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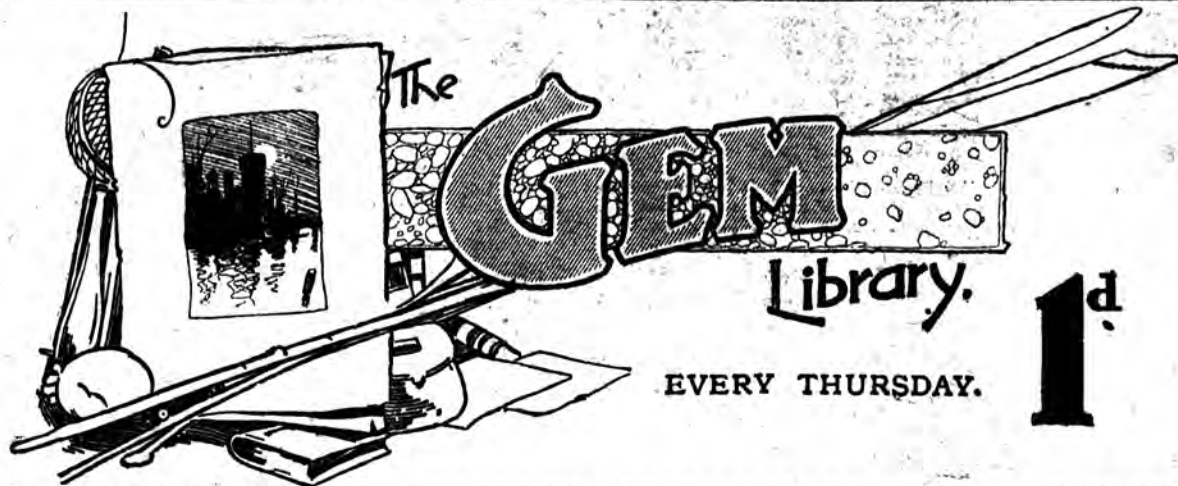
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RUCTIONS AT
ST. JIM'S;
OR,
A PARLIAMENTARY CANDIDATE.

CHAPTER I.

A Press of Invitations.

TOM MERRY ran his fingers through his curly hair with a perplexed look.

"I'm blessed if I quite know what to do," he said. Manners and Lowther were playing chess in the study in the School House at St. Jim's. They were intent upon their

game, and apparently did not hear Tom Merry's remark. At all events, they did not look up or reply.

Tom Merry was sitting on a corner of the study table, with a note in his hand. Curly of the Third had just brought it into the study, and Manners had growled when he slammed the door on going out. Manners took chess seriously, and he regarded any interruption as Tom Merry or Blake would have regarded the interruption of a cricket match.

ANOTHER TALE OF TOM MERRY NEXT THURSDAY

Tom Merry had read the note and seemed perplexed. He ran his fingers through his hair and looked at his chums. "I'm blessed if I know what to do," he remarked again. "Oh, really!" said Lowther, without looking up from the chess table. "You can't move your knight now, Manners."

Manners sniffed.

"I know I can't; teach your grandmother!"

"I say, listen to me a minute," said Tom Merry.

Manners grunted.

"This note is from Blake, and he says he's holding a consultation in his study at half-past seven, to discuss the nomination of the candidates for St. Jim's Parliament."

"Let him hold it."

"He wants us to go."

"Go, then."

"But we're holding a discussion here at half-past seven ourselves on the same subject. We can't go."

"Don't go, then."

"If you fellows would chuck up that rotten game for a bit—"

"Can't you see we're busy?"

"Yes, but—"

"Check," said Manners, moving his bishop.

"My hat," said Lowther; "I never saw that, you know! You'll lose the rook."

"I don't care."

"Well, I'll have the rook! No, I won't, though, you deep rotter! Lemme see."

"Will you listen to me?" said Tom Merry.

"Not at present, Tommy; take a little run!"

"Shall we hold our discussion, or shall we go along to Study No. 6 and attend Blake's meeting?"

"Just as you like."

"We can't do both."

"Then don't."

"But we must do one or the other."

"Do it, then."

"You pair of blinking asses—"

The door of the study opened, and Pratt of the New House looked in. Even the sight of a junior from the rival House at St. Jim's did not call the attention of Manners and Lowther from their game. Manners was very near mate, and an alarm of fire would hardly have called him off now.

Tom Merry picked up a ruler.

"Hallo, you New House specimen, what do you mean by bringing your face into a respectable study?"

"Rats!" retorted Pratt cheerfully. "Note from Figgins!"

He pitched a note upon the table beside Tom Merry, and slammed the door and departed, whistling. Manners gave a howl.

"That's the second time that door's been slammed the last five minutes!"

"It was a New House waster with a note from Figgins."

"I don't see what you want to keep on receiving letters for when I'm playing chess!"

"Well, of all the unreasonable asses! How can I help it if people send me letters? I haven't hung up a notice outside the study inviting promiscuous correspondence."

"Well, don't talk."

"That's all very well, but—"

"If you've got a note, read it!" howled Manners. "I tell you I've got a mate in three moves!"

"Rats!" said Lowther warmly. "What about my king's rook?"

"Your king's rook can't touch my bishop."

"Blow your bishop! Just see—"

"Wait a minute. I'm not going to hurry over a game of chess."

Tom Merry opened the letter. Manners had put his elbows on the chess table and his head in his hands, and was glaring at the pieces as if he were going to eat them. The deep wrinkle in his youthful brow seemed to indicate that the fate of the British Empire at least depended upon the result of the game.

Tom Merry glanced through the letter.

"My hat!"

"Shut up; I'm thinking!"

"Well, I suppose a fellow ought to shut up on a rare occasion like that! But, really, what do you think of this? I'll read Figgins' letter out to you!"

"Don't!"

"Oh, it will interest you; it's a curious coincidence:

"Dear Merry,—We're holding a discussion in our study at half-past seven, and we should be glad if you three came along. It's to discuss about nominating the candidates for the school parliament.—Yours sincerely,

"G. FIGGINS."

"What do you think of that, kids?"

"I don't think anything about it."

"Figgins wants us to go and see him."

"Go and see him then."

"But Blake wants us to go and see him at the same time."

"Well, why can't you go?"

"And we're holding a discussion in this study the same time—"

"Hold your row instead."

"Are you ever going to move, Manners?" demanded Lowther.

"Yes, I am; when I'm ready."

"It's all very well to wear a fellow out like this," said Monty Lowther. "If you fag me out waiting for the moves, I sha'n't consider you win."

"Rats! How can I move when Tom Merry is chattering away like a blessed magpie, and fellows come in slamming the door every second or two?"

"Oh, come," said Tom Merry; "there have only been two slams!"

"Shut up."

"By Jove, he's moving at last!" said Lowther.

"There you are, Monty, you beast! King's bishop to rook's seventh, and if you can get out of that you can use my head for a football!"

"I suppose I can castle—"

"Ass! Your knight's square is under check from the knight."

"So it is. All the same—"

"Finished?" asked Tom Merry.

"No," grunted Lowther. "How that chap keeps on talking! I shall have to look into this; I'm not going to be checkmated because Tom Merry can't leave off talking! Hallo, there's some demon at the door again!"

The study door opened.

Skimpole of the Shell put his head into the room. Skimpole's head was a very large one, and if he had had a body to match he would have been a youthful giant, but Nature had been more and more sparing as she went downward, so to speak, and Skimpole had a large head, a body small in proportion, and legs smaller in proportion still. But to look at his huge forehead, ornamented with a pair of big spectacles, was to see that he was a brainy man. There were plenty of brains there, though the quality could not be so easily answered for.

But Skimpole was certainly brainy. He took up subjects that made other fellows' heads ache. He could talk for hours on such topics as Socialism, Determinism, and even Schopenhauerism, and he declared that on such occasions he knew what he was talking about. He found few believers, however.

"I say, Merry, I want to speak to you if you're not busy," said Skimpole, looking into the study.

Tom Merry laughed.

"I'm not busy, except in receiving invitations," he replied. "But you mustn't speak above a whisper, or you will be killed by a chess maniac."

"Oh, chess! Not much of a subject for a fellow with brains," said Skimpole, with a disparaging glance at the chess table. "A brainy fellow ought to take up a deeper subject, and if Manners or Lowther cared about it, I wouldn't mind letting them into some knowledge on the subject of the Schopenhauer philosophy."

"Get out!" roared Manners.

"Eh? Did you address me, Manners?"

"Yes, I did. Do you want your head bunged under the grate?"

"Certainly not."

"Then get out!"

Skimpole looked at Tom Merry inquiringly.

"Manners seems excited," he remarked. "Is anything the matter?"

"Oh, no; only he's playing chess! What do you want, Skimmey?"

"I just looked in to tell you that I'm addressing a mass meeting in the quadrangle at half-past seven, and I should like you fellows to come along—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I don't see anything to laugh at, Merry."

"I do, though. Sorry we can't come, owing to a press of previous invitations from other quarters," said Tom Merry, laughing.

"I really wish you would come. I've got a speech written out, and it's a regular ripper; full of statistics."

"I'm not particularly gone on statistics, thank you."

"But really—"

"Kick him out, Tom, there's a good fellow!" said Manners imploringly. "Are you moving your knight, Lowther?"

"Yes; I'm going to exchange knights with you."

"Go on, then."

"Right you are. There!"

"But, really, you fellows," said Skimpole, "when it's a question of nominating the candidates for the first meeting of the St. Jim's Parliament, I think you might put such a thing as chess aside; I do, really!"

"Kick him out, Tom, or I won't chum with you any longer."

"Get out, Skimmy."

"But really—"

"Manners wants me to kick you out, and I couldn't refuse him a little thing like that. Better travel along," said Tom Merry, getting off the table.

"If you're in earnest, Tom Merry—"

"Deadly earnest, I assure you."

"But I want to explain to you—"

"Wait a minute while I get my football boots."

But the amateur Socialist of St. Jim's did not wait. He scuttled out of the study and banged the door hard.

Manners gave a wrathful yell.

"That's about the tenth time that door has banged!"

"No; only the third, old chap," said Tom Merry soothingly. "And you insisted upon his going out of the study, you know."

"There you are, Lowther, my pawn up. I suppose you can see it now?"

"I'm not so sure about it."

"Oh, don't be obstinate! It's mate in one more move, unless you sacrifice your queen's bishop, and that puts it off only one move more, as my rook comes straight on."

"Yes, but—"

"Well, take your time," said Manners, leaning back in his chair. "You can jabber now, Merry, if you like. What were you—"

"No, he can't!" howled Lowther. "He'll put me off my game! I fancy I can manage this with the queen to the bishop's eighth."

Manners smiled. He was an old chess-player, and he did not need to look at the board to know whether there was anything in Lowther's contention or not.

"Oh, look at it, Monty!"

"I'm looking. I think—"

The study door opened, and an eyeglass, with a face behind it, looked in. It was Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, from Study No. 6, the swell of the School House of St. Jim's.

"Hallo, Gussy!" said Tom Merry.

Lowther reached out for a cushion.

"Hallo, dear boy," said D'Arcy languidly. "Blake asked me to look in as I was passin' to see if you were comin' to the meetin' in Study No. 6 aftah tea."

"Get out!" rapped out Lowther.

Arthur Augustus turned his monocle upon Monty Lowther with an air of surprise and disdain.

"Did you address me, Lowthah?"

"Yes, I did. Get out!"

"You are a wude wottah!"

"You're interrupting the game!"

"The intewwupton of a game of chess is not a sufficient excuse for wudeness," said D'Arcy frigidly. "I must wufuse to excuse you on such frivolous grounds, Lowthah."

"Are you going?" roared Monty Lowther.

"Weally, Lowthah—"

Whiz!

"Look out!" yelled Tom Merry.

But the warning came too late. The cushion whizzed from the hand of the wrathful Lowther, and it caught Arthur Augustus full upon the chest. The swell of the School House sat down suddenly in the doorway.

"Bai Jove!" he gasped. "What—what was that? Lowthah, I wegard you as an absolute beast, and I shall give you a feahful thwashin'."

"Get out!"

But the swell of the School House did not get out. He sprang to his feet and dashed straight at Lowther.

"Look out!" yelled Manners. "You'll have the chess table over!"

But Arthur Augustus was too excited to think about such a trifle.

"Hold on," gasped Lowther, "you utter ass!"

He grappled with the excited swell of St. Jim's. Arthur Augustus lurched heavily against the chess-table, and it went flying. There was a roar from Manners as pieces and pawns went scattering over the floor.

"Oh, you utter ass!"

"I am sowwy, Mannahs; but I am goin' to give Lowthah a feahful thwashin'!" gasped Arthur Augustus.

And the next moment the combatants were rolling among the scattered chess.

CHAPTER 2.

D'Arcy Causes Trouble.

TOM MERRY was laughing too much to interfere. Arthur Augustus and Lowther rolled over and over.

Manners was whooping with wrath. He had been deprived of his checkmate, after playing for it for nearly an hour. It was enough to excite his wrath.

"You utter ass!" gasped Lowther.

"You uttah wottah!"

"Oh, chuck it!" exclaimed Tom Merry, with the tears running down his cheeks. "Don't be a pair of silly asses, you know! Chuck it!"

"I'm going to suffocate this idiot!"

"I'm goin' to give this boundah a feahful thwashin'!"

"I say, Manners, collar Lowther, will you, and I'll take care of Gussy!" exclaimed Tom Merry, who was really afraid that the excited combatants would hurt one another.

Manners did not move.

"Let 'em go on," he said. "Monty can make pea-shucks of him as easy as winking. He ought to be slain for spoiling a checkmate."

"Yes, but—"

"I had Lowther mate in one move more."

"Rot!" gasped Lowther, looking up from the furious combat for a moment—"rot, Manners. I should have played my queen to bishop's eighth!"

"Bosh! That wouldn't have made any difference!"

"It would have busted your game!"

"Ass! What about my rook?"

"Oh, blow your rook!"

"Well, of all the silly asses!" said Manners. "I wanted to finish the game, so as to make the thing clear even to Lowther's intellect, but really I never expected him to deny a perfectly evident thing like that."

"I should have played my queen to—"

"Oh, rats!"

Lowther jerked himself away from Arthur Augustus. He left the swell of St. Jim's gasping on the floor.

"Let's set 'em out again as they were!" gasped Lowther.

"I'll jolly soon show you whether I was mate in another move!"

Manners sniffed.

"Can you remember where half of them were?"

"Well, we could try."

Arthur Augustus struggled to his feet. He did not seem to be satisfied yet, for he rushed straight at Monty Lowther. But Tom Merry caught him by the shoulder and dragged him back.

"Hold on, Gussy!"

"Pway welease me, Tom Mewwy."

"Chuck it! My dear ass—"

"If you do not welease me immediately, Tom Mewwy, I shall lose my beasty tempah and stwike you."

"My dear ass, you've done enough damage. There's Lowther looking as if he had gone through a mangle or under a motor-bus."

"Well," said D'Arcy, pausing, "if Lowthah likes to confess that he has had a feahful lickin', and that he deserved it, I am willin' to let the mattah dwop."

"Rats!" said Lowther, without looking round.

"Then I shall continue to thwash you, Lowthah, until—"

"My dear Gussy, you will spoil your clothes."

"My clothes are already wumpled and dusty, Tom Mewwy, and my collah is wumpled, and my tie disawwanged. There is nothin' more that can happen, so I may as well finish thwashin' Lowthah. Pway welease me!"

"Gussy, if you think it's the real Chesterfieldian thing to come and make a row in another fellow's study, you've got a lot to learn," said Tom Merry severely.

"Oh, weally, Tom Mewwy—"

"If you choose to apologise to Lowther, we'll look over it."

"But Lowthah biffed me with a cushion in the most hwutal way, and gave me a shock to my beasty system which thwhew me into quite a fluttah," protested D'Arcy.

"It's no good arguing, Gussy. You have behaved in a really ungentlemanly way, and the less you say about it the better," said Tom Merry, shaking his head.

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—"

"I'm going to slay that ass," said Manners, picking up the cushion. "Lowther will never allow now that I had him mate in one more move."

"Because you hadn't anything of the kind," said Lowther.

"I should have played my queen to bishop's eighth."

"You ass, I'd have wiped it off with my rook!"

"Blow your rook!"

"Look here, Monty—"

"It's no good saying you had me mate in one move," said Lowther obstinately. "My belief is that in a few minutes more I should have had you cornered."

"Me cornered!" howled Manners. "Why I played chess before you were born—at least, before you ever saw a chess-board! Me cornered! Why, I could play you without a queen and with my eyes shut!"

"Well, yqr pieces were in a rotten position!"

"You utter imbecille!"

"Who are you calling an imbecille?"

"You, you dummy! I had you mate in one move!"

"If you're looking for a swelled nose, Manners—"
 "If you're looking for a thick ear, Lowther—"
 "If you can give it me—"
 "I'll jolly soon—"

D'Arcy screwed his eyeglass into his eye. It really looked as though the chums of the Shell were coming to fist-cuffs, and Arthur Augustus watched them with interest.

"Bai Jove, Tom Mewwy," he remarked, "I have nevah seen Mannahs and Lowthah fightin', and it will be an intewestin' sight. Let us stand in the doorway and watch the duffahs, Oah boy."

Tom Merry did not seem to see it in the same light. He ran quickly between Manners and Lowther, bestowing a hearty thump upon each of them, and the two chess champions staggered away.

"What are you up to?" roared Monty Lowther, glaring at his leader.

"What the dickens—" began Manners wrathfully.

Tom Merry looked at them sternly.

"What do you mean by quarrelling, especially before that grinning ass from Study No. 6?" he exclaimed.

"Oh, weally, Tom Mewwy—"

"Well, perhaps I was rather hasty," said Manners. "I oughtn't to have called you an imbecile, Lowther." He put a great deal of stress on the word "called," as if to hint that his opinion was unchanged, all the same.

"I don't mind that so much," said Lowther. "What gets my back up is your maintaining that you had me mated in one move, when it was perfectly clear—"

"I tell you I had!"

"I tell you, you hadn't!"

"My rook—"

"My queen—"

"Oh, shut up, both of you!" exclaimed Tom Merry. "If you talk about chess again, I'll give you a licking each, so look out!"

"Bai Jove, I should like you to do that while I am pwesent, Tom Mewwy! I should wegard it as distinctly amusin'."

"Gussy's at the bottom of the trouble," said Tom Merry darkly. "He upset the chess-table. We had better scrag Gussy, and that will make everything all right."

"Agreed!" said Manners and Lowther simultaneously.

And the Terrible Three made a movement towards the swell of the School House. D'Arcy skipped out into the passage with great alacrity.

"I refuse to be scawged, Tom Mewwy, and I wegard the suggestion as disweepetful!" he exclaimed. "Are you comin' to the meetin' in Study No. 6, or are you not?"

"Not," said Tom Merry.

"It's a wathah important meetin'."

"Then you had better go and attend it."

"Oh, vewy well! If you fellows choose to be left out in the cold, it's your own beastly affair," said the swell of St. Jim's. And he walked away.

Manners collected up the chess. Lowther set the table upon its legs.

"We'll have another try," said Manners, "and if I don't mate you—"

Tom Merry jerked the table away.

"No, you won't!" he said cheerfully. "You've played enough chess. We've got to think about the St. Jim's Parliament now."

"Hang the St. Jim's Parliament!"

"Now, then, Manners!"

"Oh, vewy well!" said Manners resignedly. "What about the St. Jim's Parliament?"

"It's time to nominate the candidates," said Tom Merry. "You know the system we have all agreed to. The Lower School at St. Jim's is to be divided into constituencies of a dozen each, and they're to elect the members."

"That's right."

"We've made up a list of the fellows, and divided them into dozens. The question now is to make them vote for us. As we have universal suffrage and free voting, they can

choose whom they like to represent them in the school parliament."

"And leave us out of it if they choose?"

"Exactly. It would be rather a disappointment to start an idea like this, and to be left out of the elected parliament."

"Well, rather."

"So we have got to do some electioneering. Now, all three of us want to be members of St. Jim's Parliament."

"We do."

"Then we shall have to hustle, that's all. But I've been thinking—"

"Well, give us the results of your unusual mental exercise, old chap," said Monty Lowther.

"Why, it would give the thing a sort of tone if we had a senior or two in it," said Tom Merry. "Of course, it's an affair of the juniors, I know. But if we could get a Sixth-Former of some standing in the school to take it up, and become Speaker—"

"Good. But they'd very likely only cackle if we asked them."

"Oh, I don't mean to ask any rotter like Knox or Sefton! I was thinking of Kildare, or Darrel, or Rushden."

"My hat! If we could get Kildare to become Speaker, it would make the thing go!" exclaimed Lowther. "None of the Upper Form fellows would care to cackle if the captain of St. Jim's were bossing the show."

"That's what I was thinking."

"Well, what do you say to an influential deputation to call on Kildare and ask him to stand for election?" said Manners. "A deputation would be the right thing, you know, to show him that the whole body of electors would like him to stand."

Tom Merry nodded.

"That's right. An influential and representative deputation of electors—"

"If we could get Kildare, it would make the New House wasters sing small," said Lowther. "Better lose no time about it."

"You've lost plenty of time over your rotten chess," said Tom Merry. "If Gussy hadn't stopped you, I expect you'd have kept it up all the evening."

"Oh, no, not at all!" said Manners. "I had Lowther mate in one more move!"

"Rats!" said Monty Lowther.

"I had only to play my rook to—"

"Oh, cheese it! Don't start all that over again," said Tom Merry. "I think we may as well go along to Blake's meeting, and Figgy's meeting, and stop them talking rot, and gather them into the deputation."

"Well, that's a good idea."

"Kildare is certain to be in his study about eight o'clock, and we'll catch him there, and persuade him to stand for election."

"Good wheezo! Let's get along."

The chums of the Shell left the study, and walked down to Study No. 6. It was close upon half-past seven, and the sound of voices from Blake's study seemed to show that the discussion had already commenced.

"Hallo, they're at it!" grinned Lowther. "Seem to be getting excited, too!"

The voices within Study No. 6 were certainly raised. Suddenly, as the Terrible Three drew nigh, the door of the study was opened, and a figure came hurtling forth headlong. It plumped down on the floor, and the door was slammed again.

CHAPTER 3.

The Nomination of the Candidates.

"SKIMPOLE, by Jove!"
 It was, indeed, the amateur Socialist of St. Jim's, who had been so unceremoniously ejected from Study No. 6. Skimpole picked himself up, and adjusted his spectacles, and blinked at the chums of the Shell.

"Hallo, Skimmy!" said Tom Merry sympathetically. "What's the trouble now? I see you've retired from the meeting on your neck. Have you been preaching Socialism, Determinism, Tommyrotism, or Sillydufferism?"

"I have been pointing out a few facts to those obstinate persons," gasped Skimpole. "I was interrupted most rudely. These interruptions I forgave, as rudeness of manners is only a sign of bad training in early youth, and the fault therefore lay with Blake's parents, doubtless extremely coarse and brutal persons, as I pointed out to him and would willingly have demonstrated, but he grew violent."

"Ha, ha, ha! I'm not surprised that he grew violent, Skimmy."

