Ethel. You quite fwightened me. If I had thought of it en route, I think I should not have come in to lunch, weally."

"That would have been a pity," said Ethel Maynard demurely. "I should not have had the pleasure then of meeting your friends, Arthur. Won't you come in?"

"Yes, come in, dear boys!" said D'Arcy. "There's no weason why we should wait any longah for our lunch. I am weally quite hungwy."

Arthur Augustus had gone up several degrees in the estimation of his comrades, the moment they had seen his cousin. Ethel Maynard was really a sweet girl. She went into the house by the side of Tom Merry, who talked to her as if he had known her all his life. Lunch was a plentiful meal, the housekeeper of Cressy Lodge knowing what five hungry boys would be like, and having wisely prepared for the raid.

It was an enjoyable meal. Ethel chatted cheerily with the boys. The discovery that Tom Merry was in charge of the car had made her hesitate for a minute or two about coming with them for the afternoon's run; but she admitted that if Tom had brought the car safely all the way from St. Jim's there was no reason why he shouldn't take it safely on for the remaining twenty miles or so to Huckleberry Heath.

The juniors enjoyed their lunch, and the luxury of a wash in Arthur Augustus's quarters, and the afternoon was still young when the party were ready for the road again.

Ethel Maynard looked charming in a motor-coat. Tom Merry handed her into the car with the air of a cavalier, quite ousting Arthur Augustus from the task of looking after his cousin. But D'Arcy was a good-natured fellow, and he did not seem to mind.

"Dear me!" said Ethel. "What are all these packages here?"

The juniors looked a little confused. But D'Arcy answered promptly enough.

"Gwub!"

"What?"

"Gwub--pwovisions, you know! We're going to picnic on Huckleberry Heath, and we want to have enough gwub, you know! It's most important."

Ethel laughed.

"But do you carry provisions in a hat-box?"

"Oh, that's Gussy's silk topper in that!" laughed Tom Merry. "He couldn't travel without it, so we brought it along."

"Oh, Arthur!"

"It's all vewy well to laugh, Ethel, but an occasion might arise when a decent appearance would be absolutely necessary," said D'Arcy. "Of course, it doesn't matter so much about these boundahs--"

Ethel laughed merrily, and Blake mentally promised Arthur Augustus a thick ear when they were home again in Study No. 6 at St. Jim's.

Tom Merry got into the chauffeur's seat again, and the car started. From a good many windows in Cressy Lodge curious eyes watched them go; but in the absence of his "governah" Arthur Augustus was monarch of all he surveyed at Cressy Lodge, and there was no one to say him nay.

And Tom showed that he knew how to handle a car. He took the Daimler out of the drive into the road in a masterly manner, and turned in the direction of the distant Huckleberry Heath. In the car, Ethel Maynard laughed and chatted cheerily enough with the juniors, who one and all voted her a stunning girl.

Tom kept the car at a moderate pace, as there was no further need to hurry, and he had a lady passenger inside. Huckleberry Heath now lay ahead. It was a wide heath, patched with golden gorse, and it looked very gay and inviting under the summer sun.

"Jolly-looking place," said Blake, as the car glided along the road through the heart of the lonely heath. "I say, where's Laurel Villa, Tom?"

"Ten miles yet."

"Isn't there a village, or something or other?" asked Blake rather vaguely.

Tom laughed.

"Yes; there's a little village in a hollow, but Miss Fawcett's house is a mile from that."

"Nice place to get a puncture," said Blake. "Couldn't get a tyre mended for love or money, I suppose?"

"Hardly. I doubt if they've ever seen a motor before at Huckleberry," grinned Tom. "But we're not going to get a puncture; and if we did, we have a spare outer cover, and I know how to rig it on, and Gussy knows how to help."

"Yaas; wathah!" said D'Arcy.

Right on they dashed over the far-stretching heath. A thin column of smoke rising above the gorse first indicated that they were approaching a human habitation. Presently Tom Merry, who knew the vicinity well, turned the car into a rather narrow lane, and a house, standing in its own trim grounds, surrounded by a trim hedge, came into sight.

"Is that Laurel Villa?" asked Manners.

"That's it, my son!"

"Well, it looks comfy."

Laurel Villa did, indeed, look comfortable, and very trim and neat. Tom Merry sounded his horn loudly and incessantly as he dashed up to the gate.

A trim feminine form appeared in the doorway. It was that of Miss Priscilla Fawcett, Tom Merry's old governess. She had been startled by the tooting of the horn, and she came down to the gate. Her face was a little anxious in its expression.

Miss Priscilla could never realise that Tom Merry was a growing lad. To her mind he was still the little chap whom she had tenderly cared for in his infant years. Tom was very much attached to his old governess, but sometimes he wished that Miss Fawcett had a more accurate idea of the

flight of time and the change it wrought. He stopped the car with a last ear-splitting selection on the horn. Miss Priscilla opened the gate.

"Tommy!"

She looked anxiously into the car. A run in a comfortable, roomy Daimler was not an expedition of a very desperate nature to an ordinary mind, but Miss Fawcett had grown up before the era of motor-cars. She indulged herself in all sorts of fears as to what might have happened to Tom Merry en route, and had pictured him crushed under the wheels, blown up by the engine, run down by another car, or maimed and shattered by an overturn on the road.

Had she known that he was driving the car, she would probably have been in hysterics by this time, but, fortunately, she was ignorant of that. The fact that Tom was perfectly familiar with motor-cars made no difference to Miss Priscilla. She was anxious and uneasy about him from force of habit.

