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D'ARCY'S MISADVENTURES.

A
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TALE OF
TOM MERRY

BY
MARTIN
CLIFFORD.

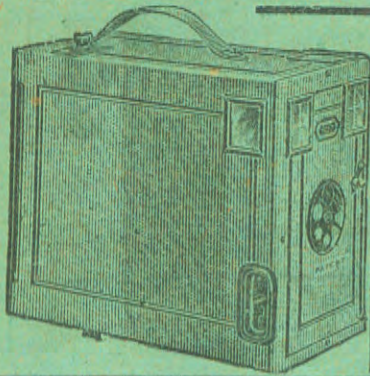


NO. 17.

VOL. 1.

D'Arcy craned his neck to look round the stack. "You wottah!" he growled, "You uttah wottah! You think you've got me, do you?"

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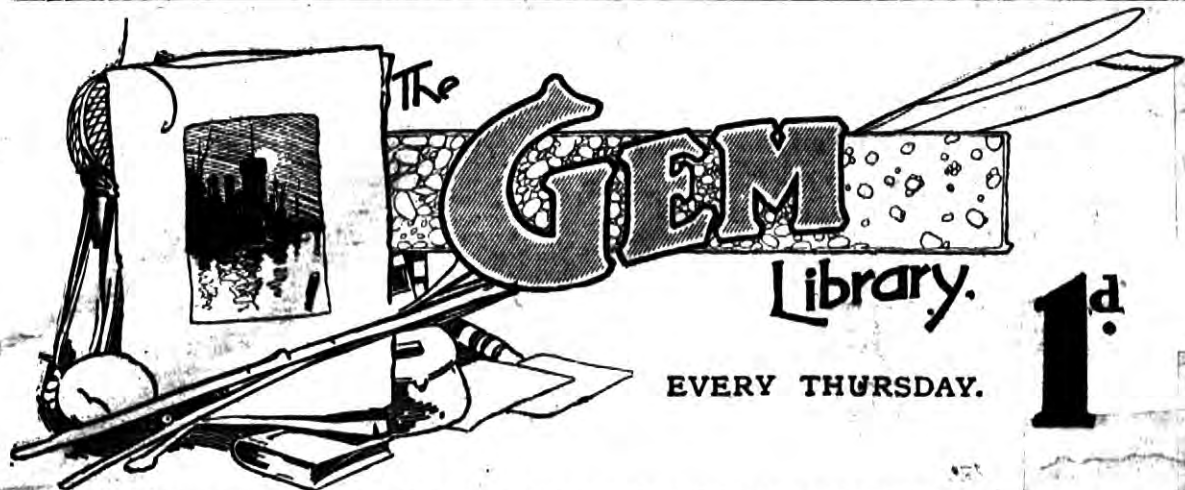
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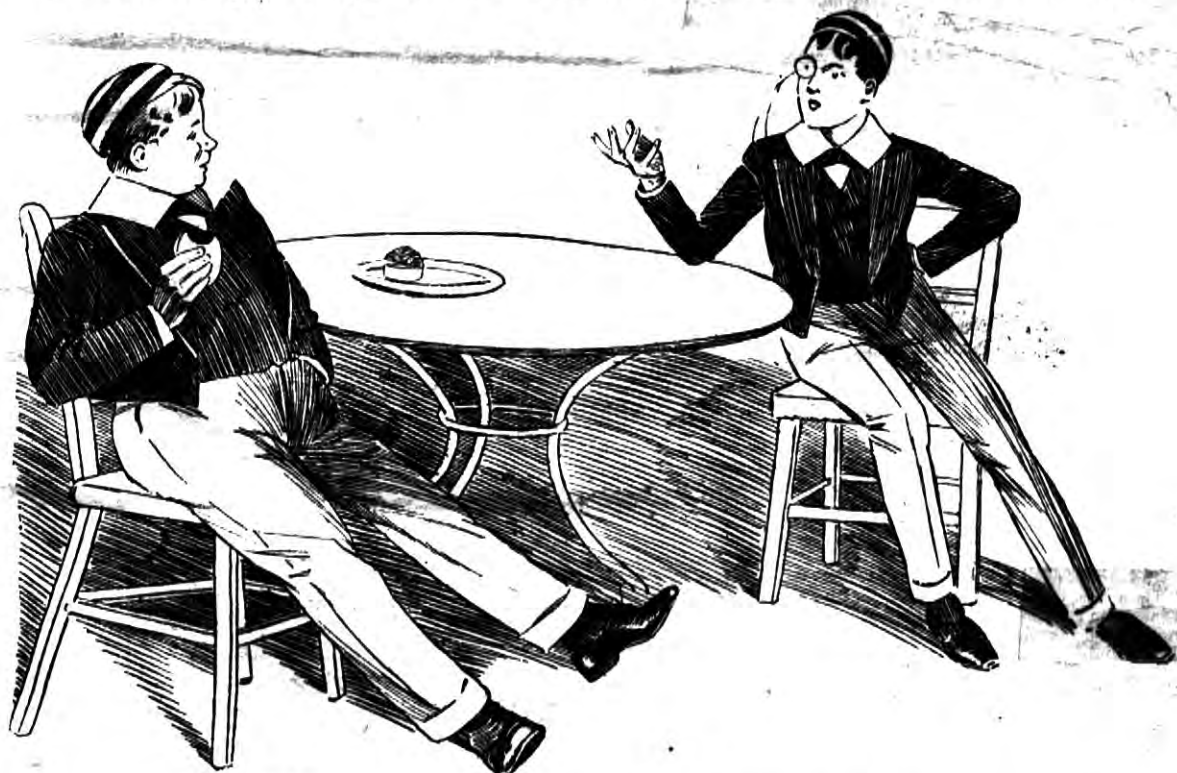


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D'ARCY'S MISADVENTURES.

A Double-length Complete Tale of Tom Merry & Co. By MARTIN CLIFFORD.



CHAPTER I. D'Arcy is Mysterious.

"D'ARCY!"

There was no reply. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, the swell of the School House at St. Jim's, was walking in the quadrangle, his hands deep in his trousers pockets, and his brow screwed up into an expression of intense reflection.

"D'Arcy!"

D'Arcy evidently did not even hear. He walked on, without looking to right or left, and Tom Merry stared after him in amazement.

"D'Arcy!" he called out, for the third time.

But Arthur Augustus did not turn his head.

"Well, my only hat!" murmured Tom Merry, gazing after the elegant form of the swell of the School House. **"What on**

ANOTHER TALE OF TOM MERRY NEXT THURSDAY

No. 17 (New Series).

earth's the matter with Gussy? Is he in love again, or is he thinking out a new pattern in fancy waistcoats, I wonder?"

"Anything wrong, Tom?"

Manners and Lowther came by under the old elms in the quadrangle at St. Jim's, and they stopped at sight of Tom Merry staring open-mouthed after Arthur Augustus. Tom Merry laughed.

"I don't know," he replied. "Did you see Gussy pass just now?"

"No," said Lowther. "Hallo, there he is!"

"He's turning back. Just watch him."

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy had reached the end of the row of elm trees, and had turned round abruptly and was stalking back. He was apparently not going anywhere, but just pacing to and fro under the trees while he thought out some weighty problem.

The Terrible Three looked at one another and grinned. Arthur Augustus had his eyes fixed on the ground, and did not see them. He was marching straight towards them, his brows still wrinkled in intense thought.

Monty Lowther, with a low chuckle, stepped right into the path of the swell of St. Jim's. Unless D'Arcy looked up, he was certain to run right into Lowther, and undoubtedly that would have the effect of startling him out of his brown study.

"One hundred pounds!" D'Arcy muttered the words aloud as he came nearer.

Monty Lowther stood like a rock, and the rapt swell of St. Jim's did not look up. He walked right into Monty Lowther, and biffed upon his chest with considerable violence.

Lowther was prepared for the shock, and he braced himself to stand it—and stood it. But Arthur Augustus was taken by surprise, and he gave a cry and staggered back several paces, and finally sat down in the quadrangle.

As his hands were in his trousers pockets, and he could not get them out in time, he could not save himself in any way. He bumped down heavily and gasped; and remained sitting there, staring up at the chums of the Shell Form in blank astonishment.

"Bai Jove!" he gasped.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Weally," gasped D'Arcy, "I wish you would not get in the way, Lowthah. You have weally given me a most unpleasant bump on the beastly gound, and thown my nerves into quite a fluffah!"

"Well, I like that!" said Monty Lowther indignantly. "You run right into a chap, and nearly knock him over, and then don't so much as apologise."

D'Arcy extricated his hands from his trousers pockets and scrambled up.

"Weally, Lowthah, if you put it like that——"

"How do you expect me to put it?" said Lowther. "I'm waiting for the apology."

"I am extremely sowwy, Lowthah, that I walked into you," said Arthur Augustus, who was never known to fail when it came to a question of politeness. "I am weally vewwy sowwy. But I wish you had not got in my way. You have intewwupted my twain of thought."

"What the dickens are you thinking about, Gussy?" demanded Tom Merry. "I spoke to you three times and you never answered."

"I am sowwy to have appeahed so wude, Tom Mewwy."

"But what's the matter?"

"Oh, nothin'."

"Oh, I know what it is!" exclaimed Monty Lowther, with a grin.

Arthur Augustus looked at him quickly, screwing an eyeglass into his right eye in order to scan the junior's expression better.

"What do you mean, Lowthah? I am quite sure that you know nothin' at all about the mattah, deah boy."

"Oh, yes, I do. You've met a girl named Ethel again."

"Weally, Lowthah——"

"And you're in love."

"Nothin' of the sort," said Arthur Augustus indignantly. "I am far too busily occupied for any frivolous nonsense of that sort, I assuah you. And I weally wish you fellows would not keep on insinuat' that I fall in love as a mattah of habit. I have only been in love three times in my life."

"Only!" roared Tom Merry. "My hat! I suppose three times is a pretty liberal allowance for a chap rising fifteen."

"Weally, Tom Mewwy——"

"But if you're not in love, what's the giddy trouble?" asked Manners. "What do you mean by going about wrapped in thought, and biffing on to the chest of a chum of mine, if you're not in love?"

"That's my little secwet."

"Now, look here, Gussy," said Monty Lowther, persuasively, "a chap like you ought not to start keeping secrets. You know we take a fatherly interest in you——"

D'Arcy screwed his eyeglass tighter into his eye and gave Lowther a withering look.

"Lowthah, I wegard that remark as widiculous. You are pewwaps a month oldah than I am——"

"Nearly five weeks," said Lowther severely.

"That is not enough——"

"We take all you Fourth Form kids under our wing," explained Lowther. "Now, tell us what the matter is, Gussy, and we will set it right. Speak to me as you would to your mother or your Aunt Selina."

D'Arcy glared at the facetious Lowther.

"Weally, Lowthah, I wegard you as an impertinent beast."

"Oh, rotten!" said Lowther, tearfully. "When I'm taking a fatherly interest in you, too. Is that what you call grateful, Gussy?"

"I wegard you——"

"Then you won't confide to us the secret of your little bosom? You won't tell us why you were muttering about a hundred pounds."

D'Arcy started.

"Weally, I should not have suspected you chaps of playin' the eavesdrippah."

"Don't be an ass, Gussy," said Tom Merry. "We couldn't help hearing you muttering."

"I accept your explanation."

"Rats!"

"But pway leave me alone now," said D'Arcy, with a wave of the hand. "I am thinkin' out a wathah difficult problem, and your pwesence distrawts me."

"What's the problem?"

"It would be no good tellin' you, deah boys, even if I were disposed to take you into the secwet, as it would be far above your intellects."

"Well, you cheeky young——"

"Pway do not use any opprobrious epithets, deah boys, or I shall be compelled to thrash you, and that would howwibly disturb my twain of thought. I wish you would wun away and play."

"Look here, Gussy——"

"Pway wing off, deah boys."

The Terrible Three looked at one another expressively. There was evidently something on D'Arcy's mind—some secret he was greatly interested in, and which he did not intend to confide to the chums of the Shell.

"Let's bump him in the fountain?" was Monty Lowther's suggestion.

D'Arcy retreated a step.

"Pway don't be a beastly wuffian, Lowthah!"

"You've got some idea in your brain that you won't tell us."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"After the careful way we've brought you up, and guided your baby footsteps in the way that they should go, and——"

"Oh, pway don't wot! I weally wish you would take your departure. You are wowwyin' me, and intewwuptin' my twain of thought."

Tom Merry laughed.

"We mustn't interrupt his train of thought," he exclaimed. "The result might be serious in a mighty brain like Gussy's. If he were to burst anything there, there might be a flood."

"Oh, weally, Tom Mewwy——"

"Come along, kids, and leave him to work out his problem."

The Terrible Three walked away. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy gazed after them vacantly for a moment, and then his eyeglass dropped to the end of its cord, and he thrust his hands into his trousers pockets again, and resumed his pacing under the trees.

The chums of the Shell looked back, and saw him pacing to and fro, his forehead wrinkled and his eyes on the ground.

"My hat!" said Tom Merry. "There's something working in Gussy's mighty brain, and I'm really curious to know what it is. You never know what that ass is going to do next."

"Let's go and ask Blake," said Lowther. "He's sure to know."

"That's a good idea."

And the chums of the Shell made their way without delay to Study No. 6, in the School House of St. Jim's, occupied by the famous quartette, Blake, Herries, Digby, and D'Arcy; and found Jack Blake alone there.

CHAPTER 2.

D'Arcy's Brilliant Idea.

JACK BLAKE was mending a fishing-rod. He looked up, and took a tighter grip upon the thickest part of it, as he saw the Terrible Three looking in at the door.

There were very often strained relations between the Terrible Three and the chums of Study No. 6. But on this occasion the visit was one of amity. Tom Merry waved his hand in reassurance, and walked into the study, followed by Manners and Lowther.

"Hallo, Blake, I see you're busy."

"Yes," said Blake amiably; "silly asses keep on coming in and interrupting me, you know."

Tom Merry laughed.

"Have you seen Gussy lately?"



"I wegard you as a pair of wottahs!" said D'Arcy.

"Yes; he went out just after tea," said Blake. "Do you want him? I think he's reading somewhere."

"Reading!" said Lowther. "What's he reading?"

Blake chuckled.

"Some stuff about Sherlock Holmes. He's studying the methods, or something, he says. He hasn't got over his idea of being a detective yet."

Tom Merry started.

"My hat! Is that it?"

"Is that what?"

"We have just come in from the quad. Gussy's there, walking about under the trees, with a brow you could sharpen a saw on, and muttering something about a hundred pounds."

"A hundred pounds!" said Blake, looking puzzled. "I don't know anything about a hundred pounds. I'm pretty sure Gussy hasn't anything like a hundred pounds. His governor keeps him well supplied with pocket-money, but not to that tune."

"That's what he was muttering about."

"Perhaps it's something from some detective yarn that he's got on the brain," said Blake. "I say, you remember Ferrers Locke, the detective, was here last week?"

"Well, rather!"

"I've found out that before he went Gussy offered—ha, ha, ha—"

"Offered what?"

"He offered Ferrers Locke—ha, ha, ha—"

"Offered Ferrers Locke what?"

"To become—ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, get it out!"

"Offered to become his assistant in London" giggled Blake.

"He was prepared to give up his career at St. Jim's, feeling that he was just cut out to be a detective."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Locke declined, of course—told Gussy he would have to adorn the House of Lords some day, and that he must keep that in view."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"But Gussy can't get the idea out of his head. He thinks a brain like his is built to grapple with mighty problems."

"The cheek of a Fourth Form kid——"

Blake's expression changed.

"What's that, Lowther?"

"The cheek of a Fourth Form kid——"

"If you're looking for a thick ear, Monty Lowther——"

"I say, the cheek of a Fourth Form kid——"

"Oh, rats! What are you Shell-fish doing in a respectable study, anyway? Just travel along, and don't worry me with your features."

"Yes, come along!" said Tom Merry. "We can't be seen in a place like this. I think we shall be able to dig some fun up, too, this time."

And the Terrible Three quitted Study No. 6. They passed two juniors in the passage, Herries and Digby, who entered the study the next moment.

"Hallo!" said Digby. "Nearly finished, eh? There's still time for a little practice at the nets if you buck up."

"Some silly ass keeps on coming in and interrupting me."

"Oh, cheese it! Keep that for the Shell bounders."

"But really——"

"Have you seen Gussy? I hear that he has been going about with portentous frowns on his brow, and not answering when spoken to," said Digby. "That means something new and startling in the fancy waistcoat line, I suppose."

"I've just heard about him from Tom Merry. He—who's that?"

A large head was put into the study from the passage, and a pair of watery eyes blinked at the chums of the Fourth.

"Hallo, Blake! Is D'Arcy here?"

"No, he isn't."

"I want to speak to him," said Skimpole of the Shell, the amateur Socialist of St. Jim's, and the brainy man of the Shell Form. "It's rather important."

"Is it? Then I advise you to go and look for him."

"Have you seen him?"

"Oh, yes, I've seen him," said Digby.

"Where?"

"In the woodshed."

"Thank you, Digby."

And Skimpole cut off. Digby giggled as Blake stared at him.

"What the dickens is Gussy doing in the woodshed?" said Blake.

"Nothing. I never said he was there."

"You said—"

"I said I had seen him there. So I had—last week, when we were holding the meeting of St. Jim's Junior Parliament."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Skimpole didn't ask me to specify the time I saw him. It only shows what a brainy man may overlook. Now, Gussy is—"

"Here he is!"

The elegant form of the swell of the School House entered the study. There was still a shade of deep thought upon the brow of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, but a light of resolve gleamed behind his eyeglass.

"I say, deah boys—"

"Anything wrong, Gussy?" asked Digby.

"Wong? Certainly not, Dig."

"I heard you'd been thinking."

"Pway don't wot, Digby! I have wathah a good ideah, and I am inclined to take you chaps into it, if you like."

"Well, we know your ideas," said Blake, distrustfully.

"They generally want boiling. But you can go on, till I've finished mending this fishing-rod, at any rate."

"That's hardly a respectful way of puttin' it, Blake."

"Oh, get on with the washing."

"Certainly, Blake. That is my intention. I was only pointin' out—"

"Get on, I tell you!"

"Well, I have a wippin' ideah—a weally first-wate, wippin' wheezo."

"Cut it short."

"It is quite imposs. for me to cut it short, Blake. With your permish, dear boys, I will explain the mattah at pwopah length. You wemembah that Fewwahs Locke was here last week?"

"What about it?"

"Pway don't interwupt me in that abwupt way. You disturb my twain of thought. Fewwahs Locke was kind enough to give us all some twainin' as amateur detectives, to teach us to observe, and to concentrate the attention—"

"He did. I didn't notice that you learned much, though."

"As a mattah of fact, Blake, I learned more than anybody else, as I have a far more powerful and weceptive bwain than any of you othahs. I offahed Fewwahs Locke my services as his assistant—"

"Yes, I know you did, ass!"

"I wufuse to be chawactewised as an ass."

"Will you get on with the washing?" roared Blake, taking a business-like grip of the rod. "I sha'n't give you much more time."

"Yaas, wathah!" said D'Arcy, keeping a wary eye on the fishing-rod. "Well, Fewwahs Locke wufused my offah, bein' in that respect wathah blind to his own intewests, for I should have been willin' for him to weceive most of the cweedit of my gweat successes—"

"What successes?"

"The gweat successes I should have achieved as a cwime investigatah. He wufused, but, although he was quite right in pointin' out that it would not do for me to take up detective work professionally, I have weflected upon the mattah, and come to the conclusion that there is no weal weason why I should not take it up in an amateur way."

"Go hon."

"That is a wathah widiculous wemark, Digby; but no mattah. I have been thinkin' of takin' up detective work as an amateur. Of course, in takin' up a case, an amateur is entitled to his expenses, the same as in cwicket. I weally do not see," D'Arcy went on thoughtfully, "why I should not make a gweatah pwofit as an amateur than as a pwofessional, as is often done in county cwicket. That is wathah a good idea, as you get more cash, you know, and, at the same time, you can look down on the pwofessionals from a superior standpoint."

"Ha, ha! Good idea."

"Now, what I want to know is, whethah you chaps will join me in this enterpwise," said Arthur Augustus. "I was thinkin' of formin' a company, to be known as D'Arcy, Blake, Hewwies, Digby, & Co., pwivate amateur detectives."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I weally don't see anythin' to laugh at, Blake, and I weally wish you would leave the cacklin' till I have explained my ideah. Any wude noise like that disturbs my twain of thought. I weally think that as D'Arcy, Blake, Hewwies, Digby & Co. we might achieve gweat successes, and make our names wing through the land."

"My dear ass—"

"I object atwongly to that mode of addwess. It is vulgah, and cannot possibly be wegwarded as respectful."

"My dear ass—"

"I wufuse to be alluded to as an ass."

"My dear ass, what kind of detective work do you propose to do at St. Jim's? That fathead Skimpole tried the same wheezo, and was sat upon all round."

"You would not compare Skimpole's bwain with mine?"

"Well, it's bigger; and as for the quality, I dare say it's much of a muchness."

"Weally, Blake, I cannot agwee with you. But I was not thinkin' of twyin' to cawwy on any detective work at St. Jim's. That would be imposs. We should have to find a sphere for our talents outside the coll."

"But they never commit any crimes worth speaking of at Ryleombe."

"I was not thinkin' of that extremely small and insignificant village."

"Then what place are you thinking of? I suppose you're not thinking of going up and down the countryside looking for a crime?" demanded Blake.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Digby. "Has anybody seen a crime?"

"Oh, pway don't wot, deah boys! I have a definite ideah in my bwain. How would you like to share a hundwed pounds with me?"

"Got it about you?"

"Not exactly, Blake, but I can easily get it."

"How?" demanded three voices in unison.

"Listen to this."

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy drew a folded newspaper from his pocket, and commenced to read out a marked paragraph.

"The little son of Sir James Jukes is still reported missing from his home, and the reward of a hundred pounds offered for his discovery has not yet been claimed."

"There!" said D'Arcy triumphantly.

"Well?" said Blake.

"There!"

"What the dickens are you getting at? What has that paragraph got to do with us? Is that the hundred pounds you were talking about?"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"And how are we to get it?"

