

TOM MERRY & CO. AFLOAT! The School Adventures of the
St. Jim's Boys at Sea.

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NEW SERIES

THE SCHOOL AFLOAT!

DOUBLE-
LENGTH
TALE OF
TOM MERRY
AND CO.

BY
MARTIN
CLIFFORD.



NO. 28.

VOL. 2.

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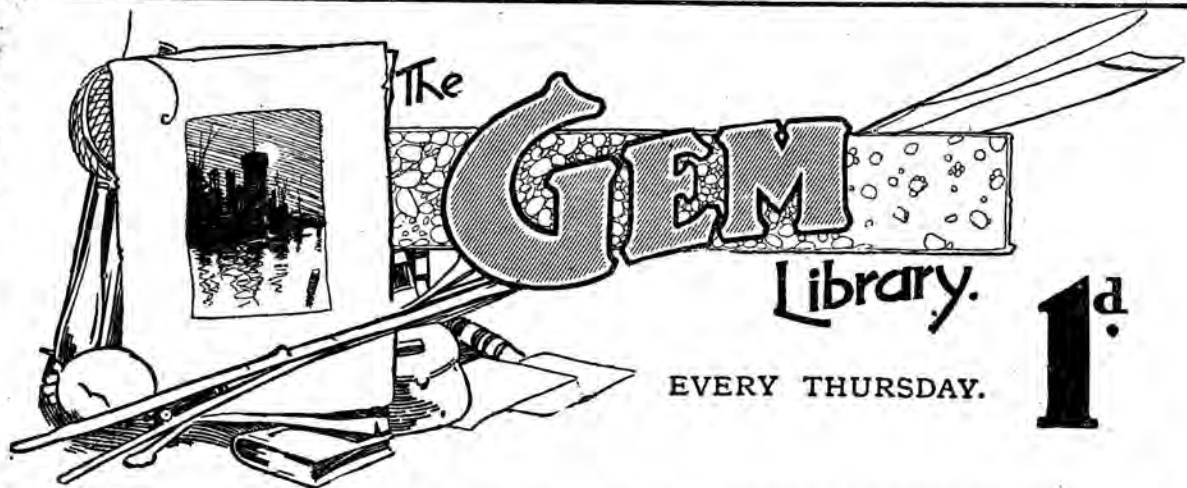
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Complete Stories for Everyone, and Every Story a Gem!



TOM MERRY & Co. AFLOAT.

A School Tale of the Boys
of St. Jim's.

By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

CHAPTER 1.

D'Arcy's Governor Does Not Come Up to the Scratch.

"TOM MEWWY!"

"Well hit, Blake!"

"Tom Mewwy!"

"Bravo!"

"Weally, Tom Mewwy, I wish you would pay me a little attention when I am makin' a wemark," said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, with some asperity in his tone.

Tom Merry looked round. He was standing by the pavilion, watching Jack Blake at the wicket on the junior cricket ground at St. Jim's, when Arthur Augustus tapped him on the shoulder.

"Hullo, Gussy! By Jove, there's Blake hitting out again! That's really ripping—good for three, at least—Kerr won't get the ball in time—"

"Tom Mewwy, will you pay me some attention?"

"Bravo! One—two—three! Didn't I say so, Gussy?"

"I weally did not notice what you said, Tom Mewwy. I considah—"

"My dear Gussy, how am I to pay you attention and watch Blake batting at the same time," said Tom Merry, in a tone of mild expostulation.

"It is a most important mattah."

"Well, go ahead then," said Tom Merry resignedly. "What is it? Have you thought out a new and really startling pattern in fancy waistcoats?"

"Nothing of the sort."

"Has your tailor sent in his bill?"

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—"

"Well, what is it then?"

"We are leaving St. Jim's to-morrow, Tom Mewwy, to go to sea for the vacation, and undah the circs—"

"Bravo, Blake!"

"I insist upon—"

"Well hit! Go on, Gussy! Do you think Figgins will get Blake's wicket?"

"I do not care a wap whethah Figgins gets Blake's wicket or not, Tom Mewwy. I have somethin' more important to think of than cwicket."

"Well, I'm waiting for you to explain," said Tom Merry, still with his eyes on the pitch, where Blake and Digby were running, and running again. "Ripping! The New House will have to sing small this time! That's two! Don't try it again—Kerr's got the ball."

"The ideah was mooted in Study No. 6 in the School House," went on Arthur Augustus, "of givin' a farewell feed in celebation of—"

"There's a tricky ball if you like. Figgins knows how to bowl."

"Hang Figgins—"

"With pleasure, if you like. Blake's stopped it all right, you see. What were you saying, Gussy—something about something, wasn't it?"

"Yaas, wathah! I was sayin' that the ideah was mooted of waisin' a subscription to give a farewell feed befoah we left St. Jim's—"

"By Jove! Look! Out!"

Figgins had sent in a ball with a twist on it that baffled the batsman, good as he was. There was a clatter of falling balls.

A DOUBLE-LENGTH TALE OF TOM MERRY & CO. NEXT THURSDAY.

No. 28 (New Series).

"How's that?" roared a score of voices belonging to juniors of the New House at St. Jim's.

"Out!"

Jack Blake made a grimace, and tucked his bat under his arm, and walked off. A cheer followed him. His wicket was down at last, but he had done very well for his side. He joined Tom Merry and Arthur Augustus D'Arcy outside the pavilion. Tom Merry gave him a slap on the shoulder in hearty appreciation.

"Good for you, Blake!"

"I wasn't quite ready for that last ball," said Blake, in a tone of explanation. "I thought it was going to be a wide."

"Looked like it. Figgins is awfully tricky sometimes."

"Oh, I suppose it was a fluke, you know. A bat can't be always looking out for flukes," said Blake.

Tom Merry laughed.

"If you think it wasn't a fluke—" said Blake.

"My dear chap, it was anything you like. It's not easy to stand up against Figgys when he's in form."

"Blake, deah boy—"

"What do you think, Gussy?" asked Blake, warmly. "Do you think—"

"I think it's a wippin' good ideah to give a farewell feed before we go to sea for the vac. on board the Condor—"

"Who's talking about going to sea? I was asking you your opinion of that ball—"

"I weally, was not watchin', deah boy," Blake grunted.

"I was just explainin' to Tom Merry," resumed Arthur Augustus, "that it was a wippin' ideah to give a farewell feed to celebrate the bweakin' up of St. Jim's. We are goin' to sea, the lot of us, for the whole of the August vac., and I should not be surprised if we do not return to St. Jim's. Things are vewy uncertain. Undah the cires., a weally wippin' feed is a good wheeze. I tried to waise a subscrition for the purpose, but it turned out to be imposs."

"Well, then, if it can't be done—"

"I wrefuse to admit defeat," said D'Arcy, with a great deal of dignity. "The ideah of a subscrition certainly turned out to be a fwoot, but I have had anothah ideah, and a weally much bettah one."

"Oh, go ahead."

"I have w'tten to my govannah to ask him to send me a tennah—"

"A what?"

"A ten-pound note, deah boy. I have explained the whole cires.—that we are all leavin' St. Jim's for a long time, pewwaps for evah. Undah the cires. he cannot do less than send me the tennah to stand a big feed to all the lowah forms."

Blake chuckled.

"I wish I had a governor who could be depended upon to send a tennah at short notice," he remarked. "It's a good idea in one way, Gussy, but I don't like sponging on you like this. I'd rather have the subscription."

"The subscription was a fwoot."

"Yes, that was because you tried to run it all on your own," said Blake. "If I take the matter in hand, it will be all right."

D'Arcy screwed his eyeglass into his eye, and turned it upon Jack Blake.

"I weally fail to perceive, Blake, how you could possibly wun the mattah bettah than I did," he said freezingly.

"There are lots of things you fail to perceive, Gussy; this is only one of them."

"Weally, Blake—"

"Anyway, we'll have the feed. We ought to do something to celebrate the occasion. I'm in favour of a general subscription."

"But I have w'tten to my govannah for a tennah."

"Well, if your governor sends the tennah, I suppose we ought to honour him by blueing it," said Blake thoughtfully. "What do you think, Tom Merry?"

"Certainly," said Tom Merry.

Arthur Augustus beamed.

"That's wight, deah boys. You can always wely upon me to tell you what's the pwopah thing to do. We can get a wippin' feed for ten pounds, and have all the lowah school chaps to it, in the Fourth Form dormitoway—"

"What a ripping wheeze," exclaimed Monty Lowther, joining the juniors. "The only doubtful point is, will your noble governor come down with the cash?"

"I have asked him particularly to do so, Lowthah."

"But he mayn't, all the same. Hallo, there's the postman—and by Jove, he's got a registered letter in his hand."

Arthur Augustus smiled.

"It is for me, deah boys, and there is a tennah in it."

"Let's see," said Blake.

"Yaas wathah! Come on."

The four juniors surrounded the postman. Blagg grinned amiably, with an eye to tips at the end of the term.

"That registahed lettah for me, Blagg?" asked D'Arcy.

"Yes, Master D'Arcy."

"Hand it ovah, thank you. What did I tell you, deah boys?"

"Any for me, Blagg?" asked Tom Merry.

"Sorry, none for you young gentlemen," said Blagg, and he

shouldered his bag, D'Arcy having signed for the letter, and went on towards the School House.

Tom Merry had taken the letter while D'Arcy was signing.

"Open it, deah boy," said the swell of the School House, with a wave of the hand, "you can wead it out to me."

Tom Merry opened the registered letter, while D'Arcy flicked some specks of dust from his immaculate trousers. A grin overspread the face of the hero of the Shell.

"Wead it out, deah boy."

"Certainly. 'My dear Arthur, as I sent you a five-pound note last week, I really do not see what you want with ten pounds now.'"

"That's just like the govannah," said D'Arcy, confidentially. "He always starts with a lecture."

"I am not rolling in money, as you seem to think—"

"Oh, that's wot! The gov. has lots of tin."

"And consequently I cannot see my way to sending you a ten-pound note—"

"Eh?"

"I enclose you one sovereign—"

"What?"

"Which I think will be quite sufficient.—Your affectionate father—"

"Bai Jove!"

"Here's the sovereign," said Tom Merry.

D'Arcy screwed his monocle tighter into his eye, and looked at the sovereign. That was all the cash there was in the letter.

"Bai Jove, I can't say that I approve of the govannah's taste in practical jokes," he murmured. "I wegard this as wotten."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"It's no laughing matter, Lowthah. This knocks our feed on the head."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I shall w'ite to the govannah and wemonstuate upon the tone of his lettah, but I am afraid this sounds as if he has made up his mind," said D'Arcy ruefully. "Bai Jove, I must say this is wathah wotten."

"Never mind," said Tom Merry, laughing. "We'll have the subscription after all."

"Yaas, that's the only thing to do, and I'll contwibute this sov. as a startah, at all events," said D'Arcy. "Bai Jove, you know, it is weally too bad of the govannah."

CHAPTER 2.

Tom Merry Packs Up!

ST. JIM'S was in a buzz of excitement and preparation. Dr. Holmes's new scheme had come as a surprise to the whole school, and most of the school welcomed it.

The idea of spending the August holidays together, afloat, instead of breaking up and scattering to the four corners of the kingdom as usual, was novel and attractive to most of the boys of St. Jim's.

Not all of them would be able to go on the cruise of the Condor.

There were some whose arrangements for the holidays were made, and could not be altered, and others who were prevented by various reasons from joining the cruise. But a very large proportion of the boys adopted the plan, and received the assent of their parents. Among them were all our old friends.

The Condor, now lying in Southampton Water, was a large steamer, and had been engaged in the Atlantic passenger traffic. There was ample accommodation aboard her for more than a hundred boys who had elected to spend the holiday afloat. Most of the fellows were looking forward to the embarkation with engerness, and, of course, there were endless preparations to make.

The busy excitement of approaching departure, however, did not prevent the juniors from finding time to make the arrangements for the farewell feed.

It had been D'Arcy's idea originally, but his subscription had been a lamentable failure, owing, as he complained, to the fellows failing to back him up in a proper manner. But in the capable hands of Tom Merry and Blake, the idea promised to become a complete success.

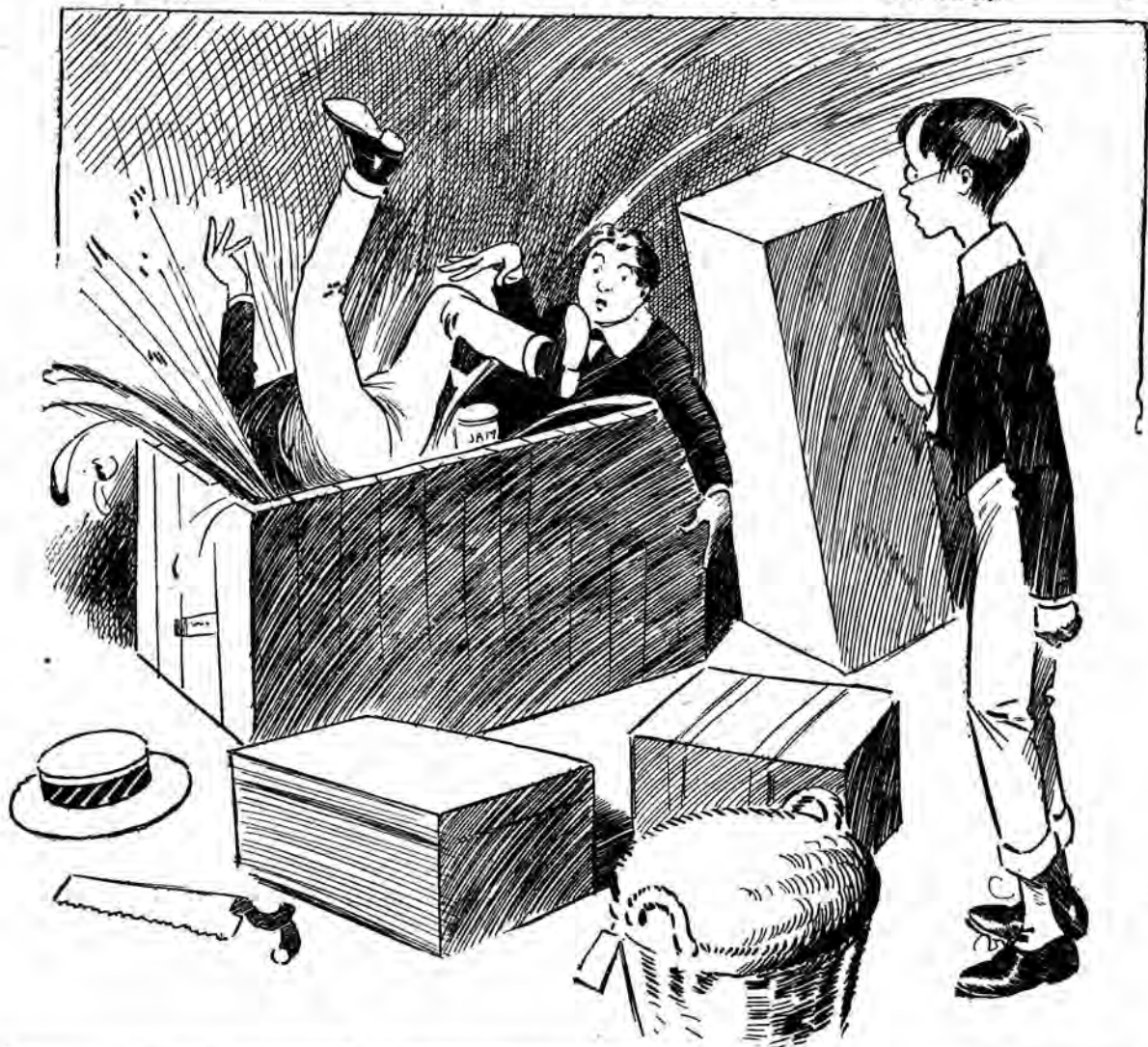
A farewell feed in the dormitory was an attractive idea, both to those who were going on the cruise and those who were not: and it found supporters in the New House as well as in the School House.