"Tommy!" Her face grew very anxious as she looked over the juniors, and failed to see Tom. "My dearest Tommy! Is he not here? Oh, dear—oh, dear, my sweet Tommy has been killed! I felt it all along. I knew these fearful motor-cars would kill my dearest Tommy!"

"Hallo! I'm not quite dead yet!" said Tom, jumping down and throwing his mask aside. "Here I am, nurse, as large as life and twice as natural!"

Miss Priscilla gave a cry of relief.

"My darling Tommy!"

And, to Tom's great horror, she hugged him round the neck hysterically.

"Here, chuck it!" roared her darling Tommy. "Back-pedal!"

"My sweetest boy," said Miss Priscilla, releasing him, and disclosing Tom's face as red as a beetroot, "I was so afraid for you! Do you mean to say that you have been driving that terrible motor-car?"

"I've driven it all the way from St. Jim's."

"My goodness! Has the chauffeur been killed? Has he—"

"The chauffeur's all right. Nobody's been killed," said Tom. "Now, do reassure yourself, nurse, and let me introduce—"

"My dearest Tommy, yes—yes, in one moment! But you have been driving, rushing along at a terrific pace—are you sure you are sufficiently thickly clad?"

"Yes, I—"

"Have you your chest-protector on?"

"I—"

"And your thickest vests, Tommy? And your—"

"That's all right," said Tommy hurriedly. "I'm all right. We're all right. It's all right. Do let me introduce the chaps."

"If you are sure you have not taken cold—"

"I haven't taken anything!" said the unhappy object of her solicitude. "I'm as right as rain, and as fit as a fiddle!"

The chums in the car were trying hard not to giggle, but Ethel was the only one who kept a perfectly straight face. Tom stole a sidelong look at her, and was greatly relieved to see that she was not even smiling.

"We've come to the picnic," said Tom more cheerfully. "Jolly day, isn't it? This is Miss Maynard, who has kindly joined us. She isn't afraid of my driving, nurse—are you, Miss Maynard?"

"Indeed—no!" said Ethel sweetly. "I think Master Tom would make an excellent chauffeur, Miss Fawcett."

She kissed the old lady in her sweet way.

"You know all my chums, nurse," said Tom. "You've met them all at St. Jim's. Now, I hope, in your anxiety, you haven't forgotten to arrange that picnic, nurse."

"Everything is arranged," said Miss Priscilla, with an affectionate look at Tom. "As if I should forget, my dearest Tommy! I have prepared everything you could possibly like, I am sure; and I have also prepared some things for you to take back to St. James's College with you. I think you must by this time have finished the last bottle of cod-liver oil I sent you."

Tom made a grimace.

"That wasn't any good, nurse."

"Haven't you finished it?"

"Yes, I didn't want to waste it, so I tried to use it in my cycle lamp, but—"

"Tommy—Tommy! You should have taken three tablespoonfuls after each meal, and four before going to bed. You are so delicate—"

"Never mind my delicacy," said Tom hurriedly. "What price the picnic?"

"But about the cod-liver oil—"

Tom would not listen.

"Where are we going to shove the car?" he exclaimed. "It will be jolly to picnic down by the stream. I'll take care this time to leave the car so that it can't be started, so

there won't be any danger of its getting pinched a second time."

"Has the car been pinched?" asked Miss Fawcett, looking at the big Daimler in a puzzled way.

"Yes. A couple of tramps pinched it."

"But how did they pinch it? And why?" asked the puzzled old lady.

Tom laughed.

"Boned it, I mean!" he explained. "When I say pinched, of course, I don't mean pinched!"

This was so lucid that Miss Fawcett gave it up.

The car was run into the garden, and the young chauffeur soon rendered it impossible for it to be started in a hurry. To make assurance doubly sure, he moored it to a tree with a chain and padlock.

"And now for the picnic," he said cheerfully.

"Yaas, wathah!" said Arthur Augustus.

The ride since lunch had made the juniors hungry again. Miss Fawcett had certainly made ample preparations for the picnic. Added to the supplies in the car, there seemed enough provisions to feed a small army; but at feeding-time the juniors of St. Jim's had a way of distinguishing themselves which made it best to provide a wide margin.

Hampers and lunch-baskets were carried down to the side of the sunny stream, where, under the shade of the old trees, they sat down to the picnic.

CHAPTER 8.

The Picnic.

It was a jolly picnic. All the lads were hungry, and the spread was the finest possible. There were ham-sandwiches, and cold meats, and hard-boiled eggs for the solids, flanked with cold fowl and pie. Then came puddings and cakes galore.

Black and red currant wine, lemonade, and ginger-pop washed down the solid portion of the feed in the most satisfactory manner.

The popping of corks and the gurgling of liquids mingled cheerily with the buzz of talk and the happy laughter of the picnicers.

Ethel Maynard, with Tom Merry on one side and Arthur Augustus on the other, was naturally very well looked after. If she had eaten a tenth part of the good things her cavaliers wished her to partake of, she would certainly have rivalled the greatest feasts of Falstaff or Fatty Wynn.

The boys enjoyed themselves amazingly. By the silver stream, under the shady tree, in the sunny summer afternoon, a picnic was a most pleasant function, and the honour of having a lady in the party was keenly appreciated by the juniors. And such a nice girl, too! There were, in fact, two ladies in the party, for Miss Priscilla consented to join the picnicers, and Ethel made the dear old lady sit down beside her, ousting Arthur Augustus from his position for that purpose.