"Violence is no argument," said Skimpole, rubbing his



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bones, which had come into contact with the floor.

"Violence proves nothing!"

"There are some subjects a fellow can't argue about," explained Tom Merry. "Some observations can only be replied to with a dot on the nose, and a lot of your remarks are of that kind."

Skimpole shook his head.

"A reasonable man ought to be willing to argue," he said. "Argument sheds light on the most abstruse subjects."

"Rats! What's the good of arguing? You'd go on for ever, getting more mixed every minute, and finish in a regular tangle," said Lowther. "You can go and eat coke, Skimmy. Let's go in to the meeting, chaps."

"I am not going to give up the good work for the sake of personal safety," said Skimpole. "A true Socialist is bound to spread the light in and out of season, and I have not yet given up the hope of converting Study No. 6. They are intelligent lads, and therefore bound to agree with me in the long run, only they are rather impatient."

"Go it, Skimmy!"

Skimpole opened the door of Study No. 6, and looked in.

"I say, Blake, I—Ow!"

A jam-tart caught Skimpole on the nose, and stuck there, and the amateur Socialist staggered back into the passage.

"If you come in here again, we'll rag you to fragments!" roared Jack Blake's voice.

Skimpole rubbed the jam off his face.

"Dear me! What a mean action! I must really go and wash my face before I carry on any more of my propaganda work," he murmured.

And the amateur Socialist went disconsolately down the passage. Tom Merry put his head into Study No. 6.

"I say, Blake, we've come—Gerrooooooh!"

A pat of butter plumped into Tom Merry's eye.

"Hallo, Merry, is that you?" exclaimed Blake, coming forward. "I'm sorry! Ha, ha! Very sorry! I thought it was that ass Skimpole coming back."

"You—you ass!"

"I'm—ha, ha!—sorry! Quite a mistake!"

"Yaas, wathah!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, putting up his eyeglass to survey Tom Merry. "But weally, you do look wathah funnay, Tom Mewwy."

Tom Merry wiped the butter off his face. The juniors in Study No. 6 were laughing, but it had really been a mistake, and the hero of the Shell was a good-tempered fellow. He wiped the butter away without getting angry.

"You've changed your mind, and come along to the discussion after all," said Jack Blake. "Good! We were just talking about nominating candidates for the election, when that ass Skimpole came in with his proper—proper—proper something—"

"Proper gander," said Herries.

"Ah, yes, I knew it was something about a gander, or a goose, or something," said Blake vaguely. "Thank goodness we've got rid of him! I don't suppose you chaps will talk much more sensibly than he did, but it's a change, at all events."

"Yaas, wathah. I wegard Mannahs and Lowthah as duffahs. They were playin' chess just now instead of thinkin' about the beastly election, you know. Talk about Newo fiddlin' while Wome was burnin'."

"The juniors are divided up into constituencies of a dozen chaps each, each constituency named after the biggest town represented by any chap in the dozen," said Blake. "I thought that a ripping idea. At first, I mean. All the electors had to do was to turn up on polling day and elect us, and everything in the garden would be lovely. But—"

Tom Merry laughed.

"But some of them have shown an inclination to elect other representatives, eh?"

"That's it. There's Belfast—"

"Where?" asked Manners, looking round as if he expected to find that great and famous city in some corner of Study No. 6.

"Not here, ass," said Blake witheringly. "Belfast is in Ireland, as you'd know if you looked on the map, or if you knew anything, which you don't."

"Oh, cheese it! Go on!"

"What about Belfast?" asked Tom Merry. "Get on with the washing."

"Well, in the voting list we've lumped together all the fellows from the North of Ireland under the head of Belfast, as that's a jolly big place."

"Nothing wrong with that, is there?"

"No; only we naturally thought that Belfast would elect one of us—say Digby, as his grandmother was an Irishman—I mean an Irish woman—she was an Irish woman, wasn't she, Dig?"

"Yes," said Digby. "Her maiden name was Murphy."

"That sounds slightly Irish," agreed Tom Merry. "It's

either Irish or Italian, I can't think which for the moment."

"Oh, don't rot!" said Blake. "Murphy is a fine old Irish name, and dates back thousands of years—at least, a jolly long time. Dig is really a Murphy, and so he can claim to represent Belfast, I should think."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"But the constituency doesn't see it," said Blake, with an aggrieved look. "They've been holding a meeting in young Reilly's study. You know young Reilly."

"Yes, rather," said Tom Merry. "He's a good footballer, and I put him in the junior team at the end of the season, in the place of Gussy, who was gone serenading on the day of an important match."

"Oh, weally, Tom Mewwy—"

"That's the chap," said Blake. "Now, I know he was a good footballer, and he plays cricket, but that's got nothing to do with parliamentary business."

"Nothing at all," agreed Tom Merry.

"Therefore, it's like his cheek to want to represent—"

"His native city?"

"Oh, I wasn't going to put it like that!" said Blake, rather uneasily. "Digby, as a true-born Murphy, can represent Belfast, I should think. But the dozen asses have been meeting in young Reilly's study, and they've nominated him as their candidate."

"Yaas, wathah."

"That won't do, you know," said Herries. "We can't have any strange dogs in the kennel like that, of course."

Tom Merry laughed.

"But surely the constituency has a right to do as it likes, Blake?"

"Oh, yes, of course! I'm not denying that, and if they like to elect Digby to St. Jim's Parliament, I've got nothing to say against it."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I suppose an Irish chap naturally takes to an Irish name," said Blake. "The only thing I can think of is for Dig to assume the name of Murphy for a time."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"It's rather a good idea," said Tom Merry gravely. "Are you thinking of taking out letters patent? You'd have to consult Sir Robert Digby. He would otherwise be surprised on his next visit to St. Jim's to find that his son and heir had been turned into Murphy—"

"Oh, don't rot!" said Blake. "Dig would become Murphy simply for the purposes of St. Jim's Parliament. I think that ought to do the trick."

"We'll try it," said Herries.

"If it doesn't answer," said Blake thoughtfully, "we can go to Reilly's study and give him a fearful licking."

"He might call up the rest of the constituency, and give you chaps the licking," suggested Tom Merry.

"Yaas, that is weally quite poss, Blake."

"Besides, what about the freedom of election?" said Lowther. "Lickings to the electors are barred."

"Yaas, wathah! What about the freedom of election, Blake?"

"Well, we'll see," said Blake. "To get on with the washing, we're thinking of nominating Herries to represent Cheshire, as he comes from Chester. Gussy will be the member for Piccadilly—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I myself am going to represent York, as I was born there. All the Yorkshire chaps have agreed to vote for me."

"Good old Yorkshire!"

"Now, are you kids putting up for election at all?" asked Blake, looking at the Terrible Three inquiringly, and by no means abashed by the indignant glare he received in return.

"I should say so!" exclaimed Tom Merry. "Of course, we three are going in."

"If you can get elected—"

"There will be some thick ears if we don't—"

"What about the freedom of election—"

"Oh, rats! Lowther is standing for Durham, as that's his county. Manners will be the member for Liverpool, as that's the nearest city to his birthplace—and a jolly good city, too!"

"You stand for Huckleberry Heath, I suppose?"

"No I don't! I was born in India, and sent home when I was a nipper, and so I stand for Britain Beyond the Seas," said Tom Merry, with some little importance.

"Well, that's a jolly big constituency," said Blake. "You'll have to rope in the Colonial votes. Dig, of course, stands for Belfast—"

"You won't beat Reilly very easily."

"Well, we're going to try. Of course, it's understood that we all back one another up, as far as we can," said Blake inquiringly.

"Yes, certainly; but candidates don't vote for other candidates, you know."

"You can use your influence for us, though, and we'll do the same for you. We ought to make some arrangement of the same sort with Figgins & Co. Union is strength, you know. That's one reason why I'm going to sit on Reilly. If they elect him for Belfast, he'll be wanting Home Rule next."

"Well, why shouldn't he have it?"

"Oh, it's no good arguing! Figgins asked us to go over to some rotten meeting or other in his study at half-past seven—"

"Ha, ha! He asked us, too."

"We may as well go over in company. We're half an hour late, but those New House bounders ought to feel honoured by our coming at all."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Let's go, then," said Tom Merry. "By the way, I want to propose a good idea—"

"Not one of your own?"

"Yes, my own."

"What do you mean by calling it a good idea, then?"

"Oh, rats!" said Tom Merry cheerfully. "What I say is, that we ought to have a fellow of some standing in the college for Speaker, to give the thing a tone—"

"Tom Mewwy is quite wight, and I have no objection in the world to bein' nominated for Speakah—"

"Oh, ring off, Gussy! I was thinking of a deputation to Kildare, to ask him to become Speaker of St. Jim's Parliament—"

"Jolly good idea!" said Blake heartily. "I don't believe in letting seniors into anything as a rule, but Kildare is a jolly good fellow, and he'll know how to behave himself. We'll ask him."

"Yaas, wathah, and I am quite willin' to be chairman of the dep. What you require is a fellow of tact and judgment—"

"We'll ask Figgins, too," said Tom Merry. "Let's get over to the New House."

And the seven juniors walked out of the School House in the May dusk to the rival House on the other side of the quadrangle.

CHAPTER 4. The Deputation.

F IGGINS, of the New House, rose from his seat at the table in his study, and stretched himself. Kerr followed suit, and Fatty Wynn looked over the table with a careful eye to see if anything eatable was left. But the table was clear, and Fatty rose too.

"Now we're ready for them," said Figgins.

"Yes, if they come," said Kerr.

"It was very thoughtful of Figgins to fix the meeting for after tea," remarked Fatty Wynn. "I don't know what we should have done if—"

"We had enough for six," said Figgins, "as Fatty counts four at a feed, there was just enough to go round. I fixed it for after tea because there will be a lot coming. As a matter of fact it's getting on for eight now, and if those School House rotters don't come soon, the House will be closed, and they won't be able to."

"If they don't come to the discussion, I suppose we shall proceed to nominate the New House candidates without them?" remarked Kerr.

"Exactly!"

"Hallo! What's that row in the quadrangle?" exclaimed Figgins, going to the window. "It sounds like a lot of chaps yelling."

"So it is," said Kerr, looking out of the window. "Looks to me as if they're chasing somebody."

"Hallo!" said a voice at the door. "Anybody at home?"

Figgins turned round.

"Come in, Tom Merry! Come in, Blake! You're late."

"Can't be helped. We had important matters to attend to," said Blake. "I see you've had tea, and there's nothing but a smell of sardines left."

"Yes, you see—"

"Yes, I see that Wynn has eaten too much, as usual."

"Look here, Blake—"

"I'm looking. Mind you don't roll over, Fatty. If you once started rolling you would never stop. But we haven't come here to chip Fatty Wynn—"

"Certainly not. We should never be so wude as to chip a gentleman in his own quartsahs, however ridiculous an as he might be."

"If that's for me—" began Fatty Wynn wrathfully.

"Oh, that's all right, Fatty," said Figgins. "Gussy naturally has a fellow-feeling for ridiculous asses! Birds of a feather—"

"Weally, Figgins—"

"We've come over to discuss the nominations," said Tom Merry. "We've also got another matter to suggest, but

we'll have the nominations first. I've made a list of the constituencies we are standing for. How do you like it?"

Figgins looked at the slip of paper the hero of the Shell handed to him.

"Well, that's all right," he said. "We'll back you fellows up if you back us up. That's a fair arrangement."

"Quite fair."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Kerr is the member for Glasgow," said Figgins—"I mean, he's going to be. All the south of Scotland fellows are lumped under the head of Glasgow, and there isn't much doubt that they'll vote for Kerr."

"Quite right," said Tom Merry. "And I suppose Fatty Wynn is standing for Cardiff?"

"Yes; that's his native place."

"It is a pity Marmaduke is not here at present," said Arthur Augustus. "He could stand for Petticoat Lane—"

"Did you come over to the New House in search of a thick ear, Gussy?" said Figgins, in a tone of friendly inquiry.

"Certainly not, Figgins. I regard that as a weally ridiculous question."

"I regard you as a really ridiculous ass, so we're square. I am standing for Bristol, as that's where my people come from. I say, what a fearful row they're making in the quad. What's the matter out there?"

The visitors to the New House chuckled.

"Oh, that's only Skimpole's Socialist meeting. The meeting are chasing him!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"It was wathah funnay," said D'Arcy. "I was wathah inclined to stop and watch them, but I considared that these youngstahs would pwobably get into mischief without me—"

"And now—" said Tom Merry.

"I was speaking, Tom Mewwy."

"I know you were, Gussy!"

"What I mean is, you are intewwupin' me."

"Quite aware of that, Gussy. As I was saying, Figgins

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—"

"We're going to ask Kildare to stand for election, to become Speaker of the St. Jim's House of Commons," said Tom Merry, unheeding. "Will you chaps come with us in a deputation. The captain of the school as speaker will give the thing a tone."

Figgins nodded cordially.

"We're on, Merry. Kildare is a first-rate chap, though he's a School House fellow. But don't you think that it would make the school parliament a bit more tony if we had a New House senior as Speaker?"

"No, I don't."

"We could ask Monteith. He's our head prefect, and

"Monteith is barred. You used not to think so awfully much of him," said Blake. "I can remember the time when you tied him up in a bicycle shed—"

Figgins coloured.

"He's improved since then."

"Well, yes, I admit he has; but Kildare was never a rotter, and he's captain of St. Jim's, too. We are going to ask Kildare."

"Well, I agree," said Figgins, after a moment's thought. "I know it would give the thing a better look to have the captain of the school in it. But if Kildare doesn't take it on—"

"Then we'll ask Monteith," said Tom Merry. "If the school captain won't come in, the head prefect of the New House will be next best."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"All right—ho!" said Blake. "Let's get along and do the deputation trick, then. We shall catch Kildare in his study if we go now."

"We're ready," said Figgins. "There are some details we were going to discuss, but we can leave them over. Let's get along."

"Come on, then."

The juniors left the study. As they passed out of the New House in a body, a flying figure darted past them with a howling mob at his heels. They caught a glimpse of Skimpole as he vanished with the crowd after him.

"Skimmy seems to be in for a rough old time," grinned Blake. "I suppose he's been telling the meeting some home truths."

The juniors entered the School House, and ascended the stairs. Mr. Raiton, the master of the School House, met them on the way, and signed to them to stop.

"What are you New House boys doing here?" asked the housemaster.

"We're a deputation, sir," said Figgins meekly.

"A what?"

"A deputation. We're going to see Kildare, to ask him to stand for St. Jim's Parliament election," said the New House junior.

Mr. Railton smiled.

"Ah, I have heard something of that! It seems that the lower forms are getting up a parliament on the lines of the House of Commons?"

"Yes, sir," said Blake; "only a little more up to date."

"With some little improvements," explained Tom Merry. The housemaster laughed.

"Very well. I wish you every success, and hope it will not end in a House quarrel."

And he passed on, satisfied that for the present, at least, the alliance of the rival juniors did not mean mischief.

Tom Merry tapped at the door of Kildare's study.

"Come in!" said the deep, pleasant voice of the captain of St. Jim's.

Tom opened the door. The light streamed out from Kildare's study into the dimmer passage. The juniors looked in. The captain of St. Jim's was talking to Rushden, one of the shining lights of the first eleven, and the topic naturally was cricket. But he left off to bestow a pleasant nod upon the juniors.

"Come in!" he said cordially. "I see the whole family is there."

The youngsters blushed as they filed in. But Tom Merry, Blake, and Figgins were not easily perturbed. They were ready to explain to Kildare; though it was rather unfortunate that they all three started explaining at once.

"We've come, Kildare—" began Blake.

"We've come—" said Tom Merry.

"We've come—" said Figgins.

Kildare smiled.

"Yes, I can see you've come," he remarked. "What I want to know is, what you have come for, and when you are going. Have you settled about that?"

"If these silly asses would keep quiet, I'd explain in a jiffy," said Blake, with a withering look at his companions.

"We've come—"

"Oh, cheese it, Blake!" said Figgins. "You'd better leave it to me. As a New House chap, it would be in more capable hands. We've come—"

"I thought I was spokesman of this deputation," said Tom Merry.

"Did you?" said Blake, with an air of interest. "What made you think that, I wonder?"

"Yaas, wathah! I wegard it as a wank impertinence on Tom Mewwy's part to think anythin' of the kind. I weally considah—"

"Oh, ring off, Gussy!"

"I wefuse to wing off. I considah—"

"You haven't appointed a spokesman, I suppose?" said Kildare.

"Well, no," said Tom Merry; "but it was understood that—"

"That I should take the lead," said Blake. "Only Tom Merry and Figgins are such a conceited pair of bounders—"

"I wouldn't mind leaving it to you," said Figgins, "only you School House idiots would be bound to make a hash of it. That's what I object to."

"Well!" said the captain of St. Jim's patiently. "Suppose you go out into the passage and elect a spokesman; or, better still, go back to your own quarters and don't bother me."

"Weally, Kildare, considerin' the honah we intend for you—"

"Kildare's right," said Tom Merry. "Come out into the passage. We'll be back in a minute or two, Kildare."

"Thank you," said the captain of St. Jim's gravely.

And the deputation crowded out into the passage again.

"Shut the door," said Kildare.

"Weally, Kildare, we should hardly be so wude as to leave a gentleman's door standin' open!" said Arthur Augustus.

"And your head," added Kildare.

"Weally—"

But Blake jerked the swell of St. Jim's away, and closed the door.

CHAPTER 5

Declined with Thanks.

TOM MERRY looked round at the deputation crowded in the passage outside Kildare's door, with something of the expression of a patient martyr.

"Now, then, you fellows—"

"Yaas, wathah, that's what I say! Blake has pulled me away from the door in a wuff and wude mannah—"

"Yes, but—"

"I wegard him as a beast. I—"



Skimpole slung desperately to the pipe.

"Who's going to be spokesman of this deputation?" exclaimed Figgins. "That's the question before the meeting."

"You had better leave it to me, dear boys—" "We're likely to leave it to the biggest ass in the School House," snorted Lowther.

"You forget yourself, Lowther—" "Ha, ha, ha!" roared Figgins.

"Blessed if I know what Figgins is cackling at," said Monty Lowther. "If this is a cackling-meeting, I'm going to retire from it."

"I weally think—" "As originator of the idea, I ought to do the speaking part," said Tom Merry.

"As the one most capable to explain, I ought to do the speaking part," said Blake; "I speak for the general good of the cause."

"Somebody will have to give in—" "I'm willing for it to be settled alphabetically," said Blake.

"Yes, because you'd come before us—" "Well, I can't make a fairer offer. It's not my fault that my name begins with a B. But we can't stay out here arguing the whole evening. The prefects will come along and kick these New House bounders out soon—"

"Bettah leave it to me—" "Oh, hang!" said Figgins. "I suppose you asses will never see reason; so I vote for Tom Merry, as the founder of the feast—I mean the idea. Let's go in, and Tom Merry can do the jabberjee part of the business."

"Unless he wishes to resign it to me—" "I don't," said Tom Merry, tapping at Kildare's door again.

"Oh, vewy well! I will stand by to pwompt you when-evah necessary—" "If you start prompting me, you'll get it where the chicken got the chopper," said Tom Merry, opening the door as Kildare called to him to come in.

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—" Tom Merry entered, followed by the rest of the honourable deputation from the Lower School. Kildare looked at them.

"Well, have you agreed upon a spokesman?" "Yaas, wathah!"

"Shut up, Gussy! Yes, Kildare, I'm spokesman, and—" "I wefuse to shut up—" "We're a deputation," went on Tom Merry. "A deputation from the Junior Forms of St. Jim's, and representing the great body of the electors of the school—" "The what?" asked Kildare, looking puzzled.

"The electors of the school. You may have heard that we are getting up a school parliament, on the lines of the House of Commons, but on improved methods."

"Yes, I've heard something of it," said Kildare, laughing. "Well, we want a really first-class, ripping Speaker—you know you can't have a parliament without a Speaker—and we thought of—" "Yes, wathah! We thought of—" "Of asking you, Kildare," said Tom Merry. "You would have to stand for election to the parliament, but you would not have any of the bother of electioneering. We could assure you a bumping majority, without your taking any trouble about the matter at all."

"That's so," said Blake; "every fellow in the House would vote for you, Kildare."

"And in our House, too," said Figgins. "If they didn't, I know I'd jolly well punch their heads, anyway."

"That would be wathah dwastic, Figgins—" "Will you stand for the parliament, Kildare?" said Tom Merry eagerly. "We should be awfully glad to have you for Speaker; and we would let you make speeches if you liked, without enforcing the five-minute rule."

"It's a great honour, Merry, and I appreciate it highly—" "Yes, wathah! But you weally deserve the honah, Kildare. We all respect you vewy much."

"Thank you! It's a great honour; but I'm afraid that, owing to the pressure of other business, I shall be compelled to decline."

"Bettah think it ovah, dear boy—" "Don't refuse in a hurry, Kildare," said Blake. "It's a pretty good thing, you know. St. Jim's Parliament will make some noise in the school, I can tell you."

"I've no doubt it will, if you youngsters are members," said Kildare, laughing. "But I'm afraid that owing to other calls upon my time, I shan't be able to take a seat in the Junior House of Commons. Good-evening!"

It was a broad hint that the interview was at an end. But the deputation was not beaten yet. Tom Merry turned to Rushden, who was looking on with a broad grin.

"As Kildare declines, would you care to be Speaker of the St. Jim's Parliament, Rushden?" he asked diffidently.

"Yaas, wathah! We'd wathah have Kildare—" "Shut up, Gussy—" "I wefuse to do anythin' of the sort. As I was saying, we'd wathah have Kildare, but Wushden will make a passable Speakah—" "I'm afraid I shall be too busy, too," said Rushden. "Cut along!"

The deputation looked at one another. To be advised to "cut along" was a cruel blow at a deputation representing a large and influential body of electors.

"Weally, Wushden—" "Oh, come along!" said Blake, with a great deal of dignity. "I dare say there are some fellows in the Sixth Form who will be jolly glad to be Speaker of the St. Jim's Parliament."

"I hope so," said Kildare cordially. "Good-night!" And the deputation left the study.

"I can't quite understand Kildare declining," said Blake thoughtfully, when they were in the passage again. "It's an honour for him. Perhaps it's all right, though, about his being busy. He has a lot of things to see to."

"With the School House kids to look after, he must have," agreed Figgins sympathetically. "We'll go over and ask Monteith now. I can't say I'm sorry Rushden declined. Monteith will be better, and that was really the arrangement."

"Of course, the spokesman settles that for himself," observed Tom Merry. "Of course he doesn't!" said Figgins. "Anyway, let's get over to the New House now, before they lock up, and ask Monteith."

"Yes, wathah!" And the deputation, feeling perhaps a little downcast, crossed the dusky quadrangle again in search of the head prefect of the New House.

CHAPTER 6.

The Speaker.

M ONTEITH was not in his study, but the deputation ran him to earth in the prefects' room. He was talking to Baker when the juniors came in sight, but he stopped, to look at them curiously. It was not a common sight to see the Terrible Three, Study No. 6, and Figgins & Co. on terms of alliance; and what they could all want in the New House was a mystery to the prefect.