The two Houses were keen rivals, but as Fatty Wynn nobly said, on an occasion like the present no one could think of such a thing as rivalry.

"The more I think about the idea, Figgins, the better I like it," Fatty Wynn remarked. "It's simply ripping. It's some time since we've had a really first-class feed, and I wonder I didn't think of the idea myself. I get so jolly hungry in this August weather, you know."

"Blessed if I know any kind of weather when you don't get jolly hungry," said Figgins. "What time has Tom Merry fixed for the feed?"

"Eleven o'clock."



There was a crash of currant-wine and ginger-beer bottles, and a terrific squash of pies and puffs and tarts. "Oh!" roared Tom Merry. "Oh!" shrieked Fatty Wynn.

"That's jolly late."

"Well, we shouldn't be safe from the prefects before then," said Kerr, with a shake of the head. "We don't want to be interrupted and have the grub confiscated, you know."

Fatty Wynn looked horrified.

"Don't suggest such a thing," he said. "You make me feel quite faint. Eleven o'clock is a good time. We can easily get out of the house by a back window."

"It will be a bit of a procession, all the Fourth, Third, and Shell going out of the house. Somebody is bound to make a row."

"We'll scrag him if he does. If old Ratty were to come down the game would be up."

"I'll warn all the fellows to be careful," said Fatty Wynn anxiously. "The feed really ought to be held in the New House, as cook house of St. Jim's; but Tom Merry says that as he's getting it up it's got to be given in the School House."

"Like his cheek!"

"Well, it's a School House wheeze, and D'Arcy has shoved a sovereign into the subscription as a start," observed Kerr. "We can't object. I only hope there won't be a row, that's all."

"I think I'll look in at the School House and see if they've got the things in yet," Fatty Wynn remarked carelessly.

"Cheese it, Fatty! Tom Merry won't let you start on the grub now!"

Fatty Wynn looked indignant.

"Who's talking about starting on the grub?"

"I know jolly well what you're thinking about."

"You're awfully suspicious, Figgins. As Tom Merry has

all the trouble of getting up the feed, it would be only civil to look in and ask him how he's getting on. I offered my services to purchase the grub."

"And they were refused?"

"Yes, some of them didn't seem to think it quite safe to let me get the grub from the village. They might have trusted me!"

"They could have trusted you—to scoff half of it before it got to St. Jim's," said Figgins.

"Oh, really Figgins!"

"You see, they know you."

"Well, I think I'll just look in at the School House, anyway," said Fatty Wynn, and he left the study, leaving Figgins and Kerr to go on with the packing upon which the three chuns had been engaged.

Tom Merry & Co. were also packing when Fatty Wynn looked into their study in the School House, and they were busy. Fatty looked in with a genial smile.

"Hallo, Merry, how are you getting on?"

Tom Merry looked up with a flustered face from the exertion of making a strap that was two inches short meet round a leather trunk.

"Oh, all right," he said. "Have you come to lend a hand?"

"Certainly, if there's anything I can do. If you wanted any help in getting in the grub for the feed to-night—"

"Oh, that's all done."

"Nothing else required?"

"Nothing!"

"If there were any trifles wanted I could get them at Dame Taggles's, in the school shop, you know, and save your time."

NEXT THURSDAY: THE FURTHER ADVENTURES OF TOM MERRY & CO. AT SEA!

Tom Merry grinned.

"My dear kid, we've laid out all the tin with the exception of three-halfpence, and we can't have any on tick. We don't want to go away owing a bill to Dame Taggles."

"N-no, I suppose not," said Fatty. "You must have got in a jolly lot of things, if all the subscribed funds are laid out now."

"Yes, it's a good spread. Lend me a hand with this trunk, will you?"

"I'd like to have a look at the grub," said Fatty Wynn carelessly. "Only just a look at it, you know; one doesn't often see a spread like that. There was about eight pounds raised altogether, wasn't there?"

"Eight pounds seven shillings and fourpence halfpenny."

"Well, that amount of grub would be worth looking at. I'd like to have just a look at the spread, Merry, if you don't mind."

"Not in the least," said Tom Merry genially. "You shall have a look at it when we get it out in the dormitory to-night."

"I mean—"

"Now lend a hand with this strap."

Fatty Wynn took hold of the strap.

"Pull, old chap! I say, Lowther, can't you give me a hand here?"

"Can't you see I'm busy?" retorted Lowther. "If I don't finish packing this tool-chest now the things will get lost."

"Well, you, Manners then."

"I'm looking after my negatives and films."

"Blow your negatives and films!"

"If you like to wait five minutes—"

"Why don't you say five hours? Hold on to it, Wynn; you and I can manage it between us, I dare say. It's been round the trunk before, so there's no reason why it shouldn't go again. Pull the beastly thing!"

"I'm pulling it!" gasped Fatty Wynn. "Mind you don't let go your end."

"I'm not likely to let go my end. Pull!"

"I'm pulling. Where are you keeping the grub?"

"In a safe place. Pull away!"

"All right. I'd like to—"

"Oh, come, old chap, if you want to help don't waste your breath talking! Pull that beastly strap and put your beef into it!"

Fatty Wynn tugged away till he was purple in the face, and Tom Merry tugged at the other end of the strap, and the leather trunk creaked and groaned with the contraction; but still the ends did not meet. Fatty Wynn gasped and eased off.

"Pull up!" exclaimed Tom Merry. "You're letting it go! Another jolly good tug and the rotten thing will go. Ow!"

The rotten thing did go! The strap broke, and the ends flew away from the trunk, and Tom Merry went heels over head in one direction and Fatty Wynn in the other.

"Ow!" roared Fatty Wynn, as he brought up against Lowther's legs and received a shower of tools and nails which Lowther had been packing up. "Ow, wow!"

"You ass!" roared Lowther. "You'll have to pick all those nails up now!"

"Oh! Oh! Gerrooh!"

Tom Merry sat up in the fender.

"My hat! I think the strap's broken."

"I think it has!" roared Manners. "Ha, ha, ha!"

Tom Merry rubbed the back of his head. Fatty Wynn sat up and gasped.

"You shrieking idiot!" he said. "You screaming lunatic! Catch me trying to help you fasten a rotten strap again!"

"Ha, ha! I'm sorry. Ha, ha!"

Fatty Wynn staggered to his feet, and, bestowing one last glare of indignation upon the chums of the Shell, departed. Tom Merry jumped up laughing.

"Ha, ha! He came here after the grub, and he got more than he bargained for," he remarked. "Blessed if I know what I'm going to do for a strap for this trunk. I shall have to take the strap off yours, Lowther."

"You'll get a thick ear if you do."

"Look here, my trunk must be strapped!"

"Give Taggles tuppence to put a cord round it. You shouldn't pack it so full. And you shouldn't buy rotten straps. Good ones are cheap enough."

To which fatherly counsel Tom Merry made the brief and classic reply:

"Rats!"

Study No. 6 were packing, too, and they had been busy some time. Blake, Herries, and Digby had nearly finished, but the swell of the School House was very far from that. He was not content with a single cabin trunk; three large trunks and two hat-boxes surrounded him, and they were filled to overflowing.

"I weally-do not know what I shall do," he remarked. "I have no woom for several of my waistcoats, and there is my silk hat."

"What have you got in that hat-box?"

"Silk hats."

"How the dickens many silk hats are you going to take?"

"Well, you see, a fellow must always be prepared for emergencies," said D'Arcy. "We may go a long way from home, and we may even visit foreign countwies, and there may be occasions when it will be necessary to appeal well dressed. Now, you know nothing looks so beastly dwessy as a silk hat."

"I suppose you're not going to wear three at a time, like a sheeny old-clothes man, are you?" asked Digby.

"Pway don't be frivolous on a serious subject, Digby, deah boy! I have two silk hats in that box, and I want to take an extra one in case of accidents."

"Well, there's something in that," assented Blake. "If you take three silk hats on board the Condor, some accident is certain to happen to some of them."

"If you mean that there will be any diswespectful twicks played on my toppahs, Blake, I must observe that I should wufuse to tolewate anythin' of the sort."

"You mayn't have the choice, Algy."

"I weally wish you would not call me Algy. As it is not my name it is uttably widiculous to address me as Algy."

"My mistake; I meant Adolphus. Now, if you'll take a friend's advice, you'll chuck away two of those silk hats—"

"Pway, don't be absurd!"

"And half the waistcoats—"

"Weally, Blake!"

"And sell half a dozen pairs of trousers to any old-clothes dealer for what they will fetch."

"I should uttably decline to dispose of any of my twousahs to an old-clothes dealah."

"And throw away half of everything else," said Blake.

"Wot!"

"Then you may be able to take the rest on board the Condor. We're only allowed one trunk each."

"It is simply impos. for me to cewold all my pwopahty into the limits of one twunk, Blake."

"Well, Mr. Raiton said plainly enough only one trunk each, so it's your own look-out."

"Mr. Waiton cannot have fully considahed the mattah. I shall point out to him that it is impos. for a fellow to be well-dressed with only one twunk to contain all his clothes and his othah pwopahty."

Blake grinned.

"Well, I hope you'll convince him; that's all, Gussy."

"As a reasonablen human bein' he cannot fail to compwehend the force of my argument. At all events, I shall send the twunks along to Southampton. But the pwesent twouble is, that I haven't woom in my twunks for all my things, and I weally think that you chaps might find a little space for me."

"Rats!" said Blake.

"And many of 'em!" said Herries.

"Weally, deah boys—"

Fatty Wynn looked into the study.

"Getting on all right?" he asked genially.

"Oh, ripping," said Blake. "Rather bothered by silly asses poking their heads into the room and asking idiotic questions, but all right otherwise."

Fatty Wynn gave a sickly sort of smile.

"Ha, ha! Very funny! I thought I'd look in—"

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CHAPTER 3.

Fatty Wynn Makes a Discovery.

"CAN you spare me any woom in your twunk, Blake?"

"Not an inch, Gussy."

"Can you, Hewwies?"

"Not a fraction of an inch."

"You, Dig?"

"Not room for an eyelash," said Digby.

Arthur-Augustus D'Arcy looked worried. The chums of

NEXT THURSDAY: THE FURTHER ADVENTURES OF TOM MERRY & CO. AT SEA!

"Well, you've looked in now," said Blake, as a hint that it was time for the New House junior to look out again. But Wynn was not to be rebuffed.

"I hear that you've laid in all the grub ready for the feed to-night," he remarked.

"Do you?" said Blake.

"Yes. It must be a jolly good spread."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Any harm in a fellow having a look at it?" asked Fatty Wynn.

"Not at all, if he knows where to look."

"Ha, ha! Of course you will have to tell me that."

"Of course I'm not going to do anything of the kind."

"Wathah not! I wondah how much there would be left for to-night if Fatty Wynn knew that the grub was stowed away in the box—"

"Shut up!" roared Blake.

"Weally, Blake, I wish you would not woad at me in that sudden and startlin' mannah. You thwow me into quite a futtah."

"You utter aas!"

"I refuse to be chawacterised as an uttah aas."

"In a box, is it?" said Fatty Wynn innocently. "Where's the box?"

"Find out."

"Really, Blake—"

"Oh, travel along. You'll have your whack in the Fourth Form dormitory to-night, and, until then, you can go and eat coke."

"I think—"

"Bunk!"

"Yaas, wathah! Bettah twavel, deah boy. Your face wowwies us."

"Oh, very well," said Fatty Wynn, with unaccustomed meekness. And he travelled. But there was a curious twinkle in Fatty Wynn's eyes; a curious grin upon his plump face.

"My hat!" he murmured to himself, as he went down the passage. "D'Arcy was going to say, 'box-room' when Blake stopped him. They've stowed away the grub in the box-room. I'd better have a look to make sure. It was rather rotten of them to refuse to let me just see it. As if I'd touch any of the grub before the time for the feast."

Fatty Wynn glanced up and down the passage. There was no one in sight. He ran quickly to the box-room and let himself in.

The interior of the box-room was very dark. Fatty Wynn closed the door, struck a match, and lit the gas. Then he looked eagerly round. The box-room had lately been disturbed, many boxes having been dragged out of their dusty places. There was an old trunk in a corner with the initials, T. M. on it, evidently belonging to Tom Merry. Fatty Wynn spotted it at once, and tried to raise the lid. It was locked. He tried to move the trunk, and found it too heavy.

The fat junior's eyes sparkled.

"That's the grub, and no mistake. I remember noticing this old trunk when I was in here before, and it was empty then. The lock is rusty, and I could snap it open with the poker. Shall I?"

Fatty Wynn thought of grub to the amount of eight pounds seven shillings and fourpence-halfpenny packed in the trunk, and his eyes danced.

"After all, as one of the subscribers I have a right to look at the stuff," he murmured. "They have no right to refuse me. Of course, I shan't touch any of it. I'll just have a look at it."

To take a little iron poker from the grate, and prise open the lid of the trunk, was the work of a minute. Fatty Wynn gave a gasp of admiration at the glorious sight disclosed by the raising of the lid.

The trunk was packed full, to the very brim, with the good things provided for the farewell feed. Fatty Wynn gazed upon paper packets of cakes, tarts, puffs, and biscuits, upon pies and puddings, currant-wine and ginger-beer, with rolling eyes.

"My—my hat!" murmured the fat junior. "This—this is spiffing! What a night we're going to have."

He looked cautiously round. There was no danger of discovery. Why should not he taste the glorious feast spread before him?

"Just a little snack," murmured Wynn. "I don't see why I shouldn't take a bite or two. I ought to do so, really, if only to punish them for not trusting me. As if I should have touched the grub. I think— Oh!"

He gave a jump as the door of the box-room opened. Then he turned round with a sickly smile, expecting to see Blake or Tom Merry. But it was Skimpole of the Shell who entered.

Skimpole, the brainy man of the School House, blinked at Fatty Wynn through his big spectacles.

"Is that you, Wynn? What are you doing in the School House?"

"Quiet, Skimmy," said Fatty Wynn mysteriously. "Close the door, and I'll tell you something."

Skimpole closed the door.

"I came here to get my box," he said. "What have you got

there, Wynn? Dear me, that looks like 'tommy' in that trunk. This must be the grub for the feed to-night."

"That's it," said Wynn. "I was just looking at it, you know. Of course, I wasn't going to sample it. But when you come to think of it, why shouldn't we both take a snack, Skimmy. Are you hungry?"

"Yes; I am rather hungry," said Skimpole. "I have not had any tea, as I gave away the last of my grub in the study to a beggar at the gate."