"By formin' the company accordin' to my suggestion, D'Arcy, Blake, Hewwies, Digby & Co., and findin' the lost son of Sir James Jukes."

"You howling ass!"

"I uttably wufuse to be chawactewised as a howlin' ass."

"How are we to find this lost kid? I suppose they didn't bring him into the quad at St. Jim's to lose him, did they?"

"I am not pwoposin' to look for him in the quad at St. Jim's," said D'Arcy, with a great deal of dignity. "Don't be a widiculous ass, Blake."

"Then where do you propose to look for him?"

"In the place where he was lost, of course."

"Oh, I see. This is a little game you are planning for the vacation."

"It is extwemely pwob. that the child will be found, and the weward claimed before the summer vacation starts," said D'Arcy. "I was not thinkin' of anythin' of the sort."

"Then what's the idea?"

"We should have to leave St. Jim's."

Blake stared aghast.

"Leave St. Jim's?"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"In the middle of the term?"

"We should probably only be absent a couple of days or so, deah boys. With my bwain bwought to bear upon the mattah, the case would not pwobably take us long. We should find the lost son of Sir James Jukes, and weatere him to the wespected bwain of his pawents, and come back to the coll, with a hundwed pounds in our pockets."

"And what do you think the Head would say when we got back?"

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"Havin' found the lost child we could point out to the Head that—"

"But—"

"He would, as a humane man and a fathah himself, excuse us."

"But suppose we didn't find the lost kidlet."

"I must wefuse to entertain any such supposition. When I take up a case I shall always follow it up to a successful conclusion."

"But suppose—"

"It's no good askin' me to suppose that I should fail in my first important case, Blake. I wefuse to entertain the ideah at all."

"You shrieking as!"

"I cannot allow such opprobrious expressions to be applied to me. If you do not care to join the Co.—"

"Catch me."

"Then you wefuse, Blake?"

"I should say so. You're not going to get me to risk being expelled for the sake of hunting after a spectre hundred pounds. That's an old paper, and you don't even know whether the kid's been found or not."

"I am pwetty sure—"

"Now, look here, Gussy—"

"I am afraid I haven't time to argue with you, Blake. It you wefuse to join the Co. I shall seek assistance from othahs. I have already wefused to acquaint Tom Mewwy with the matiah, because I was wewerin' the opportunity for you."

"Rough on Tom Merry," said Herries.

"Yas, wathah, it was wuff on Tom Mewwy. I cannot wewy well withdaw what I said to him now. If you chaps wefuse to join the Co. I shall have to go ovah to the New House and ask Figgins & Co—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Now, Blake, pway weflect before you wefuse."

"Rats! You can count me out."

"And you, Digby?"

"I'm afraid that, in the pressing concern of multifarious other engagements, I shall not be able to accept your really flattering offer," said Digby, with a perfectly serious face.

D'Arcy looked at him auspiciously, and then turned to Herries.

"What do you say, Hewwies? We two—"

Herries grinned.

"I really think I must leave amateur detective business until after the cricket season, Gussy. When the cricket's over you can ask me again."

"Oh, don't be an ass, you know."

"Better go and ask Figgins," said Blake. "I think I can see him following your lead in search of lost infants and a hundred pounds. Go and ask Figgins."

"That is what I intend to do, Blake. It will be your fault entirely if the ewedit of this enterprize falls more to the New House than to the School House."

"I think we'll risk it. Figgins is sure to jump at the offer. Go and ask him."

"Yas, wathah."

And the swell of the School House left Study No. 6, followed by a yell of laughter from the chums of the Fourth Form. D'Arcy heard it, but it made no difference to him. When Arthur Augustus got an idea into his head, nothing short of an earthquake could have shaken it out again. He left the School House and crossed the quadrangle to the rival house of St. Jim's, to submit his really brilliant idea to the consideration of Figgins & Co.

CHAPTER 3.

No Takers.

FIGGINS & Co. were in their study in the New House. It was long past tea-time, but the three New House juniors had only just come into tea, having been busy at practice on the cricket field. And there was not much of a tea on the table at Figgins's. Funds were low with the Co., and the tea-table showed it.

Figgins and Kerr were making an inroad upon bread-and-butter. Fatty Wynn looked disparagingly at the tin of sardines, which was all the table could boast beside the loaf and the butter.

"This is rather serious," said Fatty Wynn despondently. "I'm fearfully hungry, you chaps. I got so awfully keen this June weather, you know."

"Plenty of bread-and-butter," said Figgins.

"Bread-and-butter," said Fatty Wynn. "Yes, that's all very well for padding. But I want something a little more solid to fill this aching void."

"Try the sardines."

"There's only one tin, and a small one at that, and that won't go far among three."

"Quite right," said Figgins thoughtfully. "If you're so fearful hungry, it's not much good your tackling a few sardines like that. Better hand them over here. Kerr and I will polish off the lot."

"Certainly," said Kerr.

Fatty Wynn looked at Figgins with deep reproach.

"You're right on one point, Figgy. There's not much for three, and as you and Kerr seem to like the bread-and-butter so well—"

"None of your gammon, Fatty. Hand them over."

Fatty was absently eating the sardines as he was speaking. They were disappearing very quickly.

"Really, Figgins, as chief of this study you ought to be a little more careful," he said. "Hang it all, we can't die of famine!"

"Rats! What's the matter with bread-and-butter?"

"Well—"

"It's wholemeal bread and fresh butter," said Figgins indignantly. "That's solid food enough, I suppose. If you turn up your nose at bread-and-butter you—you can go and eat coke."

"That's right," said Kerr. "Go and eat coke."

"I've got rather a keen appetite," said Fatty Wynn.

"Rather keen!" exclaimed Figgins. "I believe you'd eat the leg of the table if we'd let you. Hand over those sardines."

"Oh, very well. There aren't many left."

"There ought to be about three dozen—"

"I've eaten a few."

"You young boa-constrictor, you haven't left half a dozen!"

"Well, that will be two each."

Figgins rescued the sardines before Fatty Wynn could effect any further destruction. Fatty dolefully cut half a dozen thick slices of bread-and-butter. It was good food, but it was not what Fatty wanted. There was a knock at the study door, and Fatty Wynn brightened up visibly.

"Come in!" he rapped out.

The thought that it might be some fellow coming to ask the Co. to tea was in his mind. His face fell as Arthur Augustus D'Arcy walked into the room.

"Hallo," said Figgins, "where did you get that waistcoat?"

"Weally, Figgins—"

"Where did you get that waistcoat?"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy looked down at his waistcoat, which was certainly a triumph of brilliant colour. D'Arcy was famous for his fancy waistcoats. If anything about D'Arcy excelled the crease in his trousers, or the set of his necktie, it was the colour scheme of his waistcoats.

"Yas, it's wathah nobby—isn't it, Figgins?" he said.

"This is one that we bought when we were up in town that day—you wemembah, when Tom Mewwy and the west of them got lost, and we did some shoppin' in Bond Street."

"I remember," said Figgins. "I thought I knew that waistcoat. I wasn't sure whether I had seen it before, or whether it was a rainbow I was thinking of. What do you mean by sporting a thing like that in public? It's dangerous to the eyesight."

"Weally, Figgins—"

"I suppose you've come to tea," said Figgins. "Sit down, by all means, and have some bread-and-butter. The butter will have to go on rather thin, I'm afraid, but you can have the bread as thick as you like. There's a sardine left, too—"

"No, there isn't," said Fatty Wynn hastily.

That sardine disappeared in record time.

"I haven't come to tea, deah boys," said D'Arcy. "I am far too busy at the pwezent moment to think about such twifles. May I ask you fellows how funds are in this study?"

"Well, it's rather an impertinent question, but I don't mind telling you in confidence that we're all stony broke," said Figgins. "Hence these tears—I mean, hence this tea-table."

"Good."

Figgins & Co. looked aggressively at the swell of St. Jim's as he uttered that word in a tone of complete satisfaction.

"Oh, it's good, is it?" said Figgins.

"Good, is it?" asked Kerr, carelessly picking up the empty sardine-tin, and debating in his own mind upon which spot on D'Arcy's immaculate attire he should hurl it.

"Good, is it?" exclaimed Fatty Wynn. "When we're all famished. Oh, you—"

"What I mean is—"

"Ass! Duffer! Lunatic!" said Fatty Wynn, crescendo. "Pway don't be exasperated, deah boys. What I mean is—how would you like a hundwed pounds?"

Figgins & Co. stared. Figgins tapped his forehead significantly.

"Off his rocker," he said softly.

D'Arcy screwed his monocle into his eye and fixed Figgins with it.

"I am not off my wockah, Figgins, and I wegard the suggestion as diavrespectful. I can help you to get a hundwed pounds if you like."

"Expound," said Figgins briefly.

"Wead that pawagwaph."

D'Arcy held out the marked paragraph for the inspection of the puzzled Figgins. Figgins looked at it.

"Wead it aloud," said Arthur Augustus.

Figgins read it aloud for the benefit of the Co.

"The little son of Sir James Jukes is still reported missing from his home, and the reward of a hundred pounds offered for his discovery has not yet been claimed."

"Well," said Figgins, "what has this got to do with us?"

"I have been thinkin' of formin' a company of amateur detectives—"

"A what of whats?"

"A company of amateur detectives, to be known as D'Arcy, Figgins, Kerr, Wynn & Co.," said the swell of the School House.

"My only hat!"

"If you fellows care to come into the Co. I am quite willing to lead you, and place my ability as an amateur detective at your disposal, and we will share the reward equally."

"What reward?"

"The reward of a hundred pounds for the recovery of the missing son of Sir James Jukes, Bawonot."

"And how?" said Figgins gently. "How are we to recover the missing son of Sir James Jukes, fathad? How are we to set about it, ass? How are we to rope in the hundred pounds reward, idiot?"

"I regard all those expressions as distinctly opprobrious."

"I say, you could get a ripping feed for a hundred pounds," murmured Fatty Wynn; "as much as you liked of every-thing."

"We should share the hundred pounds equally, of course; though, of course, I should do most of the brawnwork," said Arthur Augustus.

"But how?"

"I have already explained that my idea is to start a firm of amateur detectives, undah the name and title of D'Arcy, Figgins, Kerr, Wynn & Co. We should leave St. Jim's for a few days, and find the lost son of Sir James Jukes—I mean, Sir James Jukes, and claim the reward, and return to St. Jim's with twenty-five pounds each."

"You shrieking ass—"

"I refuse—"

"Do you think the Head would give us permission to leave the school on such a wild goose chase?" demanded Figgins.

"I was not thinkin' of takin' the trouble to ask for the Head's permish, deah boy."

"We should get a flogging—"

"Wats! As a humane man and the fathad of a family, the Head could not refuse to pardon the hewoic weseouns who had saved the infant son of Sir James—James Jukes from wanderin' on a cold world—"

"You ass, you'd never find him!"

"I regard that remark as a reflection upon my ability as an amateur detective, Figgins. Will you join the Co.?"

"Not much."

"Will you join it, Kerr?"

"Not taking any, thank you."

"What about you, Wynn? I should be vewy pleased to receive you as a partner in the firm of D'Arcy, Wynn & Co."

"I'm so jolly hungry I really can't think about it," said Fatty Wynn, with a sly twinkle in his eye.

"That is all wight. Come for a stwoll with me, and we will talk it ovah in the tuckshop, deah boy."

"That's a jolly good idea," said Fatty Wynn, rising with alacrity, and he put his arm through D'Arcy's in a most friendly way. "Come along, Gussy!"

"You young porker!" exclaimed Figgins. "Come back—"

"Look here, Figgins, I'm going to let D'Arcy explain his idea to me. If it's impracticable that settles it, but I believe in giving every chap a fair show."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"D'Arcy has good ideas sometimes, and I'm jolly hungry—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Come along, Gussy."

"Certainly, deah boy."

And D'Arcy and Fatty Wynn walked out of the study, leaving Figgins and Kerr chuckling.

CHAPTER 4.

Fatty Wynn Makes Hay While the Sun Shines.

FATTY WYNN led the way straight to the school shop, kept within the walls of St. Jim's by Dame Taggles.

Fatty Wynn was one of Dame Taggles's best customers, but she never allowed him credit. If she had done so the bill would have run up to endless lengths, for Fatty could not resist a feed, and he was ready for a dozen a day at least.

"Good-evening, Dame Taggles!"

"Good-evening, Master Wynn! But I've already told you three times this afternoon—"

"I'm not going to ask you for credit, Mrs. Taggles," said Fatty Wynn loftily. "I've asked you three times."

"Which I say—"

"I don't want anything myself, but D'Arcy wants some things, don't you, D'Arcy?"

"Yaas, wathah!"

Dame Taggles knew that Arthur Augustus was a cash customer, and she was all smiles for the swell of the School House.

"I'd like to begin with pork-pies, if you don't mind," said Fatty Wynn.

"Certainly, deah boy."

"Shall we say half a dozen?"

"As many as you like."

"D'Arcy, I wish you lived in the New House, and belonged to our study," said Fatty Wynn, with great feeling. "You're just the chap I'd like to chum with."

"Weally, you flattah me, Wynn."

"Not at all."

Fatty Wynn's knife and fork were soon busy upon the pork-pies. Arthur Augustus, who had had his ten, and who was a small eater, sat on one of the high stools and stretched out his legs, carefully pulling up his trousers to avoid bagging the knees. He adjusted his eyeglass and watched Fatty Wynn travel through the pork-pies, which he did at record speed.

"You think it's a wathah good ideah to form a company of private detectives, and wope in that hundred pounds?" said D'Arcy.

"Yes, rather. Would you like some ham and tongue next?"

"I don't want any, but you can have some."

"Thank you. A plate of ham and tongue, Mrs. Taggles, and mind, a big plate. Don't be stingy. D'Arcy's standing treat."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"You think it's a good ideah—"

"Yes," said Fatty, busy with the ham and tongue. "You see, if a fellow really got a hundred pounds it would last half a term, standing ripping feeds every day."

"I was thinkin' more of the hounh than the cash."

"Yes; but think of a feed every day, as much as you wanted of everything!" said Fatty Wynn. "What do you say to some steak-puddings now?"

"Certainly, deah boy."

The steak-puddings were forthcoming. D'Arcy discussed his idea, and received monosyllabic answers from Fatty Wynn, who was discussing the steak-puddings. The swell of the School House ran on at considerable length, but it is safe to say that Fatty Wynn did not hear a third of what he said, and did not much heed the rest.

"So you think you'd like to come into the Co., Wynn?"

"Ripping!" said Fatty. "I say, Mrs. Taggles makes awfully nice apple-tarts, don't you, Mrs. Taggles? Shall we have apple-tarts next, D'Arcy?"

"Yes, if you like."

The apple-tarts disappeared. Jam tarts followed and cream-

FOLLOW THE GREAT SOLDIER'S EXAMPLE:

Dear Sir,

May I send you just a line to congratulate you on the excellent story on the subject of the "Is a Scouts" now running in the Boys Herald - entitled "The Wolf Patrol." I should also like to thank you for helping to make the scheme known among boys in such a very attractive way.

Yours truly
J. D. B. Powell

Exact reproduction of the letter kindly sent you by Editor by the founder of the Boy Scouts. Get the "Boys' Herald" to-day and read "The Wolf Patrol."



D'Arcy paced to and fro, apparently thinking out some weighty problem. Tom Merry and Co. looked at one another and grinned.

puffs. Then even Fatty Wynn began to be satisfied. He stretched out his fat little legs, and looked round the tuck-shop with a satisfied eye, and finally called for a couple of bottles of ginger-pop.

"Finished?" asked Arthur Augustus, who had been watching the gastronomic performances of Fatty Wynn with a curious eye, as he might have watched some strange animal at the Zoo.

"Yes, D'Arcy," said Fatty Wynn, with a sigh of contentment. "But, since you're so pressing, I'll have a bag of those tarts to take away with me."

"Oh, have anythin' you like," said D'Arcy. "Would you like some oranges and apples and things to put in your pockets?"

"Yes I think I would," said Fatty, oblivious of the slight tinge of irony in D'Arcy's tone. "I think that's really very thoughtful of you, Gussy."

"Pway don't limit yourself in any way, deah boy."

Fatty Wynn nodded. He did not need telling that.

"I don't intend to, old chap," he said. "When a chum asks me to feed with him I always try to do him justice."

"Yaas, I believe you do."

"Yes, you can wrap them up, Mrs. Taggles. You may as well put in some nuts and bananas—that is, of course, if D'Arcy doesn't mind."

"Have what you like, deah boy."

"There will be too many things to go in my pockets, so I'll have them in a parcel. As you're wrapping up a parcel you may as well shove a couple of those cakes in."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Thank you, Mrs. Taggles. H'm! I've got nothing in my pockets, so I may as well have some sweets. Bullseyes, butter-scotch, and milk-chocolate, please."

"Bai Jove—"

"Now I think we may as well be off, D'Arcy. Thanks very much for the feed, I'll do as much for you some time."

"But what about the idea?"

"What idea?"

"The firm of amateur detectives."

"Oh, that!" said Fatty Wynn. "Come on, we can talk about that as I go back to the New House. You can walk with me as far as the door, you see. Let me see, what was it you were suggesting?"

Arthur Augustus gave him an expressive look.

"I want to know whether you'll join me in goin' to look for Sir James Jukes's lost son, and share the hundred pounds reward?"

"Hum!" said Fatty Wynn. "I'd like to awfully—"

"It's wathah a good ideal. You see, we should have fifty pounds each."

"Yes, if we found the kid."

"Oh, there's not the slightest doubt on that point, Wynn. I should bring my brawn to bear on the mattah, and with my gweat ability as an amateur detective I should soon bring the case to a successful conclusion."

"H'm! What about getting permission from the Head?"

"The Head would not give his permish."

"H'm! Very serious thing bucking up against constituted authority," said Fatty Wynn, with a shake of the head. "Better ask Dr. Holmes first, D'Arcy."

"But I tell you he would be sure to refuse."

"Well, then you wouldn't be any worse off."

"Yaas, wathah, because he would forbid it; and it would be bad form to disobey the ordahs of the doctah. That would cwab the whole thing."

"I think you'd better ask permission."

"I tell you it won't do."

"Then I'm afraid I can't come into the Co.," said Fatty Wynn, shaking his head. "It's no good going without permission."

"Now, look here—"

"It's no good—"

"My dear Wynn—"

"Hallo! here we are at the door of the New House, I declare. Good-night, Gussy!"

"I tell you—"

"Thanks awfully for the feed. It came just in the right time, and I've enjoyed it immensely."

"Have you weally? Now—"

"Good-night."

"But I want you—"

"I've got my prep. to do, you know. I've really put it off rather late so as to come and feed with you, but I don't mind."

"Look here—"

"Good-night, old chap, and thanks very much."

And Fatty Wynn disappeared into the New House, leaving Arthur Augustus D'Arcy standing on the step with feelings too deep for words.

The swell of St. Jim's slowly turned away.

"Bai Jove!" he murmured. "I weally think I have been done. That young wottah has had a feed, and he will chuckle ovah it with Figgins and Kerr. They will wegard me as an ass."

It was a distressing reflection. Arthur Augustus turned his steps in the direction of the School House.

"I suppose I shall have to take Tom Mewwy into the secwet atfah all," he murmured. "Well, pawwaps it is bettah. If the Tewwible Thwee back me up, I am certain to make a big success of the case, as Tom Mewwy is weally wathah intelligent. Of course, it will have to be clearly understood that I am leadah. I shall make that quite plain fwom the start."

And Arthur Augustus crossed to the School House. He caught sight of the chums of the Shell going into the gym and hastened after them.

"Tom Mewwy—"

Tom Merry turned round.

"Hallo, Gus! What do you want?"

"I want to speak to you thwee boundahs."

"We're just going in for some practice—"

"Yaas, but this is a wathah important mattah—"

"Oh, go ahead, then!"

And the Terrible Three stopped to hear what the swell of the School House had to say.

CHAPTER 5.

The Terrible Three are not Taking Any.

ARTHUR AUGUSTUS adjusted his monocle in his eye. He always felt more comfortable when he could feel the rim of his eyeglass there. The Terrible Three exchanged glances, and waited for him to begin.

"You were askin' me a short time ago what I meant by weferin' to a hundred pounds!" said Arthur Augustus.

"Oh," said Lowther, "is that it? Are we going to hear the history of the mystery now?"

"I am willin' to explain—"

"Go ahead!"

"Pway don't huwwy me, as I shall probably lose the thwead of my ideas, and my twain of thought will be disturbed. You wemembah Fewwahs Locke bein' here last week—"

"Oh, yes. Go on!"

"I offahed him my services as an assistant in his pwofession in London—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"There is nothin' to cackle at in that, that I can see. How-

svah, to wesume. He wefused to entertain the offah, and I have been thinkin' of becomin' an amateur detective, like Sherlock Holmes—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Pway don't cackle like that, Mannahs. It gets on my nerves, it does weally. I am thinkin' of becomin' an amateur detective. I wegard it as extwemely pwob. that in the near future I shall always be consulted by Scotland Yard when they are twoubled with vewy difficut cases, above the intellect of the ordinawy police—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"But to explain the more immediate plans I have formed; I am thinkin' of formin' a company of amateur detectives, to be called D'Arcy, Merry, Lowther, Manners & Co.—"

"My only Aunt Jane!"

"I think it's a wathah good ideah, and I have already mapped out the case we are to take up first."

"My hat!"

"It is a case of lost pwoperty. There is a weward of a hundred pounds for the discovery of the missin' article. Pway wead that pawagwaph, Tom Mewwy."

Tom Merry read out the marked paragraph in the paper D'Arcy handed to him.

"The little son of Sir James Jukes is still reported missing from his home, and the reward of a hundred pounds offered for his discovery has not yet been claimed."

Tom Merry looked amazed.

"Is that the hundred pounds you were talking about?"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"But that's offered for the discovery of a lost kid."

"Exactly."

"Then how—"

"We are goin' to find him, deah boy!"

Tom Merry stared.

"How are we going to find him? He wasn't lost in a class-room at St. Jim's, or mislaid behind the woodshed, or anything of that sort."