The deputation halted. Monteith's eye looked over them like a gimlet. Baker stared, and so did several other fellows from different parts of the room. Tom Merry coloured a little. Kildare had been interviewed in the privacy of his study, but it seemed that the deputation was to have an audience this time.

"Do you want to speak to me, you kids?" asked Monteith, looking at them.

"Yaas, wathah!" "Yes," said Tom Merry. "We've come over—" "Bettah get to the point, Tom Mewwy. Monteith can see for himself that we've come ovah, dear boy. Get to business."

"Shut up, Gussy!" "I wefuse to shut up! I considah—" Blake gave the swell of the School House a dig in the ribs, and he shut up with a gasp. Tom Merry went on.

"We're a deputation, Monteith," said Tom Merry, in a tone of explanation. "We want you to stand for election for St. Jim's Parliament, and we promise you the post of Speaker beforehand."

Monteith stared, and then laughed. "Ah, I have heard something of that rot you kids are getting up," he remarked.

"It isn't rot!" said Blake warmly. "It's a jolly good idea."

"Yes, rather!" said Tom Merry. "All sorts of questions are threshed out in one of these parliaments, Monteith, and lots of light let in on lots of subjects. It's a really good idea, and I should have expected a fellow of your intelligence to see it at once."

"Yaas, wathah! I considah Monteith's intelligence as wathah of a low ordah—" "Shut up! We want you to be Speaker of the St. Jim's House of Commons, Monteith. As head prefect of the New House, you are a person of some standing, you see."

Monteith laughed. "Why don't you ask the head prefect of your own House, Merry? You would get more eclat from him, as he's captain of the school as well."

"Well, you see—" began Tom Merry diplomatically. It would not have been judicious to tell Monteith that he was being offered the post because Kildare had declined it; but Arthur Augustus rushed into the breach, as usual.

"Told on the Telephone."

"Taming the Tuck."

"Taming the Tuck."

"Taming the Tuck."

"Taming the Tuck."

"Taming the Tuck."

"Taming the Tuck."

"Taming the Tuck."

"Taming the Tuck."

"Taming the Tuck."

"Taming the Tuck."

"Taming the Tuck."

"Taming the Tuck."

"Taming the Tuck."

"You see, Monteith, we have already asked Kildare, and he has refused," he said.

The next moment the swell of the School House gave a howl of anguish, as Monty Lowther stamped on his toes.

"Ow! Lowthah, you uttah wuffian! What did you do that for?"

"Shut up, ass!"

"I wufuse! Gentlemen, pway suspend the pwoceedings of the deputation for a few minutes, while I give Lowthah a fearful thwashin'!"

"I'm afraid you must go and do that in your own House," said Monteith.

"It won't take me many minutes, deah boy!"

"Cheese it, Gussy!"

"I decline to cheese it! I have been tweated wudely by Lowthah, and he has hurt my beasty toe, to say nothin' of scwapin' the polish off my boot!"

"I'll scrape the polish off your features if you don't shut up!" growled Monty Lowther. "Can't you see that Monteith is getting impatient?"

"Weally, Lowthah—"

"We should be glad, Monteith," said Tom Merry. "If you would accept this post. You would make a first-rate Speaker."

"Thank you!" said Monteith. "Somehow I don't feel quite equal to the strain of parliamentary life, especially in a junior school parliament."

"Oh, really, you know, we should make it easy for you."

"Ahem! I've some doubts about whether it would be easy for anybody to keep you youngsters in order."

"Oh, that's all wight, Monteith. I shall be there, too, you know, and I shall be keepin' an eye on them."

"All the same, I am afraid I must decline. Perhaps Baker feels inclined to take it on," said the prefect, looking at his companion with a grin.

Baker laughed, and shook his head.

"You might do worse, Baker," said Figgins. "If you refuse, we may have to have a School House fellow as Speaker, and that will be rotten."

"Sorry I don't see my way to taking it on," said Baker. "You might ask Taggles."

The deputation gave him a glare of indignation. Taggles was the school porter of St. Jim's. The deputation glared, and turned on its heels and walked away, leaving the two New House seniors chuckling.

"We seem to be rather hard up for a Speaker," Tom Merry remarked, as they stopped in the passage to consider the situation.

"I am quite willin' to fill up the bweach, deah boys. I wathah fancy myself in the wole of Speakah of the St. Jim's House of Commons, you know."

"Only we don't fancy you as anything of the sort," said Figgins. "Suppose we ask Darrel of the School House. He's a decent sort."

Blake shook his head.

"Look here, we're not going to go hunting around corners for a beasty Speaker!" he exclaimed. "It's an honour to whoever gets the job, and if they like to turn up their noses at it, let 'em. We're not going around to any more swelled-headed asses!"

"If you call our head prefect a swelled-headed ass—"

"Oh, don't rag, now!" said Blake crossly. "This makes our parliament look ridiculous, and it is really a rather serious and important affair, if those silly chumps could only see matters in the proper light."

"Well, we want a Speaker," said Digby.

"I am quite willin'—"

"Suppose we were to ask our housemaster?" said Blake, struck by a brilliant idea. "Let's ask Mr. Railton to become Speaker."

"Wats!" said D'Arcy. "He hasn't time; and he would wogard it as infwa dig. to pweside at a meetin' of a juniar parliament."

"Ass! I mean an honorary Speaker. Of course, he wouldn't turn up at the meetings."

"Then we shouldn't have the Speaker," said Herries.

"His name would give us the eclat we want, and show the school that our parliament was the real, dignified business we ourselves know it is."

"Something in that," said Figgins.

"Of course there's something in it, or I shouldn't have suggested it. Let's go and speak to Mr. Railton. You'd better let me be spokesman this time, Tom Merry. You've made rather a muck of it so far."

"Oh, don't be an ass, Blake! Come on!"

The deputation drifted across the quadrangle again. Monty Lowther remarked that they would know that route well soon, but he was frowned into silence. The deputation were in no mood for humorous remarks.

Mr. Railton was in his study, and he looked in surprise

at the juniors when Tom Merry, after knocking, opened the door and presented himself.

"If you please, sir," said Tom Merry glibly, "we want to appoint you an honorary Speaker of the St. Jim's Parliament. There would be another Speaker to do all the work, and you wouldn't have to appear at the meetings, or pay any subscriptions, or anything. May we appoint you an honorary Speaker?"

The housemaster smiled genially.

"Certainly, Merry. I have no objection."

"Thank you, sir!" said Tom Merry.

"Thank you, sir!" said the deputation.

"Yaaa, wathah! It is weally quite a welief to find somebody who is willin' to become Speakah of the—"

"Shut up, D'Arcy!"

"I think we ought to tell Mr. Wailton how extwemely gwateful—"

"Good-night, sir!"

"Good-night, boys!"

The deputation left the study, Arthur Augustus being bundled out among the others without having a chance of saying anything more.

"Well, we've got an honorary Speaker, at any rate, and one whose name will impress the fellows," said Blake.

"We must put up a notice of some sort somewhere, so as to let the fellows know about it."

"I have been tweated wuffly—"

"As for the working Speaker, we shall have to settle about him after the elections," said Blake. "It can be decided at the first meeting of the St. Jim's Parliament."

"I wufuse to wemain with the deputation unless you all immediately apologise!"

"Rats!"

"Then I withdwaw!" said Arthur Augustus, with great dignity.

And he walked away with his nose in the air. As the work of the deputation was done, and it was close upon bedtime, D'Arcy's withdrawal did not make much difference.

Figgins & Co. returned to the New House, getting in just before the doors were locked, and for that evening the parliamentary candidates of St. Jim's rested from their labours.

CHAPTER 7.

Skimpole Comes to Grief.

"BROTHERS!"

"Hallo! What's that?"

"Bai Jove, it's Skimpole again!"

"What's he gassing about this time?"

"Brothers—"

"Hallo, Skimmy! What's the wheeze this time?"

Morning school was over. Tom Merry & Co. had come out into the quadrangle, and their attention was immediately attracted by the sight of a gathering crowd of juniors. Skimpole was the centre of it. The amateur Socialist of St. Jim's was on the warpath again.

Skimpole had mounted upon a water-butt, almost under the eill of a window belonging to the School House. It was a coign of vantage from which a speaker could address a large meeting, and Skimpole never failed to attract a crowd when he once started.

His meetings frequently ended in his being ragged by the crowd he had called together, but as a true Socialist he was bound to face persecution in the good cause, as he expressed it himself.

"Brothers—"

"What are you driving at, Skimmy?" asked Tom Merry.

"The ass hasn't any brothers at St. Jim's!" said Herries, shaking his head. "I think he's more off his rocker than ever!"

"I am speaking in a general sense," said Skimpole. "Are we not all brothers; all born absolutely equal; and all of us now in chains?"

"Blessed if I can see the chains!" said Blake. "I suppose you are not referring to our watch-chains, are you, Skimpole?"

"Please do not interrupt me with frivolous remarks, Blake. I am referring to the chains of ignorance and stupidity and political servitude—"

"Complimentary, ain't he?" murmured Figgins, joining the crowd. "I say, Blake, what a chance to damp his enthusiasm!"

"Eh, what's that?" asked Blake.

Figgins nodded to the window above Skimpole.

"I was thinking that if a chap opened that window—"

"Yes!" said Blake, with interest.

"And had a water-can, say—"

Blake chuckled.

"Figgins, old chap, you're a giddy genius!"

Blake disappeared from the crowd. Figgins chuckled, and watched Skimpole. The amateur Socialist was far too deeply engrossed in his subject to heed that brief whisper between the two Fourth-Formers.

"But the light is coming," he said, waving both his hands in the air to emphasise his remark; "the light is coming! After long centuries of darkness and slavery, the sunrise of Socialism has come to enlighten the world, and to awaken the working masses to a knowledge of their rights and their sufferings. All that is needed is more light! In the St. Jim's Parliament I hope to air the grievances of the toiling millions, and to convert most of the school to the new creed—"

"Rats!"

"I shall be the leader of the Labour Party in the St. Jim's Parliament—"

"There won't be any Labour Party," said Lowther.

"Yes, there will. You can't have a House of Commons without a Labour Party," said Figgins. "It's the proper thing in our days. You might as well want to have one without an Irish Party!"

"Therefore, I appeal to your suffrages," said Skimpole.

"I wonder what that means?" said Pratt, scratching his head. "Is that Socialism, Skimmy? Is it Determinism, or Sillydufferism?"

"I mean that I ask for your votes."

"Why the dickens can't you say so, then?"

"You are quite right, Pratt; I stand corrected. I should be careful to speak in short words and simple language, suitable to undeveloped intellects, when I am speaking to you fellows!"

There was a roar.

"Hark at the rotter!"

"Yank him off that water-butt!"

"Bung him through the lid."

"Pray be moderate; violence is no argument. Besides, how are you to improve yourselves unless I point out to you your weaknesses. The fact that you are all ignorant, foolish, rude, and brutal—"

"Yank him down!"

"Hold on," shouted Figgins; "let him rip! Don't have him off that butt, or you'll spoil a good joke!"

As Figgins spoke, the window above Skimpole quietly opened. Most of the crowd saw it and guessed what Figgins was driving at, and the threatened rush was stopped. Skimpole—who, of course, could not see behind him—had no idea that the window was open, and that Blake was grinning there over his head.

"These faults in your natures," went on Skimpole undauntedly, "are due to a faulty training. Children brought up by drunken and vicious parents take to drink and vice like ducks to water—I say, like ducks to water!"

And Skimpole stamped emphatically on the lid of the water-butt. There was an ominous creak.

"Bai Jove, Skimpole, deah boy, you had better be careful," said D'Arcy. "You'll be inside that butt if you stamp again like that. That lid has seen its best days, you know."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Skimpole realised the truth of D'Arcy's remark, and he did not stamp again. He contented himself with waving his arms.

"Therefore, everything can be traced to the combined influences of heredity and environment—"

"My only hat; listen to him!"

"Can you spell those words, Skimmy?"

"Everything," said Skimpole, unheeding, "can be traced to the combined influence of hereditament and enviro-ny—I mean, heredity and environedity—that is to say—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"And this proves the correctness of the Determinists' creed, that nobody is to blame for anything. And everything being the effect of a cause, that cause is to blame; or rather, the cause of that cause; which makes it perfectly clear—"

"Ha, ha, ha! I like the perfect clearness of it!" grinned Lowther.

"Clear as mud," said Tom Merry; "go on, Skimmy!"

"What I maintain is— Ow—ow—coohohohohohoh!"

A water-can had appeared over the window-sill, and it was turned upon the amateur Socialist. A shower of water descended upon Skimpole, cutting short the flow of his eloquence remorselessly in the middle.

"Ow—ow—gerroooh!"

Skimpole gave a wild jump and lost his footing on the water-butt, and came down upon it in a sitting posture with a heavy bump.

Crash!

The lid was old and worn, and it was never made to

stand usage like that. It went through, and Skimpole went through with it.

"Ow! Ow!"

And still the shower of water descended from above.

"Ow! Help! Ow!"

The juniors were too convulsed to lend the unfortunate Socialist a hand for some moments. The yell of laughter that went up might have been heard all over St. Jim's.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Hear us smile!" roared Figgins. "Ha, ha, ha!"

"Ow! Help! Ow!"

Tom Merry ran to Skimpole's aid. He grasped the amateur Socialist by the legs and arms, and saved him from sinking too far into the butt.

"Here, stop that!" he roared, as a shower descended from the water-can over his own head. "Stop it, Blake, you ass!"

Blake grinned from the window.

"Sorry, Merry; is it going over you?"

"Yes," yelled Tom Merry; "stop it!"

"I'm awfully sorry!" said Blake, without moving. "How do you account for it going over you, Tom Merry?"

"You—you villain! Stop it!"

"The water will be all gone soon. I suppose it's going over you because you're in a line with the spout," said Blake thoughtfully; "that's the only way I can account for it."

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Figgins.

"Come and lend me a hand with Skimmy!" shouted Tom Merry.

"No, thanks; too much water about!"

"Ow! Help!"

"Blake, I'll jump on you for this!" roared Tom Merry.

"Ow! You utter villain! Oh!"

With a last gurgle the water ceased to pour from the can. Blake chuckled.

"There, it's all over now," he said. "You seem to have got pretty nearly as much as Skimpole, Tom Merry. Awfully awkward of you to get in the way of the shooting."

"You rotter!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Ow! Help me out!" said Skimpole, gasping. "I'm fearfully wet!"

Tom Merry dragged him from the barrel and bumped him on the ground.

"There you are!"

"You needn't be so rough, Merry! You have caused me to ache in the spot where you bumped me on the ground!"

"You ass! Look how wet I am; all because you're a silly chump!" said Tom Merry. "I'll jump on Blake when I've changed my clothes!"

And Tom Merry ran into the School House, and Skimpole followed more slowly; and a roar of laughter followed them both.

CHAPTER 8.

The Irish Party.

BLAKE came out of the School House grinning. Figgins thumped him on the back, and Digby gave him an appreciative poke in the ribs.

"Bai Jove, that was wathah funny!" remarked Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "I nevah saw Skimpole shut up so quickly before, deah boys!"

"Well, he's shut up for once now!" said Digby. "I say, I've got something to say to you, Blake; no New House boundaries admitted!"

And the chums of Study No. 6 walked away together.

"What's the row?" asked Blake, with an inquiring look at his chum. "Something about the parliamentary election?"

"Yes; it's about my standing for Belfast."

"Of course you're going to stand! We shall have to talk to Reilly and make him see reason!"

"Of course," said Herries. "If Dig calls himself Maloney, I don't see why they can't be satisfied."

"Murphy, you ass; not Maloney."

"Maloney's as good as Murphy any day in the week!"

"Well, it's Murphy," said Dig. "My grandmother's name was Murphy, and, as I'm a quarter Irish, I don't see why I shouldn't represent Belfast."

"Yass, wathah!"

"Reilly's holding another meeting of the Irish Party in his study," said Dig. "I've just heard about it."

"Oh, is that the news?"

"That's it. What's going to be done?"

"Reilly is," said Blake, looking warlike. "We'll go along to Reilly's study and interview the cheeky young bounder. I'd like to see a chum of mine left out of St. Jim's Parliament, that's all!"

"That's all right," said Dig. "I've just heard about it."

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"Reilly is," said Blake, looking warlike. "We'll go along to Reilly's study and interview the cheeky young bounder. I'd like to see a chum of mine left out of St. Jim's Parliament, that's all!"

"Yaas, wathah! Let's go an' give the meetin' a feahful thwashin'."

"There's a dozen of them," said Digby. "Oh, we're only going to explain things now," said Blake; "the punching business will come afterwards! Reilly is usually a sensible sort of chap, and I dare say he will see reason. We'll try, anyway."

"Yaas, wathah! If you like to leave the explainin' to me, I'll do my vewy best to make him see weason, deah boys."

"Yes, we're likely to leave it to you!" "What you weally wequire in a mattah like this is a fellow of tact and judgment," said D'Arcy. "Now, when I offah my services—"

But the juniors were striding on, and D'Arcy's offer was lost. They reached the study occupied by the boy from Belfast, and Blake knocked at the door.

"Come in!" rang out Reilly's voice. Blake pushed open the door.

"Sure, and ye can come in if ye can find room," said Reilly, looking up from his seat at the head of the table; "it's pretty crowded, entirely!"

Reilly was quite right on that point. The study was not a large apartment, and it already had a dozen fellows in it, and it was absolutely crammed. Three juniors were sitting on the window-sill, others were on the table, and others still were standing. There was literally not enough room for the chums of Study No. 6 to enter, so Blake went in and the rest stood in the open doorway.

"I've come to speak to you chaps," said Blake, looking round upon the juniors crammed into the study.

They were all Irish boys, belonging to the Fourth and the Shell, and both the School House and New House were represented there. House distinctions faded before the higher claims of patriotism.

Reilly looked a little doubtful. "This is my meeting," he remarked. "I don't know whether I can allow you chaps to come and do the gassing."

"I'm not going to gas. I want to speak to you plainly. I'm a plain chap—"

"Sure, and you are," agreed Reilly, looking at Blake. And there was a chuckle from the Irish party, and Blake turned red.

"I didn't come here to be cackled at," he said warmly. "I tell you I'm going to speak plainly. You chaps are the constituency of Belfast!"

"Sure, and we are!"

"We want you to elect Digby as member for Belfast."

"Rats to ye! We want an Irish representative!" exclaimed O'Toole, of the Fourth.

"Digby is an Irishman."

"Yes; his name sounds Irish, doesn't it?" said Reilly.

"His grandmother was an Irishman—woman, I mean. Her name was Murphy, and Dig is really a Murphy, of the old original brand."

"Rats!"

"If you say rats to me, Reilly—"

"Rats!"

Blake glared. Reilly was the other side of the table, and the room was too crammed for Blake to get round.

"I'll leave it over for another time," said Blake, glowering.

"We'll leave you over for another time, too," said Reilly. "Will you kindly oblige by travelling alone, and shutting the door after you?"

"I've come here to speak—"

"Oh, rats! You've spoken; now bunk!"

"Digby is the candidate for Belfast."

"We're going to have an Irish—"

"Digby is an Irishman, and he's adopting his grandmother's name of Murphy for the purposes of the election."

"Rot!"

"Did you say rot to me, Reilly?"

"Yes, sure and I did!"

"The expression is most wude," said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "I wegard it as extremewly wude, Weilly. It is true that most of Blake's remarks weally are wot, but it is not the coewect thing to tell him so."

"Shut up, Gussy!"

"I wefuse to shut up, Dig. I wegard—"

"Look here, you kids," said Blake, "you've got to elect Dig—I mean Murphy—to the seat for Belfast. Do you hear me?"

"Rats!"

It was a general chorus of "Rats!" from every fellow in the study.

"Dig is a true-born Irishman, and his name is Murphy"

"Rats!"

"Do you mean to say you won't?" roared Blake.

Reilly grinned.

"No; we won't! I'm the candidate for Belfast, and the whole constituency has promised to vote for me."

"Sure, and we have!"

Blake was a little nonplussed.

The Irish party were holding together, under the able leadership of Reilly, and it looked as though Study No. 6 would have to give in for once.

"I can't allow this," said Blake, with a shake of the head. "I am bound, as leader of the juniors of this House, to stand up for the freedom of election. You are free to elect Dig—Murphy as member for Belfast."

"And free to refuse!" grinned Reilly.

"Nothing of the sort! That isn't freedom; that's insubordination!" said Blake darkly. "That sort of thing leads to fellows getting their heads punched."

"Punch away, then!" said Reilly cheerfully. "Look here, I'm willing to leave it to Tom Merry to decide, if you like!"

"Hear, hear!"

"Rats! As leader of the School House juniors—"

"As leader of the Irish party—"

"I'm not going to stand—"

"You're interrupting the meeting!"

"If you like to withdraw your candidature—"

"Yaas, wathah! Withdraw your candidature, deah boy."

"Rats! Traval!"

"Then I'll jolly soon—"

"Which way are you going out of this study—on your feet or your neck?" demanded the member for Belfast.

"I'm not going!"

"Yes, you are! Collar him, kids!"

"Stand back, or—"

"Yaas, wathah! Stand back, or—"

"Kick them out!"

The Irish party closed round the four juniors. The odds were too great. The chums of Study No. 6, resisting desperately, were hurled forth into the corridor.

Blake picked himself up from the linoleum.

"Come on!" he roared.

And he rushed back to the attack.

The doorway of Reilly's study was crammed with juniors. They met the rush of the four chums without moving an inch, and the quartette were hurled back as though from a solid wall. Reilly grinned at them from amid his sturdy constituents.

"Better get along, dear boys," he advised.

"Yaas, wathah!" gasped D'Arcy. "I am feelin' in quite a flutah. My trowsahs are soiled, and my waistcoat is wumped."

Blake glared at the victorious Irish party. There was no disgrace in defeat when the odds were so great, but Blake did not like the situation. But it was evidently useless to attack again.

"Come on, kids!" he said. "Let 'em cackle!"

And the Irish party took full advantage of that permission, for their cackle followed the chums all along the corridor to their own door.

CHAPTER 9.

D'Arcy Stands on His Rights.

TOM MERRY looked into Study No. 6 a few minutes later. The hero of the Shell had changed his clothes, and looked himself again. The Fourth-Formers were putting themselves to rights after their rough experience at the hands of the Irish party.

Blake's hand strayed towards a cricket stump, but Tom Merry made a gesture in sign of peace. He evidently bore no malice for the ducking.

"It's all right, Blake! You look rather used up."

"We feel like it, too," granted Blake. "I suppose you've seen Reilly?"

"Yes. He tells me that you chaps have been trying to interfere with the freedom of election among the constituents of Belfast."

"No; we've been trying to maintain the freedom of election," explained Blake. "We're not going to have the electors over-persuaded by Reilly, you know. They're free to elect Dig to the representation of Belfast— Dig is assumin' the name of Murphy for the beastly purpose, you know—"

"Only they want Reilly for their member," said Tom Merry, laughing.

Blake shook his head.

"Nothing of the sort. They don't really know what they want. It's a very old political maxim that the public never know what they want, and have to be led by the nose like donkeys. The public is an ass."

"And a jolly obstinate ass sometimes," said Digby. "I really don't think there's much chance of convincing those chaps that I'm the fellow they want for their representative."