"Well, you are a mug."

"You may call me a mug, Wynn, but as a sincere Socialist I could do nothing else. I will explain to you—"

"Oh, don't trouble," said Fatty Wynn hastily. "I'll take your word for it, Skimmy. What do you say to just sampling these things?"

Skimpole nodded.

"Certainly. As a sincere Socialist, I am bound to regard it as my inalienable right to feed when I am hungry, and here is food before me. Shall I partake of this food, my friend? Why should I not? Is it wholesome and fit for sustenance? It is. Does it belong to me? Certainly, for food belongs to whoever is hungry. Therefore—"

"I say, not so loud; you'll have somebody hear—"

"I do not care who hears me state my unalterable principles."

"Yes; but we don't want anybody to drop on us and stop the feed."

"There is a certain amount of common sense in your observation, Wynn. We will partake of the feed without making a row."

Fatty Wynn grinned.

"Of course, only a sample."

"As a sincere Socialist I am entitled to take as much as I like of everything," explained Skimpole. "We start with the rabbit pies."

"Good."

The two juniors sat down on the edge of the box, and started. They were too busy to speak. The silence of the box-room was broken only by the steady munching of two pairs of powerful jaws.

CHAPTER 4.

Caught!

"THAT'S done," said Tom Merry, with a grunt of relief. "Glad to hear it," remarked Monty Lowther.

"You've been grunting and snorting over that trunk for a jolly long time."

"A good half-hour by the clock," said Manners.

"If you fellows had lent a hand, instead of grinning there like a couple of gorillas—"

"How could I lend a hand when I was packing my tool-chest?"

"How could I lend a hand when I was packing up my camera?"

"Oh, rats: I'm going for a turn in the quad now, to cool down," said Tom Merry. "I've finished my packing now."

"I've just about finished mine," said Lowther. "I'll come along with you. Coming, Manners?"

"How can I come when I am packing up my camera?"

"Oh, don't ask me conundrums!"

Tom Merry and Lowther left the study, leaving Manners still busily engaged in packing up his precious camera. The evening was warm, and the chums of the Shell were tired with sorting out things and packing them up. It was cooler in the quad-rangle.

"By Jove! packing makes me hungry," Monty Lowther remarked. "I'm rather looking forward to that spread to-night."

"So am I. It will beat most of our previous records in the supper line," said Tom Merry. "Eight pounds seven shillings and fourpence; my hat!"

"What's the matter?"

"Look there!"

Tom Merry pointed towards the box-room window. He had glanced in that direction as he thought about the dormitory feed, unconsciously, and the light in the window had struck him at once.

Lowther uttered an exclamation.

"There's somebody in the box-room."

"That's it."

"Might be somebody going in for a box—or to find something—"

"Yes; to find the grub," said Tom Merry grimly. "The light isn't moving, and it's on the side of the room where the grub is in the box."

"By Jove! You're right."

"You remember that young cormorant, Fatty Wynn—"

"Come on," exclaimed Lowther, without waiting for Tom to finish. And the chums of the Shell ran quickly into the School House, and up the stairs.

The light gleamed under the door of the box-room as they

came running up the passage. Tom Merry opened the door, and there was a startled exclamation within.

"You—you—you—" began Tom Merry.

"You—you—" said Lowther.

They looked at the surreptitious feasters, and at the open box. Fatty Wynn and Skimpole had started with the intention of being moderate; but the delicacies had tempted them to keep on. Innumerable paper bags had been unfastened, and their contents had disappeared. Fatty Wynn had done his duty nobly. Skimpole had done well, but he had not been able to keep pace with the Falstaff of the New House.

"Hallo, Tom Merry!" he said, with a sickly smile. "Fancy seeing you here!"

"You didn't expect us," said Lowther.

"N-no. Have you come to sample the grub? I don't mind. Will you have one of these cream puffs? They're ripping!" said Fatty Wynn nervously.

"Tom Merry is welcome to join us," said Skimpole, blinking at the chums of the Shell. "As a sincere Socialist I admit his right to share in the grub, although it belongs to him. I have no objection."

"You young cormorants!" said Tom Merry.

"I thought I'd just sample it," said Fatty Wynn, with a feeble smile. "I get so hungry in this August weather, you know, and—"

"As a sincere Socialist I am entitled—"

"You've scooped about a quarter of the grub between you," exclaimed Lowther. "By Jove, you're going to be made an example of!"

"Really, Lowther—"

"Collar them, Tom."

Tom Merry and Lowther promptly collared the delinquents. Fatty Wynn and Skimpole began to struggle. Skimpole was soon lying on his back, with Monty Lowther sitting on his chest; but Fatty Wynn put up a stouter fight. Tom Merry and Fatty went reeling to and fro, and staggered against the box, and fell—into it!

There was a crash of currant-wine and ginger-beer bottles, a terrific squash of pies and puffs and tarts.

"Oh!" roared Tom Merry.

"Ow!" shrieked Fatty Wynn.

An amazed face looked in at the door of the box-room.

"Faith, and what is the row about intirely?"

It was Reilly of the Fourth.

"Lend a hand here," gasped Tom Merry. "They're raiding the grub."

"The spalpeens!"

Reilly lent a hand very quickly—two, in fact. He grasped Fatty Wynn by the collar, and dragged him over and sat on him. Tom Merry extricated himself from the box, with squashed tarts clinging to him.

"We'll make an example of the rotters!" he gasped. "They've squashed a lot of the tarts—"

"You did it yourself!" gasped Fatty Wynn. "Now, you know—"

"I know what I'm going to do," said Tom Merry. "Hold him tight, Reilly."

"Faith, and I'm doing it intirely."

"Lemme go—"

"Kape still, ye gossoon!"

"Hold the rotter."

Tom Merry picked out the broken bottles, and emptied what was left of their contents over the plump face of Fatty Wynn. The fat junior gasped and squirmed. But the hero of the Shell was not finished yet. He followed it up with the squashed tarts, the cream puffs, and the damaged pies. The state of Fatty Wynn's countenance was horrid when he had finished, and Fatty Wynn was gasping wildly.

"Ow! Ugh! Groo! Groo! Gerrooh—ow!"

"You came here for these things," panted Tom Merry. "Now you've got 'em."

"Goo-gerrooh!"

"Let the fat bounder go."

Reilly rose, and Fatty Wynn staggered up. He was choked and blinded with jam and gravy and cream, sticky from collar to crown.

"Ow! Gerrooh! Beasts!"

"Now give him the boot."

Two feet were projected simultaneously towards Fatty Wynn, and both Tom Merry and Reilly landed a kick. Fatty Wynn went towards the door with a rush, staggered through, and disappeared.

"Now then, Skimpole."

"I protest against this usage," said the amateur Socialist of St. Jim's, blinking nervously at Tom Merry as he scooped up a double handful of ruined tarts. "As a sincere Socialist I am entitled to—ow—wow—wow—"

Tom Merry plastered the wrecked tarts over his face with a liberal hand. Skimpole squirmed under the weight of Lowther, but he could not escape.

"There," said Tom Merry, when he had finished, "that will

be a lesson for you to remember next time you want to become an enterprising burglar."

"Really, Tom Merry—"

"Oh, travel!"

"I am in a shocking state—"

"Well, you do look rather shocking. Ha, ha, ha!"

"As a sincere Socialist—"

"Get along!"

Skimpole got along. He felt badly in need of a wash. Tom Merry fastened up the box of good things, and the chums left the room. They found Skimpole in the passage the centre of an admiring crowd.

"Don't be in a hurry," said Jack Blake, as the amateur Socialist tried to pass. "We want to have a look at you. Doesn't he look a bote, chaps?"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"My word," said Digby. "How did you get in that state, Skimpy? Have you been trying to mix up a jam pudding with your face?"

"Please let me pass—"

"He's been raiding the grub," said Tom Merry.

"Raiding the grub!" exclaimed Blake aghast. "Raiding the grub got in for the farewell feed! The—burglar!"

"As a sincere Socialist—"

"The wottah!"

"I am entitled to take anything I like—"

"The fearful burglar!"

"From anybody—"

"You'll take something you don't like, too," exclaimed Herries. "The order of the boot, for instance."

"What-ho!" exclaimed Blake. "Boots to the fore."

"Really, Blake—ow—ow—ow!"

Skimpole, assisted from behind by a shower of powerful kicks, rushed down the passage. He disappeared amid a roar of laughter. Meanwhile, Fatty Wynn had scudded across the quadrangle into the New House. He hoped to escape into a bath-room and get cleaned before he should be observed, but as luck would have it he ran right into Figgins and Kerr.

Figgins caught him by the shoulder and stopped him.

"What on earth's the matter?"

"N-nothing! Lemme go!"

"What have you been doing with your face?"

"Nothing. Lemme go!"

"You've been after the grub!" exclaimed Kerr.

"And got it, it seems!" grinned Figgins.

"Those School House rotters found me in the box-room where the grub is," confessed Fatty Wynn. "I was just sampling the stuff—"

"You greedy young gormandiser."

"Well, I thought I'd just taste it. I have only had some rabbit-pies and a few puddings, and some salmon and cakes and biscuits and apples and jam tarts, and a few cold sausages and a jar of cream and some currant-wine—"

"Hardly enough for a taste," said Figgins sympathetically. "And they caught you, and jammed you up like this?"

"Yes."

"Serve you jolly well right, too."

"It's an insult to the New House," said Fatty Wynn. "See how they've made me look."

"Well, you do look funny. Ha, ha, ha!"

"It's an insult to the House—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I think you ought to take it up."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

There was evidently no sympathy to be got out of Figgins and Kerr. Fatty Wynn sniffed indignantly, and made a bee-line for the nearest bath-room.

CHAPTER 5.

The Farewell Feed.

BOOM! It was the first stroke from the clock-tower of St. Jim's—the first stroke of eleven. Tom Merry sat up in bed in the Shell dormitory in the School House.

"Are you awake, you chaps?"

"Gr-r-r-r!" said Manners.

"M-m-m-m!" said Lowther.

Tom Merry laughed as he slipped out of bed. He shook Manners and Lowther with forcible shakes.

"Get up! What about the feed?"

"By Jove! I believe I was asleep," said Manners.

"By Jove! I believe you were. So was Monty. So are all the other asses. Wake up, you fellows, or we shall be late. If the New House chaps get in, and Fatty Wynn gets to work, there won't be much left for us."

"Right-ho," said Gore. "I sha'n't be a tick for one."

"Buck up there, all of you!"

The Shell were soon ready. They left the dormitory in their socks, and found the passage was by no means as deserted as it



D'Arcy screwed his eyeglass into his eye and looked at the sovereign. That was all the cash there was in the letter. "Bai jove! I can't say I approve of the governah's taste in pwactical jokes," he murmured. "I wegard this as wotten."

should have been at that hour of the night. Youngsters belonging to the Remove and the Third were proceeding to the scene of the feast. Nothing but an earthquake or a dormitory feed could have fetched them out of their beds at that hour; but they were lively enough now.

Tom Merry entered the Fourth Form dormitory. The door was open, and a candle-light glimmered in the room. The beds were all empty. The Fourth-formers, in their pyjamas or trousers, were busy. The night was warm, and they required nothing more on. There was a buzz of talk, which could be plainly heard in the passage.

"Busy?" asked Tom Merry.

"Yaas, wathah!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "I am lookin' for the awwival of those kids from the New House; but they haven't come yet."

"I'd advise you to keep the door shut, if you don't want the light to be spotted," Tom Merry remarked.

"Some ass keeps on leaving it open, unless I tell him every time to shut it," said Blake. "Shut the door behind you, Lowther."

"If you mean that —"

"Don't make a row. I don't see what everybody wants to talk for. —Are you keeping an eye on the quad, Gussy?"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"You stand by the door, Reilly, will you, and shut it after every confounded idiot who comes in and leaves it open?"

"Faith, and I will."

"Let the rope ladder down as soon as you see Figgins, Gussy."

"I sha'n't be able to see him in the dark, deah boy."

"He's going to signal by throwing up a pebble at the window."

"You can trust me to look out."

Arthur Augustus was craning over the sill, standing on a chair inside to get up to the level of the window. The quadrangle was very dim below, and the swell of the School House

could see nothing but here and there the faint waving shadow of an elm.

The School House boys were all in at last, and the door was closed for the last time. Then more candle-ends and bicycle-lanterns were lighted.

"Can't you see Figgins yet, Gussy?"

"Sister Anne, Sister Anne, do you see anybody coming?" said Lowther.

"Shut up, Lowther. Don't be funny at this time of night."

"Bai Jove, I think I see—ow!"

"What's the matter?"

"Some wotten beast has thwown up a stone and stwuck me on the nose."

"Ha, ha! It's Figgy's signal."

"He has no wight to stwike me on the nose."

"You shouldn't put your nose in the way. Let down the rope ladder."

D'Arcy leaned over the window-sill.

"Is that you, Figgins?"

"Yes, rather," came the cautious voice from below. "We're all here."

"Was it you thwew that stone?"

"Yes."

"It stwuck me on the nose."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"It is no laughin' mattah, Figgins. That stone stwuck me on the nose, and I wequire an assuwanee that it was not an act of intentional impertinence before I—"

D'Arcy did not finish. He suddenly disappeared from the window, and the rope ladder came rattling down. The end of it gave Figgins a clump on the head, and Figgins gave a yelp.

"Careful, you ass!"

"Oh, come up," said Blake.

D'Arcy was sitting on the floor of the dormitory. Blake had jerked him away from the window. The swell of St. Jim's was

too dazed for a few moments to know what had happened. When he recovered himself he jumped up.

"Blake——"

"Go and eat coke."

"Blake, I have wemonstated with you several times upon this wiffness o' yours. I do not like it."

"Lump it, then."

"Figgins threw a stone and stwuck me on the nose."

"Serve you right."

"I wufuse to admit for a moment that it serves me wight. I shall wequire an assuwanee fwom Figgins that it was an accident if the harmony of this convivial meetin' is not to be intewupted."

"Oh, rats."

Figgins was coming in at the window now. The rope ladder—which consisted simply of two stout ropes knotted together—was swarming with New House juniors. Figgins put a leg in at the window, and Blake gave him a hand.

"Here we are again!" said Figgins cheerfully.

"Yes, here we are. Don't make a row!"

"Who's going to make a row?"

"Well, don't, then."

"Figgins, deah boy, I have a wathah important matter to settle with you."

"Nothing wrong with the grub, is there, Gussy?"

"Not that I am aware of, Figgins. I am not thinkin' of the grub. You threw a stone up to the window, which stwuck me on the nose."

"Ha, ha, ha."

"If you did that on purpose, Figgins, I shall have no alternative but to administrah a feahful thwashin' on the spot——"

"Is that how you always greet your guests, Gussy?" asked Kerr who was next in at the window.

"Weally, Kerr——"

"Is it the D'Arcy special brand of politeness?"

"Weally, as Figgins contributed to the feed, I can hardly wegard him as a guest——"

"Isn't he under your roof, fathead?"

"I wufuse to be addressed as a fathead. He is certainly undah our woof."

"Therefore he is a guest," said Tom Merry. "D'Arcy owes Figgins an apology."