"Pway don't wot—"

"Then what are you getting at? Have you the nerve to be attempting to pull the leg of such an important personage as myself?" demanded Tom Merry.

"Nothin' of the sort."

"Then what do you mean, ass?"

"I wefuse to be chawactewised as an ass—"

"What do you mean, fathead, if you like that better?"

"I do not like it bettah—"

"Oh, come on," said Manners, "we sha'n't get any exercise! When Gussy starts talking he goes on like a giddy gramophone."

"Weally, Mannahs—"

"Come on!" said Lowther.

"One moment, deah boys—"

"Time's up," said Tom Merry, shaking his head. "Any-

way, we're not inclined to turn into a firm of private detectives to start looking for a needle in a haystack. It's not good enough."

"But weally, Tom Mewwy—"

"Nuff said!"

"I have not fully explained my ideah."

"How long would it take?"

"Not more than a quathah of an hour—"

"Yes, I can see myself standing and being jawed at for a quarter of an hour," said Tom Merry wrathfully. "Go and eat coke!"

"But—"

"Travel along!"

"Oh, come on!" said Lowther. "What are you standing there for, Tom? Gussy will never leave off talking as long as he can find a listener."

"Weally, Lowthah—"

"Seat!"

"I think upon second thoughts that I could compwess my wemahs into five or six minutes, deah boys!"

"Good!" said Tom Merry. "Could you explain the whole thing in that time?"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Then start. You don't mind if we go on the parallel bars while you're doing it, do you? It will save time."

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—"

"I'm afraid that's the only way it can be worked," said Tom Merry, and the Terrible Three walked into the gym.

"Bai Jove," said D'Arcy to himself, "it weally seems as if I shall find no takahs for the most bwiliant idea that has evah flashed into my bwain! It is wathah wotten to think of a hundred pounds waitin' to be picked up, and a poor little chap waitin' to be found, and I can't get any of these wottahs to back me up. Ow!"

He broke off suddenly as he received a powerful slap on the back, which jerked his eyeglass from his eye. It dangled at the end of its cord as Arthur Augustus swung round indignantly, to find himself looking at the chums of Study No. 6.

Blake, Herries, and Digby were just coming into the gym.

"Hallo," said Blake, "still working out mental problems?"

"I weally wish you would not be so wuff, Blake—"

"I thought I'd wake you up," said Blake. "Thought you might be going into a trance or something, you know."

"You have broken the thwead of my ideah, and disturbed my twain of thought," said D'Arcy. "But I have somethin' to say to you. Have you thought of what I was sayin' to you in the study?"

"Yes," said Digby.

"And what do you think of the ideah?"

"I think it's about the rottenest I've ever heard of," said Blake. "That's my opinion. I may be mistaken. What do you think, Dig?"

"I think it's about the mouldiest old idea that was ever dug up," said Digby, with friendly candour. "Gussy ought to take it to a quiet place and bury it."

"What do you think, Herries?"

"I think Gussy's off his rocker," said the practical Herries.

"I am not off my wockah, Hewwies—"

"Well, I think—"

"It is a wippin' ideah, and I would wathah the School House had the credwit of it. It would be more satisfactow than to allow Figgins & Co.—"

"Have you offered it to them?"

"Yaas, wathah, but I would pwefeh—"

"Did they take it up?"

"Well, no, as a mattah of fact they wefused—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"If you chaps won't back me up, there are othahs," said Arthur Augustus, with some hauteur. "I shall find plenty of chaps willin' to back me up and get a hundwed pounds."

"Good luck, then," said Blake.

"But I would wathah you fellows—"

"Come on, kids!"

Blake, Gore, and Digby walked into the gym. D'Arcy went slowly and meditatively towards the School House in the dusk of the June evening. A really brilliant idea was going begging, and D'Arcy did not quite know to whom to turn next for support.

CHAPTER 6.

Reilly Makes a Suggestion.

GORE of the Shell was standing in the doorway of the School House, talking to Mellish of the Fourth. D'Arcy came in and glanced at him, and hesitated. He did not like either of the cads of the School House, but he wanted support in his ripping idea. He stopped to speak to them.

"Goah, deah boy—"

Gore turned his head to look at him.

"Hallo, ass!"

"That is a wathah wude expwession, Goah," said D'Arcy. "I should certainly give you a feahful thwashin' for usin' it to me, but at the present moment I have othah fish to fry. I have a new ideah—"

"Go hon!"

"There is a way of pickin' up a hundwed pounds as easy as fallin' off a form—"

"My hat! A hundred pounds!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Gammon!" said Mellish.

D'Arcy adjusted his monocle, and stared at Mellish.

The cad of the Fourth retreated a pace or two.

"Did I understand you to say 'gammon,' Mellish?" asked Arthur Augustus, with really stately courtesy.

"Yes, I did!" growled Mellish.

"It is a term of vulgah slang," said Arthur Augustus, "and I believe it implies a doubt of my word. Is that the case, Mellish?"

"Oh, rats!"

"When a gentleman doubts another gentleman's word, he is bound to give him satisfaction if required to do so," said D'Arcy, pushing back his cuffs. "I will twouble you to withdraw that word, Mellish, dear boy."

"Oh, don't be an ass!"

"Are you goin' to withdraw that obnoxious word?"

"No, I am not."

"Then I shall have no alternative but to administer a feahful thwashin' to you, Mellish. Will you pway put up your fists, deah boy?"

"Rats!"

"I am waitin' for you."

"Look here!"

Arthur Augustus evidently meant business. He squared up in quite a scientific way, and gave Mellish a tap on the nose.

"Now then, Mellish!"

"Oh, I was only joking," said Mellish, who never got into a fight if he could possibly help it. "Don't be an ass."

"A joke that reflects upon a gentleman's honah is a joke in vewy bad taste, Mellish," said Arthur Augustus. "Only a wotten boundah would imply a doubt of a gentleman's word for the sake of a joke."

"Oh, cheese it!"

"I wewas to cheese it. I weward you as a wottah!"

Mellish muttered something under his breath.

The clouds cleared from D'Arcy's brow, and he readjusted his monocle.

"I am sowwy I have been compelled to deal wuffly with you, Mellish," he said. "I have a new ideah to pwpose to you two fellows to get a hundwed pounds."

"Go ahead!" said Gore.

"There is a hundwed pounds weward offered for the wewovery of the son of Sir Juke Jakes—I mean, Sir James Jukes, and my ideah is to form a company of amateur detectives, to be known as D'Arcy, Gore, Mellish & Co.—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Pway be sewious, Goah."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

D'Arcy looked scornfully at the two juniors, who were yelling with laughter.

Gore leaned against the door-post, and Mellish against the door, both of them shaking with merriment.

D'Arcy's brow clouded.

"If my ideahs are to be wewoived in this wibald way, I shall certainly not take the twouble to speak to you furthah on the subject," he said haughtily.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I weward you as a pair of wude wottahs!"

And D'Arcy walked away, followed by a yell of laughter from Gore and Mellish.

The swell of St. Jim's was beginning to look a little despondent. Ripping as the idea was, it seemed to find no takers.

The sight of Kildare of the Sixth, the captain of St. Jim's, coming down the stairs gave a new turn to D'Arcy's thoughts.

He hurried to intercept the school captain.

"Can I speak to you for a minute, Kildare?"

The big, athletic captain of St. Jim's looked down at the junior with a good-natured smile, and nodded.

"Go ahead!" he said tersely.

"I have a weally good ideah, but I cannot sawwy it out, as I cannot find any support in the lowah Forms," explained Arthur Augustus. "It has occurred to me that it would meet with a bettah wewoception among the more cultivated intellects of the seniors."

Kildare grinned.

"Oh, go ahead, D'Arcy! What is the ideah?"

"I have been thinkin' of forming a company of amateur detectives, to be known as D'Arcy, Kildare & Co."

Kildare took the swell of the School House by the shoulders, and gently turned him round.

D'Arcy looked over his shoulder at the captain of St. Jim's, utterly amazed by this proceeding.

"Weally, Kildare—"

"Take a little run," said the Sixth-Former.

"Eh?"

"Take a little run."

And the captain of St. Jim's gave D'Arcy a start.

The swell of St. Jim's ran a few paces to save his balance. Then he stopped, and looked round.

Kildare was walking away, and Arthur Augustus could see that he was laughing.

"Weally, Kildare is vewy wude," muttered D'Arcy. "I suppose, upon the whole, it's no use expectin' to get any support for my brilliant ideah among the seniors. Ah, there is young Weilly! I'll twy him!"

Reilly, of the Fourth, was coming down the passage. Reilly was member for Belfast in the school parliament at St. Jim's. He stopped as D'Arcy tapped him on the shoulder.

"Weilly, deah boy!"

"Hallo, what's the trouble?" said Reilly.

"There isn't any twouble."

"What do you want, then?"

"I've got a good ideah."

"Get it off your chest, then," said Reilly. "Time's valuable. I'm making up a speech to my constituents, and you're spoiling it."

"Weilly—"

"Oh, get on! What's the ideah?"

"There's a hundwed pounds weward for the discovewy of the missin' son of Sir Juke James—I mean, Sir Jake James, and I thought of formin' a company of amateur detectives, to be known as D'Arcy, Reilly & Co."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"There's nothin' funnawy in the ideah!"

"That's all you know. Ha, ha, ha!"

"Weally, Weilly—"

"Why don't you ask Skimpole?" said Reilly, chuckling. "He was inquireing after you some time back. Why don't you ask him? He's the chap for you."

"Bai Jove! So I will!"

"Ha, ha, ha! He's in the Form-room if you want him," said Reilly, and he walked away grinning.

"Bai Jove!" murmured D'Arcy. "I weally ought to have wemembahed Skimpole. I feel pwetty certain that he will jump at the chance."

And off went Arthur Augustus D'Arcy in search of the brainy man of the Shell.

CHAPTER 7.

A Supporter at Last.

"SKIMPOLE!"

"D'Arcy!"

"I want to speak to you, deah boy."

"And I want to speak to you."

"Good! I will speak first," said Skimpole, "as what I have to say will probably take some time, and—"

"Not at all. I will speak first, as what I have to say is wathah important."

"Now, my dear D'Arcy!"

"Now, my dear Skimpole!"

The two juniors looked at one another doubtfully.

Arthur Augustus had found the amateur Socialist of St. Jim's in the Form-room, walking to and fro in the dusk, with his hands thrust deep into his trousers' pockets, evidently deep in the throes of intense reflection.

D'Arcy had regarded him through his eyeglass for some moments without speaking. Herbert Skimpole was not the comrade he would have chosen in his new enterprise; but it

was a case of any port in a storm. It was, apparently, Skimpole or nobody.

D'Arcy was disheartened by his long search for support in the lower Forms at St. Jim's.

"You see," said Skimpole, "ever since Ferrers Locke was here—"

"That is just the idea, Skimmy. Ever since Ferrers Locke was here—"

"I have been thinking of the detective business."

"So have I. I have been thinkin'—"

"I don't think I had a fair chance to show what I could do—"

"Yaas, and the same with me!"

"Those fellows Merry and Blake and Figgins and the rest took the cake, as they always do."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"And there really wasn't a chance for a fellow of real unpretending merit to show what he could do."

"That is exactly what I discovered, deah boy."

"I have been thinking that I was built for a detective, owing to my splendid powers of concentration and my keenness of penetration—"

"Bai Jove! That is layin' it on wathah thick, deah boy!"

"If you don't agree with me, D'Arcy—"

"Oh, I agree to anythin', Skimpole, if you will only get finished, and let me explain my idea to you."

"It seems to me that I have more than usual ability in many directions," said Skimpole, "I may be mistaken."

"Oh, no! Not at all!" said D'Arcy politely.

"Very well," said Skimpole, "we'll take it that I am not mistaken. We will take it that I have more than usual abilities. Natural modesty prevents me from stating as much myself, but since you assert that it is the case—"

"But I didn't!"

"Since you assert that it is the case," went on Skimpole, unheeding, "since you, a disinterested observer, though perhaps not an over-intelligent one, since you assert that it is the case, I must believe it."

"Weally, Skimpole—"

"I have taken up the great cause of Socialism, and endeavoured to spread the good news far and wide. With what result?"

"You have bored everybody feahfully, old fellow."

"I have been treated with contumely. I have not been elected to a seat in St. Jim's Junior Parliament."

"That is wathah hard cheese."

"My detective ability has been laughed to scorn. My great abilities in many ways have been laughed to scorn. But a time is coming."

"Is it weally, Skimpole?"

"Yes, I say the time is coming—"

"Yaas, bai Jove, it's nearly eight o'clock! Are you waferrin' to bedtime, Skimpole?"

"I say the time is coming," said Skimpole, "when the whole school shall recognise my abilities, and the Head will ask me to be with him in his house, and I shall be made a prefect—the first prefect ever selected from the Shell."

"You surpise me!"

"No doubt. I am about to undertake a case which will lead to both glory and profit," said Skimpole. "I need a comrade. Will you be that comrade?"

"That depends," said D'Arcy. "I came to see you, to ask you to join me in a new idea. I am thinkin'—"

"My idea, in brief, is this—"

"This is what I was thinkin' of—"

"Let me finish, D'Arcy—"

"Pway don't intewwupt, deah boy—"

"But—"

"But—"

"Really, D'Arcy, this egotism is unpardonable. I shall not be more than half an hour telling you all about it—"

"I could get done in a quatah of an hour, and so I think I ought to start first—"

"Really, D'Arcy—"

"Weally, Skimpole—"

"The case I intend to undertake is most important. It is the case of a lost child, for whose discovery a reward is offered—a reward of—"

"A hundred pounds?"

"Yes. How did you know?"

"Bai Jove, this is a weally wemarkable coincidence!" exclaimed D'Arcy. "I also am on the track of a lost child, for whose recovery the reward of a hundred pounds is offered by the despairin' pawent."

"How singular!"

"Wemarkable, bai Jove!"

"The lost infant I speak of is the son of Sir James Jukes, Baronet."

"So is the one I am speakin' of. Either Sir Jukes Jay—I mean Sir Juck Jones—has lost two sons, and forgotten one of them, or else—"

"Or else we're on the same case."

"Yaas, wathah."

"It is very curious," said Skimpole. "I first knew of the case from coming upon an old folded newspaper in your study, when I was looking for your Greek lexicon. The paragraph was marked with pencil—"

"Wats! That is where I got my information, twom. It is not so much of a coincidence, atfah all."

"Never mind," said Skimpole. "If we're both on the same case, we can go ahead."

"Yaas, wathah."

"Have you formed any plans?"

"Certainly, deah boy. I thought of formin' a company of amateur detectives, to be known as D'Arcy, Skimpole & Co."

"A jolly good idea!" exclaimed Skimpole heartily.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy could have fallen upon Skimpole's neck and hugged him. After the contumely with which his idea had been greeted on all sides, it was distinctly gratifying to have his idea greeted with such whole-hearted approval.

He did not stop to reflect that Skimpole was about the only junior at St. Jim's who could possibly have thought of joining in his hare-brained scheme.

"Well, I'm vewy glad to hear you say so, Skimpole," said D'Arcy. "I shall be glad to have you for a followah."

"Eh?"

"I shall be glad to have you for a followah."

"That's not quite correct. I shall be the leader, and you will be the follower," explained Skimpole.

"Wot?"

"My dear D'Arcy, in an affair like this the cleverer takes the lead naturally."

"Yaas, that's why—"

"Now, look here—"

"Wats!"

"Well, perhaps we can halve it," said Skimpole reflectively. "As a sincere Socialist, I do not believe in commanding unwilling followers. Every man has a right to his own opinion. Suppose we start on equal terms, each one doing what is right in his own eyes?"

"Yaas, I can agree to that."

"Then it's a go," said Skimpole. "Of course, it's impossible to search for the missing heir—I mean the lost kid—without leaving the school."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"And it's equally useless to think of asking the permission of the Head. He would probably regard us as a pair of fools, and refuse his permission."

"That is extremely pweb."

"So we shall have to keep the matter dark until we are gone. When we return successful, with the hundred pounds in our pockets, and leading the missing heir by the hand, the Head could not possibly punish us."

"That's what I thought."

"Besides, if we once had capital, we could leave St. Jim's if we liked, and start in business as private detectives."

"But I thought a Socialist wasn't allowed to use capital for the purpose of makin' money with it?" said D'Arcy.

Skimpole coloured.

"Oh, that's in theory, you know," he explained, after a moment. "In practice, of course, it's different."

"Yaas, I suppose so."

"Anyway, we could settle that afterwards—after we'd got the hundred pounds. The first thing is to find the missing heir. Are you game to leave the school?"

D'Arcy raised his head proudly, and screwed his monocle into his eye.

"I weally do not considah that question at all necessary, Skimpole," he said.

"Oh, all right. Only we had better fix it now, so as not to be seen talking together again, or we may be suspected."

"Yaas, that is quite poss."

"Mind, not a word to a soul. If your study-mates knew that you were going, they would try to stop you."

"I shouldn't wondah."

"Mum's the word, then. When shall we go?"

"Suppose we wise at eleven, when all the fellows will be fast asleep. I'll pack a bag this evening, and you can do the same, and we can hide them in the quad. Then we shall only have to slip out of a window, and there you are!"

"That is a good plan. By the way, do you know in what part of the country the missing heir was missed—I mean lost?"

"Yaas. The papabs said it was near the village of Blackbevy Gween that he was missed by his nurse. That is near Sir James Jackson—I mean Sir Jack Jukeson's seat."

"Good! Then we will strike out for Blackberry Green the moment we get outside the walls of St. Jim's," said Skimpole.

"Till then, not a word."

ANSWERS

"That's right."

"By the way, I hope you have plenty of money. I happen to be stony-broke. As a sincere Socialist, I am compelled to lend to all needy persons who ask me, and this has the unfortunate result of keeping me always in a state of stoniness, which is very unpleasant."

"I have plenty of tin, Skimpole. I had a fivah sworn my governah on Saturday, and it isn't a quatah gone yet."

"That is fortunate. You can pay the expenses, and I will provide the brain power, and we will share the profit and glory. We'd better cut off now, as it's getting jolly dark. Hallo, Merry!"

Tom Merry was looking into the dark class-room.

"What the dickens are you confabbing about here?" he demanded. "I heard voices, and thought I'd look in. Are you plotting a plot?"

"Only discussing matters of some importance to ourselves, but of no interest to others," said Skimpole. "As a sincere Socialist, who cannot let any opportunity pass of improving his acquaintances, I am compelled to rebuke your curiosity, Merry."

"Ass! I'm not curious. You can talk piffle there all night, for all I care," said the hero of the Shell, and he passed on his way.

The amateur detectives left the class-room; and by way of keeping the secret safely, each went about looking as mysterious as he possibly could.

CHAPTER 8.

Lowther Suspects!

"WHAT is her name, Gussy?"

Monty Lowther asked the question suddenly as he encountered Arthur Augustus D'Arcy in the junior common-room. D'Arcy gave a start.

"I do not quite comprehend, Lowthah."

"I said what's her name?"

"Whose name?" said D'Arcy.

Lowther chuckled.

"My dear kid, you can't take me in. Do you think I can't see that you're thinking about Ethel?"

"Weally, Lowthah—"

"Is her name Ethel this time?"

"Weally—"

"Well, I can see you've got something on your mind," said the humorous Lowther. "If you're not in love again, what are you mooning about? Still thinking of looking for the lost son and heir of Sir Somebody Sykes?"

"Sir James Jukes, Lowthah."

"Ah, yes! I knew it was something or other. Is that the problem that is shadowing with care your noble and manly brow?"

"I have weally not the slightest intention of takin' you into my confidence, Lowthah," said the swell of the School House. "I regard your inquiries as wathah impertinent."

And Arthur Augustus turned and walked away. Monty Lowther joined Tom Merry and Manners, who were playing chess in a corner of the room.

"Lasy, I believe Gussy has got that idea firmly in his noddle," he remarked. "He's looking as serious and mysterious as a villain in a melodrama."

"Check!" said Manners.

"He's thinking out some plan for discovering the missing kid and roping in a hundred pounds reward," went on Lowther.

"I can put in the knight," said Tom Merry.

"I never said you couldn't," remarked Manners pleasantly.

"Well, you said check in such a positive way," said Tom Merry. "Anybody would have thought that it was mate in a couple of moves."

"It's mate in three, I fancy."

"Rats!"

"I say, you chaps, I shouldn't wonder if Gussy was working up a plan to make a break in search of the missing heir," Lowther remarked.

"What about my rook to king's fourth?"

"Bosh! I'd put the knight on him."

"By Jove! so you would. Thanks for the tip."

"Look here—"

"You look here, Monty Lowther! What the dickens do you mean by coming and talking to us about Fourth Form kids and their silly ideas when we're playing chess?" demanded Tom Merry. "Go and eat coke!"

"But I think it's likely—"

"I think it's likely that we shall jump on your neck if you don't travel along," said Manners darkly.

"I shouldn't wonder if—"

"Rats! Get out! Bunk! Vamoose! Absquatulate."

"I think I'll speak to Blake. If Gussy were to make a break,

"I shall put the knight on him. I tell you."

"What! You'll put the knight on Gussy if—"

"Ass! I was speaking to Tom Merry. I wish you'd go and bury yourself in some nice quiet corner, Monty Lowther. 'Oh, very well,' grinned Lowther. 'Pray go on, you asses. I could wipe both of you off the board in about six moves.'"

"You could do what?" shouted Manners, jumping up.

But Lowther was walking away, laughing, and the incensed chess-player resumed his seat with an expressive grunt. Lowther looked round for the chums of Study No. 6, but as they were not in sight he concluded that they were in their study, and so he strolled along to No. 6.

Blake, Herries, and Digby were there, as Lowther was soon warned by the sound of high voices from the open door.

"We've got to form one solid party," said Blake. "We are going to have peace and union in this study, if I have to fight every fellow present—"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Lowther, as he caught that speech. "A jolly nice way of promoting peace and union. What's the trouble?"

Blake glared at the Shell-former.

"Don't you come in here when we're busy—"

"I can hear you all over the School House," said Monty Lowther. "What are you three chaps ragging about now?"