"We shall have to keep on pegging away," said Blake. "You're going to be member for Belfast, and that's settled!"

"The Irish party seem set on having Reilly," said Tom Merry. "Suppose we found another constituency for Dig?"

"Well, that would alter the case, of course," said Blake, with a nod. "So long as Dig's in the parliament, I'm not particularly set on his representing Belfast. As a matter of fact, his grand-maternal relation—"

"His what?"

"His grand-maternal relation," said Blake, "came from Cork. Cork is a fine big city, and it would be an honour to anybody to be member for Cork. Digby can still sit under the name of Murphy, and represent Cork."

"Then we'll rig up a new constituency," said Tom Merry. "No need to always have an even dozen in a constituency. All the chaps from the south of Ireland can vote for Cork, and there are six or seven. We'll consider that settled. And Reilly can represent Belfast."

"I'm agreeable," said Dig. "I'd just as soon sit for Cork."

"Then it's settled, and we can have some peace," said Tom Merry. "By the way, do you know if there are any chaps at St. Jim's from the Isle of Man?"

"There's Kerruish, of the Fourth."

"Yes, I know there is; and he wants to represent the Isle of Man in St. Jim's Parliament, but I can't find him any constituency."

"Oh, that's rot! They have home rule in the Isle of Man—a House of Keys, or Locks, or something. Can't have a Manx member."

"It would make the thing more complete," said Tom Merry musingly. "Kerruish is a decent chap, too, and I should like him to come in. We can make up a constituency of the fellows who've been to the Isle of Man for their holidays."

"Ha, ha, ha! That's a good idea!"

"Then we'll get Kerruish elected. Our parliament will have the pull over the other one at Westminster, in having a Manx member. Well, I'm glad that's settled about Reilly. It's reilly satisfactory."

"What an extremely wotten pun!"

"Well, it's not mine, it's Lowther's," said Tom Merry, laughing.

"Don't hurwy away, Tom Mewwy. The elections are fixed for to-morrow afternoon—"

"That's right."

"I have been nominated candidate for Piccadilly," said Arthur Augustus. "I have no objection to standin' for that constituency, you know, but you have not found me any constituents yet. There are no fellows in the school from Piccadilly."

Tom Merry scratched his curly head thoughtfully.

"I'm afraid we overlooked that important fact, Gussy."

"Yaas, I'm wathah afraid you did; but, you see, I'm not the person to be ovahlooked," said D'Arcy. "I should uttably wefuse to be ovahlooked."

"My dear Gussy, it's all right. If we can't find you a constituency, you can stand down. The parliament will be all right without a Gus in it."

D'Arcy screwed his eyeglass into his eye and surveyed the hero of the Shell with an extremely disdainful expression.

"I should wefuse to stand down!" he said—"I should uttably and distinctly wefuse to do anythin' of the sort, Tom Mewwy."

"Then I don't see what's to be done. Do you, Blake?"

Blake shook his head solemnly.

"I'm afraid I don't. Perhaps we could make Gussy a House of Lords all by himself. How would that work?"

"Well, that would have its advantages, because he would hold the meetings all by himself, and nobody would have to listen to him talking—"

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—"

"Then we'll consider the suggestion adopted."

"Nothin' of the sort. I wefuse to be wogarded as a House of Lords all by myself. Besides, the House of Lords is wathah out of date, and I am extremewly up to the times, deah boys. If you wefuse to find me a constituency, I shall appeal to the whole body of the free and enlightened electors of St. Jim's."

"That will be worth seeing," grinned Tom Merry.

D'Arcy sniffed.

"If you care to come out in the quadwangle, you can see it," he said.

And the swell of the School House marched out of the study.

Blake chuckled.

"Come on," said Tom Merry. "Gussy on his dignity is a sight worth seeing, and I'm rather curious to see how the free and enlightened electors of St. Jim's receive him."

The juniors followed Arthur Augustus into the quadwangle. They found him mount upon a tub, eyeglass in

eye, and a crowd of curious juniors round him. The May sun gleamed upon his gold watch-chain and the startling hues of his waistcoat.

"Gentlemen of St. Jim's—"

"Hear, hear!"

"Having been unreasonably ovahlooked by the nomination committee, I am compelled to appeal to you for your suffrages. I stand before you as a—"

"As a silly ass," said Pratt.

"Nothin' of the sort. I stand before you as a—"

"As a howling duffer."

"Certainly not. I stand before you as a candidate for election to the parliament of St. Jim's; but, unfortunately, I have no constituency, havin' been wecklessly ovahlooked in that wathah important particulah. I think that the general voice of the electors of St. Jim's should weturn me to parliament, and then a constituency could be found for me."

"Colney Hatch would be about your mark," said Kerr. "What price Gussy as member for Colney Hatch?"

"Hear, hear!"

"Member for Colney Hatch! Hear, hear!"

"I should wefuse to be considahed membah for Colney Hatch," said Arthur Augustus, with dignity. "I weally considah—"

"Make it Bedlam, then," said Fatty Wynn. "We're not particular on a point like that. What price Gussy as member for Bedlam?"

"Hear, hear!"

"Pway do not wot, deah boys. This is wathah a sewious mattah, and I should like you to wogard it sewiously. I am afraid the school parliament will not be much of a success unless I am there to keep an eye on the youngstahs."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"And so I considah that—"

"What is all this noise here?"

It was a sour, unpleasant voice. And it was a sour, unpleasant face that the juniors saw as they looked round. Mr. Ratcliff, the housemaster of the New House, had come upon the scene, and his look showed that there was trouble coming. Mr. Ratcliff was always especially "down" upon Study No. 6 and the Terrible Three, having had many difficulties with them, chiefly due to his own domineering, interfering nature.

As a matter of fact, the New House master had no authority to interfere with School House boys, especially on the School House side of the quadrangle; but Mr. Ratcliff had a love of interfering that he never tried to control. There were few juniors who would even have thought of offering any opposition to a housemaster; but the sublime coolness of the swell of St. Jim's was equal to even that.

D'Arcy adjusted his monocle and looked at the housemaster.

"Did you address me, sir?" he asked.

"I addressed all of you. What is all this noise here?"

"I believe the noise was caused by these youngstahs shoutin', sir," said D'Arcy. "I am makin' a political speech, if you please, sir."

"Then stop all such nonsense at once, and all of you boys disperse," said the New House master harshly.

Tom Merry's eyes sparkled, and so did Blake's. This wholly unjustifiable interference "got their backs up" at once. But D'Arcy never turned a hair.

"Pway, Mr. Watchiff—"

"Not a word, D'Arcy. Get down off that ridiculous tub at once!"

"If you please, sir, I think I am quite within my wights in addressin' a political meetin' on the School House side of the quadwangle," he said.

The New House master frowned.

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"I suppose you do not intend to disobey me, D'Arcy?" "Undah the ciroz., sir, I don't see how I can break up my meetin', consistently with my personal dig.," said D'Arcy. "You see, sir—"

"Will you get off that tub, D'Arcy?"

"I may say, sir, that we have Mr. Wailton's permission to address meetin's in the quadwangle, on our own side—"

"D'Arcy—"

"So long as we do not make too much noise, sir. If you think we are makin' too much noise, I will impress upon my respectful hearers to modewate their twansports."

His respectful hearers began to chuckle. The crowd did not disperse. They all knew very well that Mr. Ratcliff was exceeding his authority, and, having found a leader in D'Arcy, they were inclined to see the matter out.

The housemaster's brow became as black as night.

"D'Arcy!" he almost shouted.

"Yaas, Mr. Ratcliff. I hear you perfectly well," said D'Arcy languidly. "If you will allow me to explain to you—"

"Obey me instantly!"

Arthur Augustus did not move. There was a thrill in the crowd. To disobey a master, even when he was in the wrong, was a serious matter.

"If you will allow me to explain, sir—"

Mr. Ratcliff made a stride towards D'Arcy.

"If you do not immediately obey me—"

"What is the matter here?"

Mr. Raitlon's voice broke in quietly. Mr. Ratcliff swung round towards the School House master with a face inflamed with rage.

"The matter!" he cried. "The matter is that this boy, belonging to your House, has directly refused to obey me."

"Pway allow me to explain, Mr. Wailton."

"Certainly, but be brief, D'Arcy."

"If my word is not enough, Mr. Raitlon—"

"Please allow D'Arcy to speak. Go on, D'Arcy."

"Certainly, sir. You see, we were holdin' a meetin' in the quad, as we have your permish. to do, and Mr. Watcliff intewupted us, in a wathah unweasonable mannah—"

"My hat!" murmured Blake. "Did you ever hear of such nerve?"

"I twied to explain to him, but he gwew wathah excited, sir," said D'Arcy. "I shall be glad if you will tell him that we have your permish. to hold meetin's on our own side of the quadwangle, sir, and then pewwaps he will wetsire and allow the pwoceedin's to go on."

The boys gasped at D'Arcy's speech. The swell of St. Jim's was unconscious of displaying an unheard-of nerve in his remarks. He was speaking quite naturally, saying what he thought, and he considered that Mr. Ratcliff, as a reasonable man, could not fail to see that he was quite in the right. Mr. Ratcliff, however, did not look either convinced or pleased.

"This utter insolence—" he began hotly.

"Weally, sir, I fail to see insolence in my vewy sensible wemarks. I do not appwove of eithah insolence or impertinence; it is a sign of low bweeding, and certainly I have nevah been guilty of such an offence against good form."

Mr. Raitlon tried not to smile.

"I really do not see any reason for interfering with this meeting," he said. "But if the noise troubles you, Mr. Ratcliff, I will certainly dismiss it. Please disperse, boys."

Mr. Ratcliff gritted his teeth. The School House master had spoken so, to save his colleague's dignity before the boys, but his words were a snub nevertheless. There was no question of punishing D'Arcy, or even calling him to account.

"If you intend the matter to end here, Mr. Raitlon—"

"I do not see what other decision I could come to, Mr. Ratcliff," said the School House master quietly.

"Oh, very well!" said Mr. Ratcliff. "Very well!"

And he walked away very quickly. A hiss would have followed him, but Mr. Raitlon's presence restrained it. The School House master walked into his House, and then the boys broke into a general chuckle.

"My hat!" said Tom Merry. "That was one in the eye for Ratty!"

"Rather!" said Blake. "Good old Gus!"

"Stood up to him like a little man, and no mistake!" said Digby. "We shall have to find Gussy a constituency after this, kids!"

"Rather!"

The juniors surrounded the tub upon which D'Arcy was mounted. The swell of the School House, obedient to his own housemaster, was about to descend. Herries and Walsh caught him in their arms as he was stepping down.

"Hallo! What the deuce are you doin', deah boys?" gasped the swell of St. Jim's. "Pway don't be asses!"

"Shoulder high!" exclaimed Digby.

"Right-ho!"

"Weally, deah boys—"

"You're a giddy hero, Gussy!" chuckled Blake. "Shoulder high, kids, and round the quad."

The laughing juniors shouldered the amazed dude of the School House. The fellow who had calmly faced and argued with the most unpopular master at St. Jim's, was a hero in their eyes. Gussy had never been so popular. As soon as he saw that it was an ovation, and not a ragging, D'Arcy resigned himself contentedly to his fate.

"Pway don't wumple my twousahs more than you can help, deah boys," he said, as he was hoisted upon the shoulders of Walsh and Herries. "Don't bump into my waistcoat. If you could hold me a little less tightly, I should be more comfy. No need to twist my beastly ankles off, you know."

"Ha, ha, ha! March!"

"Carry him under the windows of the New House," suggested Digby. "That will make Ratty wriggle."

"Yes, and fetch him out with a cane," said Tom Merry. "Keep on our own side of the quad. He can see us, and that's enough."

"Right-ho!"

"Round he goes!"

Arthur Augustus was marched off shoulder-high. He screwed his eyeglass into his eye, and surveyed the crowd patronisingly from his somewhat perilous perch. The juniors bore him round in triumph, and the fact that a glimmer of a face could be seen at the window of Mr. Ratcliff's study in the New House, added to their satisfaction. The New House master was watching them from his window, and the boys could imagine with what feelings.

Arthur Augustus's triumph came to an end suddenly. One of his bearers stumbled, and Gussy's weight bore him over. Walsh rolled on the ground, and D'Arcy rolled over him, and, clutching wildly at Herries to save himself, dragged him down, too.

The swell of the School House sat up, looking rather dazed.

"Round again!" exclaimed Blake.

"Thank you, I have had quite enough," said D'Arcy.

"I appreciate your attentions vewy much, but I have had quite enough for the pwsent."

And Arthur Augustus skipped into the School House, and the ovation was over. But after that there could be no question that D'Arcy was to have a seat in the St. Jim's Parliament, if a constituency had to be invented for him at the last moment.

CHAPTER 10.

The Elections.

THE next day—a half-holiday—was fixed for the parliamentary elections at St. Jim's. There was a large crop of impositions in the junior Forms during morning school. But morning lessons came to an end at last, and the Lower Forms were free to think of the more important—to them—affairs of the school parliament.

The candidates for the various constituencies had been nominated, and most of them were pretty sure of their election. There were rival candidates for some of the constituencies, however, so that the result of the elections was not certain yet. Some, like Tom Merry, Blake, and Figgins, were certain to be elected unanimously.

Perhaps the busiest fellow in the school at that time was Herbert Skimpole. The amateur Socialist of St. Jim's was getting anxious about his seat in the school parliament. He intended to be leader of the Labour Party there; but that could not be unless he were elected, and that was by no means sure. No constituency at St. Jim's seemed to be particularly "gone" on Socialism.

Skimpole sought for support among the influential members of the Shell and the Fourth Form, but with indifferent success. He looked into Tom Merry's study after dinner, and found the Terrible Three extremely busy. Tom Merry had a big book on the table ready to record the result of the elections, which were to take place in the gym, and were soon to commence.

"I say, Merry—" began Skimpole.

Tom Merry looked up.

"Clear out, Skimpole!"

"I want to ask you—"

"Oh, what is it? Buck up!"

"Which constituency would you advise me to stand for?"

"Take your choice."

"But will you back me up?"

"Oh, no!"

"Don't be a rotter, Merry. I think you might back me up. I should make a better Member for London than Walsh, who has put up for it."

"You must tell that to the constituents."

"You have a lot of influence with them—"

"It wouldn't be fair to use it against Walsh. Besides, as a true Socialist, you ought to be opposed to the use of influence. Get out!"

Skimpole got out. He ambled along to Study No. 6, and found the chums of the Fourth Form getting ready to go down to the gym.

"Hallo, Blake! I see you're busy," said Skimpole.

"Yaas, wathah!" said D'Arcy. "We're just going down to the elections, deah boy. You can come along if you like, Skimmy. You're not standing for anythin', are you?"

"Yes, I'm candidate for London."

"Eh?" said Blake. "I thought Walsh was putting up for London."

"So he is; I'm his opponent."

"Well, I suppose you'll get chucked out, so it's all right."

"If you fellows would like to back me up—"

"Us fellows wouldn't like to do anything of the sort. We're busy; travel!"

Skimpole went out into the quad.

The juniors were crowding into the gym. The boys of St. Jim's not concerned in the election were mostly out in the playing-fields, and the juniors had the great building all to themselves. Tom Merry had ordained that each constituency should elect its candidate in turn, and then make room for another, the result being entered in the big book Tom Merry had specially provided for the purpose.

A crowd of juniors stood at the door of the gym to greet the Terrible Three as they came down. There was a cheer as Tom Merry was seen coming, with a big book under his arm. Skimpole stepped into his path.

"Merry, before it is too late—"

"Oh, don't bother me now, old chap!" said Tom Merry good-naturedly. "Can't you see I'm busy?"

"But it is extremely important for me to have a seat in St. Jim's Parliament—"

"Get out!" roared twenty voices.

Skimpole blinked round upon the excited electors through his spectacles.

"Don't be so noisy, my misguided brothers!" he exclaimed. "I am trying to make Merry see reason—"

"I'll make you see stars if you don't shift!" growled Monty Lowther.

"Really, Lowther—"

"Are you going, you horrid ass?"

"Certainly not. It is my duty as a Socialist to persist. Merry, you know that it is my intention to air the grievances of the toiling millions in St. Jim's Parliament, and for the sake of suffering humanity it is necessary for me to have a seat—"

"Oh, dry up, old chap!"

"I cannot dry up, consistently with my duty as a Socialist. The woes of the downtrodden masses, commonly known as the submerged tenth, cry aloud to me for redress. Instead of electing a bloated aristocrat like D'Arcy, you really want a fellow like me—"

"Oh, weally, Skimpole—"

"I can explain the great principles of Socialism to you in short, simple phrases, suitable to your intellects. I can penetrate through the depths of ignorance and folly and prejudice, and enlighten you—"

"What!"

"Yes, my brethren, even your ignorance and stupidity cannot be considered invincible. I can let in the light upon your mental darkness—"

"Kick him out!"

"Duck him in the fountain!"

There was a rush at Skimpole. The amateur Socialist dodged, but the indignant juniors were not to be denied. Skimpole took to his heels, with a yelling mob after him. Tom Merry burst into a laugh.

"Let's go to the elections—"

"Hallo, look at Skimmy!" roared Blake.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The juniors had cornered the amateur Socialist. The ducking in the fountain was not an attractive prospect to Skimpole, and he glared round desperately for an avenue of escape. A water-pipe leading up the side of the gym offered the only means, and the unhappy propagandist swarmed up it.

The juniors crowded below him, roaring with laughter. Skimpole clung desperately to the pipe.

"Really, my misguided brethren—"

"Ha, ha, ha! Will you promise to leave off talking if we let you off the ducking?" demanded Monty Lowther.

"No!" gasped Skimpole. "As a sincere Socialist and reformer it is impossible for me ever to leave off talking—"

"Then you go into the fountain—"

"I will cease to explain my views for a time."

"I thought you would. Let him alone, chaps, but if he says another word ending with 'ism,' shove him into the fountain!"

"What-ho!"

And the electors returned to the gym. Skimpole slid down the pipe, and followed them rather dubiously.

The gym was crowded with the free and enlightened electors of St. Jim's. Tom Merry opened the proceedings with a neat speech, which made a good impression.

"And now let the constituencies roll up," said Jack Blake.

The constituencies rolled up.

They came in alphabetical order, and as most of them had only one candidate, the proceedings were not delayed.

Reilly, needless to state, was elected for Belfast among the earliest, and Figgins for Bristol, and Fatty Wynn for Cardiff. Herries for Chester, and Tom Merry for the Colonies followed, then Digby-Murphy for Cork, and Monty Lowther for Durham.

Kerr was opposed for Glasgow by Macdonald of the Shell, but he carried it by a majority of one, and Figgins and Wynn cheered heartily. Figgins & Co. were now all three assured of seats in the school parliament, and they could afford to take things easily. Manners came next with a bumping majority for Liverpool.

Jimson and French contested the city of Leeds, and Jimson was at the top of the poll by two votes. Then came the election for London. Walsh had regarded himself as the only candidate, but as the constituency marched up to vote, Skimpole and Gore came forward. There were a dozen voters, one of them being Gore's chum, Mellish, who voted for him, being the only one that did so. The other eleven voted for Walsh, and Skimpole looked at them more in sorrow than in anger.

"You don't know what you're losing, that's all," he said.

"Cheer up, Skimmy," said Tom Merry. "There may be a vacancy later on, and you'll have another chance."

And the amateur Socialist brightened up at the idea.

Harrison of the Fourth was elected for Manchester, and then came the election for the Isle of Man. Kerruish, the candidate, was the only Manxman at the school, but Tom Merry's idea had been carried out, of forming a constituency of fellows who had been to that beautiful island for their holidays. And Kerruish was elected unanimously. Then came the election of D'Arcy for the rather curious constituency of Piccadilly. But the constituency had been made up of six or seven fellows, and they plumped for D'Arcy, and the swell of St. Jim's had the proud consciousness that he would have the right to inscribe M.P. St. J. after his name.

Blake's election was last, for Yorkshire, and, of course, he had a majority. The elections over, Tom Merry carefully went over the list of members in the book, checked by Figgins and Blake. Then the list was read out to the crowd, and each candidate received a cheer in turn.

Tom Merry closed the book with a snap.

"Gentlemen, and free and enlightened electors of this great and famous school," he said, "the first elections are now over, and St. Jim's Parliament is duly elected. The first session of the parliament will commence on Saturday afternoon, the Houses of Parliament for the present being the wood-shed. The honorary Speaker, Mr. Raiton, will, unfortunately, not be able to be present, but a Speaker will be duly elected. I hope that the inauguration—"

"The what?"

"The inauguration—"

"Well," said Jack Blake, "that's a jolly good word!"

"That the inauguration of the Parliament of St. Jim's will mark a new era in the history of the school, and will lead to the improvement of our minds—"

"Well, you need it," said Figgins.

"The meeting is now at an end, the elections having been carried to a satisfactory conclusion," said Tom Merry. "The proceedings of the St. Jim's Parliament will be duly reported in the famous magazine known as 'Tom Merry's Weekly.'"

And Tom Merry stepped down. Fatty Wynn nudged him as the meeting dispersed.

"I say, Merry, don't you think that an occasion like this ought to be celebrated? What do you say to a big feed?"

"Good wheeze!" said Tom Merry. "Come on, kids; talking makes me hungry. Fatty Wynn is going to stand a feed to all the elected candidates."

"Oh, really, Merry, I—"

"Never mind; my mistake," grinned Tom Merry. "Come along, kids, and I'll stand the feed."

"That you won't," said Figgins. "We'll stand half."

"Just as you like, Figgy."

And Tom Merry passed his arm through Figgins's, and walked him off to the tuckshop; and, needless to say, the whole of St. Jim's Parliament followed promptly.

THE END.

(Another long tale of Tom Merry & Co. at St. Jim's next Thursday. Please order your copy of "The Gem" Library in advance. Price 1d.)

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THE BLACK VULTURE OF FOLIAT



A TALE OF ALAN WAYWARD.

CHAPTER 1.

The Swoop of the Slavedealer.

THE Sheik Jelaluddin got up from the goatskin carpet, on which he had been kneeling and prostrating himself over his midday prayers, and looked for a long moment on the face of Alan Wayward.

The young Englishman, despite his strong, handsome face, with its clear skin, bronzed by the mountain air and sun, was looking and feeling as if he did not care if an avalanche, or even a lesser catastrophe, would sweep him altogether away. Even the inquiring nose of Clok, the great wolf-hound, was powerless to draw from him the slightest expression of interest. His blue eyes never shifted their gloomy, intent gaze from a spot about a mile distant, where he was expecting to get his last vision for a long time of Mirame, the chieftainess of the powerful and haughty Haideranli clan. He was wondering how he had ever had the courage to declare that he loved her. It was true he had saved her life from the brigand, Kasim. It was true, also, that he couldn't help himself. But beneath the scathing words her fiery old father had just heaped upon him, anything in the shape of an absolute truth felt like a brick unexpectedly heaved by a friend. Nearly a week had elapsed since the sheikh and he had ridden with the Haideranli to thank the English Consul at Van for a special service he had done the old chief. And it was when the chief was on the point of riding home with his daughter and some six hundred of his stalwarts, that Alan had taken all his courage, and craved permission to woo and wed this fair daughter of the mountains, whose sires had been chieftains of forty thousand spears ever since spears were invented.