"Nothin' of the sort. Figgins threw a stone which stwuck me on the nose."

"Apologise!"

"I wufuse to apologise. Figgins threw a stone——"

"That was agreed upon."

"It was not agreed upon for it to stwike me on the nose."

"You shouldn't have such a long nose," said Figgins. "I put it to all of you, is it my fault that Gussy has such a long proboscis?"

"Certainly not."

"I wufuse to have my nose alluded to as a long pwoboscis. Undah the cires, if Figgins assures me that it was an accident."

"Don't mind him Figgins," said Tom Merry. "He's been rather badly brought up, you know, and his manners aren't above par——"

"Weally, Tom Mewwy——"

"Or else he would apologise at once like a gentleman."

"Undah the cires, as opinion seems to be against me, I apologise, but all the same I wufuse to admit that Figgins had a wight to stwike me on the nose."

So the incident closed. The New House juniors were pouring into the window one after another, and ere long they were all in the dormitory. The long room presented an unusually crowded aspect. Blake closed the window after the last one.

Fatty Wynn looked round him anxiously.

"Where's the grub?"

"Here it is," said Blake, "what you left of it, that is."

"Oh, really, Blake——"

"Sit down all of you. There's not enough pillows and bolsters to go round, so most of you will have to sit on the floor."

"That's all right," said Figgins.

"I say, Gussy, lend me your bolster," said Kerr.

"I would with pleasure, deah boy, only I'm afraid of spoilin' my trowsahs if I sit on the floor. Pass me the wabbit pie, Lowthah."

And the feast commenced.

CHAPTER 6.

The Dormitory Dance.

"MAKE a good time of it," said Figgins, as he carved the cold leg of mutton, "this is the last feed we're to have under the hospitable roof of the School House."

"The last we shall have at St. Jim's," said Lowther.

"This time to-morrow we shall be leading a life on the ocean wave."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"And who knows what may happen before we get back," said Figgins. "Fatty Wynn may die of too much grub, and Skim-

pole may get drowned as a bore that can't be stood within the narrow limits of a ship."

"Oh, really, Figgins."

"Tom Merry and Manners may expire in agonies, under the infliction of Monty Lowther's jokes, from which there will be no escape——"

"Look here, Figgins," began Lowther, wrathfully.

"D'Arcy may find himself far from land without a clean collar, and die of a broken heart."

"Oh, weally, deah boy——"

"Or we may get wrecked and go to the bottom of the sea," continued Figgins cheerfully. "Or we may——"

"You giddy Job's comforter."

"Cheese it."

"What I mean is, that we must make this a really grand occasion. All sorts of things may happen to us, and if they don't, they may happen to the school while we are gone. St. Jim's may get burnt to the ground. Anyway, we ought to celebrate this great and mournful occasion——"

"Oh, ring off, Figgy."

"And after the feed, I propose a dance to wind up the festivities."

"A dance," said Tom Merry. "What sort of a dance?"

"Oh, any old dance—a barn dance, or a dormitory dance, or anything, as a final kick-up to celebrate the event."

"Rot," said Blake. "We shall have the masters up."

"They can't be very well do anything to us. Term's over, and we're only staying on to go to Southampton to-morrow to embark. I regard myself as being as free as a bird in the air."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Who ever heard of knuckling under to a schoolmaster in August?"

"Bai Jove, you're wight."

"That's all very well," said Blake. "Only if Mr. Railton were to look in at the door just now, I fancy you'd change your tune all of a sudden."

"Yaas, I considah that extremewly pwob."

"Oh, pass the salt, and don't argue," said Figgins.

Figgins's gloomy prognostications had no effect upon the convivial spirits of the party. They ate, drank, and were merry. In spite of the raid of the evening, there was ample left for the feed, and the juniors enjoyed themselves.

The solids vanished at a great rate, washed down by the liquids, and the spread gradually diminished.

The juniors finished with tarts and puffs and fruit, and at the end all but Fatty Wynn were constrained to cry "Hold, enough!" But Fatty was invincible. He never refused an offer.

"Have some more cake, Wynn?" asked Tom Merry.

"Yes, thank you, Merry."

"Another tart, Wynn?" asked Blake.

"Yes, please."

"Anybody say biscuits?"

"Yes, I do."

"Still another bottle of lemonade," said Figgins. "What offers?"

"Pass it this way, Figgins."

"Who says cream puffs—there's half-a-dozen left."

"I think I can manage them, Lowther."

"My hat," said Kerr. "Where does he put it all? I say, Wynn, here's a couple of sausages and some cold beef—would you like them with the cream puffs?"

"I'll have them after, Kerr."

"Ha, ha! Why don't you mix them? Here's some water-cress, and sardines, too."

"Hand them over."

The juniors, entering into the joke, gathered up the fragments of the feast, and passed them on to Fatty Wynn, and there was very little left by the time the fat junior was completely satisfied.

"I think I'm about done," he remarked, at last.

"I should think you are," said Figgins. "Blessed if I think you will get out of the window again."

"We shall have to roll him home across the quad," Kerr remarked.

"Oh, really, Kerr——"

Figgins jumped up.

"Now, what about that dance?"

"Good wheeze," said Tom Merry. "Keep nothing on but your socks, and——"

"Weally, Tom Mewwy, it will be dwaughty here without our trowsahs."

"Ass! I mean nothing on your feet but your socks. Then we shan't make a row. What about a band?"

"I'll whistle, if you like," said Skimpole.

"No, you won't," said Blake. "I know that horrid screech of yours. Don't you start whistling here."

"I'll hum a tune," said Lowther. "I can hum 'Sir Roger'——"

"I'll sing if you like, deah boys."

"We don't like, Gussy."

"Weally——"

"If you want to sing, Gussy, you'll have to go up into the box-room."

"I don't want to sing!" exclaimed the swell of the School House indignantly. "I only made the offer to be obliging."

"You'll be still more obliging if you don't sing. Two or three fellows who can't dance can buzz a tune through a paper on a comb."

"Not too loud, then," said Tom Merry. "We don't want the prefects here."

"I will sing—"

"You can sing if the prefects come, Gussy—and serve 'em right. Now, then, how many of you fellows can buzz 'Sir Roger' through a comb?"

There were plenty of volunteers. Blake arranged the band, and the beds were dragged as quietly as possible out of the way. The juniors entered heartily into the fun of the thing. A dormitory dance was a novelty, and a fit wind-up to the many scenes of fun they had enjoyed under the ancient roof of St. Jim's.

"Now, then, go it!"

"Who's leading off?"

"I am, fathead!"

"Then go it yourself."

"If you're going to start arguing, Tom Merry——"

"Oh, cheese it, and go ahead!"

"I'll go ahead when I like. I——"

"When's that band going to start? Band, start!"

"Buzz, buzz, buzz!"

There were four members in the orchestra, and they all started at different times, and as two were buzzing "Sir Roger de Coverley," one the waltz from the "Merry Widow," and the other a popular coon song, the result could not be called either musical or encouraging to the dancers.

Blake stopped his ears.

"Hold on, you asses!"

"Sure, and what's the matter?" asked Reilly, the leader of the orchestra.

"Keep to the same tune and the same time."

"Sure it's mighty particular ye are."

"Keep your rotten orchestra in time, I tell you!"

"Oh, all right. Kape the same tune, ye spalpeens!"

The spalpeens kept the same tune, and almost the same time. Then the dance commenced. The buzzing, having once got into swing, went on more or less regularly, and the "Sir Roger" was soon in full progress.

"By Jove, this is ripping!" said Tom Merry. "Figgy's idea is a good one—for once. Hop it!"

The juniors hopped it in the most lively way.

As the excitement increased the dance became more irregular, and couples went whirling in mazes, in sublime indifference to the nature of the dance and the time of the music.

Naturally enough, accidents happened. They bumped into one another with great frequency, and several rolled on the floor, but good-humour reigned supreme. Even D'Arcy, when he was rolled over and Figgins sprawled across him, only gasped and said, "It's all wight. Don't mention it, deah boy."

The fun was at its height, and in their excitement the juniors had forgotten all caution. The din was increasing, and it would have been surprising if it had not been heard in other parts of the house.

The band was buzzing away at full speed, and the dormitory was alive with gliding, rolling, bumping, whirling dancers, when the door suddenly opened.

Unnoticed for the moment, Mr. Railton, the master of the School House, stood looking in upon the scene.

CHAPTER 7.

Called to Account.

"BOYS!"

The paper and comb orchestra suddenly ceased. The Terpsichorean revel ceased with equal abruptness. The juniors of St. Jim's stood as if suddenly turned to stone, and stared in blank dismay at the housemaster.

Mr. Railton stared at them as blankly.

He had met with many little surprises during the course of his acquaintance with the juniors of St. Jim's, but never one quite like this.

He stood almost nonplussed for the moment.

"Boys!"

"Yes, sir," said Tom Merry meekly. "Did you speak, sir?"

"Did I speak, Merry? Yes, I did. What is the meaning of this—this unheard-of scene?"

"It's a dance, sir," said Tom Merry demurely.

"A—what?"

"A dance, sir. As we are leaving St. Jim's for a long time——"

"It may be for years, love—it may be for ever," murmured Monty Lowther.

"We—we thought——"

"You thought what, Merry?"

"We thought there would be no harm in a little celebration, sir."

"As a mattah of fact——" began Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

"I hardly know what to say to you, Merry."

"As a mattah of fact——"

"Ring off, Gussy."

"I refuse to ring off. As a mattah of fact, Mr. Wailton——"

"You need not speak, D'Arcy. I hardly know——"

"As a mattah of fact, the coll. term is ovah, and we are weally enjoyin' a little of the holiday in advance——"

"Silence, D'Arcy!"

"Yaas, Mr. Wailton; but as a mattah of fact——"

Blake and Herries clapped their hands over D'Arcy's mouth and silenced him.

Mr. Railton looked round upon the dismayed juniors.

"I hardly know what to say to you," he said. "You deserve a severe punishment. You New House boys will immediately leave. I leave your punishment to your housemaster."

Figgins grinned slightly.

Mr. Ratcliff, the master of the New House, would be willing enough to inflict punishment if he knew of the delinquency, but he would not know of it unless Mr. Railton told him; and Figgins did not think that Mr. Railton would do so.

D'Arcy succeeded in pushing off the hands that had been clapped over his mouth, and gasped out again.

"As a mattah of fact—g-r-r-r-r."

"Figgins, you and the other New House boys will immediately go back the way you came."

"Yes, sir," said Figgins.

He walked towards the window.

Mr. Railton called him back.

"Where are you going, Figgins?"

"Back the way I came, sir."

"Did you come in by the window?"

"Yes, sir."

"You will please to go out by the door, Figgins."

"Very well, sir."

"Go at once. As for you School House boys, go back to your own dormitories at once. I will deal with you in the morning."

Figgins & Co. and the crowd of New House juniors went downstairs. Mr. Railton had neglected to ask them how they had left their own house. Some of them had been nervous that he would march them across the quad and wake up Mr. Ratcliff to receive them.

Mr. Railton stood in the dormitory, with a grim look, while the School House juniors dispersed.

"Good-night, Blake!" said Tom Merry. "It's been a jolly good celebration, anyway."

"Yaas, wathah," said D'Arcy. "Good-night, deah boys! We shall have to face the music, though as a mattah of fact——"

"Get into bed, Fourth Form."

"Certainly, Mr. Wailton. I wish you would let me explain to you——"

"Get into bed at once!"

The Fourth Form went to bed again. The Shell and the Remove and the Third left the dormitory. Mr. Railton carefully extinguished all the lights, and quitted the room, closing the door behind him.

"Well, this is rather rotten," Jack Blake remarked. "I suppose we were really making too much row."

"Yaas, wathah! But if you had let me explain——"

"It will be all right," said Digby confidently. "He won't be rough on us just before clearing out, you know."

"Perhaps not."

"I wished to point out to Mr. Wailton that as a mattah of fact the term was ovah, deah boys, and——"

"Good-night!"

"As a mattah of fact——"

"Oh, go to sleep!"

"I refuse to go to sleep. As a mattah of fact——"

Snore.

"Do you hear me, Blake?"

Snore.

"Weally, Hewwies——"

Snore.

"I regard this as diswepetful: and I do not believe you are weally asleep. I regard you as a set of wottahs."

Snore.

D'Arcy sniffed indignantly, and laid his head on the pillow. Meanwhile, the New House juniors had crossed the quadrangle and reached their own house. Figgins had left by means of the hall window, which he had left unfastened to facilitate the return. At that hour no one was likely to observe the fact that the window was unfastened—unless the alarm had been given. Mr. Ratcliff possessed such an unpleasant faculty of smelling out wrongdoers that Figgins would not have been surprised to have the whole thing discovered.

"It's all right," murmured Figgins, with relief, as he came close to the New House in the gloom. "There's no light in old Ratty's window. There was when we came out. That shows he's gone to bed."

"Unless he's making his rounds" grinned Kerr.
 "He never makes them as late as this—it's struck twelve."
 "That's so. Let's get in."
 "Give me a bunk up first."

In the deep shadow of the New House porch Figgins received the required bunk, and mounted upon the sill of the hall window. The next moment he fell off it, and bumped down among the juniors, as a thin, acid voice came from within the window:

"Is that you, Figgins?"

Kerr groaned.

"Ratty, by Jove!"

The pale, thin face of Mr. Ratcliff was looking out at them. The housemaster had opened the window.

Figgins rose to his feet. He had rolled off the window-sill as the sudden voice startled him, and the bump had hurt him. He rubbed his limbs ruefully.

"Is that you, Figgins?"

"Yes, sir."

"Where have you been?"

"Having a feed, sir."

"At this hour of the night?"

Figgins did not reply. Mr. Ratcliff knew what hour it was, so there was no need for Figgins to speak. The housemaster's green-grey eyes glinted like a cat's in the dark.

"You are all there, I suppose?"

"Yes, sir."

"Very good. I will open the door for you. I missed you, and thought I should meet you if I waited here," said Mr. Ratcliff. "This is a pretty proceeding—"

"As it's the last night at St. Jim's, sir—"

"As it's the last night at St. James's, you ought to be in bed getting a good night's rest before your long railway journey to-morrow."

"I never thought of that, sir."

"I desay you did not; but the punishment you will receive will perhaps make your memory better," said Mr. Ratcliff. "This is too serious an offence, and on too large a scale, for me to deal with it. I shall report you to the Head."

Figgins gave an inward groan. He would rather have been flogged than have been reported to the Head, to-morrow, of all days. Mr. Ratcliff probably knew that.

The housemaster opened the door, and the juniors filed in and went to their dormitories. Mr. Ratcliff went back to his room, in a very satisfied mood. It was seldom that he had an opportunity of administering punishment on so large a scale, and he was proportionately gratified.

"Rotten," said Figgins, as he tumbled into bed; "It will look bad to be hauled up before the Head the last day here. He will think we might have behaved ourselves the last night."

"Rotten," said Kerr, "and just like Ratty."

And Figgins gloomily agreed.

CHAPTER 8.

Off at Last!

THE last day at St. Jim's dawned bright and sunny. There was no school work to be done, but the rising-bell went at the usual hour. Some of the juniors were heavy-eyed, the result of the previous night's festivity. But that soon wore off in the bright sunshine and general expectancy.