But Gussy did not mind. His face was beaming with good nature, and he surveyed the happy faces round him through his eyeglass with a benignant expression. It was, in fact, very jolly.

And though Cousin Ethel was certainly the belle of the party, it was very pleasant to see how kind and attentive the youngsters were to Miss Priscilla, and how they were careful that she wanted for nothing, and how they kept solemn and serious faces when she told them stories about Tom Merry's interesting childhood.

Tom's face went scarlet when he heard Miss Priscilla confiding to Manners her keen anxiety at the time when Tom had been a victim to a ferocious attack of measles.

Measles was a thing that every youngster had to go through; but Tom's attack was a most serious one, and Miss Priscilla had been all the more alarmed because the medical man had not realised the true gravity of the case.

He had, in fact, treated the matter almost offhandedly; while Miss Fawcett had been convinced that her darling lay hovering between life and death.

Tom's recovery on that occasion Miss Priscilla looked upon as little short of a miracle. Manners listened with an expression upon the right side of his face, which was turned towards Miss Priscilla, as solemn as that of an Egyptian mummy.

But with his left eye it is greatly to be feared that Manners winked at Blake, causing that bright youth to have a sudden accident with a glass of lemonade he was drinking.

"Oh, I say," murmured Tom under his breath, "she'll get to the time I fell into the river next, and then there'll be no stopping her!"

"How fond your old nurse seems of you!" Miss Ethel remarked to Tom.

The hero of the Shell looked at her rather suspiciously.

He had an idea that Miss Maynard saw the humorous side of the situation. But her face was very kind and serious. Its expression gave Tom courage.

"Yes, Miss Maynard," he replied. "She is the dearest old soul; but she makes a chap feel an awful ass sometimes."

"I don't see why," said Ethel, with a smile. "It is something to be proud of, I think. It shows that you are a nice boy."

Tom coloured a little deeper.

"Thank you!" he said.

"I mean it," said Ethel. "I think she is the dearest old lady I have ever met, and I am quite in love with her already."

Tom brightened up. Boy-like, he had dreaded appearing absurd to a girl, but to Miss Ethel's kind and tender heart there was nothing absurd in Miss Fawcett's tender affection towards the boy she had brought up from his infancy, and to whom she had been almost a mother.

"Thank you for saying that, Miss Ethel!" he said. "The chaps chip me a lot about it sometimes, but I don't care for them."

Miss Fawcett did indeed in the fulness of time arrive at that childish adventure of Tom's, when he had fallen into the water; but now Tom did not mind.

And the juniors were careful not to let his old governess see that they saw anything comical in the narration. It was probable that Tom Merry would hear of it again at St. Jim's, but for the present it passed without a hint of a joke.

The afternoon was passing very pleasantly. A considerable inroad had been made upon the provisions, and of the great number of bottles half had been emptied.

The youngsters, very satisfied and happy, toyed with dessert, finding room for oranges and apples and nuts and muscatels when the more solid viands had been dealt with. It was really a treat to watch Arthur Augustus dissecting an orange for Miss Ethel, and Tom Merry carefully preparing an apple for the same dainty lips. But at last Arthur Augustus glanced at his watch.

"Oh, don't say it's time to move!" said Manners. "We're all so comfy."

"We've got a long run back to St. Jim's," said D'Arcy. "I weally think it is time to make a start, deah boys."

"We needn't get in much before midnight," said Tom Merry. "It's Founder's Day, you know, and the Head will never make a fuss."

"I'm afraid we sha'n't be in much before midnight, anyway," said Arthur Augustus; "and we must take my cousin home before dark, deah boys."

"Oh, I suppose we'd better make a move," said Blake, with a sigh. "It has been a ripping time. Hasn't it been jolly, kids?"

"Awfully jolly!" said everybody.

"I've enjoyed myself very much," said Ethel sweetly. "It was so kind of you to call for me and take me."

One and all declared that it was an honour and a pleasure they would never forget to their respective dying days.

"But are you going home in that dreadful motor-car?" said Miss Fawcett nervously.

Tom laughed reassuringly.

"We've come in it, nurse."

"But to drive after dark—"

"We have acetylator lamps as large as my head," said Tom. "Besides, it's really safer after dark, because you're more careful, you know."

This specious reasoning somewhat comforted Miss Priscilla.

"You wouldn't like me to back out of driving home," said Tom aside. "I should be the joke of the school. They'd say I funk'd it."

That settled Miss Priscilla. She was torn between her uneasiness for Tom and her firm belief that anything and everything was possible to Tom Merry.

"They depend on me, you see," said Tom.

"Very well, dear Tommy, you shall go; but you will be careful?"

"Oh, rather. D'Arcy's governor would pull a long face if I smashed up a thousand-guinea motor, I expect!" grinned Tom.

"Never mind the motor. We could buy a new one, but you cannot buy a new arm or leg," said Miss Priscilla.

"I'll be careful, nurse—awfully, fearfully careful!" promised Tom. "And I'll send you a card from Rylcombe to tell you we're safe, if the post office is still open."

They returned to Laurel Villa in the motor-car.

"Hallo! What's the matter now?" exclaimed Tom, as he looked into the car. "Somebody's been playing a little game here!"

"What is it?"

"The cans of petrol are gone!"

"What?"

"It's a fact! Somebody has taken the petrol cans away. And, by Jove, the tank is empty, too! This is a little joke of somebody."

"Dear me!" said Miss Priscilla.

"Who could have done it?" exclaimed Ethel, looking alarmed.

Tom looked amazed.