Much of what Chief Hassein said Alan did not under-

stand; but the purport of it was clear enough, and, stripped of its fervours and parables, it amounted to this:

"Thou art brave and comely, and I made thee on the field captain of the Haideranli; but thou art, none the less, a presumptuous dog, and thou mayest begone to thy place, for no daughter of mine dost thou get till thou comest with twenty thousand lances at thy back, and canst show flocks and herds more than my barns may feed."

And thus the old chieftain had ridden away, full of wrath and disdain, and though the Lady Mirame had risked sending him a glance full of sunniest hope and promise, yet Alan Wayward felt the waves of rebellion mounting higher and higher, till they were quite over his heart, and fairly into his head; and if it were not for his consciousness of the sheikh's ironical gaze, he would have ridden after the departed troop, and snatched the girl from their very midst.

Perhaps the old sheikh, whose eyes missed nothing that was worth seeing, divined what was going on in his companion's mind.

"Wisdom, my son, is like unto a staff," he said, wagging the great oaken shoot, from which he never separated. "If thou take it in thy hand, it is faithful to help thee on the way thou desirest to go; but if thou thrust it between the feet, verily it landeth thee on the nose."

"That's all very well," said Alan, a little surlily. "You heard what that old ruffian said—twenty thousand lances, and about five times as many sheep and cattle."

"It is but little," said the sheikh reflectively, over a prolonged pinch of snuff.

"But little!" growled Alan.

"Pouf!" cried the sheikh. "Follow but wisdom, and thou shalt gain more and much more. For Allah, who disciplines lovers for their impatience, yet often is bounteous

in opportunities. Harken! What strife is that that goes on below?"

Alan lay flat on a great boulder, and gazed into the woods some three hundred feet beneath them—the woods through which Hassein had set to ride with his daughter and tribesmen, when he dismissed him two hours ago.

It was easy enough to see that a savage fight was being waged in the pass below, and that the Haideranli had apparently walked into an ambush. For they were surrounded on all sides, and, ringed round the chief and his daughter, were hewing, shooting, thrusting against what seemed in the glare like a pack of Nubians and Arabs.

"Know you who they are, sheikh?" asked Alan anxiously. Not a goat could have passed from where they were to the group on the plateau below, for not only was it precipitous, but it bulged inward, so that the ledge over which the two were crawling their necks hung far out above the battle.

"Observe how opportunity attends on wisdom," said the sheikh, his eyes gleaming. "Hast thou gone on, thou wert no longer here, and thy use should have been finished."

"I don't see what use I am here!" groaned Alan. "Those beggars down there in the yellow turbans and red breeches seem to be getting the best of it. It seems familiar enough, the dress, too; yet I can't remember when or where I saw it."

"Hast thou then forgotten the house of Mustapha, the slave-trafficker, at Foliat?" asked Jelaluddin.

"By Jove, you're right!" cried Alan. "But what are Mustapha's men doing here?"

"He is a very wicked and pernicious man," said the sheikh; "and I am glad that Allah is about to reprove him. He is here, without doubt, to avenge the judgment of Hassein on Idrin Pacha. For Idrin was a good customer to Mustapha, and now that he is hanged, and his house laid waste, and all his goods and people and slaves sent to serve the Haideranli, Mustapha hath lost a fat market, and his vitals ache for vengeance and profit."

"He must have travelled very fast to get here in time," said Alan.

"No man in Asia hath servants or horses or camels so good as those of Mustapha," replied the sheikh. "Wherefore is he known as the Black Vulture of Foliat. For when he swoops he strikes, and none have ever yet escaped from his claws."

Alan felt the blood at his heart stand still. Then he crept back after Jelaluddin from the edge of the boulder, and turned on the sheikh a face curiously grey.

"Do you not see the battle is going against them?" he whispered hoarsely.

"For which reason I waited," said the sheikh placidly, with another dive after his horn snuffbox. "Did I not say to thee, my son, that wisdom is not precipitate, but measured. Come, it is time! Gather up thy legs, and though they are long and young, thou shalt not race Jelaluddin, prophet of Allah."

"Fly on, eagle of Arabia," said Alan, with a sudden feeling of restored trust. He knew of old that the sheikh felt all his best achievements to, as it were, the circle of the second-hand, and not that of the minute-hand, of a watch. But he knew, too, that the old man was a warrior, skilled in every ruse, and that between his quips and saws was the fund of an experience as disciplined in emergency as it was quaint in eloquence. So when Jelaluddin said "Do this," Alan Wayward flung himself to the task, and had hitherto ever found it achieved.

Nor was he to be deceived now. For the eyes of the sheikh, blessed with that phenomenal keenness of vision that no European ever has, or will attain, had seen what had been invisible to the Englishman's searching gaze. Down in the valley, beyond the plateau, where the battle went raging, and just before the road debouched into the defile Alan had all the morning been sighing and swaining over, the eagle sight of the Arab had spotted, and counted, too, a reserve ambush of Mustapha's men, and with them, corralled in the thick screen of wood, a great train of fast-running camels.

For a good five hundred yards along the upper ledge on which they had halted for their noon meal, the sheikh led the way—swift, silent, now gliding, now leaping, with marvellous nimbleness and sureness, as though he had passed in some former existence many thousand years as a chief among goats.

He jeered openly at Alan, as the latter came up to the place he had chosen to halt, a good twelve seconds behind his master.

"Thou a hunter, a seeker of wisdom, a sigher after a royal maid!" he mocked. "Thou a finder of a few thousand lances! Thou who runnest with thy feet alone!"

"Oh, Heaven help us!" sighed Alan. "Would you have me run on my head?"

"Nay, but in it, with it, by means of it, thou son of blindness and conceit!" jabbed on the sheikh. "I would have thee use thy eyes and all of thee to the doing of the one task at hand. Up yonder, just now, thou didst overlook the great camel corps below us there. Now, since thou art young, and very slow of wit, bear me down many stones, while I sit here and rest my bones, and teach thee a little wisdom—if, indeed, thou'rt capable of comprehending. And bid that dog of thine stop his snuffling; nor make a noise. Nay, lift the stones, lazy one, and make here a breastwork, shaped like a very wide V, and surrounded with another shaped like the lip of a cup."

"Why shouldn't we lie low here, and pick off some of those camels?" asked Alan, when he had got together a vast array of two lines of solid heavy stones. "We don't want a breastwork to hold this spot."

The sheikh turned a bland, ironical eye on him, then took a pinch of snuff.

"Allah," he said, "hath taught me many things, but never, till now, to know a man who lost both sight and wits when he went wooing. Yet have I buried four wives. But enough! Bear no more stones! Reflect! If now thou shouldst put thy great arms round that mound of stones, and hurl them outwards, what would happen?"

"I suppose the stones would roll over the precipice, and kill or injure many camels," said Alan.

"Oh, son of ignorance," purred the sheikh angrily, "are camels men, that they should wait, sitting, to be killed by a rock? Will they not, at the first roar of the rocks, recover the knowledge of their strength, burst their bonds, and fly. And in their stampede, will they not overturn many men, and cause much confusion to Mustapha, since they are his camels and very valuable."

"Now fling out the stones," he went on, "and thou shalt see."

It was a clear drop, at this point, of a good six hundred feet into the camp, and as Alan swept off his little miniature avalanche, he was fairly amazed at the result. Long before the rocks reached them, the camels had swayed apart, and were stampeding wildly over the recumbent forms of the squadron left in reserve. The hoof of a terrified camel spurning a man, who is taking his afternoon nap, in the eye or nose or under the ear, is apt to create some emotion.

But with a thousand camels shoring frantically over the dozing noses of four or five hundred tired men, the hubbub is quite out of the ordinary.

From above, the two could see men rolling over each other, and doing even more damage in their mutual frenzied recriminations than the fugitive camels, who were already half way to the river that cut the plain a thousand feet further along.

"Now," said the sheikh, "fire, then run very quickly along the ledge, keeping under hard cover, and fire again. And so, by going on quickly, and firing straight, and not being seen, those children of perdition below shall think we are a multitude here, and fly themselves also."

Which the "children of perdition" promptly proceeded to do, after the first dozen shots; and under the thought that an ambush of the Haideranli had crept on them unawares, they fled as hard as they could pelt after the flying camels.

The diversion came none too soon for the safety of Hassein and his daughter, who were fighting at a desperate disadvantage against enormous odds; for they had been caught in a defile, and though the head of the column managed to fight on to the plateau, the main part of it had been badly riddled at the first discharge from Mustapha's sharpshooters, who held the woods on either side of the ravine.

But at the sight of the flying camels the slave-raiders hung back dismayed, and, as Alan and the sheikh came pelting down the path, booming out the Haideranli battle-cry, Hassein's warriors turned with such renewed fury on the attackers that they simply swept them off the plateau into the woody paths below. Nor did their chieftain, old war-dog that he was, attempt to check them; when, like a pack of wolves, they went leaping down the cliffs, their swords hacking right and left. Yet it was a fateful movement, and one destined to place the very hope and flower of the Haideranli in the deadliest peril.

For while the old chieftain, standing erect by the side of Mirame, was urging on and directing the pursuit; while Alan and the sheikh were still a good three hundred yards away, a little troop of men rushed out from the almost unscalable cliff overlooking the plateau, and in a twinkling had surrounded Hassein and his daughter.

Before Alan or Jelaluddin could realise what was done, the old chief fell, fighting furiously; a giant Nubian had thrown a shawl round Mirame's head, lifted her in front of him on to his horse, and was dashing down the defile.

CHAPTER 2.

A Capture and an Escape.

WHEN Alan saw the woman that he loved being borne away captive by one of Mustapha's ruffians, even the sheikh was surprised at the Berserk rage that fell on him. Of the six men that surprised the old chief and his daughter, four still remained, and turned savagely to guard their companions' retreat.

With all his great strength multiplied by his madness, Alan sprang on them, not pausing to unsling either rifle or battle-axe; but, gripping the two first by the throats in left and right, he whirled them off their feet and dashed them headlong against a great boulder of rock, so that they fell with broken skulls, nor moved again.

Then, like a flash of lightning, he was on the others, and, while the one great black who grappled with him he seized by neck and jaw and, with one upward heave of his elbows, cracked the fellow's spine, seeing that the other had sunk to one knee, and was preparing for a pointblank shot at him, he drove at the evil, exulting face with the long, sure kick that had made him famous when he led the Marlborough Rugby fifteen. And the kick taking the Turk in the throat, he grunted but once, and died.

"Hoo!" shouted the sheikh, who came running up—for he had stumbled and fallen on the way. "But that is a great feat!"

"Look to Hasein!" cried Alan, who, with Clok bounding along at his side, was already racing down the defile by which Mirame had been borne.

Alan Wayward had been considered a first-class runner, whether for sprinting or staying, when he was at Marlborough, but the last three months that he had passed with the sheikh on the mountains had braced his muscles to a power that bordered on the incredible. And as he ran he remembered Jelaluddin's injunction to use his head and his eyes.

Below him, on the right, he could see the now rallying fugitives of Mustapha; some of them standing off the pursuing Haideranli, others rounding up the stampeding camels. Before him, a mile ahead, was the great Nubian and the bound form of Mirame drooping at his saddle-bow. The ruffian was mounted on a splendid chestnut, and Alan ground his teeth as he realised that, with all his power of running, he could never hope to outstrip the horse in front. He unsung his rifle, and, squatting firmly, using his knees for a rest, he took a long, steady aim. But at the end of a minute that seemed like an hour he clicked back the sight. He could see nothing but the dodging dots that represented Mirame's head and feet, and fire was more than he dare do.

"I would have thee use thy eyes." The whisper in his brain was as though the sheikh had spoken at his elbow.

With a gaze sharpened by anguish he scanned the distant figure and saw it suddenly avert off to the right. He leapt to a boulder and strained his eyes to follow its course. Only a flash of the green and crimson and gold in Mirame's head-scarf was visible for a moment, then the great pines shored their screen in the way of vision. But it had sufficed, and for a moment Alan's heart stood still, for the flash had indicated that the Nubian was circling down the mountain, following the way of the ledge, to rejoin his comrades on the plains.

"Thank Allah and the wisdom of Jelaluddin!" thought Alan, as he peered over the edge of the boulder where he lay and saw, twenty feet beneath him, and separated by a patch of shale steep as the slant of a spoon in a long glass, another great boulder.

It was a dizzying prospect, but Alan did not hesitate. He unsung his battle-axe and rifle, let himself down feet first, called to Clok, and let go. It was about two seconds afterwards that his neck seemed to jerk up through his back teeth; but next moment he was over the next boulder and shooting the slippery, snow-covered shale down a toboggan a couple of hundred yards in length, to bring up this time in a drift about a fallen pine.

Practice and the tattering of his breeches' seat, made him careful during the next trip, and he guided and checked his descent by the pointed haft of his battle-axe with one hand, and the butt of his rifle with the other.

And then for a moment he gasped for relief as, after shooting over a seven-foot drop, he sat hard into a snow-drift, with the great wolfhound—an over-close second—landing sprawl on his stomach (Alan's). For, as he rummaged out of the drift and regained his vision, he saw, half a mile up the pass and coming down towards him, the glint of Mirame's scarf threading through the trees.

Silent as any redskin, and surefooted as a goat, he crept forward with Clok at heel till he reached a round boulder lying out above the path the Nubian must follow. Here he crawled full length till his eyes were on a level with the

edge, and then rested immobile, his battle-axe drawn forward to his left hand, with the haft-point covering the line of approach, and his right hand thrust for warmth's sake into the wolfhound's great, steaming jaws; for his fingers were nearly frost-bitten, and he knew that for the task that was coming he should want every finger of strength.

The Nubian came on unsuspectingly, riding now on a loose rein, his horse at a walk, his eyes scanning the plain beneath, where the rallied men of Mustapha were pushing towards the foot of the pass, fighting off the furious charges of Hasein's men.

Alan had already had a good view of it, and his heart glowed as he recognised the old chieftain and the sheikh, and thought that within the hour he should for the second time restore to the Haideranli their—and his—beloved chieftainess. But now he was all eyes for the Nubian.

He waited, breathless, feeling as though his chest was bound with steel fibre. Then his left, gripping the battle-axe, drove it pointed clean and fair through the Nubian's throat, while the right encircled the waist of Mirame.

And so, as the horse quickened its pace to the shock over its back, Mirame, hearing Alan's cry of triumph, swung up to his clasp, till her face, all hooded in the enveloping shawl, was on a level with his; while the negro, swinging backwards to the stagger, was pinned against the earth beneath. Thus Alan, bearing his weight on the fixed lance, was able to draw Mirame on to the rock by his side, and the next second had freed her from the shawl.

What they said doesn't much matter, but it must have been something very agreeable to both of them, judging by Clok's jealousy, and the look of obvious happiness in their eyes.

And that pleasant converse must also have lasted longer than they guessed, for, at the end of the apparent second, they became instantaneously aware of the lamentable and catastrophic fact that the Nubian's horse was cantering gaily down the pass to the plain beneath, neighing for all he was worth a greeting to his stable-companions.

"Thou, a sinner after a royal maid! Thou, a seeker of a few thousand lances!"

The echo of the sheikh's morning lesson—which, it may be remarked in passing, was always more pungent after his own morning prayers—sent the blood flushing to Alan's brow. Bitterly he blamed himself for this dalliance, that, however much it expressed a mutual and inevitable joy over an escape so difficult for the one to have effected, so little dreamt of by the other, yet had now virtually thrown away, if not all chance of their relief, at least the wisest fruits of victory.

For what would Hasein now say—and that he would say what he thought there was no room for doubt—of the man, who, pretending to woo his daughter, lost the chance and the splendid distinction of saving her from death or slavery in order to pass a few pleasant courtesies anent the fact? And as for the sheikh!

Alan made up his mind that if it came to being recaptured he would get killed first.

"Lady," he said, "I have been most foolish! At all costs, I should have immediately sped after the horse. Now, he will give the alarm to those down below, and they will spread on our trail like wolves!"

"I think not thou wert foolish," replied Mirame, after the manner of a maid decking with a little tinsel any folly done for her sake. "Thou hast not four hands, and long before I was in safety the horse was gone."

"Why, you weren't even looking at it," said Alan reproachfully, "so how can you know?"

"Because it is the manner of Arab chargers," said Mirame, in no way abashed, and with a wise little nod that had a distinct witchery of its own. "When they feel themselves riderless they return to the lines. Moreover, the Nubian was not his master; he would go to seek his master."

"Anyhow, there's no use discussing it," said Alan. "I ought to have tried, and I didn't. But the best thing, now, is to clear out of here. If you can run, we will go up the pass as far as possible; then, when we get to a convenient place, I'll hold them off while you run on to the heights above the plateau, whence that ruffian seized you, and give your battle-cry. Your people will see you and rescue you before those brutes of Mustapha's can get at you again."

Mirame shook her head.

"You are very crafty, dear Ingelia lord," she said; "but you forget that I am a daughter of the mountains. You

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cannot alone hold the pass for more than two minutes. They will kill you and catch me. No, no! I will stay with you. If my people are going to be beaten by those Nubian and Syrian dogs of Mustapha's, I will never see them again. I will watch you hold the pass, and when you fall I will kill myself, and so together we shall go into Paradise."

Alan gave her one look, and then together they toiled up the way of the pass, Clok managing to make the way much less idyllic than it might have proved by continuously obtruding his shaggy head in between the linking of their hands.

CHAPTER 3.

A Knight and His Fair Lady.

UP and ever up the tortuous road climbed, guarding on its right the frowning walls of unscaleable cliffs, and on the left, tumbling now in shelving banks of shale, dotted with huge, gaunt boulders, leaping now into clear abysses.

And presently, as the climbing of the two gave them view of the plains beneath, and a snatch, as it were, of the battle-song a-hum below, they quickened their paces, making for a little plateau formed by two outjutting rocks which gave a clear outlook over the depths.

"Good old Jelaluddin!" cried Alan, when, gaining the plateau, he pointed out to Mirame the figure of the sheikh—fearless, wrathful, and splendid, smiting right and left with that terrible staff of his, and seeming to bear a life charmed against sword and bullet.

"The dogs have four times our number," said the Princess of the Haideranli, "yet our men press them back! See how they sweep in. Oh, look! Those four against twenty, yet they win through. My Haideranli! Hi-hoo! Hoo-ha-hai!"

In her great enthusiasm, the girl's voice rang out through the clear, frosty air, silvery as a clarion-call, and before Alan could stop her she had torn free her scarf from neck and head, and was waving its folds, shimmering with their green and crimson and gold, wide in the wind, while her fresh voice pealed again its echo of the "Hoo-ha-hai!"

It was in vain Alan swung her back. It was too late. The mischief was done. Though the air was rent by the volley sent up from a thousand impassioned voices; though old Hasein and the sheikh waved scimitar and staff in such close and febrile conjunction that, to the eyes of the lad and the girl, the waving seemed like the effort of a fly on a window-pane to clean its face while hanging on with its back legs; though Hani, the leader of the four whom Mirame had saluted, made a holocaust of himself and a hundred braves in a dash that sent three hundred of Mustapha's best beyond the bourne, yet the mischief was done.

For, as the rain falls on the wicked and the good; as night is felt by the blind and the seeing; as a soul's strife can be wasted on a friend as on a foe; so the glory of the enthusiasm of the Haideranli's dauntless, loving princess, though it made threefold forces beat in every arm and nerve and heart among the leaf warriors of her clan; made, also, the cold, snaky, moveless eyelids of Mustapha, the slave-merchant, slightly dewed with a moisture, as though from his covetous, crafty soul a worm had dragged a drop of grave-dew into the clamour of the sunlight.

For Mustapha was no ordinary man.

Through generations his mothers had been slaves; his fathers robbers. And in his soul the venom of contradictions was a spite he buttered his bread with. He cringed to masters; he bullied inferiors; he cheated his equals, even in the excess of his prayers and prostrations on his goat-skin carpet in front of the multitude; and in the intimacy of the interior of his household he brutalised everything that could shudder into the expression of pain. He was a man of parts, Mustapha. A man famed and feared in the bazars a hundred miles round—famed for his wrath and wealth; feared for his servility and his smile.

He paid well and quickly, and he took vengeance thoroughly and slowly. So he was served well and quickly by the slow wits of the thorough blackguards he employed.

Mustapha, like Kasim, the bandit-like every pasha, brigand, bey, or male who had ever seen Mirame, the unapproachable chieftainess of the proudest clan in all Kurdistan or Daghestan—Mustapha had turned on that fair lady the eyes of approval. In his parlance, she was a "chick of the grey hawk, with whom the Black Vulture might mate."

Mustapha was very thorough. He knew his reputation, and enjoyed it. If he had a covetousness greater than that inspired by the thought of Hasein's glorious daughter, it was to justify his own reputation, that "the Black Vul-

ture's claws never let go." Yet Alan Wayward had slipped between them.

And there, on the plateau, five hundred feet above, horseless, on foot, not a mile distant, were the two beings whose capture could really put Mustapha in good humour enough to enjoy witnessing the bow-stringing of the first lady in his harem.

He was a little man, with the features of a weasel, the voice of a screech-owl, the eyes of a lizard, and the heart of a wounded puma.

"Forty men to the rear, with horses!" he shrilled into the ear of a Syrian, two seconds after Mirame's magnificent gesture had given such new impetus to the Haideranli onslaught. And, turning to the lieutenant on his left, he hissed: "Pass the word softly. Let all our men fall back and hold the mouth of the pass. There is great reward for those who live, and sure providing for the families of those who die. But for those who prefer living to dying, there are the claws and the beak of the Black Vulture. Got? I have spoken. See that it is done, lest thou wish to be the first who tasteth of my judgment!"

So, while Mustapha and forty men cantered up the pass—yet not very fast, because of the snow and the slant of it—and while the Haideranli hurled themselves in vain against the closing, retreating, evermore scarred rifles of Mustapha's sharpshooters, up above, on the little betraying plateau, Alan was standing opposite the lady to whom he had vowed his allegiance, dumb with wrath of her act, bewilderment of her beauty, and the homage of that chivalry that would die for its inspirer's fault as for its merit.

"Lady," he said, "Mustapha's men heard thee also; saw thee, too; for that fox Mustapha sent scourers after us at once! See their horses' heads bobbing through the pine-fingers down below!"

Mirame turned and faced him—angry, imperious, and hurt in her woman's dignity at his manner of forcible correction. But when she saw the adoration in his eyes, and the curiously childlike anxiety about the corners of his mouth, her woman's dignity went floodlike into the sea of her maidenly love.

"Let not my lord be vexed," she said, with a wondrous softness in her tone. "Let him think how the sight of me rejoiced the heart of the old chieftain, my father. And," she added, with that touch of feminine guile which makes a true woman always master of a masterful man, "I want to see the fight."

"Thou shalt!" said Alan grimly, a riot of glory of her a-song in his heart. "Come, we will go a little higher. They follow quick, but we have time. It is scarcely a hundred paces."

She paced alongside of him, free and lissom as a mountain roe, triumphing in his dauntlessness and her confidence therein.