At morning chapel Figgins confided to Blake the scrape into which Mr. Ratcliff's watchfulness had brought them. Blake was sympathetic, but he could only suggest to Figgins to grin and bear it.

"I wouldn't mind a licking," said Figgins dismally; "but I don't want to be yanked up before the Head to-day. It will look like bad form, you know."

"Yaas, wathah!" said D'Arcy; "suppose I go up to the Head and explain."

"Suppose you dry up, ass."

"Weally, Blake—"

"Oh, cheese it."

Arthur Augustus chesed it as requested, but there was a resolved expression upon his face. The boys were at liberty after chapel, instead of turning into the class-rooms as in term time. They were to leave St. Jim's in a variety of brakes for the railway station at eleven o'clock. Blake and his chums went off to give the finishing touches to their packing, and missed D'Arcy.

Arthur Augustus was not in the study, nor was he to be seen. As a matter of fact, he was tapping at the door of Dr. Holmes's study.

"Come in," said the deep voice of the Head.

Arthur Augustus entered. Mr. Raiton was with the Head, and he looked rather curiously at the swell of the School House.

"Well, D'Arcy, what is it?" said the Head.

"If you please sir, I should like to explain—"

"You may speak, but be quick."

"Yaas, wathah—I mean yaas, sir. It's about an event—"

a wathah unfortunate event—that occurred in the Fourth-Form dormitory in the School House last night."

"I have already acquainted the doctor with that, D'Arcy."

"Yaas, sir, but what I wanted to warn is, that Figgins & Co.—I mean Figgins and the other chaps, sir—were caught goin' back by Mr. Watcliff."

"Oh!" said the Head.

"Now, sir, as a mattah of fact the term is ovah, and with all respect, sir, we are entitled to have some high jinks in the vac," said D'Arcy, gently but firmly. "That is weally what I wanted to explain to Mr. Wailton last night."

"I hope you are not attempting to justify last night's proceedings, D'Arcy," said Dr. Holmes, sternly.

"Well, no, sir, not if you don't think they are justifiable," said Arthur Augustus. "I only want to point out as a mattah of fact that the term is weally ovah, and that we meant no harm. It was just a little celebration on an important and auspicious occasion, sir, and undah the cires—"

"I leave the matter to be dealt with by my housemasters," said the Head. "You may go, D'Arcy."

"Yaas, sir. But Mr. Watcliff isn't going to deal with it: he's going to report it to you, because he thinks that will be vewy wuff on Figgins—"

"D'Arcy!"

"So I thought—"

"You may go, D'Arcy."

"Certainly, sir, but as a mattah of fact—"

The doctor half-rose, and D'Arcy hurriedly left the study. The Head looked at the School House master with a smile.

"We had already decided that this freak should be overlooked, under the circumstances, Mr. Raiton."

"Yes, sir; but Mr. Ratcliff—"

"If he brings the matter to me—ah, come in." There was a knock at the door and the New House master entered the study.

"I have a rather serious matter to report to you, sir," said Mr. Ratcliff. "I thought it too serious to deal with myself—nothing less than the whole of the juniors of my house being absent at midnight."

"That sounds very serious, Mr. Ratcliff."

"Yes, sir. A general flogging—"

"On the last day at St. Jim's!"

"It is necessary sometimes to be severe. So serious an offence—"

"It is not so serious as it appears, Mr. Ratcliff. I have learned that the boys were, as a matter of fact, in the School House, attending a farewell feast in the Fourth-Form dormitory."

"A sufficiently serious breach of discipline—"

"Under the circumstances, I can find excuses for the youngsters," said the Head, with a smile; "and as the school breaks up to-day, I think it would be a more graceful act to pardon than to punish."

Mr. Ratcliff bit his lip.

"Of course, it is just as you think best, sir."

"Very good: then let no more be said about the matter."

It was rather a bitter pill for Mr. Ratcliff to swallow, but he had no choice about it. Nothing more was said about the matter, much to the amazement of Figgins & Co. The time came for the departure from St. Jim's, and not a word had been heard.

"I suppose it's all right," said Figgins to Blake; "blessed if I understand it, though. Ratty doesn't look any more amiable than usual, this morning."

"I think I can explain it, deah boy," said D'Arcy, joining them.

Figgins stared at him.

"What do you know about it?"

"Oh, I just dropped into the Head's study, you know, and explained mattahs. You won't hear any more about it."

"Gammon!"

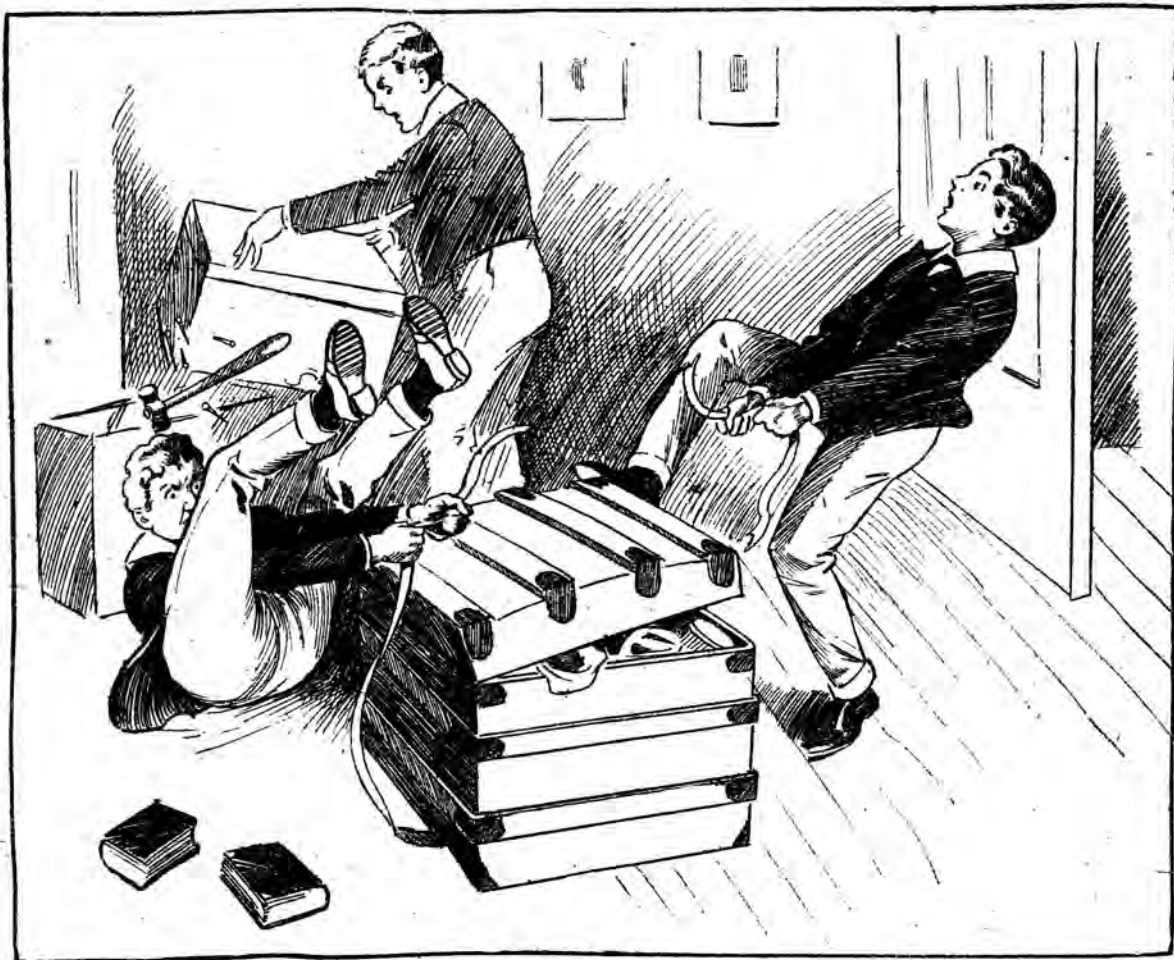
"If you chawactewise my wemarks as gammon, Figgins—"

"Well, you'll see if you hear any more on the subject," said Blake. "The Head's a good old boy, and he wouldn't like to have any trouble on the last morning. Raiton has made it a point to forget our little lark, and he's forgotten that I owe him a hundred lines. Hallo, here are the brakes."

Vehicles of all sorts and conditions were streaming into the quadrangle to take the boys of St. Jim's to the station. They were soon crowded with luggage and boys. A hundred of the Saints were to go to Southampton, including a portion of each Form. All our old friends of the Lower School, as well as Kildaro and Darrel of the Sixth, and a number of others. Taggles, the porter, was grunting under the weight of the boxes he had to carry down. Taggles welcomed breaking-up day, as he scored in two ways on that date—he got rid of the boys for a long time, and he pocketed a harvest of tips.

"Have you brought down my twunks, Taggles?" asked D'Arcy, anxiously.

"I've brought down your trunk, Master D'Arcy," said Taggles, very civilly, as he noted the School House swell's hand at his waistcoat pocket.



"Pull up!" exclaimed Tom Merry. "Another jolly good tug and the rotten thing will go—Ow!"

"Yaas, but there were three—"

"The Head said one trunk for each boy, sir."

"Yaas, but there are three for me."

"I've warned you that you w-n't get them aboard at Southampton, ass," said Blake.

"I shall wish that, Blake, and I wequest you not to address me as an ass. I wegard the expression as disrespectful. Pway bwing down the west of my boxes, Taggles, and don't forget the hatbox and the bandbox."

"What on earth have you got a bandbox for?" asked Tom Merry.

"It contains an extwa toppah."

"Well, I hope it will get safe to Southampton."

D'Arcy had a half-crown in his gloved fingers, so Taggles made no difficulties about bringing down the extra boxes. It did not matter to Taggles if they were left on the pier at Southampton. There was room in the brake, which Tom Merry and Co. had arranged to have for themselves, and which was a large one.

"All aboard," said Tom Merry. "We may as well start. Come on, Figgy. Come early and avoid the crush."

"Good," called out Figgins, from his brake. "I don't know where my driver has got to, but I'll drive, and I'll race you to the gates."

"Agreed."

"You will do nothing of the kind," said the voice of Mr. Railton. "Put down those reins at once, both of you."

"Certainly, sir," said Figgins. "I can drive jolly well, sir, if you'd rather trust me than one of those horsey chaps—"

"I would not, thank you, Figgins," said Mr. Railton, laughing.

The procession, as Lowther termed it, was ready at last. It moved out of the gates of St. Jim's, followed by the doctor's carriage. The Head was coming to the station to see his boys off, before going on his own holiday. The adventurers were to go to sea in charge of the two housemasters.

Rylecombe Station was reached, and the special was waiting.

It was to make the straight run to Southampton, without the usual change at Wayland. The boys crowded into the train and the luggage was stacked in. The doctor stood on the platform, shaking hands with many of the Sixth, and speaking very earnestly to Kildare as he bade him good-bye.

The engine screamed.

"Off!" exclaimed Tom Merry.

The train began to move.

The doctor stood on the platform, waving his hand, and the windows of the train were crammed with boys, cheering and waving handkerchiefs: and so the train swept out of the station.

CHAPTER 9. A Look Round.

"SOUTHAMPTON!"

"Here we are again!" exclaimed Figgins.

The journey had seemed long to the juniors, but it had been very swift in the special train. The special drew up at last, at the Dock station, and the hundred boys poured out. Arthur Augustus looked round him.

"I say, you portah chap, take care of my luggage, will you? There are three twunks marked A. A. D'A., and a hatbox and a bandbox."

"Yessir," said the porter addressed, pocketing the shilling D'Arcy offered him, and then going about his business.

"I say," murmured Tom Merry: "the Condor doesn't up-anchor till late in the afternoon, Blake."

"I know that," said Blake.

"What I mean is, why should we go on board with this common ruck—"

Blake's eyes sparkled.

"You mean we ought to have a look at the town?"

"Exactly."

NEXT THURSDAY: THE FURTHER ADVENTURES OF TOM MERRY & CO. AT SEA!

"Phew!" said Figgins, "there would be a row if we marched off on our lonesome now."

"Yes, but if we wandered away and got lost——"

"Ha, ha, ha."

"And walked off into the town by mistake; I don't see how we could reasonably be blamed."

"Certainly not!" said D'Arcy. "But we are not likely to wandah off, are we?"

"Very likely, indeed," replied Tom Merry. "I am, for one, anyway. Who's for a look round Southampton?"

"I am," said Kerr. "I'm curious to see the Bar Gate fellows tell you about when they have been here. We didn't have time to look round when we ran down here the other day."

"The Bar Gate? What on earth's that?"

"A gate, or something, built by the Trojans, or the ancient Britons, or somebody," said Figgins vaguely. "I've heard about it."

"Well, we'll take that in," said Tom Merry. "Come into the crowd here; it's pretty thick, and we sha'n't be noticed."

"Good!"

"But I say, Tom Mewwy, what about our beastly luggage, you know?"

"Blow your luggage!"

"It's most important——"

"Railton is looking after those things. What's the good of a housemaster if he can't look after one's luggage? Come on!"

"Vewy well, deah boy, I'm comin'!"

Half a dozen juniors lost themselves in the crowd. Tom Merry, Lowther, Blake, Figgins, D'Arcy, and Kerr emerged together from the railway-station, and Arthur Augustus signalled a four-wheeler.

"Ere you are, sir!" said the jehu, driving up.

"What on earth do you want with a cab, Gussy?"

"Bettah lose ourselves as soon as possible, Blake."

"Oh, very well, if you're rolling in tin."

"Where to, sir?"

"Oh, anywhah," said D'Arcy. "We want to lose ourselves, you know. Anywhah will do so long as we lose ourselves, my deah fellow!"

The cabman stared, as well he might.

"Take us up into the town, right up the other end," said Tom Merry, laughing. "We want to have a look at the place, you know."

"Yes, sir."

The four-wheeler rattled off with the juniors in it. Whether they were missed or not at the station they did not know. They drove off at a good pace, and soon left all danger of pursuit behind them.

"After all, why shouldn't we have a look at Southampton," said Tom Merry. "It's a grand, historic city, and jolly well worth looking at."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Cabs come expensive," said Kerr. "Of course, that doesn't matter when we've got a giddy millionaire with us."

"Are you alludin' to me, Kerr?"

"Of course I am, Gussy."

"Then you are labouwin' undah a misappwehension. As I am unfortunately in a stony bwoked state, I shall not be able to pay the cabby."

"You—won't—be—able—to—pay—the—cabby?" said Tom Merry, in measured tones.

"No. As I have explained, I am unfortunately wathah stony, through contwibutin' vewy libewally to the farewell feed at St. Jim's."

"And who is going to pay the cabby, then?"

"I weally am not particulah at all," said D'Arcy, settling back as comfortably as he could in his seat. "One of you fellows."

"You shrieking ass——"

"If the vehicle was not too crowded, Tom Mewwy, I should certainly chastise you for addressin' me as a shwicken' ass."

"You howling duffer!" said Blake.

"Weally, Blake——"

"You've stuck us for an expensive cab fare. I've a jolly good mind to get out and let you settle with the cabby."

"Oh, don't be a wottah, you know!"