"It's about the St. Jim's Parliament," said Digby. "You know, I stood for Cork under the name of Murphy, my grandmother having been an Irishwoman. Reilly is member for Belfast, and he wants Home Rule. I don't see why I shouldn't back him up."

"Why not?" said Lowther.

"Rot!" said Blake. "Utter rot! Catch me granting it! Rule to any member of my Cabinet. Confound you, I've as you Minister of the Interior as well as Speaker, and Preside the Local Government Board, and now you want to dismember the giddy Empire."

"What I say is—"

"Understand once for all that I bar Home Rule—"

"But—"

"We shall have Fatty Wynn demanding Home Rule for Wales next—"

"Yes, but—"

"And, hang it, why shouldn't I myself demand Home Rule for Yorkshire?" demanded Blake. "Yorkshire's my county, and I tell you—"

"That's all very well—"

"You can leave the question over. Governments can always leave over the questions that were raised at election times to get the votes in. It's political sagacity."

"Political what?" asked Digby, rather crushed.

"Political sagacity," said Blake triumphantly.

"Seems to me more like humbug."

"Well, politics is mostly humbug, of course," said Blake. "What the dickens is that Shell-fish blinking and grinning at there? The sooner you are on the other side of that door, Monty Lowther, the better it will be for your health."

"But I want to speak to you chaps."

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

"It's about Gussy."

"Then go and speak to Gussy. You'll find him somewhere, if he hasn't got mislaid."

"But I think—"

"Look here, Monty Lowther, I dare say your thoughts are very valuable to people of your order of intellect, but don't come telling them to us."

"I think Gussy will very likely—"

"Let him, then."

"Yes, but if he—"

"Hand me that inkpot, Dig."

"Certainly."

"Now then, Monty Lowther, I give you two seconds—"

But the study door was already slamming behind Monty Lowther. Tom Merry's chum went down the passage, and he could still hear the excited voices in Study No. 6 discussing the question of Home Rule as he went.

"Hallo," exclaimed Lowther, as Skimpole ran into him in the passage. "Hallo, where are you taking that bag to?"

The amateur Socialist of St. Jim's had a bag, packed and strapped, in his hand. He coloured as he saw Lowther's glance fixed on it.

"Oh, that's all right," he stammered. "I've packed it."

"Going off for a feed somewhere?"

"Oh, no."

"Then what's the little game?"

"I'm afraid I cannot take you wholly into my confidence, Lowther. I may mention, however, that I am engaged in a good work, and that in all probability the school will shortly be taught to look up to me with great respect."

"My only hat! But—"

"If you have ten minutes to spare, Lowther—"

"Eh?"

"If you have a few minutes to spare, I will explain—"

"Go on," said Lowther, looking curiously at the bag, which Skimpole set down in the passage while he talked.

"I'll explain the great principles of Socialism," Skimpole went on.

"You'll what?"

"I'll explain the great principles of Socialism."

"Not to me," Lowther remarked.

And he walked away. Skimpole picked up his bag and went his way. He passed out of the School House, and found D'Arcy waiting for him under the elms.

"Got your bag, deah boy?" asked the swell of the School House.

"Here it is."

"Good. I have hidden mine there; nobody will see it in the dark. Let's go in now, as the pwefects might smell a waf if they saw us out of the house at this time of the evenin'."

"Right-oh. Come in."

The two juniors re-entered the School House. Darrel of the Sixth met them in the hall and looked at them curiously.

"Hallo, where have you young rascals been?" asked Darrel.

"Weally, Dawwel—"

"I have to take exception to that question, Darrel," said Skimpole. "As a sincere Socialist, I must refuse to be questioned as to my doings by a pfect, who is appointed by the arbitrary will of the doctor, instead of being elected by the free suffrages of the whole school—ow! You're hurting my ear."

Skimpole rubbed his ear as he walked on with D'Arcy.

"Such are the difficulties of a reformer's career," he exclaimed, "it is not enough to make one's blood boil to think that a 'mer is liable at any moment to have his ear pulled for the crime of stating his opinions fearlessly—"

"Well, I think you are wathah an ass, Skimpole," said D'Arcy. "A pfect has the wight to look aftah the juniars, or wath's the good of his bein' a pwefect?"

"Yes, if he were elected by the whole school."

"Yes, but then the lowah Forms would elect a juniar, who would let them do as they liked all the time."

"Well, why shouldn't they do as they liked all the time?"

This was a poser, and Arthur Augustus gave it up. A few minutes later bedtime arrived, and the amateur detectives separated to go to their respective dormitories.

CHAPTER 9.

The Die is Cast!

ELEVEN strokes boomed out from the clock-tower of St. Jim's.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy started, and sat up in bed. He had agreed to meet Skimpole in the quad as soon after eleven as possible, and he lost no time in getting out of bed. It was a warm June night, and the swell of St. Jim's was too excited to be sleepy. This was the first night of his adventurous career as an amateur detective. The morrow would see him fairly launched on the case that was to make the name of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy famous.

D'Arcy dressed himself hastily. He took only ten minutes over his toilet, which was probably a record for the swell of the School House. He dropped a boot on the floor with a loud thud as he had nearly finished, and then sat on his bed with beating heart, waiting to see if it had given the alarm.

A sleepy voice came from Jack Blake's bed.

"Hallo, there!"

Arthur Augustus sat quite still on the edge of the bed. It was very gloomy in the dormitory, and he was pretty certain Blake would not be able to distinguish him if he looked.

"Anybody moving?"

Blake's voice was very sleepy. The silence apparently satisfied him, for he turned over and went to sleep again. Arthur Augustus did not venture to move until Blake's steady breathing warned him that it was safe.

"Bai Jove, that was a narrow escape," murmured D'Arcy, as he cautiously groped for the boot in the darkness.

He found it and put it on, and then crossed to the door on tiptoe. A moment more and he was in the corridor, thrilling with relief. The first and most difficult part of his enterprise was over. He had escaped from the Fourth Form dormitory unseen and unsuspected.

He made his way downstairs, and opened the hall window. He found it unfastened, which showed him that Skimpole was already out. To climb through the window and drop to the ground outside would have been the work of a moment to any other junior, but the swell of the School House had the cross in his trousers to consider. But out he was at last, and he ran quickly under the elms.

"Oh!"

It was a sharp exclamation as D'Arcy ran full tilt into somebody in the darkness under the trees.

"Weally—" gasped D'Arcy

"Is that you, D'Arcy?"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Why the dickens don't you look where you're going?" said

Skimpole, "and what makes you so late? I've been waiting about ten minutes."

"I am extremely sorry—"

"Did you get away all right?"

"Yaas, wathah! I dwopped a boot and woke up Blake, but he went to sleep again, so it is all wight."

"Then let's get off."

"Certainly, deah boy."

The great School House lay dark and silent. From one or two windows a light still gleamed. But there was no sign of alarm. The departure of the two juniors had not been suspected. They picked up the hidden bags under the trees, and set off at a run towards the wall of the doctor's garden. There they halted to take breath.

"All well so far," said Skimpole.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Will you give me a leg up?"

"With pleasuah, deah boy."

D'Arcy gave Skimpole the required leg up. Skimpole could not be called an athlete. His brain had developed abnormally, but it had left his body far behind in the race. The amateur Socialist at St. Jim's, in fact, was decidedly weedy. He put his hands on the top of the wall, and tried to draw himself up, and failed. He kicked out wildly, and D'Arcy's silk hat went flying.

"Ow!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus.

He made a dive for his precious topper, and Skimpole was left hanging without support from below.

"Help!" gasped Skimpole. "Help—ow!"

His hold slipped from the wall, and he dropped to the ground and rolled over.

D'Arcy picked up his hat and brushed it tenderly with his sleeve.

"You clumsay ass, Skimpole!"

"You silly cuckoo!"

"I wefuse to be called a silly cuckoo."

"You let me come a cropper."

"Serve you wight. You let my toppah come a cwoppah," said Arthur Augustus severely. "If it had been seriously damaged I should have been tempted to give you a feahful thwashing."

"Oh, give us a leg up!"

"Wathah not! You can give me a leg up this time, deah boy, and I will weanch down and help you fwom the top of the wall."

"I think I had better go first."

"Wats! Give me a bunk up."

"Oh, very well!"

Skimpole gave the required bunk. D'Arcy jammed his silk hat tightly on his head and climbed the wall. He was soon astride of it.

"Now give me a hand."

"Bettah hand up the bags first."

"True. I had forgotten them."

"Yaas, and that shows how necessary it is to have a bwain like mine on a job of this sort," D'Arcy remarked.

"Here you are. This is your bag?"

"I've got it."

D'Arcy received the bag and jerked it over the wall, and allowed it to fall lightly in the lane outside.

"Now the othah, Skimpole."

"Here you are."

Skimpole reached up with the bag, and D'Arcy reached down for it. His topper lost its balance just as he reached for the bag, and he made a wild clutch to save it. Skimpole had ceased to support the bag at the instant D'Arcy let it go, and it dropped on his foot with a bump.

Skimpole gave a yell that startled the rooks round St. Jim's.

"Ow! You've crushed my foot."

D'Arcy rescued his toppling topper just in time, and jammed it upon his head safely. Then he gave his attention to Skimpole.

"Is anythin' the mattah, deah boy?"

"You've dropped that beasty bag on my foot, you ass!"

"Weally, I did not drop it. You should not have let go, you know. But pway don't make a fuss about a twifle when there is sewious work in hand," said D'Arcy. "Hand me up the bag again."

"That's all very well—"

"Oh, pway hand up the bag!"

Skimpole did so, and this time the swell of the School House took a firmer hold upon it, and slung it safely over the wall and dropped it into the road.

"That's all wight, Skimpole."

"Now give me a hand up."

D'Arcy leaned down and gave the required hand. With considerable difficulty Skimpole pulled himself to the top of the wall, and climbed over it.

"That was rather a pull," he gasped.

"Wats!" said D'Arcy. "It was easy enough, deah boy; but you haven't any wind, you know. I hope nobody heard that feahful wow you made just now."

D'Arcy dropped into the road. Skimpole followed him, with a grunt, and they picked up their bags.

"Bai Jove, we're off now, and no mistake!"

Skimpole smote his forehead.

"I say, there's one thing I never thought of!"

"I think there are probably a good many things you haven't thought of, dear boy. What is this particular one?"

"We're going to look for the missing heir at Blackberry Green, where he was lost?"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Do you know where Blackberry Green is?"

"Bai Jove, I never thought of that eithah. No, I'm afraid I don't."

The amateur detectives looked at one another dubiously. The quest was to begin at Blackberry Green, but where was Blackberry Green?

"We shall have to find out," said D'Arcy at last.

"I suppose so."

"We will take the twain at the station, anyway. We must get away from the vicinity of the coll."

"True."

"Then come on, dear boy."

And the two amateur detectives started at a trot down the dark lane leading to the village of Rylecombo.

CHAPTER 10.

Missing!

JACK BLAKE happened to be the first awake in the Fourth Form dormitory in the School House the following morning. He yawned and sat up, blinking in the bright June sunshine that poured in at the high windows.

"Hallo, kids, time to get up!" he called out, deftly hurling his pillow at Herries, and causing that youth to suddenly start out of a dream in which he was knocking up an impossible score on the cricket-field against the New House junior team.

"Ow! Ooo-h! Ah!" gasped Herries.

"Lazybones! Time to get up."

"Tain't rising-bell yet."

"I know it isn't. It's time to go for a run in the quad, though, to keep yourself from growing fat and lazy," said Blake severely. "Get up at once, and yank Dig out of bed."

"Right-oh!" said Herries.

And he tumbled out of bed. He soon had the bedclothes off Digby, that youth loudly protesting, and Jack Blake stepped over to D'Arcy's bed to perform the same kind service for him.

"My only hat!"

"Hallo, what's the matter?" asked Herries, looking round.

"D'Arcy's up."

"D'Arcy up before us! What's the matter with him?"

Blake pointed to the empty bed, where at that hour of the morning the elegant form of the swell of St. Jim's should have reposed.

"He's gone."

"So he is," said Digby. "That is about the first time on record that Gussy has been up first. I wonder what's on."

"We'll go out and look for him," said Blake. "It's a glorious morning, and it's a sin to stay in bed."

"How often do you feel like that?" grunted Dig. "This is the first time you've been up before rising-bell for a week or more."

"It's never too late to mend, Dig. Get your togs on and follow your uncle," said Blake serenely.

The three juniors were soon dressed and out of the dormitory. They met Kildare of the Sixth in the lower hall, and the captain of St. Jim's, who was going out with a towel on his arm for an early swim in the Ryll, nodded genially to the Fourth Formers.

"I say, have you seen Gussy?" asked Blake.

"D'Arcy, do you mean?"

"Yes; the only Guss."

"No, I haven't seen him this morning. Is he up?"

"He was up and out of the dormitory before we woke," said Blake. "I was going to yank him out of bed when I discovered that he was gone. I thought you might have seen him."

"No, I am only just out myself."

Kildare strode from the house, and the juniors followed more slowly. There was a slight shade upon Blake's brow.

He looked right and left in the quadrangle. The old trees looked very fresh and green in the morning sunlight, and the grass glowed like emerald. There was no sign of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy in any direction. Early housemaids were at work on the steps of the School House and the New House, and the birds were twittering in the trees. There were no other signs of life in the deserted quad.

"Where is the bounder?" muttered Blake.

Herries and Digby looked at him curiously.

"You're not anxious about him, surely," said Digby. "He's all right."

"Not exactly anxious, but——"

"But what?"

"Well, his bed wasn't warm at all, you know. He had been out of it some time."

"He must have been up at dawn, then."

"Yes; or before."

"Before!"

"Perhaps."

And the worried look deepened on Blake's face. He did not speak again, but the faces of his chums were somewhat serious now. They went round the quad, and strolled down to the river, and looked in at the boat-house, but there was no sign of Arthur Augustus.

"I can't make it out," said Digby at last.

"Blessed if I can either," confessed Herries. "Where has the young bounder got to?"

Blake was silent.

They retraced their steps towards the School House, and met the Terrible Three in the quadrangle. The chums of the Shell hailed them at once.

"Hallo, Blake!" called out Tom Merry. "You're up early. Have you seen Skimpole?"

"Skimpole? No."

"He's up," said Tom Merry. "When we woke we found he was out of the dormitory, and Lowther thinks——"

"Suggests," said Monty Lowther.

"Well, suggests, then—that he has bunked."

"Bunked!" said Blake, in amazement.

"Yes, bunked, vanoused, cleared off."

"What on earth should Skimpole bunk for?"

"Well, that's my idea," said Monty Lowther. "I don't say it is so, but I've got my suspicions. I thought there was something on last night."

"You thought Skimpole was going to bunk?"

"Well, I thought there was something on; but not so much with Skimpole as with D'Arcy. I should have been less surprised to find that D'Arcy had gone," Monty Lowther remarked.

The chums of Study No. 6 started simultaneously. Lowther's words came curiously at that moment, when they had hunted for D'Arcy for half an hour in vain.

"What do you mean?" exclaimed Blake. "Do you know anything about——?" He paused.

"About what?"

"Well, as a matter of fact, we can't find D'Arcy."

"Can't find him!" ejaculated Tom Merry.

"No. He was gone out of the dormitory before we got up in the morning, and we've looked all over the place for him, and can't find a trace of him anywhere."

"Pshaw!"

"I thought so," said Lowther, with conviction. "He's bolted."

"Bolted!"

"Yes. It's that detective wheeze he's got in his head. I thought there was something of the kind on last night, and I tried to warn you——"

"Tried to warn me?"

"Yes."

"Blessed if I remember anything of the sort," said Blake warmly. "You'd better put a dog-chain on your imagination."

"I came to your study to warn you," said Lowther. "You wouldn't listen to me——"

"You came talking a lot of piffle when we were busy——"

"I tried to speak to Merry and Manners about it, too, but they wouldn't listen——"

"You came jawing to us when we were playing chess," said Manners. "You couldn't expect us to pay any attention then."

"Well, there you are!" said Lowther, with the air of a fellow who had done his best, and now washed his hands of the matter.

"Yes, here we are," said Blake. "But where's Gussy—that's the question."

"And where's Skimpole?" said Tom Merry.

"Well, it's not so important about Skimpole. He's only a bounder in the Shell, but D'Arcy is one of us——"

"Just so," said Dig. "We must find Gussy before morning roll-call, or there'll be a row."

Tom Merry shook his head.

"You won't find him if he's made a break as Lowther suggests. You know what Gussy is when he gets an idea into his head. Wild horses couldn't get it out again. And Skimpole is the same variety of an ass."

Blake looked extremely worried.

"It's a jolly serious thing to bolt like this," he said. "The Head is a good old sport, but if D'Arcy has bolted, it means a flogging."

"And serve him jolly well right," said Digby. "What does he mean by making us anxious about him like this?"

"Come to think of it, it's pretty certain he's gone," said Blake thoughtfully. "He was saying that if he discovered the missing heir, or whatever it is that's missing, the Head would be bound to overlook his having left the college without permission. Of course he won't find him. Probably he's

found already, as that paper D'Arcy had was nearly a week old. The young ass!"

The breakfast bell called the juniors into the School House. They turned their steps slowly homewards, and encountered Figgins & Co. coming out of the gym. Figgins stopped as he glanced at their serious faces.

"Anything wrong?" he asked.

"Yes," said Blake. "Gussy's bolted."

"And Skimpole's gone with him."

"My hat! What's the game?"

The School House juniors explained what they suspected. Figgins looked very serious, and so did the Co.

"The young ass came over to us last evening, and wanted us to join some harebrained amateur detective Co.," said Figgins.

"Of course, we weren't taking any. Catch us coming into any School House wheeze like that."

"Looking for a black eye?" asked Blake.

"Not at all. I'm sorry this has happened, as it will be serious for Gussy. If he's gone, goodness knows where he'll have got to by this time."

"I expect he's off to Blackberry Green in search of the missing heir," observed Kerr, the Scottish partner in the Co.

"Most likely."

"The young ass!" said Blake. "There will be a fearful row. Skimpole ought to have known better, as he was in the Shell. They're a pair, though. They won't catch the missing heir, but they'll catch a record hiding when they return."

"They must have gone in the middle of the night, I suppose," Tom Merry remarked. "The thing was planned, too, from what Lowther says about the bag he saw Skimpole with."

"I hope they took some sandwiches with them," said Fatty Wynn thoughtfully. "If they left in the middle of the night, they'd get fearfully hungry before they had a chance of getting anything to eat."

"Trust Fatty to think of that," grinned Figgins.

"Well, really, Figg, it's a rather important matter. I don't like to think of anybody going short of grub," said Fatty Wynn.

"And that reminds me—we're nearly a minute late for breakfast already. Come on!"

"See you kids later," said Figgins, and he walked on with the Co. towards the New House, while the School House chums entered their own quarters.

Mr. Linton, the master of the Shell, who boarded in the School House, was at the head of the Shell table. He soon found that Skimpole's place was empty.

"Why has not Skimpole come down?" he asked, looking at Tom Merry.

Tom coloured uncomfortably.

"He is down, sir."

"Then where is he?"

"I don't know."

"Does anyone present know where Skimpole is?"

There was no reply.

"H'm!" said Mr. Linton, pursing up his lips in a way that did not bode good for the absent Skimpole. "H'm!"

"If you please, sir," said Tom Merry, "I think he has left the college."

The hero of the Shell had thought the matter over. Ere long the truth must come out, and the sooner the better. The sooner the truants were found and brought back to St. Jim's, the less severe their punishment was likely to be.

Mr. Linton almost jumped from his chair.

"Left the college, Merry?"

"I'm afraid so, sir."

Mr. Linton looked at the junior's troubled face, and saw that the matter was serious. He rose from his place.

"Are you sure of what you say, Merry?"

"I think so, sir."

"You had better come with me to the Head."

"Yes, sir."

Mr. Linton glanced towards the Fourth Form table. The voice of little Mr. Lathom, the master of the Fourth, could be heard.

"What is that Blake? You do not know where D'Arcy is?"

"No, sir."

"Did he not come down with you this morning?"

"No, sir."

"Then he must be still in the dormitory."

"He was gone before we got up, sir."

"Then—then—what—" ejaculated Mr. Lathom, blinking at Blake in amazement through his glasses. "What—"

"I'm afraid he has left the school, sir."

"What?"

"I'm afraid he has left the school."

"Dear me!" murmured Mr. Lathom. "Dear me! What can have possessed him to leave the school. What a very singular proceeding."

"A boy of my Form is also missing," said Mr. Linton.

"Dear me! How very singular!"

"They have probably gone together," said the master of the Shell. "Do you think that is likely, Blake?"

"Very likely, sir."

"You had better come with me to the Head, as well as Merry. Shall I take this matter in hand, Mr. Lathom?"

"Oh, certainly," said the Fourth Form master.

"Then come with me, boys."

Tom Merry and Blake obediently followed the master of the Shell from the room. They left every table in a buzz of amazed comment.

CHAPTER 11.

A Tramp in the Country.

"B AI Jove, deah boy, I feel wathah fatigued, you know."

It was Arthur Augustus D'Arcy who spoke.

While St. Jim's was in a state of uneasy wonder that morning as to what had become of the missing juniors, the amateur detectives were far away pursuing their quest. They had caught the last train from Rylocombe, and left it at a town some twenty miles from the school. D'Arcy had inquired assiduously of railway porters, guards, and officials, as to the whereabouts of Blackberry Green, but information on the point was not easy to come by. Blackberry Green was not a well-known place, but at last the juniors heard something of it. A kind stationmaster informed them that it was a village a couple of miles off the line, and they left the station and started to walk. Arthur Augustus had suggested taking the ancient back which was waiting outside the station, but Skimpole argued against it.

"You see, we can't very well begin our investigations there before daylight," Skimpole pointed out. "So we'd better walk, and save the money. If we get into Blackberry Green by dawn, that will be soon enough."

"Yaas, I suppose so," said D'Arcy. "That's wathah thoughtful of you, Skimpole."

And they walked.

The amateur detectives were enthusiastic, and a walk of a couple of miles was not much. But the chief difficulty, after they had once started, was to find the way. They knew the direction to start with. But when they came to two or three branching lanes, without anything in the shape of a finger-post to guide them, Sherlock Holmes himself could not have guessed which road led to Blackberry Green, and which didn't.