Sixty yards up from where they had stood, the path

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curved to the left, then five paces on to the right, then, by a little level space some twenty paces in length and breadth, gave on to a narrow gut, where but ten feet separated an implacable rearing of granite from a pitiless, precipitous dive into the depths beneath.

Alan pointed to the glade, then to the neck of the pass.

"There, my battle-ground," he said; "here, thy watch-tower, in the place I am about to build thee."

"Build, my lord!" she said simply, and watched him as he laid battle-axe and rifle at her feet, and bent his huge strength to the lifting of rocks.

The old sheikh's lesson had not been lost. Alan remembered well that formation of the open, inverted V, marked by the rounded horn of a half-moon. Remembered, too, the wisdom of eye use.

On the verge of the precipice he built his V-shaped rock barrier, so that one arm of the V lay along the edge of the brink, the other stretching midway into the pass, leaving but a five-foot way by which a man might pass. Then, round the apex of the V-shaped barrier, boulder after boulder he built, cunningly placed to hold tottering grips one on the other, so that one arm of the arc ran upwards along the verge of the precipice, and the other curved, like the broken curve of an O, to meet it. And in between the curving arms he placed Mirame, now exceedingly submissive.

For he had not completed his work without some opposition.

Mirame was not a girl to sit still and do nothing. When she saw Alan struggling to lift a little stone, which the muscles of either arm gripped hard on a monstrous rock, she had sprung forward.

"I will help thee," she said.

"Get thee to thy place!" growled Alan, it being contrary to his English idea that women should hew wood or carry stones. "This is not women's work!"

"Nay; but am I a child?" cried Mirame passionately. "I am—"

"Do as I tell thee!" said Alan curtly.

"As my lord wills!" said Mirame, with a little shrug, turning away and seating herself, to watch him with exultant eyes in his strength and eareness.

"Lady Mirame," said Alan, as he led her into the tiny fortress he had made, "I will not talk of farewells; but this is a fight that we must win, or both die in. Look! I leave you my rifle. It has ten bullets in its magazine. I leave you also one of my two revolvers. You see the wave of the trees, fifty yards down? Those are Mustapha's men. Be brave, dear! If I fall, I'll wait for you. Will you kiss me?"

Mirame did.

"You won't fall," she said, her two hands round his throat, her eyes proudly trustful of his faith. "You are too strong and sure. Go, captain of the Haideranli. The dogs are barking!"

One little moment she clung to him, drawing his cheek softly against hers.

"You and Allah," she whispered, "are now my one hope."

The sheikh, could he have heard that, would probably have considered that the "Allah" was a concession to future contingencies. But Alan wasn't dogmatic. He took her hands in his, held them for a moment to his lips, then laughed with the laughter of his blue eyes into the violet challenge of hers.

"I'll trust in God, and do my best!" he said simply. Then, as he turned away, to face the vanguard of Mustapha creeping up along the snow-strewn way, he looked over his shoulder, and cried laughingly: "Take care that you don't shoot me, whatever you do!"

The chieftainess of the Haideranli tilted her chin in a gesture of disdain and challenge.

"I am considered a very sure shot," she said, in an accent a trifle too unconcerned. "I shall aim at no one but the little ape Mustapha, and you will see that I shall hit him first shot."

Shlish, shlot!

It was the right and left swing of Alan's battle-axe, meeting the shoulder of one and the waist of another as the rush came.

It was a double-headed battle-axe, blade to left, and razor-blade to right, with a point steel-capped to the fineness of a needle sticking out eighteen inches in front of the two blades. What it touched it shored, like a hot knife going through butter. And when it got into a free swing, with the light of sunshine on it, and the frost in the wind a-hum round it, it was a pretty sight when its gleaming shades of cold blue were clean. It was a terrible yet a grand sight when Alan Wayward, with his six-foot-two of muscular symmetry, swinging it swift and sure, braided its gleaming blades with the crimson of the death of those who were

stalking that fair, frail form, for whose honour the good axe swung.

Right at the end of the V's outjutting arm Alan stood, and from the first he smiled to see how the old sheikh's ruse baffled and bewildered them. For if a man got within the angle of the V, he might hope to win over the fragile barrier. One man so hoping got within, and a single back stroke of the swinging axe left him headless there; while the pendulum-like return of the back-swinging blade swayed through the trunk of a shrieking Nubian, to pause, turn, and thrust snakelike into the throat of an onrushing slave of Syria.

Five men were down, and the others, crouching back, felt for their guns; while Clok, every hair a-ruffle, hung tense on his haunches, waiting his master's word. Alan's eyes were gleaming like torch-lit ice. Mirame, erect and beautiful, scanned the battle as if she were a queen of some mock tournament, her eyes full of a proud disdain for the foe, her lips set in proud assurance of her champion.

From a ten-yard range, a dozen guns were levelled at Alan, as he stood quietly waiting, certain of death, yet knowing not what he might do. Then, suddenly, he was aware that Mirame was at his side, resting the rifle in the bend of his elbow.

And on the instant, Mustapha's yellow monkey-face peered from cover of a tree, and his voice shrilled out:

"Fire not—fire not! I must have them both alive! Shields and lance butts! Rifle-butts and shields, my pariah-dogs! Hoo! Have at them! One rush!"

Crack! went Mirame's rifle, aiming at Mustapha's face.

Crack, and crack, and crack again; yet Mustapha's face remained, though four of his men went down, biting at the snow.

"It is thou!" said Mirame angrily. "I cannot shoot, because thy arm is full of shaking," which, seeing that Alan was rocking with silent laughter over the effect of the first shot, was indeed true enough.

"They come, dear lady," he said. "Leave this to me. Get quickly behind the barrier, and aim at the ground at the foot of the man at whom thou first next."

"Surely it shall not hit him!" said Mirame, puzzled.

"But it will hit the fellow behind him," said Alan. "Such is the trick of the gun with those not accustomed to it. Quick! To shelter!"

From below, the men of Mustapha were creeping up to the attack, formed in wedge-shape, with rifles and lances crossed above their heads, and held in the left hand, while each man, in his right wielded lance or rifle, clubbed for a knock-out blow.

Alan scanned the "tortoise" narrowly. It was yet ten yards away, and crawling forward, till it got its opportunity to rush at short quarters. He had no illusions about the danger of it. One blow from a clubbed rifle on knee or ankle, would bring him to ground. And the rest would be over in twenty seconds.

For a moment he thought of hurling down the arm of the V at their lags, and rushing in on the subsequent confusion. But he put the thought away. The rocks he had piled up were for the last line of defence, when, all else being lost, he might heave them down on the enemy, and hurl himself, with Mirame in his arms, over the abyss.

A long snarl from Clok brought a gleam to his eyes.

"Sou, boy! Bite 'em! Rout 'em!" he whispered.

Clok went as if he had been shot from a catapult. With one bound he was full in the centre of the serried legs propelling upwards that menacing shield. Right and left, left and right, his great jaws snapped, and his hard fangs tore.

The surprise was complete, the confusion almost ludicrous. The tangle of arms above nullified all sense of escape to the writhing of the tortured legs below. As a good wolfhound, Clok knew that safety lay in biting hard once at one thing, to bite harder quickly at the next, and quicker still at the following one. By the time Clok had got to the end of his "wolf-pack," Alan had leapt on to the disarray of the vanguard, and his battleaxe, smiting right and left, now upcutting in long, dreadful sweeps, that sheared three men at a time, now pointing, now circling backwards and forwards, flayed the column as with forked lightning. His arms worked like fresh catgut, elastic, tireless. His eyes seemed to be everywhere. In two minutes he had hewn a way through the column, and found none but Clok to stand on the other side, alive.

And all the time, through the stress of the battle Mirame's battle-cry cheered him on.

"Hi-hoo!" she cheered. "A lord of men thou art! Hoo-hi-hai! Chief of the Haideranli thou art! Wearer of my scarf! Hoo, hoo, hoo!"

Of Mustapha's forty, but eight or nine remained, and these, gathered round their master, jibbering with rage, now dashed forward.

Clok, full now of the zest of battle, forgot to wait his

master's word, and sprang forward. By knee, ankle, and thigh, three men he crippled, before, attentive to his master's call, he turned a red, inquiring eye on Alan, and paused.

And as he paused, a slave thrust at him with his lance, and, quick though the faithful hound was to wriggle from the blow, and so save his heart, the cutting steel laid bare his ribs, and sent him rolling into the edge of the cliff.

Then there came on Alan the same red fit of Berserk rage that had seized him when he saw Mirame being borne away by the Nubian.

With one spring, and one right-hand upward heaving thrust, he pierced the wounder of his dog through the root of the chest till the point of his dreadful axe showed on the nape of the hanging neck. Then, wielding the dead man aloft, he charged the remaining seven, brooming three of them in one encircling sweep over the abyss, and as the others fled after Mustapha on his galloping horse, he beat them as with a flail, till none remained, and in the pass was silence, save only for the pad-a-pud of the hoofs of the horses stampeding after Mustapha.

Yet, for all his rage, this time Alan did not forget, and as one horse, with ears back, and tail straight out, charged past him, he flung himself on it, gripping its nostrils, and winding one arm round its neck, curled his knees about its straining legs.

It was the battle of a hundred yards. Then Alan, walking it back, picked up his battle-axe, and mounted to where Mirame stood.

"God and thy love hath prevailed, lady!" he said, looking at her, and wondering greatly to see her altered mien, the trembling of her mouth, her downcast eyes.

"Thou art not wounded?" he cried anxiously.

"Nay," she said, with a shy, uplifting of her eyes, "only humbled to think that I should have so often spoken to a war-lord like thee, as I have."

"I don't see the point," said Alan, who was thirsty and tired and lax from the reaction. "We must not waste minutes. That rat, Mustapha, will return with more. It was luck getting this horse."

"None but thou could or dared have stopped him," said Mirame, with a new look in the shining of her eyes that troubled Alan.

He turned from it, half shy, half awkward, and flung himself into the saddle. Then, stretching out his foot, and holding forth his arms, he bent down, and lifted her, using his foot as a springboard, across the saddle-bow.

"What hast thou?" he said, as he noted how she trembled against his arm, shrinking away from him.

"Dear," she said, not daring to look at him, "I never knew before that thou wert a man of men. I feel so alone with thee!"

"God is with us," said Alan simply. "Don't worry about that!"

The woman in her wanted to weep, but the princess in her tilted her chin, and made her smile at him.

"I think I shall grow to like you, in time," she said.

Alan might have replied otherwise than by quickly turning his head, if it had not been that the rolling of a stone in the track they had quitted drew his attention.

"God forgive me!" he cried, reining in the horse. "It's Clok, and I'd forgotten him!"

Clok it was, trailing himself stiffly and painfully after his beloved master, with the blood dripping from his wound, but not so much as a whimper from his tongue.

Before Alan could move, Mirame had slipped through his arms, and was on the ground, running to the faithful partner of their fight. Alan, tethering the horse, was by his side in a moment.

"Let me tend him," said Mirame. "I am skilled in wounds."

"See how his wisdom has taught him to cleanse it in the snow," she went on, pointing to his side, where the shaggy coat was as if frosted with the starlike petals.

She took her dagger from the fold around her bosom, and ripped two lengths from her white petticoat. Then, with quick skill, she staunched the wound, and bound the dog round in four great crosswise bindings.

"There, noble friend of my lord," she said, kissing the dog's shaggy front, "so shall thy breathing be relieved."

She turned to Alan, with a smile winsomely gracious.

"Thou hast fought hard and art tired, and I am sick for want of walking," she said. "Mount thou the horse, and take the dog across thy knees, and I will walk by thy side."

"There was never a woman like thou, dear lady," said Alan, very softly; "nor would there ever be man like me, did I yield to thy request."

He lifted her bodily into the saddle as he spoke, and, unwinding the sash from his waist, bound Clok, who

grumbled greatly over the process, over the horse's hind-quarters.

Then, marching alongside, at just such an angle that he might keep both eyes on the road, while gaining an occasional glimpse of the Lady Mirame's face, he swung into his best stride, the stride taught him by that ancient "foot-slogger" of the mountains and the deserts, the Sheikh Jelaluddin.

He felt delightfully light-hearted and gay. It was as though all the world belonged to him, now that he was alone with all his world; and, climbing the bleak hillside, with its white mantle of snow still crisp, its great chanoels of pines, broken here and there by villages of beech and juniper, and seamed with precipices and wild ravines, he told her, to lighten the way, the story of his early days in England, and how he had been tricked by a wicked man's spite into a journey to the East, and dwelt laughingly on the days of slavery under Idrin's rule, and lovingly on the sheikh and his ways of wisdom. And now and then he would sing some of the songs of England to her, his fresh voice pealing like a bell-chime through the tree-girt, frosty air, till the girl swayed in her saddle, looking at him through half-closed eyes, and wondering—wondering why it was that Allah had made the earth so dear, and she had never known it before.

She was too shy to talk to him, too afraid of her own shyness. Everything seemed to be alive with a new sense. The trees were whispering, the golden lights of the setting sun were making homes in the sky that had their hearths on earth, an old one-horned goat, standing solitary on a distant ledge, was calling for his mate. It no longer weighed on her that Alan was tired. The two of them seemed swinging along to one rhythm. And she wished it might go on, just like that, for ever.

Up and up they plodded, till, as the stars flashed through the short twilight, they reached the upper ridge of the Sipan Dag, whence they could see Lake Van, gleaming like a blob of quicksilver, half a mile beneath.

"There is a cave quite near here," said Alan. "We shall reach it in two minutes. Not a month ago I cached bearflesh there, and there is a cascade near. There we will halt and eat."

They went on slowly, for the crust of snow had in places yielded to the spring sunshine, and the horse sank deep at each step. For five minutes they continued the track in silence, and then a low, muttering growl from Clok was followed by the long desolate whimper that told all too plainly of wolves on their trail.

Alan cast a glance of anxiety at Mirame.

"Wolves," she whispered, with a little involuntary shudder.

"Don't be afraid," said Alan, meeting her groping hand.

"Look! In front there! That black smudge in the cliff—that is the cave!"

The horse had heard the whimper, too, and was toiling forward with all its power.

"Don't leave me!" cried the girl, as Alan, relinquishing her hand, dropped a pace behind, and slung free his axe.

"I will not leave thee, Lady of the Haideranli," he replied quietly. "I am cutting Clok free. The horse will travel faster so."

He did not add that he could already see the grey, shadowy shapes of the pack not a thousand yards behind.

With Clok free, the horse made a brave spurt, and they were within ten yards of the cave before a great gaunt wolf came within leap. But Clok, wounded though he was, snapped him by the throat before he could rise from his haunches. And the cave was three yards distant when Alan's revolver cracked out twice, and delayed the rest of the pack to partake of two meals.

Then, next minute Alan had swung Mirame into the cave, and the horse had stampeded in wild flight with the first rush of the pack after him, while the tail end, ravening, pelted at the cave entrance. But the entrance was small, and Alan and Clok were old hunters.

Not more than one wolf could come in at a time, and, just within the entry, Clok's unerring grip and Alan's ruthless axe sent eight of them to their account. It was enough for the rest. The remnant and stragglers sat round the entrance at a respectful distance in a silent ring, broken now and then by an uneasy whimper—now and then by a sudden snarl, that was taken up and lifted into a desolate howl.

"In a corner there," said Alan, from his post at the door, "are faggots under a great stone. Make a fire; I have matches. Beneath the faggots, under some little stones, is cooked bear-meat. Toast it at the flame and eat. It is not succulent, but it is better than gnawing hunger."

The Princess of the Haideranli had not a notion how to light a fire, or toast bear-meat; but she did it, as she did

everything, with a rare grace, bringing thereto woman's wit, and silence withal.

Alan gnawed the unsavoury stuff that she brought him, and felt the better for it; gnawed on and on till he felt his fatigue drop from him, and eyed the ring outside with a speculative rather than a sombre gaze.

He glanced round at Mirame. The girl had eaten her portion, and now, leaning against the wall, was sleeping.

"She's a brick!" murmured Alan. "I daren't venture a sally; one of the brutes might get in!"

So throughout the night he maintained grim vigil, sometimes half-rocketing into slumber, but ever like Clok with one eye open, and ever conscious of that dreadful, ravenous patience of the muttering circle without.

But with the first light of day the pack began to drift away; silent shadows, slinking shiveringly into the surrounding woods, to vanish as if swallowed up by the snow.

Then Alan, going outside, stood for some seconds drinking in the crisp sweetness of the morning breeze, till Clok's low, warning mutter brought him to a swift posture of intent listening.

From far below there was a movement in the forest—a movement as of men and horses tramping upwards.

Friend or foe—which?

He stepped gently into the cave and looked at Mirame. She had not stirred. All through the night, sitting erect, her head against the wall, she had slept, secure in her trust of the man who was keeping vigil for her.

"Mirame!" he called softly.

She opened her eyes, and, smiling at him, rose to greet him with outstretched hands.

"Dawn already!" she cried. "What, then hast thou—"

"Dear," he interrupted, "all night long Clok and I have kept guard against the wolves."

"They are still there?" she cried, clinging to him.

"They have just slunk away," he replied, drawing her to the entrance. "Let us come to the stream and drink, for we must travel far. See, it is there. While thou drinkest, I will gather some provision."

She nodded, hastening to the stream that was leaping down the rocks ten paces off.

Alan, stooping down, gathered an armful of the bones of the dead wolves, picked by their departed comrades, and strewed them in the cavern, scattered the faggots, and booted into the centre of the cave the one dead wolf that had lain too near for the others to grab. Then he loaded his pockets with bear-flesh and rejoined Mirame.

"If those below were friends," he had said to himself, "they would come with cries and calls and cheers; being foes, they will see the bones and the dead wolf, and will believe us devoured. So we shall gain some start."

And as he rejoined Mirame he sent on Clok ahead, and, tearing down a pine-branch, he walked backward, destroying their tracks to the cascade.

"Why dost thou that?" cried Mirame.

Alan leant over the water and took a long drink, and yet another.

"Because Mustapha's men pursue us," he said, "and I would destroy our trace."

"But where then can we go?" said Mirame, paling.

"Down the cascade," said Alan grimly.

"Down there?" she cried, pointing to the foaming torrent, that went bounding from rock to rock on a long slope till lost to view in the flatlands around Mush.

The Lady Mirame looked at her feet, her baggy trousers peeping from beneath the capacious petticoat, and shook her head.

"I'll do it," she said, "but I shall be washed away and drowned."

"I'm going to carry you," said Alan.

"Then let us make haste," said the Lady Mirame, without a blush.

Alan pointed Clok into the water.

"Follow!" he said.

Clok, who hated cold water except internally, went into it like a Spartan, and wallowed his way from rock to rock.

Alan stepped in, the water coming scarcely more than to his ankles, unslinging his battle-axe, and turned the steel-shod haft downwards.

"You will be in no danger," he said calmly. "I shall prod my way forward with the end of my haft, and steady myself by it. All you have to do is to sit in the bend of my left elbow, lean your weight against me and not away from me, and put your arms round my neck."

"Pek ala" (very well), said the Lady Mirame meekly.

And this time Clok did not get a chance of playing chapevon.

CHAPTER 4.

In the Claws of the Vulture.

ALAN had not been mistaken in thinking that it was Mustapha's men whose movements he had heard from the mouth of the cavern.

Nor did his ruse for deceiving them as to the fate of himself and Mirame fall short of the success he desired. A dozen times during the night he had refrained from the impulse to sling the carcass away from the cave-entrance, as he had slung forth the others. But it had amused him to watch the sly sneaking forward of some braver or hungrier beast than the rest, in ever recurrent efforts to get at the prey so tantalisingly out of reach; and he had guarded its carcass there, rather in the object of keeping himself awake and vigilant with the play of battle-axe necessitated from time to time by the pack's efforts to get at their fallen comrade.

And when Mustapha's men reached the cave and saw the dead wolf with his skull cloven, they recognised at once the handiwork of him whom Mustapha had called the "Ingeliaz with seven devils." The strewn bones suggested their own grisly tale; nor were the pursuers skilled enough to say what being the snapped fragments might belong to.

For a long half-hour they stood and discussed the matter, with a wealth of detail and a capacity for repetition only to be found among the people of the East and the congeries of Paris.

One and all agreed that the fugitives had been devoured. The point that troubled them was to convince Mustapha of the fact, for the Black Vulture had been extremely precise in his instructions.

"See ye bring them both back, alive and uninjured," he had said. "If ye fail me, ye shall all be flayed alive, if I have to search Asia for you."

For Mustapha was in an exceedingly ill-humour. His plans had miscarried for the first time in a career that counted forty years of extremely active villainy. Thanks to the cunning ruse of the Sheikh Jelaluddin, his ambush of the Haideranli had been utterly thwarted at the very moment when he was sweeping on to victory. And though he had reformed the rout, the men of Hassein had fought as he had never seen men fight before; and, despite the fact that he vastly outnumbered them, they were clinging on to his rear-guard hour after hour; dauntless, persistent, ferocious as wounded leopards.

Moreover, he knew that while he could not retreat in haste, because of the tacklers at his heels, he dared not stay much longer; for Hassein's outlying villages were not forty miles distant, and he was sure that runners had already set out to summon reinforcements, and any hour might bring twenty thousand lances thundering down on him.

He was in a fix, and a very tight fix, for his own home of Foliat, between the Euphrates and the Bingol Dagh, lay thirty miles away, and almost his whole fighting force was with him now.

But he had the tenacity of a puma. Hassein's daughter and Alan Wayward he meant to have, and, as he thought of that stand the Englishman had made up there in the pass, his yellow teeth clenched over his thick, hanging under-lip, and he swore to himself that he would make Mirame his bride before twenty-four hours should pass, and amuse himself the following day by making her witness the slow torturing of her hero.

Yet in his soul there was fear withal; for the old sheikh, heading a charge that came within forty paces of Mustapha's body-guard, had chanted at him in a wild, exultant voice:

"I see thy blood upon thy burning threshold, Black Vulture of Foliat! Allah is calling thee!"

And though Mustapha, like many respectable Christians, had deferred consideration of Allah to more convenient moments, when he should have finished achieving the commercial profit he was after, the menace from the lips of a man half Asia held to be an inspired prophet gave Mustapha a nasty indigestion.

But Allah or no Allah, he meant to have Mirame and Alan, even if death came after. Wherefore he did not leave any doubts in the minds of the hundred picked men he despatched on their trail as to what their fate would be in the event of failure.

And so, while the pursuing column climbed the pass, Mustapha, leaving a doomed band to hold the approach to the pass, fought steadily in retreat on to his fortified palace at Foliat, sure of meeting his desired victims there.

For all of which reasons Mustapha's men discussed the bones in the mountain cave with as much concern as a committee of museum experts, till one, tiring of it and going to the cascade to drink, sent forth a yell that brought the hundred pell-mell to his aide.

"'Tis a trick!" he cried, pointing to the snow on the other

sides of the torrent. "See the tracks of the horse, and the spoor of wolves thereon!"

In another moment they were in the saddle, racing down the shaly slopes after the plain spoor, as only Kurds, Nubians, and Basutos can ride down breakneck places.