"It will come to six or seven bob," said Kerr. "Of course, we could stop at a pawnbroker's shop and put in Gussy's watch-chain."

"I should wufuse to give my permish for anythin' of the sort."

"We shouldn't ask your permish, ass! Never mind, we'll whip round and raise it between us, and if Gussy calls any more cabs, we'll throttle him."

"I should uttably wufuse to be thwottled."

The cab drive was a long one. In the heart of the old city the juniors alighted, and the cabby was satisfied with six shillings. The juniors walked about, looking at the sights,

where ancient and modern jostled one another strangely. Kerr, who had a friend who had spent a holiday in Southampton, took upon himself the office of cicerone, and showed his friends about the city as if he had lived there all the days of his fifteen years.

"Ah, this is the West Park!" he remarked. "Better come in here and have a look at the Watts Monument!"

"Watts!" said D'Arcy. "Who was he? The word reminds me of electwicity or somethin'."

"He was the steam-in-the-tea-kettle chap," said Kerr. "There's a monument——"

"Let it wainain there, deah boys! I don't think we ought to exhaust ourselves with too much walkin'."

"Well, there's the East Park over the way," said Kerr. "There's a monument in that, too, of——"

"Oh, weally, I don't think much of monuments. I would wathah have a feed."

"We shall have to get down into the town for that," said Kerr. "This is the High Street. If you bear off to the left there's Palmerston's monument——"

"Bai Jove, they seem to live on monuments. There was a chap I wead of once, they w'ote a poem about him, his name was St. Simon or somethin', and he lived on a monument or somethin', somewhere——"

"Let's get on a tram," said Tom Merry. "It's all very well to take a run, but we don't want to overdo it, and my old governess is coming down to see us off, too."

"I asked my Cousin Ethel to come, too," said D'Arcy. "I weally think she might come——"

"By Jove, I hope she will!" exclaimed Figgins, and then he suddenly turned red.

Arthur Augustus turned his eyeglass upon the long-limbed junior.

"I weally don't see why you should be so beastly enthusiastic about it, Figgins," he said. "Ethel's not your cousin."

"Hallo, here's the tram!"

"Jump on!"

The juniors swarmed on top of the tram. It sped along the lines through the city, and D'Arcy peered about with great interest through his eyeglass.

"Sit down!" called out the conductor suddenly, looking along the top of the tram.

D'Arcy stared at him. He noticed that all the others on top of the tram were seated, but he was standing up and looking back along the road.

"What did you say, my deah fellow?" asked D'Arcy, seeing that the conductor was staring at him and gesticulating.

"Sit down!"

"I weally have no desire to sit down——"

"Sit down!" yelled the man excitedly.

"Weally——oh!"

A passenger on the tram-top suddenly grasped D'Arcy and dragged him down. Tom Merry had been reaching for him, but it was not needed. D'Arcy plumped down, and the next moment the tram passed under a great arch—the famous Bar Gate of Southampton High Street. The swell of St. Jim's struggled to his feet the next moment. The tram was through the arch.

Arthur Augustus turned upon the passenger who had pulled him down, with the light of battle gleaming behind his eyeglass.

"You wude, wuff person——"

The passenger grinned.

"Did you want your head knocked off, young shaver?"

Tom Merry seized D'Arcy by the collar, and jerked him round so that he had to look at the arch the tram had passed under. Arthur Augustus turned pale.

"Bai Jove!"

"This gentleman has saved you from a serious accident, you ass!"

"Bai Jove! I weally apologize for the expwessions I used just now, sir, and I thank you vewy much indeed!"

"That's the Bar Gate," said Kerr. "It was built by the Normans. They started it soon after the Conquest, and didn't finish till the reign of Edward the Third——"

"Bai Jove, they must have been pwetly tired when they knocked off," said D'Arcy.

Kerr glared at him.

"Ass! That's the Guildhall over the Gate——"

"What do they gild there?" asked Lowther.

And Kerr gave up the attempt to impart any further information. The juniors alighted from the tram in Below Bar Street, and strolled about for a time, and enjoyed a solid lunch before they set out to look for the Condor.

ANSWERS

CHAPTER 10.

D'Arcy's Trunks.

"MY darling Tommy!"

"Bai Jove, it is Miss Pwiscilla!"

Miss Priscilla Fawcett threw her arms round Tom Merry's neck, and hugged him, with a sublime disregard of the crowd who looked on curiously.

"My darling boy! I thought you were lost! I feared——"

"I'm all right!"

"Where have you been? I was sure that you had fallen over the quay, or tumbled into the dock, or been run over by a tram——"

"Only been having a look round," said Tom Merry, disengaging himself, and turning red as he saw about a hundred pairs of eyes fixed upon him and Miss Fawcett. "It's all right. Is Miss Cleveland with you?"

"Yes, she has come with me to see you off."

Cousin Ethel came up with a smile. Figgins coloured very much when he shook hands with Cousin Ethel; he always did, for some reason best known to himself. Arthur Augustus noticed it, and he noticed Cousin Ethel's sweet smile, and sniffed. What Ethel could see in that chap Figgins passed the comprehension of Arthur Augustus.

"Bai Jove, Ethel, it's awfully wippin' of you to come and see us off!" the swell of St. Jim's remarked.

"Yes, Miss Fawcett was kind enough to bring me with her," said Cousin Ethel, "and, of course, I was glad to come. I wish I were coming on the cruise."

"By Jove, I wish you were!" exclaimed Figgins, so eagerly that Cousin Ethel coloured and laughed.

"Weally, Figgins——" began D'Arcy.

"And you are quite well, my dear Tommy?" said Miss Fawcett. "And you have carried out all my instructions?"

"Yes, dear," said Tom Merry, keeping at arm's length in case Miss Priscilla should bug him again. He was very fond of his old governess, but he was keenly conscious of the amusement of the onlookers.

"You have packed up all the things I sent you?"

"As many as could be got into my trunk."

"Dear me! Surely you are not restricted as to the amount of luggage you take!"

Tom Merry laughed. "If we weren't, dear, we should want another steamer in attendance to carry it."

"Ah, yes, but you surely must be allowed to take the actual necessities of life!" said Miss Fawcett. "Did you find room in your trunk for the half-dozen bottles of Dr. Bones' Wonderful Elixir for Pining Persons?"

Tom Merry coloured guiltily.

"N-no, they were crowded out."

"You put in the Purple Pills for Pale Patients?"

"N-no, I was going to, but they had to be left over."

"The Tiny Tablets for Troubled Tummies——"

"They were left out, too."

"My dear child, it is as much as your life is worth to go to sea unprovided for in this way."

"That's all right."

"It is not all right. I am very much alarmed."

"Suppose you send me some to the first port we touch at," suggested Tom Merry. "We can let you know, and you can send a parcel to wait for the Condor there."

"Yes, that is a good thought, my child. It is better than nothing, though I wish you had been able to find room in your box for some of the Purple Pills at least. Fortunately, you will not be without ample cod-liver oil——"

"I am afraid that got left out, too," murmured Tom Merry.

"But I have brought an extra bottle in my bag," said Miss Priscilla triumphantly. "It is a large bottle, and will last you some time, if you take it all yourself, though if any of the other boys should want some, of course you will share with them."

"Willingly," said Tom Merry.

"That is my own generous boy——"

"B'y'r'leave!"

"Dear me, what is that curious noise?"

"It's a porter," grinned Tom Merry. "He's saying, 'By your leave. You're in the way of the trolley.'"

"Dear me, I beg your pardon, my good man!"

The good man grunted and rolled his trolley-load of trunks onward to the gangway to the steamer. Arthur Augustus stepped forward eagerly.

"Bai Jove, there they are! They're my twunks."

"You won't be allowed to take them all on board," said Blake.

"But they're goin' on now, deah boy."

Mr. Railton was looking over the side of the steamer. He caught sight of the juniors and came hastily ashore. His brow was very stern, but it had to clear when he found himself in the presence of Miss Fawcett and Cousin Ethel. He greeted them very courteously, and saved up his wrath for the truants.

"B'y'r'leave!"

"Stop a minute, my good man," said Mr. Railton, glancing at the trunks, "I see by the initials, D'Arcy, that all these trunks belong to you."

"Yaas, wathah—I mean, yaas, sir."

"Each boy is allowed to take only one trunk," said Mr. Railton. "That was notified to the whole school by Dr. Holmes."

"Yaas, but——"

"No exception can be made in favour of any particular person. You can take whichever trunk you like on board, D'Arcy, but you can take only one."

The face of Arthur Augustus fell considerably.

"But undah the cires, sir——"

"Come, you are keeping a busy man waiting."

"But——"

"Leave two of those trunks standing here, my man," said Mr. Railton. "Any two. They are to be sent back."

"Weally, Mr. Wailton——"

"Better choose one quick," said Blake, grinning.

"Yaas, wathah! I will take this one, please," said D'Arcy, laying his gloved hand on the largest trunk. "But weally it is wathah wotten, as my things are divided among the twunks, and I can't open them now to sort them out."

"No, you certainly cannot," said Mr. Railton, smiling.

"I suppose I can have the hatbox as well as the twunk, sir."

"Well, yes, I suppose so."

"And the bandbox?"

"Yes, you may take that."

Two trunks were left standing. The other went with the luggage on board the Condor, with the hatbox and bandbox. Mr. Railton escorted the ladies on board, the juniors forming a sort of guard of honour round them.

The rest of the passengers had long been on board. Mr. Railton took the first opportunity of speaking to Tom Merry unheard by Miss Fawcett.

"You left the party at the station without permission, Merry?"

"Wandered away in the crowd, sir."

"Accidentally?"

Tom Merry coloured.

"No, sir," he said frankly.

Mr. Railton smiled.

"H'm! Well, you are at least frank about it, Merry. Perhaps I can overlook the matter this time, but mind, nothing of the sort must occur again."

"Thank you, sir," said Tom Merry. "We really meant no harm, sir; only just wanted to have a look at the town. It's a fine city, sir."

"Very well, the matter is ended."

Mr. Ratcliff came along the deck. There was a sour look upon the face of the New House master.

"Ah, the truants have returned, I see!" he observed.

"Yes, Mr. Ratcliff."

"Have you punished them?"

Mr. Railton's cheek showed a slight deepening of colour.

"No. As we are sailing to-day I did not wish the occasion to be marred by any punishment, so I have forgiven them, as no harm is really done."

"You are too lenient, Mr. Railton."

The School House master was silent. He was junior master there, and authority, in the last resort, rested in the hands of his senior.

"With the boys of your House I shall not interfere—at least, at present," said Mr. Ratcliff. "But some of the truants belonged to my House."

"Only two of them."

"Figgins and Kerr, I think?"

"Yes."

"Ah, I will speak to Figgins and Kerr presently," said Mr. Ratcliff, in a very significant tone.

"If I were to ask you, as a personal favour, to overlook this incident, Mr. Ratcliff."

The New House master looked very sour.

"I am afraid I could not consent to do so, Mr. Railton. Discipline must be maintained—at least, among my boys."

"Very well," said Mr. Railton quietly, biting his lip. And he turned upon his heel.

Tom Merry had heard what was said, and there was a gleam in his eyes as he looked at Mr. Ratcliff. He began to have an idea of what the senior master's rule in the ship would be like.

CHAPTER 11.

A Misfortune for D'Arcy.

"TOMMY!"

"Yes, dear."

"I missed you. I was afraid you had fallen over the side of the ship," said Miss Fawcett, slipping her hand through Tom Merry's arm. "This vessel seems to be very crowded and noisy, my dear boy."

"Oh, that's only the hurry of getting off!"

"Yes, I suppose so. I hear that we shall have to go ashore soon, and I have many things to attend to before then. I want you to show me your cabin——"

Tom Merry laughed.

"But I haven't a cabin, dear."

Miss Fawcett looked blank.

"But—where——"

"I shall have a berth with the rest of the fellows," explained Tom Merry. "The School House chaps have the after end, and the New House the fore end of the ship. We haven't the space here that we had at St. Jim's, you know."

"I—I suppose not."

"It will be jolly comfy, though," said Tom Merry reassuringly.

"I suppose there is a bell handy to your berth——"

"A bell! What for?"

"To ring for the steward or—the housemaster, in case you should be ill."

"Oh, I'm not going to be ill!" said Tom Merry, grinning at the idea of ringing up Mr. Railton in the middle of the night. "I'm a pretty good sailor, you know."

"You were very ill on the ship coming from India, when you were a tiny tot," said Miss Fawcett anxiously.

"Well, I'm older now. Some of the chaps will be ill, I expect. Fatty Wynn is bound to have a high old time. He's been getting round the steward for grub already, and he's full up to the chin. I've warned him."

"Yaas, watah!" said Arthur Augustus. "He's sitting on the other side of the funnel now eatin' pork pies, bai Jove! He will be sowwy for it. For my part, I'm not goin' to eat anythin' more at all before we sail."

"Well, I will go and look at your berth, Tommy," said Miss Fawcett. "I must see that the sheets are well aired, and——"

"The berths are not awanged yet," said Arthur Augustus, coming to Tom's rescue. "It would be bettah to speak to Mr. Wailton about it."

"Yes, that is quite right," said Miss Fawcett, and she bore down upon Mr. Railton. Figgins was showing Cousin Ethel over the ship, and the girl was delighted with it. The dimensions of the great steamer surprised her. There was ample room for the hundred boys, and the Condor could have crowded in almost as many more.

"We've got the fore part of the ship," said Figgins. "See, here are our quarters."

"How nice!"

Miss Cleveland spoke quite unsuspiciously, and did not appear to be aware that the fore part of the ship was less agreeable than the stern. Figgins was relieved.

"You see, it's quite appropriate, as the New House takes the lead," he explained.

And Cousin Ethel smilingly assented.

"Jolly big saloon, isn't it? This will be used as a school-room. We're going to have lessons every day while we're at sea, same as at St. Jim's, but shorter of course. Some of the chaps don't want lessons—say we oughtn't to have them as it's vacation time. Something in that, too; only the powers that be think it's better for us."

"So it is," said Cousin Ethel, and Figgins laughed.

"Well, yes, we might get bored doing nothing all day," he admitted. "But we're going to rig up netting when we get to sea, so that we can play cricket and tennis on deck. This is the grand staircase. There is a lift up to the top deck, you see, but it's not working just now."

"That will be very useful."

"Yes, when it gets going. We can have some larks on this staircase, too," said Figgins, as he led the way up. "Jolly big place, isn't it? Hallo, what on earth's that?"

Something came rolling down the stairs from above. It proved to be a silk hat. It bumped down past Figgins before he could stop it, and the next moment Arthur Augustus D'Arcy came into view in hot pursuit.

"Stop it, Figgins!"

"Jump for it, Gussy," said Figgins encouragingly. "Jump, and you'll land on it if you're careful."

D'Arcy did not take this advice. He ran down the stairs after the escaped hat, which had been blown off by a gust of wind. The hat was an easy first at the bottom, and unfortunately several juniors in the room below sighted it before the swell of St. Jim's could overtake it.

"On the ball!" shouted Lowther, making for the hat.

"Hold on, Lowthab——"

"Pass!" yelled Reilly.

"Pway don't be an ass, Weilly. That is my hat——"

"Pass, you spalpeen!"