"Can't imagine! Some silly bounder has done it for a joke, I suppose. We can't move the car without petrol."

"Cannot you buy some in the village?"

"They've never heard of such a thing at Huckleberry Heath," said Tom dismally, "and the nearest town is six miles away."

The juniors looked at one another blankly. They were certainly in a terrible fix. The car could not be driven without petrol, and of petrol hardly a drop remained in the big Daimler.

The extra supply of the spirit was carried in the car in big cans, in the usual way, and the cans were gone—gone, without leaving a trace behind.

It was hardly likely that it was a theft, for the petrol could scarcely be of any use to anybody in the neighbourhood of Huckleberry Heath. It was undoubtedly a joke; but it was a joke that was likely to prove somewhat serious for the unfortunate motorists, for there were the picnicers stranded, in a petrolless condition, without any possibility of obtaining a fresh supply, and the afternoon rapidly waning towards evening.

Ethel Maynard looked a little alarmed. She had promised to be back at Cressy Lodge by dusk, and the housekeeper there, in whose charge she had been left, would certainly be uneasy if she did not come, especially as the Daimler had been taken out in charge of a boy. What was to be done?

"Hallo! Anything the matter there, kids?"

It was a familiar voice at the gate. The School House boys looked round as if electrified. Three forms were leaning on the gate, and Tom Merry gasped:

"Figgins & Co.!"

CHAPTER 9.

Figgins Scores—Home Once More.

F IGGINS & CO. raised their caps politely to Ethel Maynard and Miss Priscilla. Tom Merry came hastily towards the gate.

"Look here Figgy—"

"How do you do?" said Figgy.

"Have you—"

"Nice afternoon, eh?"

"Taken our—"

"But the evening's drawing in."

"Petrol?"

"But it's going to be a fine night, I think."

"Have you taken our petrol?"

"Your what?"

"Petrol! P-e-t-r-o-l! Petrol!"

"What do you think I want your mouldy old petrol for?"

"A silly-ass sort of a joke, perhaps!"

"Have you taken his sweet-scented petrol, Fatty Wynn?"

"No," said Fatty. "I've no use for it. Was it in cans painted green, Merry?"

"Yes, it was."

"Then I saw them taking them away."

"What did he do with them?"

"I think he must have hidden them."

"Look here, you chaps, there's a lady in the case! Miss Maynard has got to get back to Cressy Lodge by dusk."

"That's what I hailed you for."

"What do you mean?" asked Tom, staring at Figgins, who was smiling in the most affable way.

"Why, you see," explained Figgins, "I saw the chap with your petrol, and I thought the lady might like a lift home in a trailer. Fatty Wynn will abdicate in favour of Miss Maynard!"

Figgins & Co. chuckled at Tom Merry's wrathful stare.

Tom understood now how the petrol had vanished, and why.

The School House had put the New House decidedly in the shade by having a motor-car out for the day, and taking a lady in the party.

Figgins had hit upon that device for getting level. It would be one to the New House, with a vengeance, if Figgins carried off the lady under the noses of the School House boys.

ANSWERS

Ethel, who was a little curious, came towards the gate. "Mine, not a word!" whispered Figgins. "Don't tell tales out of school, you know! Mustn't row before a lady." Tom checked the words that were on his lips. He turned a chagrined face towards Ethel.

He knew his Figgins. Figgys would never give up the petrol unless he had his way, and it was impossible to "row," as Figgins said, before the girl. It would not be exactly the thing to tell Ethel that Figgys had raided the petrol. But to let Figgins have his way was distinctly exasperating.

"Introduce me, Tom!" said Figgys, in a stage whisper. Tom Merry choked back his wrath. "Allow me to introduce Figgins & Co., Miss Ethel," he said—"Figgins, Kerr, and Wynn, three horrid bound—I mean, three of the best, Miss Maynard!"

Figgins & Co. raised their caps and bowed. Ethel smiled. "I am very pleased to make the acquaintance of Figgins & Co.," she said gravely.

"You haven't told Miss Maynard that I am quite at her service in this little difficulty," said Figgins.

The girl looked inquiringly at Tom. "Figgins has offered to take you home in his trailer, Miss Ethel," said Tom. "Fatty—I mean, Wynn—will stay, and come in the car, when we—when we find the petrol!"

"How kind of Mr. Figgins," said Ethel, smiling brightly on the chief of the famous "Co." of the New House at St. Jim's.

The "Mr. Figgins" and the smile between them made Figgins her slave for life.

"I should be so delighted, Miss Maynard!" he said eagerly. "Tom Merry knows that I am a safe and reliable driver, and—"

"Yes," said Manners gravely; "especially when you get going on a cricket pitch!"

Figgins looked daggers at him. "And I could run you to Cressy Lodge before dark, Miss Maynard. It would be a real pleasure to me!" he said.

The girl hesitated. She very much wanted to get home before dark, very much indeed, and Figgys's offer seemed a really excellent way out of the difficulty. Yet she hesitated to leave her friends, especially in their present plight.

It was Tom Merry's turn to speak. He knew that the petrol would not be forthcoming until Miss Ethel had gone with Figgins, and that it would be forthcoming as soon as she was gone.

"I think it's a good idea, Miss Maynard," he said. "We're awfully sorry to lose you for the drive back, but we can't start without the petrol."

"But what will you do?"

"Oh, Fatty—I mean, Wynn—saw the chap take it, and I've no doubt we shall be able to find it in time," said Tom.