Down, and ever down, they went, on a line almost parallel to, but about a mile from, the cascade, behind its fringe of trees, till the whole troop brought up, shivering on their horses' haunches, to a halt round the fresh-picked carcase of a horse, lying in the telltale rosebud snow, and splayed all around with the tracks of the departing wolves.

"A curse on them!" cried a swarthy Turk. "Are there nothing but bones in this land of devils?"

"Hoo!" jeered another ironically. "A babe can tell a horse's bones; here are no bones of man or woman. They have escaped! Spread and cast about. In this snow, we must come upon their spoor!"

"Perchance," suggested a half-caste Greek, "they feared dogs, and went down by the watercourse."

And so full chance undid what courage, wit, and high endeavour had so nobly wrought to attain.

For, indeed, both wit and high endeavour, and courage of no ordinary fibre had guided the feet of Alan Wayward, as, with the Lady Mirame in his arms, he had forded the length of that treacherous watercourse. Again and again they had to stop, and, landing, circumvent a slippery boulder, sweeping away their tracks before taking again to the stream. The cold of it, too, was numbing, and, despite his endurance, Alan began to find that his feet were losing their use. It was in vain that he stepped ashore, and, cutting away sandals and leg-wrappings, chafed his limbs with snow.

"Let us go on on the land," said Mirame. "Hast thou not noticed that Clok has refused the water the last hundred yards? If the pursuit have dogs, they cannot trace us now."

"I'm rather an obstinate ass, and that's a fact!" said Alan, giving his feet another vigorous frictioning.

They were seated on a fallen pine, a screen of brushwood all around them, with Clok sniffing on the other side of the cascade at a warm goat-spoor. And so bent were both on restoring the circulation to their frozen limbs, that neither noticed the soft parting of the bushes on their right, nor the yellow-turbaned head of a Nubian crouching low beneath the drooping branches.

For one second the Nubian rolled the whites of his eyes, glistening over the sight of them, then withdrew, more silently and cautiously than any snake, the snow on the ground entombing all-sound of his progress, to the gentle toll of the "plash-plash" of the rime dripping from the branches under the slanting rays of the rising sun.

"Hallo," said Alan suddenly, "there's old Clok after a young goat! Isn't he a treat! I never met a beast who knew breakfast-time better. Watch him. Oh, good jump! He's got it!"

This last, as Clok, with a bound that outdistanced a fleeing goat-kid, landed clean on its back.

Alan jumped up, eager to secure some fresh meat, that would chase away the blue lines that were beginning to gather round the girl's lips, and at the corners of ears and eyes.

"Don't leave me!" said Mirame, drawing him back, and looking round with a swift shiver. "I don't like this place. I wish the sun would be quick and dry these sodden sandals of mine"—for the water had sprayed round her, and she, like Alan, was suffering acutely from the numbness of her feet, till at his growl, "Why don't you take the things off, and scrub your feet with the snow?" she had obeyed him, and had, when his cry awoke Clok interrupted her, been contentedly regarding the effect of ten pink toes against the snow.

Alan sent out a long, single-noted whistle, as he sank back on the pine-log.

"That means for Clok, 'bring it to foot,'" he explained. "Why should you be afraid here, dear?" he went on casually. "It's a perfect harbour. By Jove, how ripping your toes look against the sunlight on the snow! They're like coral crocuses!"

"I was thinking they looked rather nice, myself," said Mirame demurely.

The words were scarcely out of her mouth when twenty figures sprang from the surrounding bush, and, before either could move, the heads of both were enveloped in sheepskins. It was in vain Alan heaved and struggled. Sixteen men were on him, and he was on his back, and inch by inch his heaving limbs were being bound with rope of twisted fibre, strong and biting as steel wire.

"Take off the skins, lest they smother," said a voice; and as the enveloping cloth was switched from his head, Alan turned hunted, anguished eyes towards the place where Mirame had been. He encountered the girl's gaze, bright, fearless, flawless in its conscious pride of a dignity beyond the reach of insult or of outrage to hurt.

"That was a very complete surprise, my lord," she said.

Alan groaned. He had been careless again, and before him rose the accusing, seamed, ironical face of the sheikh, and he seemed to hear his voice, a quiver with disdain, "Thou a sinner after a royal maiden! Thou, who, in regarding the prettiness of ten silly-looking pink toes, forgetteth to use thy ears!"

"I suppose they're Mustapha's chaps all right," he said, looking at his captors, who were cutting tree-branches, and lashing them into a litter. "If only Clok had been—!" There he stopped, flushing. He had been about to blame the dog, on whose keen instinct and warning of danger he had grown accustomed to rely. It was an oft-repeated maxim of the sheikh's that had caught him up in time.

"My son," the sheikh was wont to counsel, "if misfortune happen, then blame first thy want of wisdom. Then shalt thou forgive the lack in the one on whom thou didst most foolishly rely. So Allah shall have pity on thee, for, in truth, he hath much pity for the foolish."

"Grieve not," said Mirame. "Allah is Allah, and there is always death."

"I'm hanged if I want to die," said Alan savagely; "and I'll take care you don't! Don't you dare to, before I tell you!"

"I will wait for thy word," said Mirame, with a look that made him suddenly master of himself. Meanwhile, Mustapha's men were wrangling.

"The Black Vulture's orders were to bring them together," said one.

"Who shall carry the two in one litter?" jeered another.

"Is it not thirty miles to Foliat?" asked a third.

"Dogs," cried the one in command, "stop your snarling and obey! It is but a step from here to the plains. Lead here two horses. Nose-ring them together, and pass ropes round the loins of both. So will we place the litter on the horses, and the prisoners thereon. What dost thou there?"

This to a greasy hybrid from Aleppo, who was staring into Mirame's face, and the question being accompanied by a clout over the ear from the stock of a rifle, none other felt inclined to repeat the impertinence.

So, bound from ankle to neck, Alan and Mirame were laid side by side on the litter, and lashed again to that, experienced not a little discomfort as the horses jolted their way down to the plain.

"We seem fairly caught this time," said Alan, as the two were lifted again to horse, after the first halt, when they had been laid in their litter under the shelter of a beech-tree, a little apart from the camp, and regaled with sour milk.

"Have courage," said Mirame. "Already I have worked one arm almost free, enough to reach the dagger in my bosom."

"Even so, we could not get away," said Alan gloomily. "Nay, but we could die," whispered the girl, with shining eyes.

"Lady, do not be too hasty with thy dagger," said Alan. "As a last resort, good! But it is not well to anticipate the moment when death must be chosen. We may even yet fight through. It will be night before we reach Foliat, for it is yet far. Attempt not to cut thy bonds till dusk falls, for if we are discovered at it once, then, indeed, our last chance is gone."

But Fortune was kind to them, for as the sun fell, and the chill wind of the evening blew down from the mountains, the captain of the hundred ordered blankets to be thrown over them. Then Mirame, who had gained one arm free of the bonds by the constant working of her supple body, stole her knife forth, and sawed through the fibres binding Alan's arms. It was only very gradually and tediously that the two cut their way into freedom, for, despite the night, the eyes of the horsemen all around them were keen, and any abrupt movement might have at once betrayed them.

But as the lights of Foliat twinkled before their eyes, their last bonds were cut free, and Alan's eyes turned longingly to the battle-axe hanging at the pommel of the horse on his left, almost within reach of his hand.

"Hearken, Mirame!" he said. "We shall be at Mustapha's house in a few minutes now. This is my plan. When they come to take us from the litter, I will leap up, snatch my battle-axe, and hew a way into the house. We shall certainly not halt till we get into the courtyard, and the surprise will be so complete, that we shall easily win through."

"But why into the house, my lord?" queried Mirame. "Surely it were better to snatch two horses, and fly!"

"We should be stopped before we got to the gates," said Alan, "and then we should be separated. In the open one man may do nothing against a hundred; but in the house, once we gain a room or a corridor, one man may hold a



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hundred at bay. Moreover, I should then know that thou wast safe."

"I shall be ready at thy word," said Mirame.

As the troop clattered down the rough, cobbled street of Foliat, making for the hillside, where Mustapha's house was, it was very obvious that the whole village was in the wildest state of excitement. Everywhere men were running, some with horn lanterns, some with torches, all with guns and sashes abristle with knives, while women, children, camels, donkeys, handcarts, and every form of conveyance were bearing the household goods of the people of Mustapha to the palace on the hill.

"What is all this fuss?" asked the captain of the troop, stopping a man who seemed to have a little more of his wits about him than had the others.

"Thou askest," was the reply. "Yet didst thou ride with Mustapha to bring this woe on us."

"Answer, son of a dog, or I will slit thy gizzard for thee!" growled the captain.

"Nay, I meant no ill," said the man, shrinking back. "It is that the Haideranli are coming down on us. Scarce an hour ago, Mustapha, with but twenty camel-men, rode in, and verily his face was as the face of a scalded monkey. Soon message came from him to bid us gather at the palace with all our goods, and from the messengers we learned that all the force of the Haideranli had gathered round the soldiers, who still hold the foot of the mountain towards the plain, eastward. So thou seest what—"

"A murrain on thee for thy evil tidings!" cursed the

captain, smiting him with his sword over the mouth, and urging on his troop.

They left the street, riding rough shod over the cursing fugitives, and sweeping forward to clatter to a halt in a great courtway, bright as day with the flare of torches and lanterns.

The horses bearing the litter soon stopped, facing a doorway, outside which a dozen Nubians with scimitars at "the rest," stood in two lines, awaiting the orders of Mustapha, whose yellow head seemed to rear like the head of a cobra from the shaking folds of his body.

"Hast thou found them, Feydin?" he shrilled, in his screech-owl voice.

"I have found them, lord," said Feydin. "Behold, in the litter there they lie bound hand and foot."

"Thou hast saved thy skin," was all the comfort Mustapha vouchsafed. "Get ye gone!" he shrilled at his guard. "Drive back the soldiery. It is not for dogs like those to gaze on the face of my bride. Go, one of you, bid Disir, the eunuch of the harem, come hither, and bear the princess to the women, who shall attire her for her bridal."

"Now," whispered Alan to Mirame, "have thy dagger ready, and keep thy hand on my left arm, once we are aground!"

He waited till the guard had withdrawn, then, vaulting to his feet, snatched his battleaxe with his right-hand at the same moment as he swung Mirame clear of the litter.

Next moment the two had dashed at the doorway, where Mustapha stood like a grinning effigy of terror. One slash Alan made at him, but the slave-merchant, despite the paralysis of his tongue, had lived too long like an eel to be slain by a straight blow. He wriggled aside, just in time to avoid the slining blade, though not quickly enough to evade the stout oaken staff, that, smiting him on the shoulder, hurled him face-foremost on to the ground.

Lifting Mirame into his encircling left arm, Alan, with a back kick of his bare heel, that nearly knocked Mustapha's head off, leapt through the doorway, and raced along the corridor. An array of bright lamps showed a variety of doors on the right, a blank wall on the left.

"To the end," whispered Alan. "The front rooms will all be full of captains and guards."

But already from outside a yell had arisen that brought a dozen heads from the various doors, and the cries of "Stop them!" that volleyed down the corridor with the insurging of the pursuing Nubians, headed by Mustapha himself, brought half-a-dozen more men into view, intercepting the further progress of the fugitives, while those in the rear leapt forward with swords aloft.

"Slay not! Take them alive!" shrieked Mustapha.

"Stick close by me," whispered Alan. "I am going to charge those in front."

And in good sooth it was a charge they relished not. The battleaxe, with its needle point, and its six-foot haft, was, in Alan's hands like a foil in the hand of a maitre d'escrime, with the weight of a buffalo behind it. He rushed on them at a trot, pointing with a sureness and dexterity that took one man in the throat, another in the eye, a third under the chin. It was enough for the rest, who, terrified by the white rage in the face of this giant, and unnerved by Mustapha's order, scuttled like rabbits to cover.

"Out!" panted Alan, as he drew Mirame into cover in the kind of ante-room, in which the corridor, branching right and left, terminated, it being, in fact, the place reserved for women visitors to the harem, the door of which opened into it.

"Now, let them come!" he said, standing where he might gain full swing and best play for his freedom, yet so that his body was screened from any snapshot by the protecting wall.

Come they did, like dogs in full cry, urged on by Mustapha's shrill curses. But the good axe never failed, and its toll piled up a heap of writhing bodies in the narrow way, till Mustapha's men drew back, growling that they could not fight such a thing as this with hands and staves.

It was then that the craft of Disir, the eunuch, did more to achieve his master's will than all his men-at-arms could do.

For, through the jalousie, or peep-hole grilled shutter, in the harem door, he had seen the work of death going on, and noted Mirame, pale and beautiful, standing out of reach of the swing of the axe, not three feet from the door behind which he was.

In the silence that ensued on the pause in the fighting, and while her face was turned, talking in low tones to Alan, Disir glided back the door inch by inch, at the same time beckoning to half a dozen half-naked Nubian women, all giantesses, the attendants of the harem, to gather round the door.

Then softly he glided into the ante-room, and, with one

swing of his great arms, lifted Mirame from her feet, and literally flung her into the waiting arms of the attendants, springing after her as he went. But, quick as he was, the girl's tense gasp had made Alan turn his head, and his hand was on the giant eunuch's shoulder before he could glide through the door.

"Close the door! Close the door, fools!" yelled Disir.

And at his words the great door, three-inch thick with oak, and plated with iron, slammed to.

"The maiden is in the harem, master," yelled Disir, struggling into view of the corridor; "and I have the man in grip."

"Have at him, dogs!" yelled Mustapha. "I give him to you. Ye may kill him as ye will, whilst I seek the priest and my bride."

CHAPTER 5.

Wild and Grim.

THE Nubian attendants of Mustapha's harem had had to do with the taming of many captive birds, and as they seized hold of Mirame they grinned complacently, having no doubts of their strength, and amused at Disir's ruse. But their grins gave way to sudden cries of rage and alarm, for the proud daughter of that old mountain-hawk, Hasseen, was no dove of the plains, and before the Nubians realised what she was about, she had wrenched herself free of them, and with a dagger in either hand was advancing on them, terrible in her wrath, her eyes like stars, seeming to blaze out from the pallor of her face.

"Open me that door!" she cried.

But the Nubian who was by it seized the key, and flinging it above Mirame's head into the hands of one beyond, fled.

The girl turned on then, her bosom heaving, her cheeks suddenly tinged with scarlet, her whole being shaken by a passion of anger.

"Ye dogs!" she hissed. And then, like a falcon on the wing, she leapt among them, striking right and left.

They fled before her, terrified; and from room to room she drove them, through the huddling groups of Mustapha's wives, pursuing them remorselessly. It was in vain they scattered. Like a hawk she pounced on one after the other, driving them to and fro, and all the while seeking with her eyes some method of escape.

Then, as she passed a divan, on which a pale-faced Circassian girl was leaning on one elbow, gazing at her with eager eyes, though the girl's lips did not move, Mirame heard the low-toned whisper: "The window on thy right, behind the curtain, leads to a verandah, overlooking a cliff."

One glance of gratitude she gave the girl, then with a sudden show of fury dashed at the attendants, who scattered again, howling and cursing. One who fled towards the corner the Circassian had indicated Mirame followed up, and as the creature fled in terror, the daughter of Hasseen tore down the curtain, flung wide the window, and leapt out on to the verandah.

For a moment she could distinguish nothing, for her eyes were blinded by the transition from the glare of rose-hued lights within the harem. But the night was brilliant with stars, and presently she could distinguish that she was on a long wooden railed platform, built out above a ledge of cliff, that gave almost sheer into the valley land a hundred and fifty feet below. And as she peered into the depths the sound of strife came up to her, and she could make out great bodies of horsemen enveloping on every side the village and the palace, and in the gut leading up to the palace itself a confused mass of men, whence came the ceaseless sound of volley firing, sharp yells of sudden agony, and clash of steel with steel.

Then swiftly she turned, conscious by her instinct of danger rearward. And none too soon, for creeping on her, not two paces away, was Mustapha himself, gorgeously attired in a purple petticoat, with a saffron jerkin and a sash of rainbow hues. And even as she turned he leapt at her, to fall back with a howl of rage and pain, as her knife, true and unerring, and sharp as any razor, smote through the back of his hand, splitting it from root to fingers. Nor did she give him time to nurse his pain. The insult of his presence, and all the outrage he had put on her, and all the brave lives of her beloved tribesmen that he had sacrificed, was working her to a tempest of wrath; and this girl, who had wept while binding up a dog's wound, now, with eyes as hard and glittering as any Judith's that ever avenged the wrongs of her people, followed up her stroke with another that, save for his celestial dexterity, would have found Mustapha's heart.

In terror he retreated before her, flying along the

verandah. But pitiless as any falcon her father had ever flown, she followed in his tracks, right hand and left driving her dagger down, just as the falcon's beak beats on its prey. Twice Mustapha went to his knees, scored by the stiletto blades. His finery was hanging in ribbons, his teeth chattering in terror, a dozen gashes in shoulders, arms, and back scalding him with rage and pain. At last, with a hissing screech, he stumbled forward, pressed a knob in the wall, and vanishing in a doorway, slammed it to, just as the girl's dagger buried in his back.

For a moment Mirame regarded the broken, dripping blade, the closed door, the starlit solitude. Then, with a shudder that shook her from head to foot, she flung the dagger far into the night, reeled against the verandah rail, and, clinging there, burst into a passion of sobs.

And it was thus, a minute later, that Alan Wayward found her.

Nor had it been by any child's play he had won his way from that ante-room, through the harem, to her side.

For Disir, the eunuch, was a giant of a strength such as Alan had never before encountered, and his grip had been as the hug of a black bear, swift and suffocating.

"Hoo!" had yelled one of the onrushing soldiery, as he saw the two awaying in that fast lock. "Let them wrestle it out. 'Tis time enough to flay his skin when Disir cracks his back."

And so, while the guards, with their black faces and gleaming eyes, craned their necks above the barrier of dead, Alan and Disir fought their mortal fight. The eunuch had him round the waist, and Alan, with his right clamped in a backhold on Disir's chin, and his left thrust down between the strangling arms, was swaying to and fro, on legs taut as steel springs, striving with every atom of his power to break the other's hold. Indeed, it was only the mighty power of his legs that saved him from disaster.

But if the eunuch's neck was like cast-iron, unbreakable and unturnable, Alan's legs, hardened by the months on the mountains, were as sturdy yet as supple as young oaks. It was in vain Disir bent his huge back and tightened his grip, endeavouring to sway the Englishman off his feet. The most he could manage was to make him shift his position, and even so with every shift the vicelike leverage Alan had on his chin tightened and strengthened its fulcrum.

Under that iron pressure the eunuch's head little by little creaked more and more to his left, till Alan, looking down, could just see the blood-flecked whites of the rolling, infuriated eyes, and knew that his enemy was in his power. For Disir had lost the leverage of his head in that last away, and before he could break hold Alan's left shot up, gripped him on the nape of the neck, and with one swift, remorseless movement he had literally wrung the eunuch's neck; and as the arms fell spasmodically away, he lifted him aloft, and hurling him in the faces of the soldiery, sprang for his battle-axe.

He had not been in Idrin's household as slave during three long months of torture without knowing how futile it would be to attack the door closed in front of him with anything less than dynamite. But he knew also that at the other end of the passage would be Mustapha's private rooms, and through them an entrance, unguarded and unbarred, save perhaps for some miserable slave of the harem.

So he waited not, but followed the broken-necked Disir. In one leap he cleared the barrier of the slain, and was among the confused and serried throng of the living. Then for five minutes he fought the fight of his lifetime. There was just room for the full arm-swing of his terrible axe, and he swung it. With two circling cuts, one from the right and one from the left, he cleared the press around him; then, urging forward, he drove them foot by foot before him, smiting now in long up-strokes, that seemed to curl in air and descend again in unbroken curve right and left, left and right. Their scimitars were as straw wands before him, and wonder and fear and admiration grew in their hearts, as they rushed in on him again and again, only to heap up the pile of their dead.

Then, as the resistance grew and the minutes passed, the thought of Mirame in that den, at the mercy of the apelike Mustapha, came on Alan, and lashed him to a paroxysm. He saw "red," and, taking his lance in rest, he charged down on them, bearing through the thick of them, like an arrow cleaves through corn.

They hardly realised what he had done before he had burst through the outer ring, and was racing at giant strides down the corridor. They were after him like wolves, but they were ten yards away when he burst into Mustapha's apartment, with a sweep of his axe to right and left scattered a group of captains sitting round a table, and with one bound gained the door in the harem. There he paused, slammed to, and jammed the door with a chair he

wrenched in two, then sped on. Door after door he beat in, regardless of screams or cries, leaving no nook unexplored, till he came to the great room whence Mirame had gained the verandah.

There the huddled women gazed at him aghast as he glared round.

"Where is she who was brought here but now?" he demanded, gripping one of the Nubian attendants by the throat.

But the woman, speechless with terror, only jibbered at him.

He flung her aside, and, gazing wildly round, met the eyes of the Circassian girl. It was but a second's glance, but the swift flash of the eyes to the horn curtain told him enough.

With one bound he was through the window, and next moment Mirame was in his arms.

"You are not hurt?" he said, in a voice that was little more than a cracked whisper.

She shuddered against him, choking back her sobs.

"It was very dreadful!" she said. "I fought my way here. He followed me, and I pursued him, slaying him. He fled before me. I struck and struck, and then he dived through a secret door, and I felt sick and humiliated. And oh, my lord, I am very glad you have come!"

"Be at peace," said Alan, in a quiet, steady tone; "we shall win through. You've been rippingly brave. Pull yourself together. Ha! Listen to that!"

Through the clash of battle from below there suddenly rang forth a shout that seemed to ring the mountains.

"Hi-hoo! Hoo-ha-hai!"

It was the battle-cry of her people, of the full force of the Haideranli, of Hussein's famous twenty thousand lances, who, having swept round till they encircled the whole palace, now gave the signal for a general attack. It thrilled the girl like an electric shock. She sprang from Alan's arms, and, standing erect, sent the cry pealing back; and Alan, joining his voice to hers, sent it out again. For a moment they paused, then exchanged glances of triumph, as in one mighty roar there came up from below the answering shout: "Hoo! Mirame! Hi-hoo! Hoo-ha-hai!"

"That is good!" said Alan. "Yet are we far from safety. That wounded rat, Mustapha, is like to ease his venom with some vengeance. Down there I dare not climb with thee in this dark, nor dare I risk again taking thee into that den of traps. Here, at any rate, we are beneath God's sky, and a man may breathe while he smites."

"See, my lord," cried Mirame, "the light goes out in the window whence we came through. Be on thy guard."

"Stand thou here," said Alan, "while I go forward and see what they're about."

He glided along the verandah, his bare feet making no more sound than a cat's. For a moment he stood puzzled and anxious, for the window was being shuttered, and he could see that the shutters were of iron, and he could hear the sound of a mallet beating in wedges between the heavy crossbars within.

"What devilry is Mustapha up to, I wonder?" he said, as he rejoined Mirame. "He has shuttered in the only way of escape. What means he to do?"

Mirame shivered.

"I know not," she said, "yet I am fearful; I know not why. Ah! Allah! Look! What beast is that?"