Lowther reached the hat, and manfully passed to Reilly, who centred to the saloon, and Manners captured the hat and dribbled it in fine style along the length of the great apartment.

A dozen juniors promptly joined in the game, Arthur Augustus following them with shrieks of dismay and wrath.

"Pass!"

"Play up there!"

"On the ball!"

"Stop, you wottahs! I uttally wefuse to have my hat tweated as a footah, and I insist upon its bein' westored to me. Stop, I say! You uttah wottahs!"

"Pass!"

"Play up!"

D'Arcy made a desperate rush into the midst of the footballers, and rescued his hat. It was a wreck. The swell of St. Jim's gazed at the broken crown and damaged brim and burst sides with feelings too deep for words.

"I say, I hope we haven't damaged it," said Reilly.

It was insult added to injury. Arthur Augustus dropped the ruined topper, and went for Reilly like a bolt from a bow. The Irish junior had just time to grapple with him before he was bowled over, and they rolled on the floor in deadly combat.

"You uttah beast!"

"You silly ass!"

"Bai Jove, I'll give you a feahful thwashin'!"

"Sure, and it's yerself that will get that same entirely."

"Go it!" exclaimed Lowther. "This heats cock-fighting! Go it, Gussy!"

"Play up, Reilly!"

"Go for his boko, Gussy!"

"Whatever is the matter?"

It was Miss Priscilla's voice. The good old soul had arrived upon the scene, escorted by Tom Merry. Tom had endeavoured to guide her footsteps in another direction, but Miss Fawcett had been alarmed by the noise, and insisted upon coming to see what was the matter.

"Dear me! Is it possible that they are fighting?"

"Fighting!" exclaimed Monty Lowther, in amazement. "Whatever can make you think of such a thing, Miss Fawcett?"

"Dear me! It looks very much like it."

D'Arcy and Reilly separated at once. D'Arcy rubbed his mouth, from the corner of which came a trickle of red, and Reilly caressed his nose, which was swelling visibly.

"I—I am sure you are hurt, my children," exclaimed Miss Fawcett anxiously. "What have you been doing?"

"I was just instwuctin' Weilly," said D'Arcy. "I—I was showin' him a new twick, you know."

"Faith, and I was showin' D'Arcy one!" said Reilly.

"Dear me! It looked just as if you were fighting."

"Oh, Miss Pwiscillah!"

"Oh, Miss Fawcett!"

"I am sure I beg your pardon for my mistake," said Miss Fawcett. "Of course, I know that two such nice boys would not fight."

And she passed on with Tom Merry.

"Faith, and it's ashamed of yourself ye ought to be, Gussy," said Reilly—"fighting before a lady like a hoodigan."

"I wefuse to admit anythin' of the sort," retorted D'Arcy. "Aftah your impertinence, I had no alternative but to administrah a feahful thwashin'. My hat is wuined."

"Well, you've got lots of them," said Lowther. "One silk topper more or less doesn't make any difference to you."

"I have only three more on board this ship, and I shall not be able to get any new ones until we return from the ewaise."

"Well, surely three at a time are enough, even for you!"

But D'Arcy only sniffed indignantly and turned away.

CHAPTER 12.

Off to Sea!

"DEAR me! What is that dreadful noise, Tommy darling?"

"That's the engines, dear."

"The ship seems to be moving——"

"That's all right; we haven't cast off yet."

"It is time for all who are not going to sail to go ashore, Miss Fawcett," said Mr. Railton, coming up. "May I see you off the ship?"

"Thank you, Mr. Railton. Good-bye, Tommy."

"Good-bye, dear," said Tom Merry, kissing his old nurse affectionately. "Good-bye, and keep your pecker up—I mean, don't be anxious about me."

"You are sure you have the bottle of cod-liver oil safe?"

"Yes; I was careful to put it in a safe place."

"You promise me to change your socks immediately, if you should get your feet wet?"

"Certainly."

"And always to wear flannel next——"

"Yes, yes; certainly."

"Remember that you are a delicate child, and that it is necessary to be very careful of your darling health."

"I am afraid there is no time to lose," said Mr. Railton.

"Yes, yes. Good-bye once more, my sweet child. Where is Ethel?"

"Ah, I have not seen Miss Cleveland."



Tom Merry emptied the bottles over the plump face of Fatty Wynn.

"I'll look for her," said Tom Merry.

Miss Fawcett accepted Mr. Railton's arm to the deck. Tom Merry went in search of Cousin Ethel. Arthur Augustus was looking for her, too. The swell of St. Jim's had taken the extra topper out of the handbox, and brushed it up well, and was wearing it in the place of the one that had been basely used as a footer.

"Have you seen Cousin Ethel, Tom Mewwy?" he asked.

"I'm looking for her now."

"Bai Jove, I wondah where she is? Have you seen Figgins?"

"He was with Cousin Ethel when I saw him last."

Arthur Augustus frowned.

"I weally don't see why that chap is always hangin' round Cousin Ethel," he observed. "He must bore her feahfully. I wondah—"

"I can hear Figgy's voice," said Tom Merry.

"Bai Jove, so can I!"

Figgins's voice could be heard from the other side of a huge pile of luggage.

"That's the whistle sounding, Miss Ethel. I suppose you must go. By Jove, I do wish you were coming on this cruise."

"It would be very nice."

"Do you care for picture-postcards?"

Tom Merry grinned, and dragged D'Arcy away from the spot. The swell of St. Jim's stared at him.

"What are you up to, Tom Mewwy?"

"Oh, that's all right; let them say good-bye."

"It's like Figgins' cheek to say good-bye to my cousin, and it's time for Ethel to go ashore."

"That's all right; there's a few minutes yet."

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—"

"Oh, buzz off!"

"But Figgins must be boring Ethel feahfully—"

Tom Merry laughed.

"Don't worry about that, Gussy. Keep off the grass."

Cousin Ethel did not look as if Figgins were boring her. They had paused, quite accidentally, of course, in the screen of the huge luggage pile to exchange a few words of farewell.

"Do you care for picture-postcards, Cousin Ethel?"

"Very much," said Cousin Ethel.

"Would you care for me to send you some—from every place we stop at?" said Figgins eagerly.

"But that would be a great trouble, surely."

"Trouble!" said Figgins reproachfully.

Cousin Ethel smiled.

"Well, I should like it very much."

"I'll just stick my initials on them, you know," said Figgins, "then you'll know whom they come from. I—I wish I weren't going. I—"

"Ethel!"

"Dear me! that is Miss Fawcett calling."

Cousin Ethel and Figgins emerged from behind the pile of luggage, and joined Miss Fawcett. The old lady looked relieved.

"I was afraid you had fallen into the water, my dear," she said. "Still, I might have known Figgins would look after you. You remember how well he did so at the Franco-British Exhibition, holding your hand all the time we were on the mountain railway—"

Figgins turned crimson, and Cousin Ethel put up her parasol.

"Yes, yes," she said hurriedly. "Is it time to go ashore?"

"Yes," said Mr. Railton, with a smile. "I am sorry, but there are only a few minutes now. Let me see you over the gangway."

There was a final handshaking, a final injunction from Miss Fawcett to Tom Merry to be sure not to get his feet wet, and the ladies left the ship with the housemaster. Mr. Railton returned hastily. Miss Priscilla waved her hand to Tom Merry, and Cousin Ethel waved a little handkerchief, to whom we cannot specify.

"Bai Jove, we're moving at last!" said D'Arcy, leaning on the rail, and waving his glove to Cousin Ethel. "How wippin' of them to come and see us off. See!—Ethel's wavin' her handkerchief to me."

The ship was in a buzz now. Captain Bolsover was rapping out orders on the bridge, and Thropp and Green, the mates, were excited and busy, as was everyone else on board. The Condor began to rise and fall on the water.

The engines were thumping away noisily. The boys of St. Jim's crowded the rail and waved hats and handkerchiefs and hands. Many of the fellows had had friends to see them off, and there was quite a crowd at the landing-place. Among them could be seen Miss Fawcett and Cousin Ethel. The white handkerchief still fluttered from Miss Cleveland's hand, and her eyes were still on the ship. The great steamer floated out, the water widening more and more, and objects on shore growing smaller and more confused.

Figgins stood up on the lower rail, one leg on the upper rail to keep himself steady, and D'Arcy took off his silk hat a dozen times. Merry waved his hand. Miss Fawcett left off waving her hand, and D'Arcy saw the umbrella.

old gentleman standing near her, and that was the last he saw of Miss Fawcett.

The white handkerchief still fluttered, and Figgins waved his cap frantically. Arthur Augustus turned his eyeglass upon the long-limbed junior on the rail.

"I weally think Figgins is off his wockah, Tom Mewwy," he remarked. "He has had nobody down here to see him off, and yet he's wavin' his cap as if all his fiwends and welations were there."

"Curious," said Tom Merry, laughing.

"Yaas, I wegard it as extremely cwious. Hallo, Cousin Ethel is still wavin' her handkerchief to me."

And D'Arcy raised his silk hat for the thirteenth time, and this time waved it round his head. A gust of wind caught it, and swept it from his hand, and it splashed into the water. In a moment it was whisked into the white wake of the ship. Arthur Augustus gave a shout.

"My hat's overboard! Pway stop the ship at once!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

D'Arcy ran towards the bridge.

"Captain Bobsoyah! Pway turn the steamah back for a few minutes! My hat's drownded ovalboard!"

The captain did not even look down. Blake and Digby and Herries dragged the swell of St. Jim's away, and held on to him to keep him from further moderate requests to the captain. D'Arcy protested, and finding his protests useless, gave it up, and relapsed into indignant silence, watching his silk hat whisk away in the wake of the steamer, till it disappeared from view.

CHAPTER 13.

Mal-de-Mer.

SKIMPOLE was leaning on the rail and thoughtfully watching the water churning away from under the steamer, when Jack Blake tapped him on the shoulder. The amateur Socialist of St. Jim's looked round, blinking through his spectacles in the sunlight.

"Got it?" asked Blake.

Skimpole looked puzzled.

"Got what?"

"It?"

"I really do not understand you, Blake. I was thinking of my airship. If it had been completed, it would have been much more satisfactory for us to have made this holiday trip on board of it, instead of on a common steamer."

"Ripping!" said Blake. "Why didn't you finish it?"

"Well, there were a few structural details I had not quite decided upon, such as the method of rising in the air and the method of propulsion. Otherwise, it was practically perfect. But I really gave up the idea because I felt that I had been neglecting the cause of Socialism too long. This cruise will be a grand opportunity for me to complete my great book. I am now engaged upon the three hundred and twenty-third chapter."

"My hat!"

"I have the notes here, and will read you a few extracts—"

"Oh, no, you won't!"

"There is a paragraph in the two hundred and eighty-fourth chapter specially referring to fellows like you, Blake. I mention the difficulty a real genius experiences in making common, stupid people understand his lofty aims—"

"Ha, ha, ha!" cackled Monty Lowther. "There's your character, Blake."

"I think it would do you good if I— Please don't bump me against the rail like that, Blake. If you are joking, I consider it a rough and idiotic joke, due, of course, to your naturally feeble intellect—"

Skimpole sat down on the deck with a bump ere he could finish. Blake turned wrathfully away, leaving the amateur Socialist staring after him, and Lowther cackling. A deep groan caught Blake's ear, and he looked round, to see Fatty Wynn sitting in the shadow of a boat, his face as white as chalk.

"Bai Jove!" exclaimed D'Arcy, coming up, and looking really concerned. "Fatty Wynn looks as if he was ill."

Fatty Wynn groaned deeply.

"I am dying!"

"Good gracious! Have you hurt yourself anyhow?"

"Oh, oh, oh!"

"Where do you feel the beastly pain, you know?"

"Oh, oh, oh!"

"Poah chap! He does look wotten," said D'Arcy anxiously.

"What do you think is the matter with him, Blake?"

"—his—," said Blake. "Porkpieitis."

"—?" said D'Arcy, looking puzzled. "I have 'cause of that name."

"—ings you never heard of, Gussy, and 't Fatty's got."

"—fully! Shall I call the

Blake giggled.

"Yes. I think I can see him coming."

"I suppose he would come if I called him," said Arthur Augustus, in his most stately manner.

"Ha, ha! Try."

D'Arcy did not try. Skimpole came up. He came to remonstrate with Blake upon his rough handling, and to explain that although as a Socialist he was bound not to resent injuries, yet as a Determinist he was going to punch Blake's head. But his attention was arrested by the sight of Fatty Wynn's anguish.

"Good gracious! What is the matter with Wynn?"

"He's ill," said D'Arcy. "Blake says he's got something called porkpieitis, but I don't believe it's anything of the sort."

"Oh, oh, oh!"

"It is terrible to see a fellow-creature suffering like this," said Skimpole. "Perhaps he has been eating some tinned food from America. Have you been eating any tinned meat, Wynn? In that case you have probably got ptomaine poisoning."

"Oh, oh, oh!"

"You asses!" said Blake. "Can't you see that it's the mal-de-mer?"

"The what?"

"Sea-sickness, duffer."

"Bai Jove, you know, I nevah thought of that."

"It was the pork-pies," groaned Fatty Wynn. "I had a feeling at the time that they would not agree with the cold rabbit and the veal outlets."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I thought I'd risk it. Oh, oh, oh! I'm dying!"

"Bai Jove!"

"Oh, oh, OH! Help! Murder! Stop the ship!"

"The steamah can't be stopped, deah boy. The captain wufused to turn back when my silk toppah went overboard, so he's pwetty certain to keep on now," said D'Arcy sympathetically. "I say, Skimmey, you're a brainy chap; don't you know any cure for sea-sickness?"

Skimpole rubbed his bumpy forehead and reflected.

"I have heard that a piece of fat bacon, tied on the end of a string, and drawn slowly up and down the inside of the throat—"

"Ow, aw, gerrarararararrah!" gasped Fatty Wynn.

"Dear me, he seems to have become worse all of a sudden," said Skimpole. "It is too late to try that remedy now."

"You cheerful chump!" said Blake.

"Really, Blake—"

"Don't bother him. Let him be ill if he wants to. Here's a glass of water, Fatty, old chap—that's what you want."

"Ooh, ooh, ooh!"

"Can I do anything else for you?"

"Ooh, ooh, ooh!"

"Feeling better?"

"Ooh, ooh, ooh!"

Blake gave it up. He moved along so as not to be a witness of the agonies of the fat junior. He came upon Herries sitting on a trunk, with a far-away look in his eyes, and his hands tightly clenched.

"Hallo," said Blake, dropping his hand on his chum's shoulder. "You've been pretty mum for some time. Enjoying the scenery?"

"D-don't touch me," muttered Herries.

Blake stared at him.

"Why not?"

"I—I—don't feel quite well."

"Have you got it?"

"I—I—I think so."

Herries' face was becoming paler every moment, and beads of perspiration were standing upon his brow. His gaze was fixed, and seemed to be following the flight of a sea-gull far away on the blue waters of the Channel. In reality he saw nothing. All his energies and faculties were bound up in a desperate attempt to resist the strange feeling that was creeping over him.

"Have a glass of water, old son?"

"Ye-es."

The steward had tin basins and water-glasses all ready in any number. He knew what to expect. Blake brought a glass of water for Herries, and left it beside him. The junior seemed to want to be alone.