"Then you think I had better go with Mr. Figgins?" said Ethel, with a sweet smile, that sent Figgys into the seventh heaven again.

"I'm afraid it would be best," said Tom dolefully. "We shan't find the petrol till you're gone with Figgys—I mean, we may not find it!"

He broke off, turning rather red.

Ethel glanced from the School House juniors to Figgins & Co., and from Figgins & Co. back to the boys of the School House.

Perhaps she guessed something. At all events, her look became very demure, and a smile lurked round the corners of her little mouth.

"Very well!" she said. "What do you say, Arthur?"

"I'm afraid there's nothing else to be done," said D'Arcy.

"I'm awfully afraid we shan't find the petrol for some time, Ethel!"

"Then I will go with Mr. Figgins, if he is sure that I shan't be putting him to a great deal of trouble."

Figgins was quite sure, eagerly and ecstatically sure. And so Ethel, taking her leave of Miss Priscilla and the School House boys, wrapped her motor-cloak around her and took her place in the comfortable, roomy trailer, and Figgins started his motor-cycle.

Pip, pip!

Away went bike and trailer, Figgins tooting his horn, and Ethel waving her hand to her friends as they stood at the gate. Miss Priscilla went into the house as soon as they were out of sight, leaving the boys to search for the lost petrol.

"You beasts!"

"You rotters!"

"You're a set of toads!"

"Yaas; wathah!"

"Let's duck 'em in the water!"

"Let's jump on them!"

"Yaas; wathah!"

"Pax!" exclaimed Kerr and Fatty Wynn, chuckling.

"It's the joke of the season! Ha, ha, ha! Who's putting

on side about taking a lady out in a giddy motor? Ha, ha, ha!"

"Once aboard the trailer, and the girl is ours!" giggled Kerr. "Ha, ha, ha!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, shut up!" exclaimed Blake. "You'll make me tired with your cackling!"

"You made us tired with your cackling when you dusted us on the road!" grinned Kerr. "Mind, it's pax, and a seat in the car for Fatty, or you'll never see your petrol any more!"

"Pax, of course!" said Tom Merry, breaking into a grin. "It wasn't a bad wheeze, for you New House chaps! Now, where's the petrol?"

Kerr led the way, and indicated a hollow in a bank of earth where the cans of petrol reposed. Kerr and Wynn were chuckling all the time, seeing the humour of the situation far more clearly than the School House youngsters did.

The petrol was carried back to the car, and Tom Merry refilled the tank.

Miss Fawcett was informed that the lost cans had been recovered, and she took a cordial farewell of the juniors, above all impressing upon Tom the necessity of slowing down whenever he passed a cart, and of stopping altogether whenever another motor passed him.

Kerr mounted his bike, and Fatty Wynn took Ethel's place in the car. They started off, Miss Priscilla waving her handkerchief from the gate till they were out of sight.

Kerr kept pace with the motor, Tom keeping it at a moderate speed. After the compact, it was not in the game to pass Figgins on the road. It was well after dark, therefore, when the car came in sight of the big gates of Cressy Lodge, and they found Figgins waiting in the road with his cycle.

He grinned as the big Daimler halted. "Where is my cousin?" asked D'Arcy. "I hope she awivved all wight!"

"Ten minutes ago," said Figgins. "You found the petrol, then?"

"Yes, you boundah, we found it!"

"Ha, ha, ha! Who scores this time, Merry?"

"Oh, rats! You can get into your old trailer now, Fatty Wynn!"

Fatty Wynn chuckled as he got out of the car.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Figgins & Co., as the Daimler started off again. "Ha, ha, ha! Hear us smile! Who's cock-house at St. Jim's?"

The Daimler rushed on.

And Figgins & Co., still chuckling hugely over the success of their joke, followed on their motor-bikes, Fatty Wynn in the trailer.

"Well, we were done that time!" said Blake, grinning.

"Old Figgins has got a bit of his own back for the dose we gave him this morning."

"Yaas; wathah!"

"Never mind; we've given the New House the kybosh often enough to be able to afford to give Figgys a little run for his money every now and then. I say, chauffeur!"

"Hullo?" said Tom Merry, without looking round.

"When shall we be home?"

"This side of midnight—I don't think!" said Tom cheerfully.

"Well, Figgins & Co. will be in later, that's one comfort!"

And the car rushed on through the summer evening. For many and many a mile it rushed on, skilfully steered by the hero of the Shell, while the time passed swiftly enough.

Long before St. Jim's was reached the juniors had made a fresh inroad upon the remains of the picnic that had been repacked into the car.

Then they burst into song, and the sound of their voices floated far through the night as the big Daimler hummed and buzzed on its way.

Through sleeping towns, along silent roads, under the soft, bright stars, went the big Daimler, with never a halt as mile after mile of the white road slipped under its wheels.

The juniors were roaring out a chorus as they dashed into Rylcombe, and more than one window opened and a night-capped head was thrust out to see what the uproar was about.

Rylcombe post-office was the central one for a large district, and it remained open till twelve, so Tom was just in time to send the promised card to Miss Fawcett assuring her of his safe arrival. Tom Merry never forgot a promise, and though his old governess's uneasiness on his account was without grounds, Tom was not the fellow to disregard it.

After the brief halt the car buzzed on again on the road to St. Jim's, and in the starlight the top of the familiar old clock-tower rose into view above the trees.

A quarter-past midnight chimed out as Tom halted the car and commenced a series of variations on the horn to

awaken Taggles and bring him to the gates. Blake hammered on the gate with a spanner at the same time. Taggles had been awakened a good many times by belated parties coming in, for Founder's Day at St. Jim's was an occasion when the boys were allowed many unaccustomed freedoms. The school-porter came grumbling to the gate once more.