They were standing at the far end of the verandah, near the little low doorway by which Mustapha had vanished.

Alan wheeled round as Mirame spoke, and for a moment his heart stood still within him, and his blood ran cold, and his great rippling muscles seemed to be drawn up in a thousand quivering cramps. He glanced at Mirame's face, and saw that it was white and rigid as that of a person in a trance, and her eyelids were stark, as if frozen above the terror in her beautiful eyes.

Then he looked again into the doorway, where the glittering starlight shone on to the huge head and yellow, unflickering eyes of a great tiger.

"Ha, ha, ha!" cackled the gloating, jeering voice of Mustapha, from some hidden place in the wall above their heads. "Ye shall taste of the death Mustapha reserves for the unfaithful of his harem, and Mustapha shall watch ye die!"

Then Alan realised. He had wondered much that Mustapha should have a secret door to lead him into his own harem. But now he understood. The tiger was some infernal purchase destined to sate the lust of cruelty in the apelike heart of the slave-dealer. Kept in some cage behind that low doorway, it could be turned out to roam the verandah, while any slave doomed to die had only to be turned loose there, and, ignorant of her fate, learn it in those yellow, terrible eyes.

Again he glanced at Mirame, while his hand tightened like a vice round his trusty battle-axe. The girl's eyes had

never moved. She seemed as if petrified in marble. And in a flash it came to Alan that the reason of the tiger's motionless crouching was just the hypnotic intensity of that human, unflinching gaze.

Inch by inch he lifted the point of his battleaxe, gathering his right arm back, and nerving his muscle for one mighty thrust.

Then, just as he was about to leap forward, Mirame, with a sudden quivering moan, covered her eyes with her hands. And in the instant, the tiger leapt.

Strong and true, with all the force of Alan's body behind it, the battleaxe lanced out, meeting the shock of the rushing brute, and hewing its way through flesh and bone, till half the razor-edged blade lay buried in the knotted muscles of its chest.

Then began a struggle wild and grim, as Alan, throwing his whole weight on the haft, used all his giant force to hold the maddened, gnashing beast to earth.

Mirame had fled to the far end of the verandah, and, standing on the rail, was peeling out her cry of battle.

Round and round the man and the beast whirled, the tiger heaving and writhing, now clawing at the haft, now gnashing its blood-foamed fangs in an endeavour to snap the wood. But each time Alan was too swift for it. His wrists, strung to the tenacity of steel rods, deftly turning now to right and now to left, yet ever driving deeper and deeper the biting blade. Roar after roar the maddened brute bellowed forth, adding its clamour to the wild shouts of the Haidaranli swarming up from below.

Then, suddenly, a panic seized on the stricken beast. It began dragging away, snarling, and coughing blood, backing ever towards the hole where was its lair, seeking the dark for the death it felt imminent. But as it backed Alan advanced, driving in the blade, till with one last drive the needle point pierced the brute's heart, and it rolled over, clawed and bit at the air, then lay stark.

Alan, dragging free the blade, reeled against the wall, faint with exhaustion.

Mirame came up to him, and taking his two hands held them against her breast.

"Thou art indeed a man, and my lord for ever!" she said. "And none but thee shall ever wed Mirame."

"I'll take jolly good care no one does," said Alan, looking down into the fairness of the upturned face, and the triumphing glory in her eyes.

CHAPTER 6.

"The Staff of Allah."

"WHY tarry the Haidaranli?" asked Alan presently, as the fight seemed suddenly to pause all around the palace.

"I know not," replied Mirame anxiously. "It is not like my father to check the attack. What is that light in the sky?"

She pointed straight above, where a red glare had suddenly shown, and was spreading wider and wider, and each moment becoming brighter.

Alan looked at it, and then down at the house, then up again. Then he uttered a little grim laugh.

"Mustapha's palace burns," he said; "and after all the other deaths that we have escaped, we are like now to perish by fire."

"Canst thou not hew down the shutter?" asked Mirame. "It is of iron and an inch thick, and wedged tight," Alan replied. "I should but spoil my axe."

The glare was now illuminating the whole countryside, and as the long tongues of flame leapt and roared aloft, they seemed to be scissored off by the wind, and to be whirled hundreds of feet skyward.

"Rescue, men of the Haidaranli!" Mirame's voice pealed out, drawing to her thousands of eyes. She stood encircled by Alan's arm, and in the full light of the glow the two were plainly visible, and for a long moment it seemed as though a wind had rustled among the lances of the stupefied multitude.

"By Jove! Look, Mirame!" cried Alan. "There's old Clok! He's seen us. I've been wondering this last twelve hours what he had done with himself. He's making up the face of the cliff. Then there must be a path. And old Jelaluddin's after him, too! Courage! They'll find a way."

"Accursed Ingelzi," screeched the voice of Mustapha from his secret watchtower, "they will find no way for ye! A way there is, but they know it not. Ye have escaped the tiger, but ye will not escape Mustapha's hounds. Six great boardhounds are they, and for three days have they been caged and gone unfed. And now I go to loose them. I shall watch them raven on ye. Then Mustapha, while all men think he burns, will take the way of escape, whence already have gone his wives and goods and slaves."

"Oh, let us risk all!" cried Mirame. "Didst thou not

win me bearing me down the face of a precipice worse far than this? I would not wait those savage hounds."

"Look," said Alan, "and fear not!"

He pointed to the low doorway, hardly higher than so mean a man as Mustapha might get through crouching, and now completely blocked by the body of the dead tiger. For Alan, as he had drawn out his battle-axe, had hurled the beast full into the hole whence it came, and stamped it in, so that scarce a cat could pass on either side.

"But will those savage hounds not quickly drag it away?" cried Mirame.

"Nay! Seeing that they have not fed for three days, rather will they feed," answered Alan. "Nevertheless, thy counsel is good," he went on, as a great shower of sparks fell on to the verandah. "And now that we have light and enough to see by, we will try the path, and join the sheikh and Clok halfway."

He lifted her over the rail, bidding her hang there by her hands, till he should first go down and find safe footway. For all his great height, he had to drop a full three feet, and then only to find but a narrow space some four foot square on which to stand. Solidly he planted his legs, and lifted high the point of his spear.

"Let down one hand, and seize the haft of my spear!" he cried.

The girl obeyed, looking down on him, and the dizzy depths at his back, with dauntless eyes.

"Now," he went on, "twine thy knees about the haft, yet very gently, and then thy other hand, so will I let thee down."

Yet, despite his great force, he felt his knees trembling, and his loins as if smitten with a hot flail, as the full weight of that most precious body hung balanced about the top of the haft, and he stooped till the point rested in earth, while his hands grew up it inch by inch, and his body straightened after them, and with a sudden swift movement he had clasped her, spear and all, in his arms.

"Verily," she mocked at him from her security, "I believe thou wast afraid."

"I was," he said shortly, wiping the clamminess from his brow. "And thou?"

"Nay, I trusted in thee," said Mirame. "Hearken to the baying and the snarling of the hounds. I fear lest they like not tiger flesh, and, breaking free, pursue us here. Let us hasten on."

They peered over the ledge, to see, six feet beneath them, another ledge that led by a narrow, winding path down the hill. Alan let himself over, and as Mirame followed suit, hanging by her hands, he picked her from the face of the cliff into his arms, and laughingly bore her onwards.

"Ah!" he cried suddenly, placing her down and pointing to right and left. "See the secret way of escape by which Mustapha means to go. And look at the trampling of the ground, where his household have already passed."

For across the path by which they were descending, another path ran at right angles for some ten paces, to vanish on either side into the yawning mouth of a tunnel.

For a long minute Alan stared at it, then scanned the rocks around.

"Go down a little way and wait," he said to Mirame. "We will pinch the fox in his own trap."

He mounted the path by which they had come, and seizing a huge boulder in his arms, bore it to the mouth of one of the tunnels, and rolled it in. Another and another he brought, hurling them after the first, and then many smaller rocks, which he jammed tight around the others, until even his strength could not move the solid mass. The other he treated in like manner. Then he rejoined Mirame, laughing grimly.

"I would I could see Mustapha's face when he finds that way blocked!" he said. "For I am well convinced that his only way back lies through his den of cages on to his own verandah. For all the rest of his palace is a mass of flame. But there the rock runs up, and it is from a chamber in that rock he has been watching us."

"Then if he fly back, surely the hounds will seize him!" said Mirame, with a shudder.

"It's mightily to be hoped so," said Alan.

As he spoke, they came to a point where the path turned swiftly to the left, and narrowing, but gave sufficient footway for a half-dozen paces for one person to pass warily, the cliff rising twenty feet above, and falling sheerly to the plain a hundred feet below.

Mirame had passed it, guided by Alan's outstretched spear, and stood on a little plateau, waiting him, and in full view of the burning palace.

"Quick, my lord!" she cried, with a gasp. "The hounds are coming!"

And, indeed, at that instant they gave tongue in no uncertain note. Alan joined her, gave one swift glance upward, and then grinned cheerfully.

"What's good enough for the master, should be good enough for his dogs," he said, and commenced heaving at a great boulder lying near the edge of the gully they had just traversed. He started it at last, and set it moving down the gentle gradient till it brought up three paces down the narrow neck, and rested oscillating, as if undecided whether to take a dive or not. Alan decided for it by thrusting the point of his axe into the ground, and levering the boulder against the upward shelving rock. Then he kicked in beneath the uneven edges of it a number of little stones with which the neck was strewn, and gently withdrew his axe.

The boulder stood firm. The pass was blocked. "Now," said Alan, as he drew the girl to the far edge of the plateau, where they had full view of the path they had descended, "we shall see how the Black Vulture and his dogs get on together. For they are fairly corked into the same bottle!"

"Ho, son of folly and all indiscretion!" panted a well-known voice, as Jelaluddin's face rose over the edge of the plateau. "Art thou indeed alive? A nice chase thou hast given us."

Yet, despite the carping accent in his tones, the old man's eyes were gleaming with something like triumphant pride as he ran to Alan, and folded him in his arms with a fervour and a force that made even Alan's sturdy ribs creak.

"I'm all right, father of wisdom and prudence," he said gaily.

"Lady, I salute thee," bowed the sheikh, after a gleam of the eye in Alan's direction, that showed he had not lost the delicate insinuation. "If Allah did not love thee, verily thou wouldst not be here. Yet I—"

A long whimper from below the edge of the plateau interrupted the sheikh, who in his joy at this reunion with his beloved "disciple"—over whose peril he had plucked out more than one clump from his beard during the last twenty-four hours—was ripe for a really long "chow-wow."

"May Allah forgive me! I have forgotten thy faithful hound," he cried. And, flinging himself face downwards, he stretched over his arms and drew the shaggy head of Clok on a level with the edge, and helped him scramble up.

"Thou art a faithless deserter. A kid-hunter. A glutton," said Alan chidingly, as the dog wound itself into contortions round his legs and licked at his bare feet in a rapture of canine eloquence.

"Thou dost him great wrong," said the sheikh. "He is a noble hound. We found thy spoor, and traced thee down the cascade. And then we found that poor beast of thine, with a sheepskin tied about his head, and his tail bound fast to a tree. And, indeed, I think I have never seen a beast wear such an expression of wounded dignity as he when we freed him; yet it was he who led us on thy trail. And we were hard after thee when some fool of Hasein's put fire in the village of Foliat, and forced us to make a circle. And now, indeed, I would know all thy adventure; yet tell me first how thou didst circumvent yonder boulder, and what do those great, gaunt dogs, baying at its base.

Alan explained to him, and the sheikh nodded grimly. "Thou growest in wisdom as in sinew," he said, in his dry way; "and if thou wilt exercise the one as thou dost the other, at the end of three years thou wilt no longer be a fool. Now, tell me how ye came into this pass. And what was the meaning of that barrier of stones on the mountain-side of Sipan Dag, and all that ring of corpses?"

"Nay, but I will tell thee!" cried Mirame.

"Be silent, Mirame!" said Alan, rather brusquely; for he saw the love-glory in her eyes, and he hated to hear his own deeds sung.

"From the beginning of the world," retorted Mirame, with a dainty little toss of her chin, "speech hath ever been the privilege of a Princess of the Haideranli!"

Mirame proceeded; and the old sheikh's hand twitched about his staff, his ironic, aged eyes gleamed and glowed, and he shovelled pinch after pinch of snuff into his nose, till Alan gaped in wonder at him, as the chieftainess of the Haideranli, standing erect, half-spoke, half-chanted the psalm of her lord's prowess.

"And we're to be married to-morrow!" she concluded triumphantly, sinking down beside the sheikh, and pulling Clok's silky ears through her tender, trembling fingers, while she buried her burning face over his shaggy head.

"Hoo!" grunted the sheikh, lifting his staff, and bringing it with a thwack on Alan's shoulders that made him writhe, and Clok give a sudden, inquiring snarl. "Hoo! But it was well done. Ha! What was that?"

They had all started to their feet as the shriek, tense and long-drawn, rang through the air.

The moon had risen, golden and full, and all the hillside was bathed in a flood of light, that was rendered more lurid by the intermittent jutting of a rush of flame heavenward,

as a new portion of Mustapha's rabbit-warren of a palace caught fire.

The three on the rock stood as if transfixed by the scene before them; for there, high aloft on the square of rock below the blazing terrace, stood Mustapha, the slave-merchant, and beneath him, leaping upward and ravening, the six gaunt boarhounds bayed and clamoured for food.

For, indeed, as Alan had surmised, it had been the nastiest surprise of his life for Mustapha when he had found his exit blocked. But he had not been over-shocked. He had seen the hounds get on the track of the fugitives, and he retraced his steps, gloating over the imagined details of their fate. It was only when he regained the doorway leading on to the verandah, and saw that it was already blazing, that he began to fear. But he had taken his fear in his yellow teeth, dived through the flames, and scrambled down to the plateau, to which Alan had lifted Mirame on his spear.

And then, as he stood up to scan the path for some trace of his victims, he had heard the baying of his dogs beneath him, and seen, sitting secure and tranquil in the moonlight, Mirame and her lover and the prophet of Bagdad.

Then the fear of death, and the terror of the prophecy he had heard down there in the plains beneath Sipan Dag, had squeezed the heart of the Black Vulture of Foliat so that he screamed in his rage and fright, yet never knew a sound had passed his lips.

"In good truth I foretold him his end," said Jelaluddin; and, lifting his staff, he pointed it at the doomed wretch.

As though the action had some galvanic power on the frenzied wit of Mustapha, he gathered himself together, and leapt clean over the heads of the yelping hounds, alighted twenty feet beyond them on the path, and fled like a grey-gout down the breakneck pass.

In a second the hounds were after him, giving tongue in dreadful chorus. But, fast as they ran, Mustapha ran faster, bounding from height to fall with the recklessness of maddened terror.

"It'll be a shocking surprise to him when he runs his nose into my little boulder!" said Alan grimly.

They were in full view of the chase, and Mustapha was now within ten yards of the narrow neck, with the pack not three yards from his heels.

"Thou shalt see!" said the sheikh grimly. "I told him he should die on his threshold, and thou hast rolled the stone to the very limit that marks the edge of his boundary. Yet, none the less, he would pass it were it not for my staff. Stay thou there, and watch."

The sheikh strode forward, and Alan, fascinated, stood watching. For a second Mustapha paused as, swinging into the neck, he caught sight of the great boulder in front of him. But the frenzy of his fear lent him a superhuman force, and, crouching even as he ran along that dizzy edge, he sprang, and, his nails digging into the rock, he clambered up like any monkey, to stand jibbering down at the stern face of the sheikh, and shuddering from the yelping pack behind.

Then, as one great hound leapt tearing at the rock, Mustapha gathered himself together, to leap down on the man beneath.

"Black Vulture of Foliat," chanted the prophet, "Allah hath need of thee."

Then, with his staff, he poked Mustapha in the stomach, so that he fell backward into the maws of his hounds.

And thus the sheikh, like the practical man of wisdom that he was, did his little part to prevent any untoward accident spoiling his reputation as a prophet.

"Now, my children," he said, as he rejoined the two on the plateau, "the Black Vulture of Foliat is no more, and the Hawk of the Haideranli mourns for his empty nest. Let us go to him and comfort him."

"And you will speak words of wisdom to my father, O sheikh, will you not?" said Mirame as, after circling the foot of the cliff, they came in sight of the host of the Haideranli, every man standing with his spear down-turned, looking with gloomy, shamed eyes on what they thought was the funeral pyre of their chieftain's daughter.

"Assuredly will I speak naught but wisdom to him," said the sheikh.

"Thou shalt I and my Lord Alan be wed this day!" said Mirame joyously.

"Um!" grunted the sheikh. "That's as it may be."

"Hoo! Dogs," he yelled to the startled ranks, "salute ye not the Lady Mirame!"

And so, through the cheering, frantic ranks of twenty thousand warriors, Alan led Mirame from out of the clutches of the Black Vulture to the tent of her father.

THE END.

(Another Tale of Alan Wayward next Thursday. Please order your copy of the "Gem" Library in advance. Price 1d.)



The Only New and Original School Tale.
By S. CLARKE HOOK.

READ THIS FIRST.

Billy Barnes, Cyril Conway, and Snowy White Adonis Venus are three great chums at Tempest Headland School. Dr. Buchanan, the headmaster, finds them very troublesome pupils; as does also Herr Ludvig, the German master. Venus is a black boy, and is taken as a tag by Graft.

The end of the term arrives, and, after tantalising Venus for some time, Cyril informs him that they are to spend the holidays together at Cyril's home.

"Hooroo! Hurrah!" yells Venus, disregarding Mopps, the school porter, who has entered the dormitory to get some of the boys' boxes. "Is it really true dat I am to spend de holidays wid you, Cyril?"

(Now go on with the story.)

Venus versus Snigg.

"Every day of them," said Cyril. "We shall go down together, and return together, and if we don't have a grand time of it the fault will be ours. My mother is the most perfect woman that ever lived—at least I think so, and you are bound to think the same. Every chap I take there thinks her splendid."

"Tell us all about it, Cyril. Neber mind Mopps. I tink de man is rader mad as well as stupid; still, he can't help it. Somehow, I feel sorry for him, 'cos he ain't going."

"No! I draw the line at Mopps. A little of him goes a long way. Good-bye, Mopps, we haven't time to listen to you. You can talk to one of the bed-posts; it will have just the same effect as though you talked to us. This way, Venus."

Now, Mopps knew perfectly well that he would have help on the morrow in bringing down the boxes, but as he had been ordered to get down as many as he could, so as to save time, he saved it by taking down two light ones, and he determined to let the men carry down the rest, while he attended to such lighter duties as taking up the masters' breakfasts, and so on. He invariably arranged matters this way at the end of each term, because tips were not to be expected. At the beginning of each term he carried up such boxes as had a tip attached to them, and let the outside help carry up the others.

Venus was so excited about spending the holidays with his chum that he declared he would not sleep a wink all night, and it was nearly a quarter of an hour before he was snoring; but he was up at break of day, and when Cyril opened his eyes, he found Venus seated on the bed watching him, like some faithful old dog.

"Golly! I dunno when I felt so glad as dis!" exclaimed Venus. "Hooroo!"

"Stop that beastly row!" snarled Snigg, hurling a boot at his head, which it missed, and went through the window.

"Yah, yah, yah!" roared Venus. "You can't aim for nuts, Snigg. Look here, you stand dat side ob de dormitory, and I'll stand dis. Den we will chuck boots at each other like so—yah, yah, yah! Caught him first time. Now let's hab anoder shot."

Snigg uttered a howl as a boot caught him on the side of the head, and promptly ducked his head beneath the clothes. It was well that he did so, for the second boot hit him on the nose, and it hurt, even sheltered by the bedclothes.

"You little black beast!" roared the irate Snigg. "Won't I give you something!"

"Here, you leave my boots alone, Venus," shouted another boy.

Snigg leapt out of bed, seized the poker, and, rushing at Venus, caught him a sounding crack over the head, then Venus got one end of the poker, and there was a tug of war for it.

Although Snigg was considerably bigger, it is doubtful who would have been the victor, for Venus was very strong, and he knew that it was an important matter, for he was likely to get another crack over the head if he let go.

However, he manoeuvred a little until Snigg's back was towards the wash-stand, then Venus suddenly let go.

Snigg took a backward dive, smashed the water-jug with his head, clutched at the wash-stand to save himself falling, then went to the floor with the wash-stand on the top of him, and water and broken china all around.

"Yah, yah, yah!" roared Venus. "De boy must tink he's a fish, or else a barge. You ain't got de right to swim in de bed-room, Snigg. Yah, yah, yah! You might hab hurt yourself dat time if you hadn't been so careful. See you downstairs, Cyril. I ain't got time to listen to what dat boy has got to say."

Then Venus bolted, and they heard his shouts of laughter as he descended the stairs. For Venus was very happy that morning, and such a trifle as a smashed jug or so did not trouble him at all.

The man who brought round hot rolls was at the gate for the last time, and Venus purchased a shillingsworth straight away, and took them to the cook for buttering operations, while she promised to keep them nice and hot. She knew that Cyril would certainly partake of those rolls, and she was always ready to take any trouble to please him.

At breakfast, Venus declared he was too happy to eat much, but he managed to dispose of five of the rolls, while Cyril and Billy helped him with some of the others, and there was not the slightest difficulty in disposing of the rest. The breakfast was an hour earlier than usual because some of the boys had to catch trains. Venus did not know how they were going, nor did he care, so long as he went.

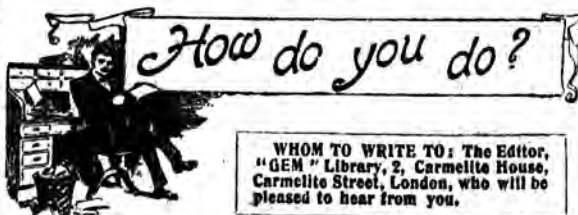
Herr Ludvig was on duty in the breakfast-hall, but he knew that it would be impossible to keep anything like order, and so did not bother himself much about the noise. He was thinking more of his own breakfast, which would be served up later in his study—at least, he thought it would. He had ordered a couple of rashers of bacon, and some fried eggs, and had given Mopps particular instructions to see that they came up piping hot, then he left the rest to fate; but, alas! Fate at times is a cruel jade, and so it happened on this particular day.

The doctor had received an invitation to spend a few days at Mrs. Conway's with his wife and daughter, and he went in search of Cyril, to hand him the note accepting the invitation. He found him in the square hall beneath the dormitories, instructing one of the men to bring his box down next, and he tipped the man a shilling to emphasise the request.

The doctor led Cyril a little aside, and Venus stood behind in rather an anxious state of mind, for he feared that something must have happened to prevent his going.

Meantime, Snigg, who never had any money to tip anyone, failing to get preferential attention, decided to bring his box down himself, and the brilliant idea occurred to him of sliding it down the balusters. He got it down the first flight all right as far as the box was concerned, though the balusters suffered considerably, then Snigg had to shove it along a straight piece, and he was just above Cyril's head. Venus at that critical moment looked up just as Snigg gave a violent shove, and the box toppled over, while it was coming straight for Cyril's head, and would certainly have brained him, seeing that it was a large and heavy box.

(Another instalment next Thursday.)



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