The worst of it was that when, after some lengthy searching for a sign-post, they decided to walk back to the town and take a hack after all, they could not find for certain which of the lanes led back to the place they had come from. The sense of direction is hard to keep in the darkness, with no prominent landmark to keep in sight. The juniors were utterly at a loss. D'Arcy suggested guiding their course by the stars, but as he did not know one star from another, and had not the faintest idea how to set about doing so, the suggestion could not be regarded as having much practical value. Finally they started off again, trusting to luck, and dawn found them tramping along a green lane bordered by cornfields, with no other human being in sight. The warm June sun rising over the cornfields cheered the two juniors, who were beginning to be despondent. They were beginning to be hungry, too.

It was then that D'Arcy observed that he felt rather fatigued. He followed up the observation by sinking down on the lower step of a stile, and pushing his silk hat back from his warm brow.

Skimpole was tired, too. The stationmaster had told them that it was a couple of miles from Fernfield to Blackberry Green, but the juniors felt as if they had walked a couple of hundred already. They had in reality covered about four or five. Blackberry Green seemed as far off as ever.

"Bai Jove! this is fatiguing work, you know," D'Arcy observed, fanning himself with his handkerchief.

"Yes, isn't it?" said Skimpole, leaping on the stile. "I am rather tired, and I must confess that I am getting hungry. This bag is very heavy."

"I hope you have got something to eat in it, deah boy."

Skimpole shook his head.

"No; I didn't think of it, D'Arcy. I am rather sorry now. I have brought with me most of the things we require—a life-preserver, and a change of linen, all my volumes of Sherlock Holmes, and a pair of handcuffs—"

"A what?"

"A pair of handcuffs. I bought them second-hand in Rylocombe. We may need them in case we capture any criminals," explained Skimpole. "For all we know the missing son of Sir Juke Jakes—I mean James Jukes—may have been kidnapped, and in that case we may have to arrest the kidnappers when we have tracked them down. The handcuffs will come in very useful then."

"Bai Jove! some gwub would come in more useful just now, I think," said D'Arcy, with a sigh.

"I should have thought you would think of that," said Skimpole. "Your bag is bigger than mine. What on earth have you filled it with?"

"Oh, only a few absolute necessaries—three changes of linen, and a hat-bwush, and three waistcoats and some neckties—"



"Ow!" exclaimed D'Arcy, as he made a dive for his precious topper, and Skimpole was left hanging without support from below.

"Really, D'Arcy——"

"I didn't think of the gub at the time. You ought to have thought of that, Skimpole!"

"I wish I had. But we shall be able to get some food somewhere, I suppose. You can get ripping bread and cheese at these country inns."

"Yaas; but where is there a country inn?"

Skimpole scanned the horizon. He could see cornfields and trees and a distant orchard. But there was no sign of an inn.

"Well, we shall have to get on," he said.

"Bai Jove, Skimpole, you are an ass, you know!"

"You mean you're an ass——"

"If we had taken the hack at Fernfield we should have been at Blackbewwy Gween long ago."

"Well, how was I to guess that you would lose the way?"

"I! It was you lost the way, you ass."

"Nothing of the sort."

"Now look here."

"I'm not going to admit that I lost the way. You remember I wanted to take the other lane, and you insisted upon taking this one."

"You wanted to mooch aound all night lookin' for the way."

"Well, and now——"

"Now we—bai Jove, what's that?"

A grimy face and an unkempt head emerged from the hedge

a dozen feet from the two juniors at the stile. It was evidently the head of a tramp who had been sleeping under the hedge all night. The flabby face and bleared eyes showed that he had been drinking before he sought that al fresco couch, and the evil expression of his face was evidence enough that he had not awakened in the best of tempers.

"Ullo!"

Skimpole glanced at the tramp. D'Arcy rose to his feet. He was not a suspicious person, but he could see that the man was a dangerous neighbour in that lonely place. But Skimpole the Socialist did not think of a trifle like that.

"Hullo," he exclaimed, returning the tramp's greeting. "Good-morning, my friend."

The man stared at him. He dragged himself from the hedge, and stood up in the lane, and shook leaves and twigs from his ragged clothes. He was rags and filth from head to foot, and his dirty face had a three or four days' growth of beard on it.

He came closer to the juniors, looking at them curiously. He gave one glance up and down the lane, and across the fields, and ascertained that there was no one in sight. There was a gleam of greed in his bleary eyes.

"Ullo!" he repeated. "Good-mornin', young gentlemen. Can you 'elp a pore man who has been out of work for a long time?"

The tramp had certainly been out of work for a long time, and looked as if he intended to remain so. D'Arcy drew back

with an involuntary expression of disgust as he caught a whiff of beer and foul tobacco from the ruffian.

Skimpole shook his head.

"I am afraid I cannot help you financially, my friend," said the amateur Socialist of St. Jim's. "I have no money. D'Arcy has plenty of money."

The tramp's eyes glittered.

"Ho! He 'as plenty of money, 'as he?"

"Yes; but he will not give you any, owing to his aristocratic prejudices. I cannot help you in a financial way, but I can hold out to you the hope of better days—the coming of Socialism, my poor fellow, when you will be provided with regular work, and afforded facilities for cleaning yourself."

"Wot!"

"I am far from blaming you for appearing before us in this filthy and degraded condition," said Skimpole. "Neither do I visit upon your head the fact that you went to sleep intoxicated last night. You were evidently trained in the ways of beastly self-indulgence, and, consequently, a sincere Socialist can only pity and not condemn you. Your filthy and disreputable appearance is undoubtedly due to the vile training of your early youth, doubtless in one of the horrible slums which it is the aim of Socialism to destroy."

The tramp's face was a study as the amateur Socialist proceeded.

"I have a book here," said Skimpole, opening his bag. "It is called, 'Socialism for the Young,' and is couched in simple language suitable to a defective intellect, and will, therefore, be just the book you want on the subject. I shall have great pleasure in presenting it to you."

The tramp put out his foot as Skimpole stooped over the bag, and sent the enthusiastic propagandist rolling in the dust.

Then he turned savagely on D'Arcy.

"And over your money and your watch, young shaver," he said, between his teeth. "Quick, now, before I jump on yer."

D'Arcy rose from his seat and retreated precipitately.

"I refuse to do anythin' of the sort," he replied. "I certainly shall not hand over my money to a disreputable person like you, and I have not the slightest intention of pwesentin' you with a twenty-five guinea watch."

"Twenty-five guineas! My word! 'And it over,'"

"Certainly not."

The tramp sprang towards him. Skimpole scrambled to his feet.

"My good man——"

"Shut up, you young fool."

"Let me explain to you——"

"Will you 'and over that watch."

"Wathah not——"

The tramp seized D'Arcy by the shoulder. He was a powerful ruffian, and the swell of St. Jim's was as an infant in his grip. Skimpole stood looking on dazedly.

"Now will yer—ow!"

D'Arcy twisted his leg neatly in the ruffian's, and the next moment the tramp was rolling in the dust.

"Wun!" shouted D'Arcy. "Wun like anythin'!"

"But——" gasped Skimpole.

"Wun, you ass!"

"The bags?"

"Ass!" D'Arcy grasped him by the arm. "Wun, I tell you."

The tramp was scrambling to his feet, muttering horrible oaths. If he had got to close quarters with the juniors he would certainly have done them terrible bodily injury, and they would have had no chance whatever against the powerful ruffian. D'Arcy was full of pluck, but it was no time to show fight then. He dragged Skimpole away, and they ran swiftly up the lane.

"Come back."

The tramp's heavy footsteps pattered after them. The juniors ran hard. The bags were lost now, with all they contained, but they would be lucky to escape with what they had in their pockets, and with unbroken heads. Fortunately, the previous night's potatoes had not left the ruffian in a good condition for running. His footsteps grew fainter behind. D'Arcy glanced back and saw him standing in the lane, shaking his fist savagely after them.

"Bai Jove!" gasped the swell of St. Jim's. "What a fearful nawwow escape."

"Yes," panted Skimpole. "We have lost the bags, but I do not wholly regret the loss, as the ruffian will certainly find the book on Socialism in my bag, and he may read it, and be turned from the error of his ways."

"Wats!"

"Really, D'Arcy!"

"Oh, wats! I wish Blake and Dig had been with us, and we'd have given him a fearful thwashin'. We are in a howwible fix now. I don't see how I can go on with the searchin' for the missin' heir without my bag. I haven't even a change of linen now. What am I to do for a clean shirt?"

"I'd give all the clean shirts in Christendom for a breakfast now," murmured Skimpole.

"Yaas; bai Jove! I'm beastly hungwy, too."

"Hallo! look there: there's a signboard!"

"Yaas; and there's Blackbewwy Gween on it, too," said D'Arcy, stopping under the post. "Blackbewwy Gween, four miles. Bai Jove!"

"Four miles! Then it's twice as far as when we started from Fernfield."

"Looks like it, deah boy."

"You've wandered a lot out of the way."

"You mean you have wandered."

"I say you."

"I say you."

"Oh, let's get on," said Skimpole. "We've got to walk four miles to get some grub. I'm rather glad that unfortunate victim of the social system has stolen our bags. I don't think I could have carried mine four miles."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Let's get on."

And the amateur detectives started on the weary tramp of four miles. As they limped along, it was borne in upon their minds that the amateur detective business might have its drawbacks. Skimpole looked at his watch.

"They're having breakfast at St. Jim's now," he remarked.

D'Arcy groaned.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"I could do with a hot cup of tea and some eggs and bacon."

"Don't speak of it, deah boy."

And in silence the amateur detectives tramped on under the hot June sun.

CHAPTER 12.

D'Arcy Discovers a Clue!

"BLACKBEWWY GWEEN at last!" gasped D'Arcy. The two fatigued juniors limped into the village. They were red and perspiring in the hot sun, way-worn and weary. The sight of a cosy-looking little inn was a relief to them, and they limped into the shady porch.

"Bai Jove! this is bettah!"

"Isn't it?" said Skimpole, sinking upon a bench in the porch. "I have never been so thirsty before, you know, or so hungry."

"Wathah not!"

"I could drink a wellful of water now, I think. I am awfully dry; but we're here on the spot at last, D'Arcy, all ready to begin our investigations. As soon as we've had something to eat and drink I will show you——"

"That you won't!"

"I will show you how to——"

"Nothin' of the sort!"

"What do you mean, D'Arcy?"

"I mean that I am the leadah in this enterprize. Aftah the ghastly way you have mucked up affairs already, you can hardly expect a fellow to follow your lead."

"But——"

"Here's the waitah. Waitah!"

"Yes, sir," said the fat-faced, ruddy-complexioned man in a white apron, coming out into the porch. "What can I got for you?"

"Bwread-and-cheese, please, and plenty of it," said D'Arcy. "Also some fwesh milk, and plenty of it, and some cake, and plenty of it."

"Yes, sir."

And the provender was soon set before the famished juniors in the shady porch, on the low oaken table. They set to with a will. Bwread-and-cheese and milk is a wholesome diet, and very palatable when one is ravenously hungry. The way the juniors travelled through it was really creditable.

"I feel better now," said Skimpole presently.

"Yaas, wathah!" said D'Arcy, with a sigh of contentment. "Before we start on our investigations, I think we will make up some bundles of this bwread-and-cheese, in case of accidents."

"That's a good idea!"

"I think I will take a little west before I start," added D'Arcy. "I am not accustomed to exertin' myself so much, you know."

"I don't think we ought to waste time, D'Arcy!"

"I am not pwoposin' to waste time, deah boy, but to take a little west."

"Yes, but——"

"We may as well settle about the mattah we were speakin' of, too. You have so fah mucked up the thing in a wassally way."

"You mean you have!"

"If we had taken the hack at Fernfield——"

"If you hadn't lost the way——"

"It's no good arguin', deah boy!" said Arthur Augustus, with a wave of the hand. "You will eithah have to follow my lead implicitly in this mattah, or else we shall have to part company, and pursue our investigations independently of each othah."

"That will suit me very well," said Skimpole. "I should feel less hampered in my movements, but——"

"But what, deah boy?"

"But there's a difficulty——"

Arthur Augustus beamed.

"You feel that you couldn't do without my assistance, deah boy?"

"Oh, no, nothing of the sort!" said Skimpole. "But as I explained to you when we left St. Jim's, I haven't any money."

"Oh, I see!"

"So we shall have to remain together, but if we do so you will have to follow my lead, as I could not follow you, you see, as I know more about the business than you do, and——"

"Wot!"

"Then I don't see——"

"We can arrange the matter easily enough. I will lend you a sovereign, Skimpole, and then you will have nearly as much as I have."

"That is a good idea!" said Skimpole, looking quite satisfied. "You hamper my movements a great deal, of course, but as I was stony——"

"And you hamper me a lot, too, especially when you insist upon walkin' instead of takin' a conveyance, and then losin' the way."

"It was you lost the way——"

"There's the sov., dear boy, and I wish you success. Of course, when I get the hundred pounds, I shall share with you just the same."

"Oh, yes, that's understood."

"Now I am goin' to have a little wot, and then I shall go and look for a clue."

Skimpole rose to his feet.

"I cannot afford the time for resting," he remarked. "It is quite possible that the Head will have us searched for, and, in that case, the sooner we find the missing heir the better."

"I must have a little wot!"

"Well, I'm off! Don't forget to settle the bill, will you?"

And Skimpole walked out of the porch. Arthur Augustus filled his glass with milk again and drank it slowly, turning the matter over in his mind. Here he was at Blackberry Green, all ready to commence his search for the lost son of Sir James Jukes, and all he wanted was a clue.

Where was he to find that clue? Doubtless information was to be gained by questioning the natives. As soon as he had rested, that was evidently the course to be followed. D'Arcy had just come to this conclusion when a stranger entered the porch of the inn, and sat down and called for ale. He glanced at D'Arcy as he sipped his ale, and D'Arcy glanced at him.

"Bai Jove!" murmured the swell of St. Jim's. "This is a good chance to begin examin' the natives. I suppose this chap belongs to those parts."

From the cut of the stranger's clothes, and his general manner and bearing, anyone but an amateur detective might have guessed that he was a racecourse tout, tramping his way to some racing centre, and extremely hard up. But Arthur Augustus D'Arcy's knowledge of the world, especially of the seamy side, was limited.

He adjusted his monocle and looked at the stranger with a beaming smile.

"Good-morning, sir!"

"Good-morning!" said the man looking D'Arcy over, and not failing to note the signs of prosperity about him, in spite of his dusty appearance. "Fine morning!"

"Yaas, wathah! You belong to this village, I suppose?"

The man stared.

That anybody should imagine that he belonged to any village was an insult to Jimmy Jex, the knowing sporting character. He could only stare at the genial swell of St. Jim's.

"I wonder if you could give me some information?" D'Arcy went on, unconscious of the feelings in Mr. Jex's bosom. "I suppose you have heard of the missing son of Sir James Jukes? There's a hundred pounds reward offered for his recovery."

Mr. Jex stared harder.

"Yes, I've heard about that."

"I'm looking for the youngstah," explained D'Arcy.

"You're looking for him," said Mr. Jex, in measured accents.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Then you don't know that——"

"Know what, deah boy?" asked Arthur Augustus, as the stranger paused.

"Nothing," said Mr. Jex, changing his mind, apparently, about what he had been going to say. "I—er—was about to remark—let me see—you are a friend of the missing youngster, I suppose?"

"Oh, no, I have never seen him."

"Then what are you looking for him for?"

"I am afah the hundred pounds reward," explained D'Arcy.

"I also wish to do a service to the unfortunate youngstah, and to relieve the sorrow of a sallowin' fathah."

Mr. Jex chuckled.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy screwed his monocle tighter into his eye, and looked rather laughingly at the stranger.

"Weally, I cannot see anythin' to laugh at!" he said coldly.

"There is nothing whatever comical in the sorrow of an anxious parent."

Mr. Jex became grave at once.

"Certainly not!" he said. "I was thinking that the police who have been searching for the—the missing youth, will be very much annoyed if he should be found by an—an amateur, as I may say."

"Yaas, wathah! I think that is extremely pwob."

"Extremely what—oh, probable! I see," said Mr. Jex, looking at D'Arcy curiously. "You have come specially to Blackberry Green to look for the missing lad?"

"Quite wight!"

"Dear me, how singular!"

"What is there singular about that, deah boy?"

"Why, it happens that I know something about the matter, and I could give you some valuable information on the point," explained Mr. Jex.

D'Arcy's heart beat. His policy of questioning the natives was panning out more successfully than he had dared to hope.

"Bai Jove! Can you weally?" he exclaimed. "I shall be vewy much obliged. I am takin' up detective work in an amateur way, you know, and I should be vewy glad to make a howlin' success of my first case."

Mr. Jex grinned.

"Yes, I suppose so."

"If you can give me a clue——"

"I could easily do so, but——"

"If you are thinkin' of the reward, I should certainly considah myself bound to hand ovah to you a fair share."

"I was not thinkin' of that, sir. The thought of the reward never even crossed my mind. If I could help to restore a missing son to the arms of his sorrowing parents, I should consider myself sufficiently rewarded," said Mr. Jex, drawing his coat-sleeve across his eyes.

Arthur Augustus was considerably touched.

"That is vewy wight and pwopah of you!" he exclaimed.

"All the same, I should insist upon your takin' a fair share of the reward."

"I should refuse to touch it," said Mr. Jex. "If you find the missing boy, as I have no doubt you could easily do with the information I can give you, you are entitled to the reward. I do not deny that I am poor at the present moment, owing to my lawyer having absconded with eighty thousand pounds belonging to me——"

"Bai Jove! that was wathah wuff!" said the unsuspecting D'Arcy.

"It was very rough!" said Mr. Jex. "I think I could get on the villain's track if I had a sovereign to pay my fare to London."

"Bai Jove!"

"If you think I am entitled to any reward for the assistance I can give you, I would accept a sovereign," said Mr. Jex. "The reward offered by Sir James Jukes, however, would be wholly yours."

"That is vewy generous of you."

"Not at all. If I can recover my fortune I shall be rolling in money. I will tell you all I can of the missing boy, and leave the rest to your generosity."

D'Arcy was already feeling in his pocket for a sovereign, and Mr. Jex's little eyes twinkled as he went on.

"Do you know the well by the roadside outside the village?"

"Yaas, I think we passed a well as we came in."

"At the bottom of that well," said Mr. Jex impressively, "there is a chamber cut out in the brickwork, and in that chamber the boy is kept a prisoner."

D'Arcy started.

"But the water——"

"There is no water in the well. It is disused."

"Oh, I see!"

"The kidnappers—did I tell you he was kidnapped?—the kidnappers go every day to take him food. They are waiting till the reward for his recovery is increased to a thousand pounds before they restore him to his suffering parents."

"The wascals!"

"I came into possession of this information by overhearing their talk on the subject," explained Mr. Jex. "I was about to go to the police and lay information, at the risk of losing the track of the man who has absconded with my fortune. If you chose to undertake the case——"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Then I can safely leave it in your hands. If you think the information I have given you is worth a sovereign——"

"Bai Jove, wathah!"

"In that case I will accept it, but merely as a loan, to be repaid to you later."

"Just as you like, my dear sir."

Arthur Augustus laid the sovereign on the table, and Mr. Jex picked it up very quickly.

He rose from his bench.

"I shall have just time to catch my train," he said hurriedly.

"Good-bye!"

And he disappeared.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy settled his account, and followed in a more leisurely manner.

The swell of St. Jim's was looking very contented as he strolled out of the village towards the well. He had found a clue already. In another quarter of an hour he would have found the missing youth, and the reward was as good as within his grasp. What a triumph over the unbelieving juniors of St. Jim's!

CHAPTER 13. Deep Down.

"HERE it is, bai Jove!"

Arthur Augustus stopped at the well. A low brick wall surrounded it, but there was no cover. The pulley and chain and bucket were there, and were in working order, whether the well was disused or not.

Arthur Augustus adjusted his monocle, and looked into the gloomy depths of the well.

The swell of St. Jim's was a little puzzled.

There was no sign anywhere near of the kidnappers of whom Mr. Jex had spoken. The coast was clear, so to speak. It was a grand opportunity of rescuing the kidnapped youth and bearing him away to safety; but how to get him was the difficulty.

D'Arcy rubbed his chin thoughtfully.

"I suppose I can make him hear," he murmured. "Then I can lower the bucket, and he can get into it, and I can pull him up. Yaas, that's a good ideah."

He bent over the brick rim.

"Hallo! Hallo!"

His voice rang curiously through the gloomy depths of the well.

"Hallo!"

The echoes thundered back, but there was no sound of a human voice.

"Hallo! Are you there?"

It reminded D'Arcy of Skimpole's telephone as he shouted

"Are you there?"

There was no reply.

D'Arcy was disappointed.

"It is poss. that the kidnappahs have suspected something, and wemoved him to a place of gwestah safety," he murmured, "or he has fallen asleep frowm exhaustion pwaps. He doesn't seem to hear me."

The swell of St. Jim's shouted into the well again, more loudly than before, and countless echoes thundered back.

"Hallo! Are you there?"

But there was no voice but his own booming up in reply.

Either the prisoner was no longer there, or he was unconscious. D'Arcy was baffled, but he was not beaten. He was on the track, and if he could not succeed one way, there were other ways.

"I shall have to go down," he murmured.

It was a serious project. To go down might not be attended with any great danger to life or limb, but it was pretty certain to have a destructive effect upon the clothing.

But D'Arcy was prepared to ruin even his trousers as the price of success. He made up his mind, and after one more look round to ascertain that no man was nigh, he clambered into the broad oaken bucket in a sitting posture, and commenced to lower himself into the well.

The swell of St. Jim's felt rather giddy as he swung downwards into the well. His eye-glass fell off, and he made a clutch at it. The chain slipped, and rattled out swiftly, and the bucket shot downwards.

Splash!

D'Arcy gave a terrific yell.

Mr. Jex had told him that the well was disused, but if that was the case it was certainly not for want of a supply of water. Water was there in plenty, as D'Arcy discovered.

He went right under the water, and came up gasping and clinging to the bucket.

"Bai Jove!"