"Nice goings hon!" said Taggles grumpily. "Ere's the doctor a-saying I oughtn't never to have allowed you to take the car out of the gates, as if I've got heyces in the back of me 'ead. Nice goings hon, I must say! Hey, what's that?"

"Sorry to wake you up, Taggy, old dear!" said Tom Merry, slipping half-a-crown into his hand. "Come and help me put the car up along with the doctor's!"

The tip modified Taggles. He lent a hand in putting up the car, and then the juniors entered the School House. They found the Head waiting for them.

"Where have you been?"

"A little run to Huckleberry Heath, sir!" said Tom cheerfully. "Deed to see my old governess, sir! Couldn't take the chauffeur, as he disappeared before we started. All serene, sir! I've driven a motor before!"

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READ  
THIS  
FIRST

# Stormpoint

A School Tale. By MAURICE MERRIMAN

Rex Allingham, Jim Fisher, and Bob Bouncer are three well-known chums at Stormpoint College. Hal Trehearn, the captain of the school, favours them; but they are bullied by Jardon and Symes, two Fifth-Formers, who play many spiteful tricks upon them. Bob mysteriously comes into some money, and, as he is frightened that his stepfather—who is coming down to the school—might like to have the handling of it, Bob draws it from the bank and hides it. His stepfather arrives, but he is unable to obtain the money, and so takes his departure, much to Bob's delight. Rex suggests that they go and see what Porker, the school porter, is having for tea. They manage to play a very funny joke on him. This is witnessed by the Head and Mr. Salmon, one of the masters. The prank so amuses them,

that they are unable to punish the boys, who are dismissed. (Now go on with the story.)

## Perkins Has a Surprise.

Two mornings later, when all the boys had assembled in class, it was generally known that Bob Bouncer had something mysterious in his desk.

Most of the boys thought it was food of some sort or description, for Bob had broken bounds the previous night, and he had been most mysterious after coming in. Perkins had given hints that he would certainly feel it his duty to mention the matter of his having broken bounds, unless Bob gave him some of the provisions, and doubtless he would have mentioned the matter had not Bob informed him that, in the event of his doing so, he would certainly feel it his duty to give him the soundest thrashing he had ever had in his life; so Perkins deemed it judicious to say nothing, and find out what Bob had got as soon as he conveniently could.

Mr. Salmon was taking the class in natural history, and Bob was not paying the slightest attention. Every now and then he would open his desk and look in, until Perkins, who was of an inquisitive turn of mind, became mad with curiosity.

"Bouncer," cried Mr. Salmon, "what am I talking about?"

"I don't know, sir."

"Just as I expected. Describe a mandrill."

"Sorter piece of iron that turns round in a lathe."

"You have not been paying the slightest attention. I am not talking about iron, but about wild beasts."

"Why, I never heard Seaslug mention your name, Perkins!" growled Bob.

"Mandrill is a species of baboon," explained Mr. Salmon. "Step this way, Bouncer! Perhaps you will be able to pay a little more attention when you are standing up."

"He, he, he! I hope he canes you, you beast!" muttered Perkins. "I'm going to collar your grub now."

"You will be sorry for it if you dare to touch my desk," growled Bob.

"Won't I just! I'll have as much as I want. You

The doctor's face relaxed.

"I am glad to learn that you have all returned safely!" he said. "As it is Founder's Day, I will say nothing more about the matter!"

"Oh, thank you, sir! Good-night, sir!" chorussed the juniors.

"Good-night!" said the Head, smiling.

And they went upstairs.

"Well, it's been a ripping time!" said Blake. "Pleasant dreams! I wonder when old Figgins will get in?"

He knew a couple of hours later, when he was awakened by a pip-pipping in the quadrangle. The stars were paling in the east when Figgins & Co. got home, but at their escapade, too, the Head winked an eye, as it was Founder's Day.

It had been a most enjoyable time, and for many days the juniors retained pleasant recollections of Tom Merry's Day Out!

THE END.

(Another Tale dealing with Tom Merry next Thursday. Please order in advance, and also introduce Tom to your friends.)

have no right to bring grub into the class-room. He, he, he!"

"Perkins," cried Mr. Salmon, "write a hundred lines for talking in class!"

"I was only pointing out to Bob that he hasn't the right to call you names, sir, and—"

"Silence!" ordered the master, who strongly objected to this kind of sneaking.

"Well, sir, of course, if you like being called Seaslug—"

"I heard you refer to me in that manner this morning," interposed Mr. Salmon. "But I did not punish you, for the simple reason that I did not suppose you intended me to hear. I do not suppose Bouncer intended me to hear him, and so I shall certainly not punish him, because another boy is mean enough to sneak. Now, be silent, or I shall double your lines!"

Perkins was savage, and he meant to have revenge. Creeping under the desk, he got to Bob's place, which was the row in front of him; then, lifting the lid of the desk, he put his hand in.

The next moment he uttered a wild yell, and followed it up with others in quick succession; but the noise he made was as nothing to the screaming of a large green parrot, which had caught Perkins by the finger, and was biting just as hard as it knew how. Then it transferred its bite to Perkins's ear, and flapped him in the face with its wings.

Perkins went dancing round the room, howling at the top of his voice; but far above that, and the roars of laughter of the boys, rose the parrot's shrieks.

"Don't hurt my parrot!" shouted Bob. "I wouldn't have that bird hurt for anything. Be gentle with it."

"Woohoo! It's biting my ear off! Wahah! Owow!"

"It is only its fun! It won't hurt you if you don't tease it."

"Fury! It is hurting me!" hooted the unfortunate Perkins.

"Well, let it have its bite out," said Bob. "It will stop when it feels satisfied."

NEXT THURSDAY. THE TRIPLE ALLIANCE. A TALE OF TOM MERRY'S SCHOOLDAYS.

The parrot appeared to be satisfied now, for it fluttered on to Mr. Salmon's desk, gazed blankly at him, and said, in a deep voice:

"Who are you?"

The howls of laughter brought Dr. Andale into the room; then Polly turned round, and repeated his question.

"Woo-hoo! I'm bleeding to death!" yelled Perkins.

He was exaggerating, as he generally did, although he was certainly bleeding pretty freely both from the ear and finger.

"Serves you right for teasing my parrot!" said Bob, stroking Polly's head without the slightest sign of fear. Then he lifted it on his shoulder, where it perched quite contentedly.

"Silence, boys!" commanded the doctor.

"Who are you?" inquired Polly again.

This caused a fresh roar, and even Mr. Salmon and the doctor smiled.

"Let there be silence!" cried the doctor.

"Go away—go away!" said Polly.

"What has happened, Perkins?" inquired the doctor.

"Bob Bouncer has set his bird on me, sir. Boo-hoo! It flew at my head, and bit my ear off, and it's bitten my finger to the bone. I believe I shall get hydrophobia!"

"Did you make that bird bite him, Bouncer?"

"No, sir. I never gave it any orders at all; in fact, it won't obey my orders. It was Perkins's fault for rummaging in my desk. Still, he's not hurt."

"Am I not?" hooted Perkins. "Boo-hoo! I'm in shocking agony!"

"Just as if a little bird could hurt you! We all know that you cry at the least thing. I suppose I ought to know the bird's nature better than you, seeing that it is mine; and if I tell you that it is quite incapable of hurting anyone—why, it stands to reason that you are not hurt!"

"Don't talk such nonsense, Bouncer!" said the doctor. "Of course, he is hurt. His ear is bleeding, so is his finger."

"That's only his vindictiveness, sir," declared Bob. "When I punched his nose yesterday he started bleeding, just to get me into a row. Now he has started bleeding at the ear, because he wants to make you dislike my bird. You can see for yourself that the bird won't bite."

"It is trying to bite your ear now," said the doctor.

"No, sir; he only just closes his beak on it. He wouldn't bite me for anything, unless someone was to give him a shove or something like that, and frighten him. I tell you he is as tame as a maggot, and he would no more bite than a dog."

"The bird has bitten Perkins."

"I think, sir, Poll must have mistaken him for a worm! He's not unlike a worm—a sand-worm—these crawly things with legs that you use for fishing."

This maddened Perkins, and he badly wanted vengeance. He wanted Bob to have a taste of the parrot's biting powers, and so he seized the bird by the tail, and gave it a violent wrench.

Possibly Poll might have bitten Bob under the trying circumstances, but it was dragged backwards, and dexterously turning, it caught Perkins by the nose, and just showed him how hard it really could bite.

"It's all right, Perkins!" observed Bob. "Don't get excited. Keep quite still, and he will soon leave off. He wants a bit of your nose now. Still, it is too long for your face, so you can spare him the tip of it!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Rex. "The bird is determined to have pieces of him. It's jolly lucky there's no pain attached to its bite—at least, from what Bob says, there isn't."

Polly hopped on one of the desks now, and sharpened its beak. Perhaps it thought it might have a little more biting to perform.

"Nice day!" it observed.

"Ha, ha, ha! That's what Perkins thinks!" roared Jim. "It's what he might call a warm day—isn't it, Perkins?"

"I'm mutilated!" howled Perkins. "It's bitten my nose off now! Boo-hoo! I won't stand it! I shall write to my father!"

"No good!" declared Rex. "He won't know you without your ear and nose. He will think you have been among the brigands, and that they have been taking pieces off you to tempt people to send a ransom, though I should hardly think that any living person would be such an utter idiot as to ransom you!"

"Be silent, Allingham!" ordered the doctor. "There is nothing to laugh about. That boy is hurt."

"No, sir!" exclaimed Bob. "That bird won't really hurt anyone. He is far too gentle. Why, he is like a kitten! Just you stroke him and try!"

"I shall do nothing of the sort! How dare you bring the bird into the class-room? Besides, who told you that you might keep a parrot here?"

"He will be quite harmless kept in the dormitory, sir."

"I'll wring the brute's neck!" declared Perkins.

"Well, of course, you can try to do that," said Bob; "but if you were to ask my advice, it would be 'don't.' Gentle though that bird is—and you will have noticed it—I don't believe it would be so jolly gentle while you were trying to wring its neck. You see, parrots have their feelings the same as other people."

"Look at my nose!"

"Oh, bother your nose! I don't want to look at a thing like that. Shove the thing into splints, and perhaps it will grow straight this time!"

"I shall be scarred for life!"

"Well, you will be able to boast that you got the scars in action! You would be able to tell pages of how you cut the foe down. Of course, no one would believe you; but then no one ever does now! Do stop that horrid snuffling; it makes me feel ill!"

"You will write five hundred lines for bringing the parrot into class, Bouncer!" said the doctor. "When did you buy the bird?"

"Quite lately, sir."