He clung to the bucket and chain, and looked round him. Above his head the sky was a round patch of blue. The top of the well seemed an immense distance away. The walls round him were solid enough. There was no trace of the excavation in which, according to his informant's story, the missing heir of Sir James Jukes was kept a prisoner.

"Bai Jove! There is some beastly mistake here," murmured D'Arcy. "It must have been some othah well the kidnappahs were speakin' of. I have had this wotten beastly duckin' for nothin'!"

D'Arcy shivered. It was warm enough in the hot June sun, but it was decidedly cold in the water at the bottom of the well.

"Bai Jove! How am I to get out?"

That was something of a puzzle. The end of the chain had escaped D'Arcy's clutch when the bucket slipped, and it was now far out of his reach.

He gazed at the bare, inaccessible walls of the well, and at the patch of blue sky above.

"This is a fearful fix," he murmured. "That chap must

have been mistaken when he said that the well was disused. There's a lot of watah here, anyway. I dare say if I shout somebody will come."

There was evidently nothing else to be done.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, clinging to the chain, shouted with the full force of his lungs, and the old well echoed with the sound like thunder.

"Help! Help!"

Again and again the shout rang reverberating from the depths of the well.

"Help!"

A black patch darkened the blue sky over the rim of the well.

D'Arcy gave a gasp of relief. It was a human head.

"Help!"

"Hallo!"

"Bai Jove! It's Skimpole!"

"Is that you, D'Arcy?"

"Yaas, watah!"

"Dear me! What are you doing down there?"

"Getting soaked," groaned D'Arcy. "Pway help me out, Skimmy, there's a good chap."

"But what did you go down there for?"

"I was looking for—for clues," said D'Arcy. "You can contrive to pull up the bucket with me in it."

"Possibly. I will try. I hope you realise now, D'Arcy, how helpless you are without my assistance."

"Oh, don't be an ass!"

"Really, D'Arcy, under the circumstances——"

"I am catchin' a fearful cold. Pway pull me up, deah boy."

"Certainly. I hope this lesson will not be lost upon you, however. Obstinacy is your chief failing. As the famous propagandist Muddehdd says in his great book——"

"Oh, never mind his great book! Help me out!"

"Are you in the bucket?"

"Yaas, I'm in it now."

"Then hold on."

"I'm holdin' on."

"I will raise you to the top. I hope that this will be a lesson to you, and that in future you will follow the lead of those wiser than yourself."

D'Arcy did not speak, but he thought a great deal.

Skimpole wound in the chain, and the bucket rose to the surface.

The drenched and dripping swell of St. Jim's clambered out.

Skimpole looked at him critically.

"Well, you do look a fearful object," he said. "Have you been in the well long?"

"It seems like hours."

"Impossible, as it is not an hour since we parted at the inn. I cannot imagine why you should have descended into the well. Were you thirsty?"

"No," snapped D'Arcy.

"You will have to get a change of things. I hope this will be a lesson to you not to leave me in the future, but to follow my lead——"

"Oh, wing off!"

"Really, D'Arcy——"

"Cheese it!"

"I am willing to look after you——"

"But I am not willin' to be looked aftah."

"I consider this ungrateful, after I have saved you from a watery grave," said Skimpole.

"Wats! I shouldn't have been drowned. It wasn't dangerous, only beastly uncomfy."

"Well, really——"

"Oh, wats!"

And Arthur Augustus walked off to the inn.

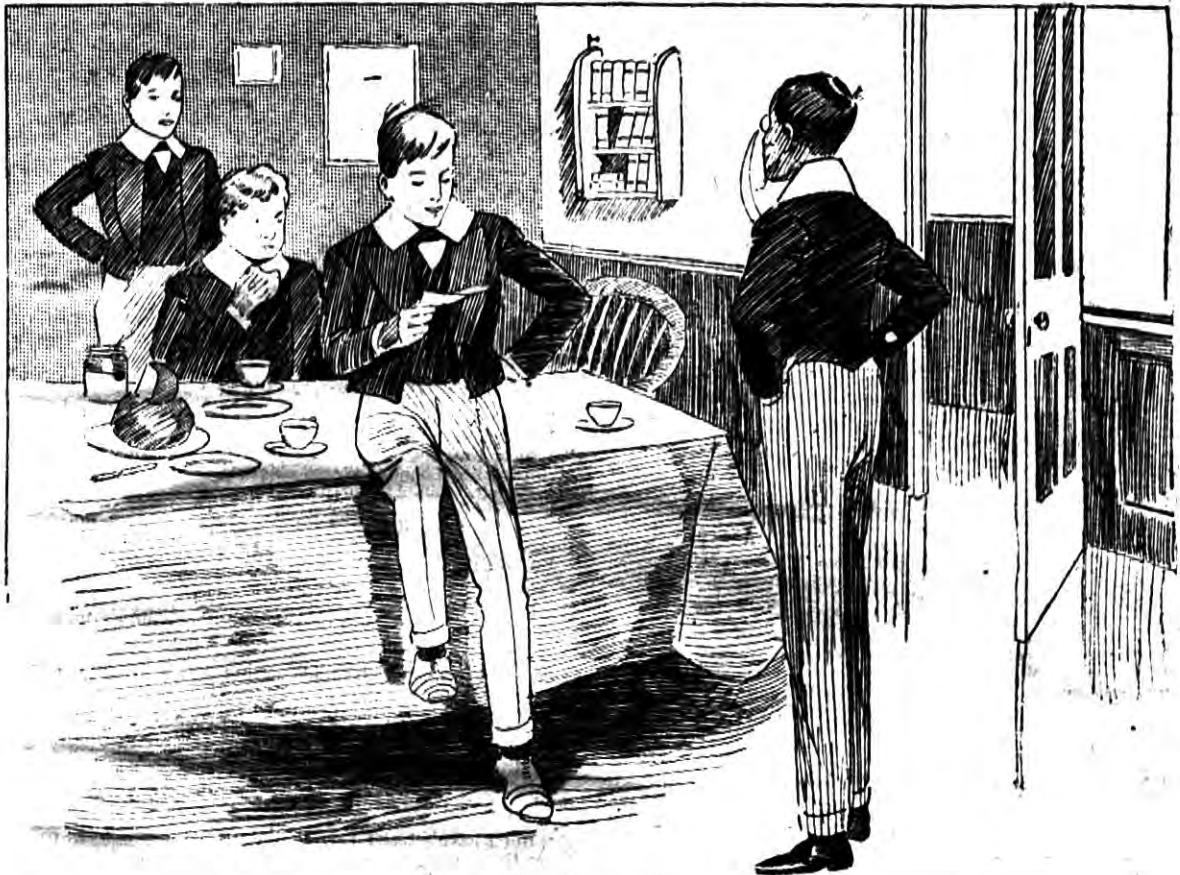
Skimpole gazed after him, and shook his head solemnly.

"He is very ungrateful," he murmured. "I shall not trouble about him any more. It is fortunate for him that I had stopped near at hand to rest and think out the problem, or he might have stayed a long time in the well. I shall now pursue my investigations, and leave him severely alone."

Arthur Augustus made his way back to the inn in Blackberry Green as quickly as he could.

To the amused Boniface he only explained that he had accidentally had a ducking, and asked for a room where he could dry himself, and a change of clothing. The room was quickly provided, with towels and a roaring fire. But the change of clothing presented great difficulties. The only clothes available were corduroy trousers and a smock frock, which D'Arcy considered it absolutely impossible for him to don. The only alternative was for him to stay in bed while his clothes were dried at the fire, and though he thought with great misgiving of the ill-fitting that would inevitably follow, he had no choice but to assent.

He borrowed a book, and sat by the window with a blanket round him, while his clothes were drying. His dinner was brought up to him, but after that his clothes were not yet dry.



D'Arcy held out the paper with the marked paragraph for the inspection of the puzzled Figgins. Figgins looked at it. "Wead it aloud," said Arthur Augustus.

About an hour later he examined them again, and was glad to find that the wet was mostly gone.

"Another half-hour," he murmured, "then I shall get on the track again! Weally, I have been vewy unfortunate."

He returned to his seat at the window. As he sat down and took up his book, he gave a sudden start.

Through the open window, from below, the sound of a well-known voice floated—a voice familiar to his ear at St. Jim's.

CHAPTER 14.

Tom Merry & Co. Take the Trail.

DR. HOLMES sat in his study at St. Jim's with an amazed and troubled expression upon his fine old face. He had just heard Mr. Linton's explanation of the absence of Skimpole and D'Arcy, and had questioned Tom Merry and Blake.

Tom and Blake had told him all they could. There was no question now of keeping anything back. Two juniors had left the college, and they might be getting into any kind of mischief. The sooner they were found and brought back the better. The Head had listened with a troubled face, and dismissed the juniors. The boys had gone into the class-room that morning the same as usual, but the whole school was discussing the latest escapade of the swell of the School House. When Mr. Railton left his class he came to the Head's study. He was the man Dr. Holmes always turned to in a moment of difficulty.

"This is a serious matter, sir," the master of the School House remarked.

The doctor nodded.

"Yes, very serious, Mr. Railton. I really hardly know how to deal with it. The two truants will have to be severely punished."

"But they will have to be found first," said the housemaster; "and that does not seem to be an easy task."

"No. This idea of practising detective work seems to be at the bottom of the escapade. They have gone away, but it is pretty certain that they have not gone to their homes. I do not wish to alarm their parents by telegrams of inquiry. I would rather have them found quietly and brought back if possible."

"That would certainly be more satisfactory."

"But where can they be? Where are we to look for them?"

"I think it possible that their friends in the same Form will have some knowledge or suspicion of their destination," Mr. Railton said thoughtfully. "If you like, sir, I can inquire among the juniors, in an unofficial way, and may perhaps elicit something of importance."

"That is a good plan."

"As it is a half-holiday this afternoon, there will be no difficulty in my getting away," said the housemaster. "If I can obtain a clue to the destination of the foolish lads, I can follow them quietly and bring them back without any publicity of any sort."

The Head drew a breath of relief.

"That would be very satisfactory indeed, Mr. Railton."

"Then I will inquire among the juniors."

"Pray do so."

After morning lessons Mr. Railton called Tom Merry and Blake into his study. Blake was looking animated, as if some excellent idea were working in his brain.

"There is one point the Head did not go into when he questioned you boys," said the housemaster. "Have you any idea of what might be D'Arcy's probable destination?"

Tom Merry and Blake exchanged glances.

"You must answer me freely," said Mr. Railton quietly. "You know as well as I do that the two foolish lads may get into some mischief, and that they must be brought back to the school as quickly as possible."

"Oh, yes, sir," said Tom Merry. "We know that."

"But, sir—" said Blake.

"Well, Blake."

"It's a half-holiday this afternoon, sir—"

"What of that?"

"I was just thinking that it would be a good idea for two or three of us fellows to go and look for D'Arcy, sir. I was just suggesting it to Tom Merry when you called us in."

Mr. Railton looked thoughtful.

"Then you have some idea of the place D'Arcy and Skimpole would probably make for, Blake?"

"Yes, sir."

"What is the place?"

"A village called Blackberry Green."

"Blackberry Green! I have heard that name before," said the housemaster, looking puzzled, "I cannot quite recall where."

"It's where Sir James Jukes' son was lost last week, sir," said Tom Merry. "There's a hundred pounds reward offered for his recovery."

"Oh, yes, I remember now; that is what I was thinking of. I remember reading in the 'Daily Mail' yesterday that the boy had been found."

Blake chuckled.

"Blake!"

"Excuse me, sir. But D'Arcy and Skimpole have gone off to rake in the hundred pounds reward offered for the discovery of the missing heir."

Mr. Railton smiled.

"Indeed?"

"Yes, sir. It seems funny that D'Arcy is gone hunting for the reward, when the kidlet is already found."

"The what?"

"The child, sir," said Blake, abashed.

"It is very curious," said Mr. Railton. "Perhaps some correction, when he returns, will teach D'Arcy not to be so impulsive. I was thinking of going this afternoon myself in search of D'Arcy and Skimpole."

"If you please, sir—"

"Well, Merry?"

"It would be better for us to go, because—"

"Well, why, Merry? You need not be afraid to speak out. I am only anxious to recover these foolish lads."

"Well, sir, they'll have their eyes open, of course, and if they spotted a master near Blackberry Green, they would scout—I mean they'd give you a wide berth, sir."

"Quite likely."

"You could hardly search for them without making inquiries and showing yourself, sir. If we went, Gussy—I mean D'Arcy—wouldn't be so likely to take the alarm if he saw us, and there would be two or three of us, too."

"And if he bolted," said Blake, "we could run him down. But you couldn't buzz after him as we could, sir. It would look so—so conspicuous."

The housemaster laughed.

"There is certainly something in what you say, my lads. I am inclined to think that you could deal with the matter more effectively than I could, under the peculiar circumstances. You will promise me, of course, to leave no stone unturned to find D'Arcy, and that you will bring him and Skimpole back to the school whether they are willing to come or not."

"Certainly, sir."

"Then I shall leave it to you at present, my boys."

"Thank you, sir."

And Tom Merry and Blake left the housemaster's study looking very contented. Mr. Railton was not sorry to be relieved of the task of hunting for two elusive juniors up and down the countryside, and it was a fact that the matter was more likely to prosper in the hands of the juniors.

"We'll start immediately after dinner," said Tom Merry. "The next question is, how many shall we take?"

"Not a crowd," said Blake decidedly. "If Gussy spots us, there will be a run, quite as much as if he spotted Railton after him. Where we score is that we could chase him up hill and down dale, and a master couldn't, because his dignity has to be considered. But if a crowd of us went, Gussy would see some of us, and bolt—and we don't want a hot chase if we can help it."

"That's so."

"My idea is to have a party of three—yourself, myself, and say Figgins—we three are the best sprinters in either house, and we could easily carry Gussy and Skimpole home if they resisted."

"Right-oh."

"If you think it's a good idea, we'll go over and speak to Figgins. Better catch him alone, too. If the others get to know about it, we may have half the school following us to Blackberry Green, and then good-bye to any chance of catching Gussy. And we must catch him. Every hour he stays away will make it worse for him when he gets back, the young ass."

"You're right there," said Tom Merry thoughtfully. "If he's away over to-night the Head can hardly help letting his governor know about it, and calling in the help of the police. That would make a regular uproar over the business. It might even get into the papers."

"He's got to come back," said Blake grimly. "Let us only find him, and we'll get him back right enough, if we have to tie him hand and foot, and bring him home on a wheelbarrow."

"Ha, ha! I say, there's Figgins," exclaimed Tom Merry, as the lanky form of the New House junior crossed under the elms. "Now's our chance."

"Come on."

The two School House boys ran towards Figgins. Figgins promptly put his back to one of the elms and squared up with his fists.

Tom Merry laughed.

"It's all right, Figgys," he exclaimed. "It's not a house row this time. We only want to speak to you."

"It's pax," said Blake.

"Oh, all right," said Figgins, dropping his warlike attitude. "One never knows, you know. What is it? Have you heard any news of Gussy yet?"

"No. We're going to look for him."

"Good."

"Mr. Railton has left it in our hands," said Tom Merry. "Two or three of us are to go, and find the pair of silly asses, and bring them back. Would you care to come?"

"Rather," said Figgins promptly.

"We can't take a crowd in case he spots us and gives us the slip," exclaimed Blake. "We three can manage the affair, I think."

"I should say so," assented Figgins. "I'll come with pleasure."

"Good! Come down to the gate immediately after dinner, then, and we'll be outside in the lane. Shove some grub in your pocket."

"I'll remember."

And the rivals of St. Jim's parted very cordially. Figgins was prompt to his appointment. After the juniors' midday dinner, the New House lad turned up at the gate, and found Tom Merry and Blake already there. The Co. were on the cricket-field, and for the moment the three leaders were not missed.

"By the way, which way are we going?" asked Figgins, as he joined the School House boys. "I haven't the faintest idea."

"But I have!" said Tom Merry. "Gussy is gone to Blackberry Green to look for a chap who isn't lost, and we're going to Blackberry Green to look for Gussy."

"But where is Blackberry Green?"

"About twenty miles up the line. I've looked it out in the timetable. You take the train to Fernfield, and then walk a couple of miles."

"That won't hurt us."

"Rather not! There's a train leaves Rylcombe for Fernfield in twenty minutes, so we shall do it all right."

And the juniors strode down the lane. They caught the train at Rylcombe, and alighted from it at Fernfield. There they inquired of the stationmaster, who well remembered the two juniors he had directed to Blackberry Green in the middle of the previous night.

"They're the two!" said Tom Merry, as they left the station. "There's no doubt that the two chaps here last night were Gussy and Skimpole."

"None at all," said Figgins.

"It's plain sailing now. We've only got to hoof it to Blackberry Green and inquire for Gussy at the inn. He must have had a feed somewhere, and so they'll have seen him there. That's the programme."

"Right-oh!" said Blake. "Best foot forward."

A couple of miles on a sunny day was nothing to the three champion athletes of the junior Forms at St. Jim's. They arrived in Blackberry Green—without losing their way as the amateur detectives had done—quite fresh and fit, and proceeded straight to the village inn to inquire for Arthur Augustus.

CHAPTER 15.

Run Down!

D'ARCY gave a sudden jump as he sat at the window of the inn in Blackberry Green; for the voice that floated up from below was the voice of Tom Merry of the Shell at St. Jim's.

"Here's the inn, chaps! I'm pretty dry, too!"

Read "The Boys' Herald."

Great Scout Story and New Competitions just starting!

THURSDAY: A TALE OF TOM MERRY. "Skimpole's Crusade." AND A STORY OF ALAN WAYWARD. "Alan's Fox."

"Let's get inside," said Blake's voice. "We'll have some ginger-pop, and then inquire for Gussy."

"Right-oh!" said Figgins.

The three passed into the inn. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy sat petrified for a minute. The juniors of St. Jim's were evidently after him, and they were close on his track.

"Bai Jove!" murmured D'Arcy. "This is what I wegard as extremely wotten! Fanny the wascally boundahs havin' the cheek to follow me in this mannah! What the dickens am I to do?"

The swell of St. Jim's jumped up, in a very perturbed frame of mind.

In his calculations he had remembered that he might be searched for from the school, but he had had no doubt of his ability to elude any master who came to look for him, especially as he did not suppose that any of the masters would guess his destination.

But with the juniors it was different.

They had clearly come to fetch him back, and it would not be so easy to dodge three active and determined juniors as it would be to escape a more ponderous and dignified Form-master.

At the thought of being taken back to St. Jim's like a naughty boy, the blood of all the D'Arcys boiled in the veins of the amateur detective.

"Bai Jove! I will give them a fearful thwashin' if they wowry me!" he murmured. "They weally deserve a severe hidin' for comin' and inteww' tin' my investigations in this mannah." But, bai Jove! I can't very well thwash the three of them at once. I must think of s'ethin' else."

It would have been easy to slip downstairs and escape by the back of the house, while the juniors were discussing their ginger-pop at the front, if he had been in a fit state to go.

But, apart from the fact that his clothes were not yet dry, it would take him some little time to dress, and, before that the searchers would have inquired of the landlord and learned that he was on the premises. In fact, they might come up at any moment. Every sound in the inn might be the footstep of Tom Merry on the stairs.

At the thought Arthur Augustus scuttled across the room to the door, and turned the key in the lock. The door was a ponderous old-fashioned one of oak, and the lock equally massive, so, for the present he was safe. Though, as a matter of fact, it would not advantage him much to be besieged in his room. Still, it was a respite, and gave him time to think.

"Bai Jove, what's a fellow to do?" he murmured. "It is like their fearful cheek to come here aftah me, but the point is that they have come. I shall certainly no longah wegard Blake as a friend."

There was a sound on the stairs. D'Arcy stood just inside the door, draped in the blanket, and listened with beating heart. The footsteps stopped outside.

"Is this the room?"

It was Tom Merry's voice on the landing.

"That's the room, sir. The young gentleman is staying in there while his clothes is a-drying. He got a ducking some where."

"Thank you, landlord!"

There was a knock at the door.

D'Arcy stood still his heart beating, but an extremely determined expression upon his face. The handle was tried immediately after the knock, but the door, of course, did not open. Arthur Augustus smiled silently.

"Knock again!"

"Hallo, in there!"

D'Arcy did not reply.

"Hallo, in there! Gussy! D'Arcy! Do you hear?"

Still the swell of St. Jim's did not speak. He had a faint hope that the juniors would think they were mistaken, and pass on. But the next moment there came a thundering shower of blows on the panels, and Blake and Figgins joined their voices to Tom Merry's.

"D'Arcy!"

"Gussy!"

"Fathead!"

"Open this door!"

"Do you hear? Open this door, you young ass!"

"We've found you, Gussy! It's no good dodging any more. You've got to come back to St. Jim's. Open this door!"

D'Arcy bent his head to speak through the keyhole.

"I wefuse to do anythin' of the sort."

"Hallo! So you're there!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Are you going to open this door?"

"Certainly not!"

"We want to come in!"

"I'm afraid the want is all on your side, deah boys. You are not comin' in," said Arthur Augustus. "Pway go away!"

This continual knocking at the door is disturbin' to my twain o' thought, and thwows me into a fluttah!"

"You young ass!"

"I wefuse to be addressed as a young ass!"

"Open this door!"

"Wats!"

"We've come to take you back to St. Jim's."

"I absolutely wefuse to be taken back to St. Jim's."

"Look here, if you don't open the door we shall bust it in," exclaimed Tom Merry.

"I weally think you will not be able to bust it in, Tom Mewwy, and it is extremely impwob. that the landlord would allow you to damage his pwoperty in such a mannah."

"Look here, Gussy, the game's up!" called out Blake. "You've played the giddy goat quite long enough. You've got to come back."

"I decline to come back!"

"You will get a licking for bolting like that. You will get a worse one if you don't come back at once."

"When I weturn with the missin' heir the doctah will have no alternative but to look ovah any slight iwwegulawity in my pwoceedings, Blake."

"Ass! The missing kidlet has been found."

"Wats!"

"I tell you he has been found! He was found long ago, before you started out on this rotten fathead detective business."

"I must wefuse to cwedit that statement."

"Mr. Railton told us so!" called out Tom Merry.