"I believe he broke bounds last night to get it!" blubbered Perkins, dabbing first his ear and then his nose. "Look how I am bleeding!"

"Go and shove your nose into a cobweb!" said Bob.

"That will stop it bleeding, though I should say the best thing to do with it would be to let it bleed to death, and then bury it decently! A nose like that isn't worth preserving!"

"It is extremely vulgar to make such remarks as that, Bouncer!" said the doctor sternly.

"Yes, sir; I know it is."

"Then why do you make them?"

"Because he is such a vulgar little cad that he would not understand polite language, sir. I should not think of making such a remark to you, sir, because you have a decent-looking nasal organ, and because I'd jolly well be afraid you would lick me!"

"I shall gate you for next Saturday for your bad behaviour, if you are not careful what you say! You ought to be sorry that Perkins is so badly hurt."

"I must be a bad lot, then, sir, for I feel pure, undiluted joy at it! My only regret is that the parrot did not bite him harder. It was all his fault. What right had he to go groping in my desk? Then, again, he wrenched the bird's tail, and no self-respecting parrot would stand that treatment."

"I meant to make the brute bite you!" admitted Perkins.

"It knew the one who deserved biting; and my only regret is that it did not hurt you! A little worm, who pulls a parrot's tail, deserves to be bitten; so you've only got what you deserve?"

(Another long instalment next Thursday.)



WHO TO WRITE TO: The Editor, "GEM" Library, 2, Carmelite House, Carmelite Street, London, who will be pleased to hear from you.

## "THE TRIPLE ALLIANCE"

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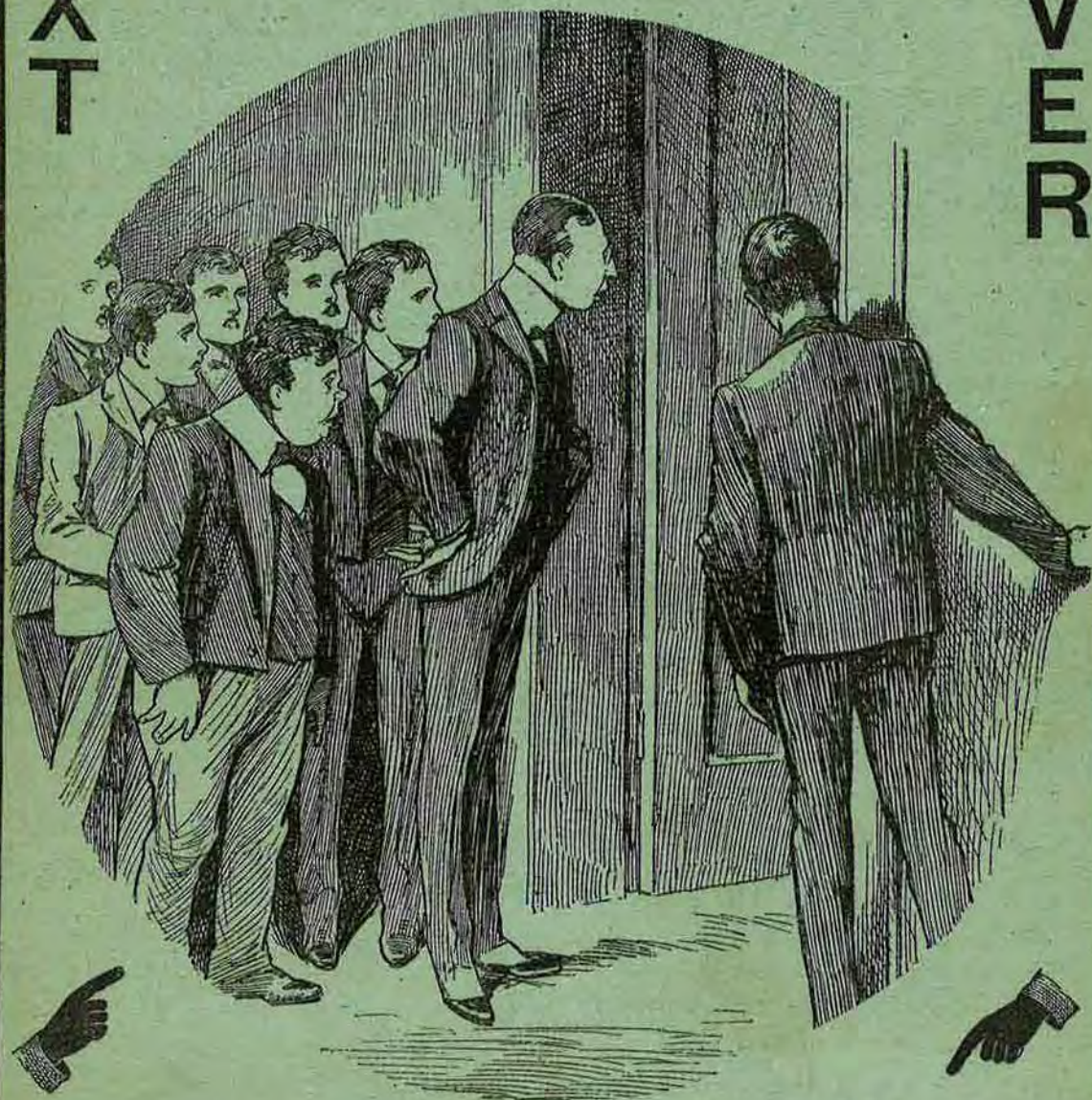
to your friends yet? If you have not, do so, and oblige THE EDITOR.

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