"Mr. Waitton was pwobably mistaken."

"He saw it in the 'Daily Mail'."

"Pewwaps the weportah was misinformed!"

"You obstinate young ass!" roared Figgins.

"I wefuse to be called an obstinate young ass! Unless you address me in a more wewspectful mannah, I shall decline to hold any conversation with you."

"We'll bust the lock!"

"Pway do so, if you can, deah boys! I weally wegard it as a difficult task, but I am quite willin' to see you twy."

Figgins did not try. He knew perfectly well that it was hopeless to attempt to break in either the lock or the door with the means at his disposal, even if the landlord of the inn did not interfere, as he would, in all probability.

Arthur Augustus examined his clothes. They were very nearly dry, and the underclothing was sufficiently aired to be put on. The swell of St. Jim's began to dress himself. The juniors outside knocked savagely at the door.

"D'Arcy! Gussy!"

"Pway go away, deah boys. You are disturbin' my wewfections."

"If you don't open the door, we'll camp down outside it, and then you won't be able to get away, so you may as well chuck up the sponge at once."

"I wefuse to chuck up the sponge!"

"You young ass! Where is Skimpole? Is he in there?"

"He is not in here."

"Then where is he?"

"I weally do not know. I parted company with Skimpole some time ago. He was not sufficiently wewspectful to me."

"Are you going to open this door?"

"Certainly not!"

There was a muttering of voices outside, and then footsteps on the stairs. The juniors of St. Jim's had retired for the time baffled. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy chuckled, and went on with his dressing.

"The wotten boundahs!" he murmured. "They can camp out there if they like. I shall wait till it is dark, and then climb out of the window on to the beasty wwoof, and escape down the back. They can wait as long as they like, the beasty boundahs."

And the swell of St. Jim's chuckled again.

CHAPTER 16.

On the Watch!

TOM MERRY, Blake, and Figgins descended the stairs. The June dusk was falling over the landscape, and the shadow of the big oak-tree lengthening before the inn. The juniors called for a fresh supply of ginger-pop, and sat down at the table outside the inn, under the tree, and produced their packets of sandwiches. They were hungry, and they fell to with a good appetite.

"The obstinate young rotter!" Tom Merry exclaimed. "He might as well give in, as he can't get away. But it's something to have run him to earth, anyway."

"We've got him safe here," Figgins remarked. "He can't get away, unless he climbs out of the window; and as that would soil his trousers, he's pretty safe."

"Ha, ha! Yes."

"But I wonder where Skimpole is," Tom Merry remarked. "We've found only one of the two idiots."

"I expect he's not far off. As soon as we've had a feed one

of us had better stay here to look after Gussy, while the other two go and hunt for Skimpy. We ought to get back to the school before calling-over, if we can."

"That won't be possible, unless Gussy gives in."

"And he won't," said Blake, shaking his head. "I never met such an obstinate young mule in my life. We sha'n't be home till pretty late, I expect. Still, Railton knows where we are, so it won't much matter. As for Skimpy—"

"Talk of angels," said Figgins, "and you hear the rustle of their giddy wings. Look there!"

He pointed with his sandwich. A dusty and tired-looking figure was coming towards the inn. It was the amateur Socialist of St. Jim's. Skimpole had evidently had a hard afternoon of it.

He caught sight of the juniors sitting at the table outside the inn, but the sight did not alarm him. He came straight on and sat down on the bench.

"Have you got any ginger-pop to spare?" he said. "I am fearfully dry."

Tom Merry pushed a full glass across to him. Skimpole drank it in a way that showed how thirsty he was.

"Thank you," he said; "that is good. What are you fellows doing so far from St. Jim's? It's a rather long run for a half-holiday."

"Oh, we came over to look for a pair of escaped-lunatics," said Tom Merry.

Skimpole looked puzzled.

"I don't quite understand."

"You are one, and D'Arcy is the other."

"You were looking for me?"

"Yes, and we've found you now," said Figgins, getting a little closer to Skimpole and linking his arm in the amateur detective's. "Got the silly ass."

"Good!"

"What do you mean?" said Skimpole. "I am not responsible for my actions to you."

"I know you're not responsible for your actions," agreed Tom Merry. "That's why we have come over to fetch you back to St. Jim's."

"I shall certainly not go back to St. Jim's with you. I am here on detective business, looking for the missing heir."

"Oh, he's been found."

"Found! Do you mean to say that D'Arcy—"

"D'Arcy rats! The lost kid was found before you left St. Jim's. It was in the 'Daily Mail'."

"Dear me!" said Skimpole. "We seem to have had a great deal of trouble for nothing."

"And to have given a great deal."

"That was unfortunately necessary, and as a sincere Socialist, I cannot pay any regard to the trouble I cause others in doing what I conceive to be right."

"And, as a sincere ass, you'll get a licking when you get back to the school," Figgins remarked.

"A true Socialist is always prepared to face persecution, and, if necessary, to endure martyrdom for the sake of duty."

"Oh, rats!"

"If you assure me that the missing heir is found, I have no objection to going back to the school," said Skimpole. "I admit that I should like a square meal. I had a sovereign from D'Arcy, but it has all gone in expenses in pursuing my inquiries. I have had rather a hard day of it. It seems now that my expenses will not be paid, as the reward, I suppose, is no longer offered."

"Of course it isn't, ass."

"That is rather hard cheese. Does any one of you fellows feel inclined to stand me a solid feed just now?"

The fellows were grimly silent.

"If not," said Skimpole, "I may as well return to the school as soon as possible, as my investigations as a detective are no longer required in this case."

"You'd better," said Tom Merry.

"Will you lend me my railway fare?"

"Yes, ass. You can have a couple of sandwiches. I dare say they'll let you have a bit of supper as well as a licking at the school."

"Thank you, Merry. I see you have half a dozen sandwiches left. I will take them all if you don't mind. I am very hungry."

The amateur detective calmly finished up all there was to eat and drink left on the table, the juniors watching him in curious silence. Skimpole rose at last with a sigh of contentment.

"I feel much better now," he remarked. "By the way, where is D'Arcy?"

"He's in the inn, and he won't come out."

"Have you told him the missing heir is discovered?"

"Yes, but the obstinate young ass won't believe it."

"I say, it's honest Injun, isn't it?" asked Skimpole.

"Honour bright."

"It's rather a disappointment. I intended this case to make my name ring through the length and breadth of the land."

"Well, your voice will ring through the length and breadth of the School House when Mr. Railton starts the flogging," said Blake consolingly.

"Really, Blake—"

"Oh, travel along! You make me tired."

Skimpole disappeared in the dusk. The grinning juniors rose from the table.

"That's one ass caught and sent home," said Blake. "Now let's go up and have another jaw with Gussy. He may be tired of staying in his room by this time."

The juniors ascended the stairs again. Tom Merry knocked loudly at the door of the room tenanted by the swell of St. Jim's.

"Gussy! Hallo, there!"

"Hallo, deah boys! I came back through the keyhole."

"Are you going to open this door?"

"Certainly not."

"We've found Skimpole. He's given in and gone back to school!" called out Tom Merry.

"Woally!"

"Yes, ass."

"I really do not care what Skimpole has done, Tom Mowwy. I refuse to go back to the coll. until I have found the missin' heir and weceived the hundwed pounds weward."

"I tell you the kidlet was found long ago."

"Wats, I—"

"Will you open this door?"

"No, I won't."

"Well, we'll wait for you, you young waster, and we'll make it warm for you."

"You can wait if you like, you wottahs. I weward you as a set of impertinent boundahs, and I no longer regard you as friends. Pway clear out, and don't disturb my twain of thought."

The juniors, breathing vengeance, descended the stairs again. The swell of St. Jim's was evidently neither to be convinced nor persuaded.

"We'll wait for the obstinate bounder," said Blake, "and when we get hold of him, if I don't bash his hat over his eyes, you can use my head for a footer."

And that was all the consolation the juniors of St. Jim's had as they waited.

CHAPTER 17.

On the Tiles!

D'ARCY was waiting, too waiting for the darkness to grow, so that he could make his attempt to escape from the window. To make the attempt while the light lasted was to court failure. If he were seen, his escape could easily be cut off. After dark he had a good chance of getting away unseen and unsuspected. He chuckled to himself as he thought of the feelings of Tom Merry & Co. when they found that the bird was flown!

Darker grew the sky. D'Arcy knew that there would be a moon that night, and so, when darkness had once set in, there was no time to waste. The swell of St. Jim's left a half-sovereign on the table, with a note to the landlord. What his bill would come to he did not know, but he knew that that would cover it and to spare. He opened the window silently and cautiously to its fullest extent, and put his head out.

The glimmer of light from the inn windows below was mostly shut off by the thick, heavy branches of the big oak. The darkness was quite thick enough to hide the climber, and, in fact, a little more light would have been acceptable to render his climb easier. But to escape undetected was the great desideratum. Arthur Augustus got out on the window-sill, and stood upright, holding to the brickwork.

The inn was a little, old-fashioned building, and climbing to the roof was not a difficult task. Arthur Augustus had scanned the wall before dark, and knew just how it lay. The roof was only a foot above the top of his window, at the edge, and there was a strong gutter and a rain-pipe. Close to the window was a buttress of the wall, and in the angle where the buttress joined the wall was the big, clamped rain-pipe. The climb would have been a child's task in the daylight. After dark it was more difficult, but D'Arcy accomplished it. He gave an inward groan as his trousers rubbed against the rusty, weather-stained pipe. But those precious garments had already been almost ruined by the soaking in the well and the drying before the fire, and a little further damage did not count for much.

"Here I am, bat Jove!" murmured D'Arcy, as he drew himself up on the roof and crawled up to the brick ridge where the chimney-stacks stood out in a black mass against the sky. "I wathah fancy those boundahs are not up to this. It weally is no good their puttin' their bwains against mine. There are vewy few bwains like mine at St. Jim's."

He crawled closer to the chimney. The moon was glimmering from behind a bank of clouds, and when the rays got fairly through, it would be very light. But light was welcome to Arthur Augustus now. He was not in sight from the ground, and there was no longer danger of being observed, unless, of course, Tom Merry & Co. suspected his design, and looked for him on the roof.

"Bai Jove, I fancy I have done the wottahs this time," murmured D'Arcy. "They could get out on the roof through the twapdoor if they smelled a wat, but they don't smell a wat. They're not quite up to my form in this sort of thing."

The next moment D'Arcy's self-satisfaction received a shock. There was a slight sound on the roof, on the other side of the chimney-stack.

The swell of St. Jim's gave a start.

"My hat!" he murmured, "what's that?"

He crouched close to the stack and listened intently, with bated breath.

There was a sound again—the sound, as it seemed, of a moving body brushing against the brickwork as it crept cautiously close to the chimney-stack.

"The wottahs!" murmured D'Arcy. "They're on the roof."

He remained quite still, and listened intently.

There was no sound now. Probably the other person, on the other side of the chimney-stack, was listening intently, too.

D'Arcy craned his neck to look round the stack. But, without quitting his place of safety, he was unable to see round it. He heard a faint sound that seemed to indicate that the stranger was doing the same.

"You wottah!" growled D'Arcy. "You uttah wottah! You think you've got me, do you?"

There was no reply.

"Oh, you needn't keep silent, you feahful wottah!" said D'Arcy. "I know you're there. But understand me once and for all, you beast, I wufuse to go back to St. Jim's. I uttably wufuse to do anythin' of the sort!"

Still no reply from the mysterious lurker on the other side of the chimney-stack.

"You wottah!" howled D'Arcy, getting exasperated. "Why don't you speak, you silly ass? I tell you I know you're there, and I uttably wufuse to come back."

"Mee-ow-wow-yw-wywww!"

D'Arcy gave a violent start.

"Bai Jove!"

"Mee-iaou-iaou—wow—wow—wow!"

"Bai Jove! It's a beastly cat!"

"Mee-iaou-iaou—wow!"

It certainly was a cat. D'Arcy blushed in the gloom. He realised that his defiant remarks had been addressed to a feline Ramco on the tiles, who was doubtless surprised and indignant at the junior's invasion of his domain.

"Bai Jove!"

There was the sound of a voice below, under the tree. It was the voice of Tom Merry.

"My hat! He's on the roof! I heard his voice distinctly."

"So did I. He must have climbed out of the window."

D'Arcy could have kicked himself. The game was up now, with a vengeance. He had given himself away, by his argument with the cat.

"How are we to get him down?"

"That's all right," said a deep voice. "I've got my blunderbuss here, young gentlemen. If he won't come down, I'll fire. Hi, there! Come down off the roof!"

D'Arcy gave a gasp. He might or might not have been exposed to fire from below, as he sat astride of the ridge, but he was not inclined to risk it.

"Stop!" he yelled. "Pway don't shoot, you howlin' ass!"

"Then come down at once," said the deep bass voice.

"I will certainly come. I have no desire to remain on this roof, but wemembah, Tom Mewwy, I wufuse to return to St. Jim's!"

"Come down!" repeated the deep voice.

"I'm comin'."

"Come down the rain-pipe. If you try to get in at the window again I shall let fly. Better be quick, as this blunderbuss might go off if I jerk it."

"Tom Mewwy, I call upon you to westwain that silly ass!"

"Then come down."

"I'm comin', you wottahs!"

There was no help for it. If D'Arcy had defied the blunderbuss he could have been assailed by means of the trap in the roof. He climbed down the rain-pipe, and stood on the ground, looking extremely dirty and indignant.

"Got him!" shouted Figgins, grasping the swell of St. Jim's by the shoulder.

"Pway don't put your paws on me, Figgins. Where is that wottah with the blundahbuss?"

"Here I am," said Figgins, in the deep bass voice which had deceived D'Arcy.

Arthur Augustus gave a start.

"Figgins! You wottah! It was you playin' a twick all the time."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Come along," said Tom Merry, linking his arm in D'Arcy's.

"Back to St. Jim's."

"Wats! I uttably wufuse to go back to St. Jim's. I am goin' to pursuo my beastly investigations!"

"Are you coming, or shall we have to carry you?"

"I wufuse to come. I uttably wufuse. I—"

"Very well. We'll hire a trap of the landlord here, and tie you up behind it like a led horse, and drive back to the school," said Tom Merry. "Anything for a quiet life."

"I should wufuse."

"You won't have any choice in the matter."

"Wathah than be tweated in such an extremely diswespctful way, I will weturn with you to the coll," said D'Arcy, "and I will give my pawole to that effect. But I weserve the wight to give you all a feahful thwashin' to-morrow."

"I think we'll risk that, Gussy. Come along."

And a few minutes later, Tom Merry & Co. were on the return journey to St. Jim's, with the amateur detective in their midst.

Mr. Railton smiled grimly as he looked from the door of the School House into the moonlit quad, about ten o'clock that evening. The hack from Rylecombe had just driven up, and four juniors alighted from it. The moonlight glimmered upon the battered silk hat of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, and the housemaster knew that the fugitive had returned.

"Thank you, Merry, and you, Blake and Figgins," said Mr. Railton. "You may go to your dormitories. Skimpole has returned, and I have dealt with him. D'Arcy, you may follow me to my study."

"I would wathah go to bed, sir, if you have no objection. I am wathah fatigued."

"Follow me to my study!" thundered Mr. Railton.

"Certainly, sir," said D'Arcy, with a jump; "if you make a point of it."

And he followed the housemaster.

"Now, sir," said Mr. Railton, taking up a cane, "what have you to say for yourself?"

"I weally left the coll. with the best intentions in the world, sir," said D'Arcy, with a wary eye on the cane. "I wished to discovah a long-lost chap and westore him to his sowwown' p'wents."

"The child has been found, and was found before you left the school."

"There is pwobably some mistake about that."

"There is no mistake, D'Arcy. But you must learn that it is not allowed to leave the school as you have done, even with the best intentions in the world."

"Yes, but—"

"Hold out your hand."

"But, weally—"

"Hold out your hand."

"Certainly, sir, if you insist."

The housemaster tried not to smile. D'Arcy had six on each hand, and hard ones, too. He wriggled a little, but made no audible complaint.

"Now you may go," said Mr. Railton. "And remember in future, D'Arcy, that the rules of a school are not made to be broken. Good-night."

"Good-night, sir," said D'Arcy, as cheerfully as he could.

Blake was waiting up for him when he entered the Fourth Form dormitory.

"How did you get on with Railton, Gussy?" he asked.

"Wathah wottely, Blake. Six on each beastly hand."

"You would have got a flogging if it had been the New House master," said Blake. "Railton has let you down lightly, because we fetched you back so soon. You can thank me for having got off so easily, you young ass."

"Pewwaps so," said D'Arcy. "Of course, if the missin' heir is weally discovahed, it would be no use pursuin' my investigations. Upon the whole, I am vewwy sleepy, and I'm not sowwy to get to bed, deah boy. Upon weflection, I think it would pewwaps be wathah a bore to be an amateur detective, so I shall give it up for the pwesent."

And he did.

THE END.

Next Thursday!

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SPLENDID NEW TALE OF CIRCUS LIFE.



Joe Throws Up His Job—He Meets Jim the Acrobat.

JOE was an office-boy—that is to say, he had lately become one. His father had been a farmer in a large way, and when he died Joe's uncle, the executor, sold the farm, kept all the money he conveniently could, and put Joe into an office in Gresham House, in the City of London. And Joe hated it just as much as a country-bred lad, used to riding wild horses and in other ways enjoying himself, could hate such a life.

When he told his uncle how he hated it, that worthy threatened to kick him into the street and leave him to starve if he did not stick to it; which was rather rough on Joe, seeing that his father had left a comfortable little fortune and had trusted his brother implicitly, for which reason Joe was now a sufferer.

He was a strongly-built lad, with an honest, sunburnt face, for the London smoke and fogs had not yet effaced his tan. He was rather slow in his movements, and abnormally stolid in his manner. Joe was not the sort of lad to show much respect for any man, especially if he did not feel it. That he felt none for anyone in that office is not to be wondered at, for when the head bullied the manager—which was not infrequent—the manager bullied the clerks, and everyone in the office bullied Joe.

The manager's name was Parks. He was a pompous, fat man, with a beast of a temper. He was very haughty to the clerks, and very subservient to his employer.

A gloomy day was drawing to a close. It had been raining and misty since early morning, and now the lamps were lighted in the dingy office. The clerks kept glancing at the manager, seated at his table. They were supposed to leave at half-past five, but it depended on Parks's temper and his private arrangements. On this special occasion he was going to the theatre, and he did not intend to leave the office till a quarter to seven, but the unfortunate clerks did not know that. They only feared that there might be some such appointment, because Parks was a bigger swell than ever; and that was saying a good deal.

"Boy!" he bawled.

Joe fondly imagined that it was the customary order to put the books away, and he shut his call-book up without the preliminary of using blotting-paper. Two seconds later that book was in the safe; so was a day-book, which one of the clerks had been busy with. Three letter-books followed it, and then Joe became aware that Parks was glaring at him through his gold-rimmed spectacles.

Parks was a baldheaded man, with a fringe of white hair, and white whiskers, shaped like parsnips; and, as his brows were still black, he wore rather a formidable appearance.

"Boy!"

"What?"

"How dare you answer me in that insolent manner? How dare you put those books away?"

"Because I thought you wanted me to."

"Then you should not think. An empty-headed, wooden-headed boy like you will do more harm than good by thinking."

The clerks enjoyed this immensely. They laughed aloud. One of them got off his stool and stamped about a little; but then he intended to ask for a rise on the morrow, and his request would have to go through the manager. It was a rule of the office, because the poor wretch generally waited three months before mentioning the matter again, and then the manager would inform him that he had not found a

suitable opportunity to mention the matter to the great man. It gave time and saved money.

Mr. Parks thought his sarcasm caused the laughter, so he tried a little more.

"Office-boys are not supposed to think. They—they have not the capacity. Put some more coal on my fire and refill my ink-bottle. Wash it out."

However funny this sarcasm might have been, it caused no laughter. The clerk who had shown the most exuberant joy got on his stool again and muttered a word that sounded very much like "Rotter."

Joe did not care much. It mattered little to him whether he spent the evening with his uncle or in the office. He shot the remains of the scuttle of coal on the fire and, grabbing the large inkpot, took it to the bottom of the safe, where the ink was kept.

"Boy!"

"Hallo!" cried Joe, slopping some ink on the floor and some more over his hand.

"Wash that bottle out, you empty-headed, stupid, country bumpkin!"

There was no laughter now—the clerks were too savage—because they knew from past experience that the orders meant stopping late; and nothing they hated more, unless it was the manager.

Joe obeyed, and, having filled the inkpot with ink, placed it on the manager's table on the left-hand side, because it was nearest to him.

"Oh, you wooden-headed boy!" snarled Parks. "Put it the other side!"

Joe reached in front of the great man, raised the inkpot, then there was a cracking sound. The glass to the gas, which was immediately over the manager's head, had burst, and a large piece of the nearly red-hot glass dropped on the great man's bald pate; another piece fell on Joe's hand.

It was quite an accident, but it looked just as though Joe had hurled the inkpot into Parks's face with a force that knocked him backwards to the floor.

Joe certainly had slapped the inkpot into Parks's face, but it was only because the lad had a piece of red-hot glass on the back of his hand. In the same way Parks, in a vain endeavour to escape the red-hot glass on the top of his crown, had toppled backwards.

Being a heavyweight, he smashed the back of his office chair—and he must nearly have smashed the back of his head—on the floor. But this was not the worst of it. He received about half a pint of best black ink over his face, whiskers, and shirt-front.

This was enough to vex any man who was going to the theatre, but Joe made matters worse.

He gazed at the fallen manager for a moment, then the comic side of the scene struck him and he burst into a howl of laughter, while the clerks nearly choked themselves in their efforts to suppress their merriment.

Parks struggled to his feet, and, being an exceedingly bad-tempered man, he seized the ruler and caught Joe a crack over the head with it that caused him to see stars.

Now Joe was not the sort of lad who would submit to being hit with impunity—and a ruler. He was by no means a quick thinker, but this was a case where quick action—if not quick thought—were indispensable, because Parks raised the ruler for a second blow.

A quick-witted lad might have taken consequences into consideration and retreated, though he would certainly have received a second crack had he done so. Joe found the first

one quite enough for him, and the only way that occurred to him to avoid a repetition was to duck his head and charge it full force into Parks's waistcoat. This had the effect of causing the manager to sit on the splinters of his chair and howl. He was not of such physique as would enable him to take one in the wind with any degree of comfort.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Joe, seizing the ledger-clerk's ruler, which was a long one. "I hope you have hurt yourself, you beast. Ha, ha, ha! You are in a jolly mess, too. I hope the boss will sack you for getting into that disgraceful state, you twopenny-halfpenny jumped-up sausage. You fellows are a lot of miserable curs to put up with a beast like that. I'm going. I don't know where, but I won't work in an office like this. Do you think I'll knuckle under like that bully does to the boss? He's all 'Yes, sir—no, sir' to him, and he treats you fellows like doormats. Who is he, I would like to know, with all his airs? After all, he's only a clerk like you, only he has got more bounce. Well, just you touch me, you bloated bully!"

Parks was in such a state of fury that he accepted the invitation. Springing to his feet, he made another blow at Joe's head; but that worthy darted aside and caught him one over the knuckles that caused him to drop the ruler and dance about the office, howling with pain.

Joe flung the ruler on the floor, put on his cap, and left the office. And that is how he ceased to be an office-boy and, for the first time in his life, felt the pangs of hunger.

To go home was not to be thought of, and as he had only a few pence in his pocket, the prospect of facing the world with that capital was not alluring. However, that is what he decided to do.

He made his way northwards, and disposed of his capital at a coffee-house, then he wondered what on earth he should do next. He could come to no conclusion, except that under no circumstances would he go home.

London had no charms for him, so he determined to get into the country; and so he walked on until the rows of houses gave place to fields. That night he slept beneath a haystack, thereby rendering himself liable to imprisonment, but he was up so early the following morning that no one caught him.

It was about as miserable a day as it well could be. A drizzling rain was falling and the country was blurred in a thick haze; while, to add to the wretchedness of the thing, Joe was very hungry. However, as he was now penniless, it was not much good thinking about that.

At about midday he reached a spot where there were three turnings, and, as he did not know the places to which they led, he hesitated as to which lane to take; and he was still hesitating, when he saw a lad of about his own age coming towards him at a run.

Directly the stranger caught sight of Joe he stopped, and glanced behind him, then Joe heard a man's voice.

"Stop thief!" roared the man, who carried a riding-whip. Joe was trying to make up his mind whether he would do so or not, when the strange lad decided the matter by charging down on him; and before Joe had quite made up his mind not to intervene, he found himself rolled on his back in the mud. But the lad also went sprawling, and, as he regained his feet, the man seized him by the collar and commenced to lash him with all his strength, which was considerable, for he was a tall, athletic fellow.

Joe decided quickly enough now. That sort of treatment reminded him of his uncle, a man whom he had good cause to hate. Joe determined to go to the lad's assistance, and he did so by seizing the man by one leg and hoisting it up with a suddenness that caused him to pitch on the grass at the side of the lane.

Joe had seen how cabmen keep a fallen horse still, and he thought it would be a good idea in this case; especially as the lad who had been lashed was too much hurt to render any assistance for the moment. He was writhing about and groaning a little, for the man had hit him heavily.

Joe knelt on the fallen man's head, and perhaps it was just as well that the ground was soft and muddy.

"Give him beans while I kneel on his head," growled Joe. "You can pay him back a bit."

"So I can—and so I will!" exclaimed the lad, wrenching the whip from the fallen man's hand.

"Mark my words, Jim," cried the ruffian; "if you touch me I will kill you!"

"Will you, really, Muerte?" observed Jim, raising the whip. "Then you will surely become a murderer, for this is how I'll touch you! Mind you hold him, old chap; he's dangerous!"

"He can't get up unless he breaks his neck," declared Joe. "Ha, ha, ha! He's getting it. Pr'aps he will know in future that a whip hurts!"

As the lash descended Muerte howled at the top of his

voice; but it was pretty evident that Jim had a lot to pay back, and he paid it back now.

Joe had all his work to do to keep Muerte down, for his struggles were of a desperate character.

"He will be savage when we let him up," observed Joe. "I think we had better bolt through that gap in the hedge."

"Right you are. I'll give him a good one for the finish."

That good one was most thorough, and it caused a wild howl of pain. Then the two youngsters darted away, and they were through a gap in the hedge before Muerte had regained his feet.

"What's your name, old chap?" inquired Jim, glancing at his new comrade.

"Joe."

"All right, Joe, you have done me a good turn, and I did you a bad one by bowling you in the mud. Still, I thought you were going to stop me, and if you knew how that brute has treated me for years past, you would understand how jolly anxious I was to get away. Here, you keep back, you brutal Spanish ruffian, or I will lash you like that."

Muerte was pushing through the gap, but Jim gave him a cut that quickly induced him to retreat.

"You young demon!" panted the infuriated man. "I will make you remember this to your dying day!"

"I shall remember it without any making," retorted Jim.

"Ha, ha, ha! If you only knew how funny you looked with Joe kneeling on your napper and me flogging you, you would quite understand how I should be certain to remember the incident. Try to come through again, you Spanish gipsy. I really don't see why they should allow such alien scum as you to come to a respectable country. You ought to be horsewhipped every day of your life, and I would like to do it. Perhaps in six years or so you might become a respectable member of society."

"I'll follow you up, you young blackguard!" snarled Muerte. "I don't care if it takes me days, but I'll track you down, and then—Ah; won't I flog you! I'll lash every bit of flesh off your vile back!"

"Do you think we could tackle the beast, Joe?" inquired Jim. "He deserves another hiding. He is supposed to be a strong man and a boxer, so the chances are we should get the worst of it."

"I think we had better let him have a few more tries to get through that gap," observed Joe. "Come on, Muerte, or whatever your name is. Have another try, and we will lash at you while you are making the attempt."

"Listen to me, Jim," snarled Muerte, showing his teeth, though he strove hard to suppress his fury. "If you choose to return with me now, I will pardon what has happened."

"Oh, you simple Spanish ruffian!" exclaimed Jim. "Do you think that I am such an idiot as to trust to your word, on the honour of a Spaniard? I don't know whether they are all liars, because I have only met one, and he was the greatest scoundrel on the face of the earth to my way of thinking. You have no honour, Muerte, and you are a thief. I have not told you these facts before for the reason that you must have known them, and because the chances are you would have hurt me if I had mentioned the facts; but you are really a very great scoundrel. I think you must have been born with a diseased brain; that is to say if you have one. I suppose you must have some sort of brain, the same as every vicious brute beast has, but yours wants training. You ought to be flogged two or three times a day; and if I had the flogging of you, you may take my word for it, it would be done thoroughly. Now, you silly, empty-headed Spanish gipsy, I am never coming back to your circus again. All that I have learnt there shall be for the benefit of some rival—and my own. I worked for you for my food. Now I am going to work for another man for wages, and there are plenty who will be glad to get hold of Jim the gymnast."

"Will they, you cur?" snarled Muerte. "We shall see about that. I shall have something to say in the matter. You are apprenticed to me."

"I was not a party to the arrangement, if it was ever made. You are such a liar that it is impossible to believe a word you say. In fact, when you tell me anything I always believe the reverse. That does not matter. The question is, what are you going to do?"

"Follow you to the end of the earth, and bring you back, little hound; and when I bring you back—well, remember this, I never forget or forgive an insult. You two little demons have insulted me—"

"And hurt you. I think we hurt you," observed Jim. "I know that I tried to do so, and it would grieve me greatly had I not succeeded. But by your howls, and by the tears that were streaming from your eyes, you were hurt. You always found it a difficult matter to make me howl, you Spanish beast, didn't you? But to make you howl was the easiest matter on the face of the earth. When in pain, howling comes as natural to you as it does to a little child."

Go away, Muerte. You make me feel ill. You are not a man. There is nothing manly in your conduct, which more resembles that of a brute beast; and I know of no beast who is as bad as you. Perhaps Spanish mules are."

"So! You speak to me thus!" cried Muerte, drawing a knife from his belt. "Do you know what I will do to you when I catch you?"

"Nothing with that knife. You are too frightened of the hangman over to become a murderer. Timidity is the one redeeming feature in your vile nature. It prevents you becoming a dangerous scoundrel. You are merely a cowardly scoundrel now. A creature who would lash a lad who had not the strength to retaliate; but if you met a man as strong as yourself, you would cringe to him, and treat him with respect—unless, of course, you got the opportunity of stabbing him in the back, or poisoning him without the chance of the hangman wringing your duck's neck. Look at his snarling face, Joe. Reminds you of a wolf with the colic. Ha, ha, ha! The silly idiot is coming after us. Well, let him come."

Muerte got through the hedge further along, and then he rushed at the two youngsters in a most furious way.

Fortunately they were both good runners; but they were nearly captured at the first hedge, and got considerably scratched in scrambling through it. Then Jim had a rest, while he chaffed their angry pursuer.

"You don't run much better than a duck, Muerte," said Jim. "Come through this hole, you silly scoundrel. You will find it far easier than lower down. I shall have to get Joe to sit on your head again while I ~~hog~~ you. Ha, ha, ha! You do look remarkably stupid puffing and blowing like that."

"Wait till I get you!" panted the infuriated man. "Only wait, and then I will give you a lesson that you will never forget. When I get you back, I will make your life a misery to you."

"What a nasty-tempered creature you are, Muerte," observed Jim, watching Joe, who, under cover of the hedge, was pulling up a large clod. "I wouldn't try to jump the hedge, if I were you. It is too high for you. Do come through this gap."

Muerte, muttering fierce threats, made his way along the hedge, in the hope of finding an opening, knowing that he would be at their mercy were he to attempt to push through the place where they stood.

Joe was watching his opportunity, and as Muerte stepped towards the hedge where it was lower, Joe hurled the clod at his head.

It caught him at the side of the head with a force that knocked his hat off.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Jim. "Bulls-eye first time. What a pity you did not knock his stupid head off his shoulders. I say, Joe, just watch him. He is going to jump the hedge at the corner where it is lower, but he hasn't looked this side."

"Don't laugh," murmured Joe. "We shall see some fun if he clears the leap."

Muerte did clear it; but he did not reckon on the ditch on the other side, which was now full of miry water.

He landed in about two feet of water, and as many more of mud, then he toppled over, and disappeared beneath the surface; and when he rose above the surface, black mire was streaming down his face, while the comrades' roars of laughter did not tend to improve his temper.

"Well, you are a dirty-looking clown, Muerte!" exclaimed Jim. "I never saw a man in such a disgusting state. You look more like a scarecrow than a Spanish brigand. You had better go home and wash yourself. You will never catch us, you miserable water-rat. Come on, Joe, it is no good listening to the idiot."

"I say," exclaimed Joe, when they had got some little distance, "here comes the farmer. Don't you think we had better hide behind the hedge? Because the probabilities are we are trespassing."

Jim did think so, and they scrambled through the hedge, and remained in hiding close to the spot where Muerte had tumbled into the ditch.

Presumably the farmer had not seen them, for he went up to Muerte, and commenced to give him a piece of his mind, which appeared to be more forcible than polite, but it amused the youngsters immensely.

"You dirty-looking, pudden-headed brute!" roared the farmer. "How dare you come trespassing on my ground and breaking down my hedges? I'll make you pay for this, just you see if I don't. You've spoilt the banks of that 'ere ditch. Here, come out of my ditch! I don't allow bathing here."

"Listen to me," snarled Muerte. "There is a boy in that hedge—at least, there are a couple of them. If you will help me to capture them I will give you a sovereign—half-a-

sovereign down, and the other half when we have caught them. It was they who broke your hedge down like that."

"Well, you are talking now, mate," growled the farmer. "We will catch 'em right enough, and I'll let 'em have a bit of this stick, too. I hate boys! The young brutes does more damage than enough. Where are they?"

"In that hedge."

They were not; for they bolted across a field sown with wheat; and judging by the way that farmer was howling, he did not like it. However, he followed, so did Muerte, and matters began to look very serious.

"The brutes mean catching us, if they can," panted Jim. "But we will give them the slip. Make for yonder barn. You follow me, and I'll show you how to dodge them."

What Jim feared was that they would meet some of the farmer's men sooner or later, and thus get stopped. The barn was at the corner of a field, close to the hedge. Jim darted towards the hedge, and burst his way through it, then he turned sharp to the right, burst his way through the hedge again, and got to the further side of the barn, where he was hidden from his pursuers.

"It's all right," he murmured. "We will get into the barn. It's the last place they will think of looking for us. This way."

The door was open, and they both slipped in, then ascended the ladder to the loft, from where they had a view of their pursuers, who were going across the next field for all they were worth.

It was a small grass field, so that footprints did not show, and Muerte evidently took it for granted that the fugitives had already crossed it and scrambled through the next hedge.

"You see, we are safe here for the present, and we can hide amongst this hay if anyone comes up. Have you got anything to do in this part?"

Joe told exactly what had happened to him, and it appeared to amuse Jim very much.

"I'm much in the same plight as you are," he said. "That is to say I'm penniless, homeless, and hungry. The question is, how are we to get any food?"

"I suppose the farmer's wife wouldn't give us any?" suggested Joe.

"Ha, ha! It would be too risky to ask her. You see her husband might return. No, I don't think that idea would work. What are you going to do for a living?"

"Haven't the slightest idea. What are you?"

"Join a circus. Look here, Joe, you stuck by me, and I'll do the same by you. Suppose we both join a circus?"

"I'd like it all right, only I can't do anything—except ride."

"Can you ride well?"

"Oh, yes! I've been used to it all my life."

"Do you think you could stick on a buck-jumping and kicking horse?"

"I'm pretty certain I could."

"Then we will see what can be managed. Mind you, I can get a job all right, because I have been at it ever since I can remember, and I shall make it a stipulation that you are engaged as well. You leave me to do the talking, because I understand these showmen better than you do. They are rather awkward chaps to deal with, but I dare say we shall be able to manage it. Now, I know where there is a circus, but it is an awful long way from here. I know one of the chaps at it. His name is Leo, and he can do almost anything. He used to be with Muerte once, only he couldn't stand the brute. You will like Leo. We shall have to get food on the journey; and the worst of it is Muerte will be following us up, because he's going to pitch his circus at the same place, to have vengeance on the other proprietor. However, we shall have a bit of a start, and ought to be able to travel faster than the circus. Hark! Here they come back. Seem to be coming this way, too!"

Jim drew back from the window, for Muerte and the farmer were coming directly towards the barn, and they were so close that it would not have been safe to have descended.

"Can you jump?" inquired Jim, opening the outer door of the loft and gazing down the height, which was considerable.

"Well, I can jump downwards," murmured Joe; "and seeing the ground is below us, I'm bound to reach it sooner or later. Whether I break my legs or not is another matter."

"If you do they will be bound to catch us, and then we shall get hurt."

"Shouldn't wonder, and I'm almost certain that I shall get hurt if I break my legs. They say the setting is the painful part of the business, and I quite believe them."

"P'raps those brutes won't look for us here," observed Jim, who was inclined to be optimistic.

"You may be right, old chap; although I'm most certain that you are wrong, for here they come."

"Wait till they get into the loft," said Jim, "then we will jump together and bolt as hard as we can go. You see, that will give us a fair start, and if we can't run as fast as Muerte, it's jolly certain we can run faster than that fat farmer. I don't think Muerte would dare to take this jump; but we shall find that out; for here he comes. Poor, old idiot, you are in a disgusting state! Ha, ha, ha! Did you like the flogging we gave you?"

Muerte roared out something in Spanish—English was not sufficiently expressive for his feelings—then he rushed at the two worthies, who immediately leapt from the barn.

"Have you broken your legs, Joe?" inquired Jim, as they darted across the field.

"I don't think so," answered Joe; "they seem to be working all right; but I'm jolly hungry!"

"We shall soon get over that difficulty."

"I don't see how, considering that we are both penniless."

"Oh, we will manage it somehow, if we can only escape that muddy brute! Through this hedge now!"

"I'm smashing it down a bit."

"Never mind that."

"I don't; but I'm inclined to think that the farmer will. Here they come."

They went over a few more fields, and then the pursuers gave up the chase as hopeless.

"We have got over that little difficulty," panted Jim, slackening his pace to a walk; "now we will tackle the next one. It's always well to take them one at a time, otherwise they are apt to frighten you. Now, let me see, we want to strike the lane first of all. Come this way, and we will do it."

It was not a difficult matter, but to find the means of getting food was; and even Jim saw obstacles in the way.

"There's a town not very far from here," he observed. "Of course, there would be plenty of places there where we could get food."

"All the same, we can't steal it, Jim."

"No, we can't do that, but I really don't see why we should not be able to earn it."

They walked on for a considerable distance, and Jim appeared to be quite confident of being able to get some food, although he did not appear to have the remotest idea as to how it was to be managed.

"Now, this is the town," he observed, as they came in sight of some houses. "If there were only more people about I might be able to get a bit by some aerobatic performances. You see, if we could get a good feed, we should be able to hold on till we found the circus. It's not very far ahead now. But the worst of it is that Muerte's circus will be coming up in the rear, so we are between two fires as it were. Let's try this grocer's shop. It looks as though a clean-up would do it good. Huggett is his name, we will soon find out what his nature is."

"Idle, I'd say," murmured Joe, as they entered a shop where a stout party was seated behind the counter reading a paper and smoking a pipe.

"Good-morning!" exclaimed Jim, in his most polite manner.

"What do you want?" growled the grocer.

"I believe you are in need of a couple of good, useful lads, and—"

"No, I ain't; and if I was I wouldn't choose you."

"Ah, you cannot always judge by appearances! Now, this is Joe, and I can give him the highest character that it is possible for a lad to receive."

"It would equal the character I can give to Jim," observed Joe. "You'll find him one of the best workers you ever saw."

"I never heard such cheek in all my born days!" gasped the astonished grocer. "Here's one young scamp giving the other one a character, and 'tother giving the first beauty a still better one! Why don't you tell me you are worth half-a-sovereign each a week, and will run the business for me?"

"It isn't for us to judge our value, Mr. Huggett," observed Jim. "What I would suggest is that you set us to work to thoroughly clean the shop, paint and all—make the place look like new, and bring you customers by the thousand."

"And what would you want for that job?"

"Sir, nothing. We do not ask for pay until you have engaged us. We should just clean down the shop according to your directions, and when it is all finished you could decide whether you would engage us or not, and we could decide whether it would answer our purpose to accept the situation. All we should need would be a bucket of hot water and a scrubbing-brush, with some soap, and there you are."

Huggett appeared to be wondering where he would be if

he allowed the pair to go slapdashing about his shop; but he certainly needed cleaning badly, so he thought it would be an excellent opportunity for getting it done for nothing. He had been there over a year and it had never been properly cleaned yet, nor was it ever likely to be if he had to do it.

He carefully took all the silver and coppers out of his till, which he locked, and then he told them to follow him to the kitchen, where he gave them the bucket of water. After that he set them to work, keeping an eye on them from his parlour.

Joe saw no earthly advantage in doing the work for nothing; but somehow he had a belief in Jim's resources, so he worked with a will.

"Clean about a quarter of the shop," whispered Jim. "Make the paint look nice. I'll take a turn when you are tired. I want to get down some of these jars and things."

Huggett was certainly pleased with the manner in which the work was commenced, and at one o'clock his dinner was brought from an eating-house, for he did not keep a servant.

Joe, in response to Jim's whispered instructions, got everything he conveniently could out of the window, while Jim was getting more from the shelves. Huggett could not see them from where he sat, so he came out.

"Why, you silly young vagabonds," he roared, "look at the mess you are making! Put them things back at once!"

"My dear sir," exclaimed Jim, "we want to scrub the shelves!"

"Well, scrub 'em, and put them things back! I shall be having customers in directly!"

"They will be pleased at seeing the shop so nice and clean. Now, my dear sir, I think before we do any more we will have some dinner, if it is all the same to you."

"You ain't going to leave this shop till you've cleared up that awful mess!"

"Certainly not. We will have dinner here. What have you got nice, now. Joe likes something substantial—so do I."

"You varmint!" roared the angry man. "You said as you didn't want no pay!"

"Certainly not. This is merely a sample of our work, and we don't charge for the sample. Look how beautifully clean that paint is—as far as Joe has done it. It is a credit to him."

So undoubtedly it was; but, as he had stopped short, the cleaned paint made the other look most frightfully dirty. And although he had cleaned a small portion of the floor, he had slopped water and soapsuds over the other portion. Then, again, the best part of Huggett's stock was on his counter.

"You shall have some food when you've finished."

"Thanks, my dear sir," exclaimed Jim, gazing calmly at him. "But we could not do any more work now without food. If it is all the same to you, we will have dinner now."

It was not all the same to Huggett. He did not want to give them any food at all; at the same time, he did not want his shop left in that state. He tried to make a compromise with a piece of bread and cheese, but Jim insisted on having as much bread and cheese as they required.

"It would be quite impossible for us to work without food. Boys never can," he said.

Huggett did not say what he thought, but he gave them a slice of bread each and a remarkably small piece of cheese. Then he found that he was compelled to give them more, and at last he told them to help themselves from the piece of cheese left—which was not large—while he went to finish his dinner, which was getting cold. When he came back he found that they had finished the loaf of bread and the cheese.

"I don't think much of your cheese, Huggett," observed Jim calmly; "the bread was all right. Now, what do you think of the sample of work?"

"Just you finish that off, my lad."

"Then I take it we are engaged?"

"Do you really? Well, you are mistook."

"Well, it is unfortunate. Still, you have seen a sample of Joe's work, which I must say is excellent. Don't you think so, Joe?"

"I never saw anything more beautifully done, except what you have done."

"You have seen a fair sample of our work, Huggett, and you have got it for nothing; which, I rather imagine, is very suitable to your disposition. You can't say that we haven't earned our bread and cheese. Good-morning!"

"No, you don't, you varmin't!" roared the angry man. "Just you finish cleaning that 'ere shop, or it will be the worse for you!"

"Our terms for finishing that would be a sovereign each," said Joe. "You see, we are rather good cleaners, and we charge accordingly."

Huggett uttered a roar, and, making a rush at Joe,

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