The steamer was rolling very slightly, considering, but it was quite sufficient to trouble her passengers, especially those who had, before embarking, lunched not wisely but too well.

Far away to the north was the blue line of the Hampshire coast and the Isle of Wight, and hills beyond. Round the Condor rolled the waters of the Channel, dotted with white sails and black smoke of steamers.

"Rough on old Herries, isn't it, Dig?" said Blake, joining his chum at the rail. "He's knocked under."

Digby did not reply.

He had sunk forward on the rail, resting his head upon it, and his face was staring downwards, without a vestige of colour in it, at the sea.

"I say, Dig—"

"Ger-r-r-r-r-r!"

"My only hat! Dig's got it, too!"

"I say, Blake, deah boy!" said a faint voice.

Blake turned towards Arthur Augustus. D'Arcy had sunk into a deck chair, and was looking very white.

"Got it, Gussy?"

"I am not sea sick, if that's what you mean, Blake. I feel wathah queer—I think I ate somethin' at lunch that disagreed with me—but I am not sea sick. I wathah think I should like a glass of watah."

Blake grinned.

"I'll get you one, Gussy, though you're not sea sick."

"Thank you, Blake." D'Arcy sipped the water when Blake brought it. "Yaas, that tastes wathah wewfeshin'—oh!"

"What's the matter?"

"Nothin'. I felt a curious feelin', that's all. It was nothin'."

"Nothing like sea sickness?" grinned Blake.

"Oh, no, not at all—oh, oh!"

"Anything the matter?"

"No, yaas—I don't know! I certainly feel wathah queer," groaned Arthur Augustus. "It is poss. that I have a slight attack, afaah all."

"I should say it was," remarked Blake.

He looked up and down the deck. A large number of fellows had gone below, and others were sitting or standing about the decks looking very unhappy. Kildare, the captain of St. Jim's, looked comfortable enough, as he chatted with Darrel and Rushden. He was an old sailor, and impervious. But both Darrel and Rushden were looking a little uneasy, and all at once the latter made a rush for the side.

"By Jove, they're all getting it," murmured Blake. "It's this beastly choppy water, I suppose, and that lovely niff you get now and then from the engines. I'm all right." He paused for a moment, as a curious feeling of uncertainty seemed to float about within him. "I'm all right," he repeated, but less confidently than before. "Hallo, here's old Ratty—I wonder how he'll stand it."

Mr. Ratcliff, the senior housemaster—and monarch of all he surveyed on board the Condor, as far as the boys were concerned—had just come on deck, looking very sour.

CHAPTER 14.

Skimpole, the Comforter.

"FIGGINS!"

"Adsum!" said Figgins cheerfully.

"Kerr!"

"Here, sir."

"Come here, both of you," said Mr. Ratcliff sourly. "I have to deal with a very serious breach of discipline."

"In for it," murmured Figgins, as he came towards his housemaster. "Why, oh, why didn't they drown him at birth?"

"You absented yourselves without leave immediately on arrival at Southampton. I have had no time to deal with the matter before. What is the matter with you, Kerr?"

The Scottish partner in the Co. was looking very white.

"I—I feel rather queer, sir," he gasped.

"Nonsense! You will not escape your punishment by an absurd pretence of that kind," said Mr. Ratcliff sternly.

"I am not pretending," said Kerr, with spirit. "I'm feeling sick. There are a good many others the same; you can see for yourself."

"That is not the way to speak to me, Kerr. I—" Mr. Ratcliff paused. A strange feeling came through him, and he drew a long, quivering breath. "Dear me, how the ship is rolling. Figgins and Kerr, it will be necessary for me to—Oh, dear."

Mr. Ratcliff was looking white himself now. The sight of several sick fellows near him added to the effect of his inward qualms.

"Yes, sir," said Figgins.

"It will be necessary for me," said Mr. Ratcliff, speaking steadily with great difficulty, "to make an example—an example—oh, dear!"

He broke off abruptly.

"I—I—I—can you get me a glass of water, Monteith?"

"Certainly, sir," said the New House prefect promptly.

He brought the water; and Mr. Ratcliff sipped it. The two juniors stood like culprits awaiting their doom. Secretly they were watching the signs of growing unrest in Mr. Ratcliff's sour countenance with great interest.

"Figgins, you were to blame, and—I—I—think—oh—"

Mr. Ratcliff reeled a little, and Monteith put out an arm to steady him. He gasped. His face was not white now; it was almost green.

"Better sit down, sir."

"Ye-es, thank you, Monteith, I—I will."

"Do you want us any longer, sir?" said Figgins demurely.

"No—er—you may go."

"If we are to be punished, sir—"

"You—you may go; I—I overlook your offence," said Mr. Ratcliff, who would have forgiven anybody anything to be let alone at that moment. "You may go—go—oh! Oh! Oh!"

"Thank you, sir."

Figgins and Kerr retired. The mal-de-mer had saved them. But Kerr was looking very peculiar, and a minute or two later he collapsed upon a deck-chair. Figgins looked after him as much as he could, and after Fatty Wynn, but after all there was little that could be done. And Figgins was beginning to feel some very uneasy symptoms himself.

"Bai Jove!" gasped Arthur Augustus. "I am feeling worse! I am not what you would call seasick, but it certainly feels vewy bad."

"A great pity my airship was not completed, and it would have saved all this," Skimpole remarked. "I am feeling very well myself. Can I get you anything to eat, D'Arcy?"

"Ow, get away!"

"There is no need to be rude about it. I only meant to be obliging. I say, Tom Merry, will you come and help me unpack my trunk?"

Gr-r-r-r.

"Is there anything the matter, Merry?"

"Yes, ass! Get away!"

"Will you come down with me, Lowther, and help me—"

"Oh, get away! Don't bother."

"Really, Lowther, I cannot help regarding your reply as almost rude. Perhaps, however, Manners will come and help me. Will you, Manners?"

Manners did not reply. He was clinging to the rail and gazing at the sea with a deep, deep gaze. At intervals his chest heaved.

"Manners—"

"Get away, idiot!"

"Oh, certainly. You need not be uncivil. Blake—dear me, Blake, you do look queer. Are you seasick too?"

"Oh, no," said Blake; "I—I'm enjoying myself. Don't I look as if I were, you shrieking fathead? Oh—oh—er!"

"Dear me! My airship would have obviated all this. It is very unfortunate. I seem to be almost the only person who is well. This is doubtless due to a careful and temperate diet. It is very sad to hear you groaning like that, Wynn. Do you feel bad?"

"Do you think I'm groaning for fun, you screaming dummy?" asked Fatty Wynn.

"Really, Wynn—"

"Get away!"

"I do not desire to incommode you with my conversation if it is unwelcome to you, Wynn; but I think—"

"Take him away!" moaned Fatty Wynn. "Kill him, somebody!"

Monteith inserted two fingers in Skimpole's collar, and jerked him away, and sat him down on the deck. The bump on the planks knocked all the breath out of the amateur Socialist, and he sat for some minutes staring and gasping. Curiously enough, Skimpole was not in the least seasick. He scrambled up presently.

"Dear me! I wonder why Monteith did that?" he murmured. "It was almost rude of him. I should certainly punch his head, but as a sincere Socialist I am bound not to use violence—and, besides, he is a prefect and might give me a licking. It would have been really useful if I had devoted my vast brain power to thinking out some cure for seasickness—perhaps more beneficial than the invention of an airship. Perhaps some entertaining and instructive conversation, to take their minds off their sufferings, is the best consolation I can offer under the circumstances. I will do my best."

Kerr was hanging upon the rail as if his life depended upon it, when the amateur Socialist tapped him on the shoulder, with a kindly smile.

"Would you care to hear an exposition of the first principles of Determinism, Kerr?" asked Skimpole. "I should be very pleased to quote from memory an extract from the hundred and forty-fourth chapter of my great work—"

Kerr turned a glassy glare upon the speaker.

"Get out!"

"Eh?"

"Get away!"

"Really, Kerr—"

"You dummy! Get out!"

Skimpole got out. He was a little discouraged, but his kind heart was not easily chilled. He moved along to the spot where Herries was embracing his knees and looking the picture of abject misery.

"I say, Herries!"

Herries did not move. He did not look up.

"Herries, old chap, you look pretty bad. I'm sorry I have no cure for seasickness; but I should like to remove your thoughts from your sufferings by some light and entertaining conversation. Would you care to hear me quote at full length

a poem I have written upon the subject of the starving children of the London slums? It begins

"Starving mite in filthy slum,
Whose parents drink both gin and rum——"

Herries reached out his hand, caught Skimpole by the collar, and slung him away. Skimpole staggered along till he brought up against Monteith, who was making a sudden rush for the side. Both of them went flying. Skimpole sat down, and stared about him vaguely; Monteith rolled on the deck, and remained there, looking white as ashes and gasping faintly in the grip of the demon mal-de-mer.

"Dear me," said Skimpole. "Herries was almost rude—a fact, quite rude. I shall not attempt to comfort Herries again."

He rose to his feet and adjusted his spectacles. Reilly was leaning near him, and Skimpole approached him sympathetically.

"Are you suffering, Reilly?"

"Faith, and I am," groaned the boy from Belfast. "Sure and I'd give anythin' on earth to have me foot on Belfast ground this minute."

"I am afraid that is impossible; but I can remove your thoughts from your sufferings by conversation. I should be very happy to explain the principles set forth by Schopenhauer in his great book, 'Die Welt als Wille und Vorstellung——'"

"Get along wid ye."

"In the first place, he——"

"Faith, and if ye bother me any more I'll scalp ye! Get along wid ye for a silly chatterin' gossoon!"

"Really, Reilly——"

Reilly made a threatening gesture; and the amateur Socialist retired. He was greatly inclined to give up his role of comforter, but the sight of Gore sitting on the deck and gasping in anguish touched him deeply.

"I am very sorry to see you in this state, Gore," said Skimpole. "Under the painful circumstances, I cannot but forget that you are a rotter, and have always treated me like a cad. Would it relieve your mind if I recited you from memory an article I have lately written upon woman's suffrage for 'Tom Merry's Weekly'?"

Gore glared at him, and muttered something.

"In this article I point out that the granting of woman's suffrage would inevitably lead to a considerable—ow—wow—wow!"

Gore had reached out with his feet and given Skimpole a shove that sent him rolling over. He rolled near Tom Merry, who was feeling very ill, but found strength enough to give him another shove to send him further. Lowther and Blake also lent their aid, and Skimpole was feeling decidedly rumpled by the time he escaped below. He gave up the role of comforter on the spot.

CHAPTER 15.

The Captain is Obstinate.

THE sun sank lower into the heaving waters. The Condor steadily churned on her way through the growing dusk, gleaming now with lights fore and aft. From the dusk of the sea gleamed points of light from other unseen craft. Tom Merry rose to his feet.

His face was still a little chalky, but he was feeling better—decidedly better. His sickness was over, and he was beginning to feel more firm in his inside—more as if it belonged to him, as it were. He drank some cold water, and felt better.

"I say, Lowther."

Monty Lowther turned a lack-lustre eye upon him.

"Hallo, Tom!"

"How do you feel?"

"Like a washed-out rag."

Tom Merry laughed.

"And you, Manners, old man?"

"Don't ask me," said Manners. "I can't think how I ever came to be such a shrieking idiot as to set my foot on a ship. Why people go to sea when there's plenty of dry land to stay on puzzles me. Gr-r-r!"

"Yas, wathnah!" said a feeble voice. "I wish the captain would turn the ship round and steam stwaight back to Southampton."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Suppose we got up a wound wobin——"

"A what?"

"A wound wobin."

"He means a round robin," grinned Blake, who was looking almost himself again by this time. "What do you want to get up a round robin for, Gussy?"

"I think we might present a wound wobin to Mr. Waitton to ask him to go back to Southampton at once, as we've changed our minds about goin' to sea."

"I think I can see him doing it," grinned Tom Merry.

"Yes, rather," said Figgins. "Why don't you go and tell the captain to turn the ship round, Gussy?"

"I have already made a similar request, when my toppah was blown ova'board, and he refused to take the slightest notice."

"Curious."

"Yas, it was wathnah curious. He certainly did not tweek me with pwopah respect."

"Dear me, I am glad to see you fellows looking so much better," said the voice of Skimpole, as he came, blinking, out of the gloom. "There's a jolly good meal laid below, and I've been having some. Won't you come and tuck in?"

There was a chorus of groans.

"Don't talk to me about food!" gasped Figgins. "I was feeling better; and now——"

"There's some boiled pork, that is very good——"

"Ow, kill him!"

"You need not be rude about it," said Skimpole. "I only want to be obliging. If you feel so bad, why don't you insist upon being set ashore?"

Tom Merry glanced at the dusky sea flowing in ripples past the steamer's rail.

"Rather a wide step to the shore," he remarked.

"As freeborn citizens we have a right to have our own way in the matter, and if a majority of us decided to go back, the captain ought to return to Southampton."

"Go and tell him so."

Skimpole blinked resolutely round at the juniors.

"I would certainly do so, if I were backed up by a majority of the passengers," he said. "The captain is a hired person who must naturally do as he is told."

Tom Merry grinned.

"Well, you can see that most of the chaps would like to go back," he remarked. "You've only got to ask them, anyway."

"I shall certainly do so. Would you fellows like to go ashore if possible?" called out Skimpole.

"Yes, rather."

It was an almost unanimous chorus. Even the sickest of the passengers managed to make that reply.

"Very well," said Skimpole, "I will see to it."

The juniors watched him curiously as he made his way towards the bridge. Captain Bolsover and Mr. Thropp, the chief mate, were there, and they both stared at Skimpole as he put his foot on the bridge ladder. Mr. Thropp made him a furious gesture, which Skimpole did not understand or heed. He calmly ascended the steps.

The captain waved his hand warningly.

"Get back."

Skimpole stopped a moment, adjusted his spectacles, and stared at the captain.

"Did you address me?" he asked.

"Yes, you young fool. Get off that ladder."

"But I want to come upon the bridge."

"You are not allowed here."

"I cannot but regard that statement as absurd," said Skimpole. "This steamer has been hired for our use, and it stands to reason that we are allowed to go anywhere we like upon it."

Captain Bolsover seemed petrified by this reply. Mr. Thropp scowled. Skimpole continued to ascend the ladder.

"Go back," rapped out Mr. Thropp.

"I cannot accede to that unreasonable request. I want to speak to the captain on a most important matter," said Skimpole.

"Take him away," yelled Mr. Thropp.

A couple of seamen ran towards the bridge ladder. But Skimpole skipped up in time to escape their clutches, and approached the amazed captain rather hurriedly.

"If you please, Captain Bolsover——"

"Get off the bridge. You are not allowed here."

"I have a most important matter to speak to you about. The majority of the passengers have decided that they would rather go ashore, and therefore you are requested to turn the ship round and make for Southampton immediately."

The captain gasped.

"As a sincere Socialist, I regard the voice of the majority as irresistible," said Skimpole. "You are bound to obey their orders, and they require you to turn the ship round immediately."

"You—you young lubber!" gasped the captain.

"If you refuse, I shall certainly advise the majority to remove you from your post, and take the ship back themselves."

"Take him away," said Mr. Thropp to a couple of hands who had come up in obedience to his call.

"Ay, ay, sir."

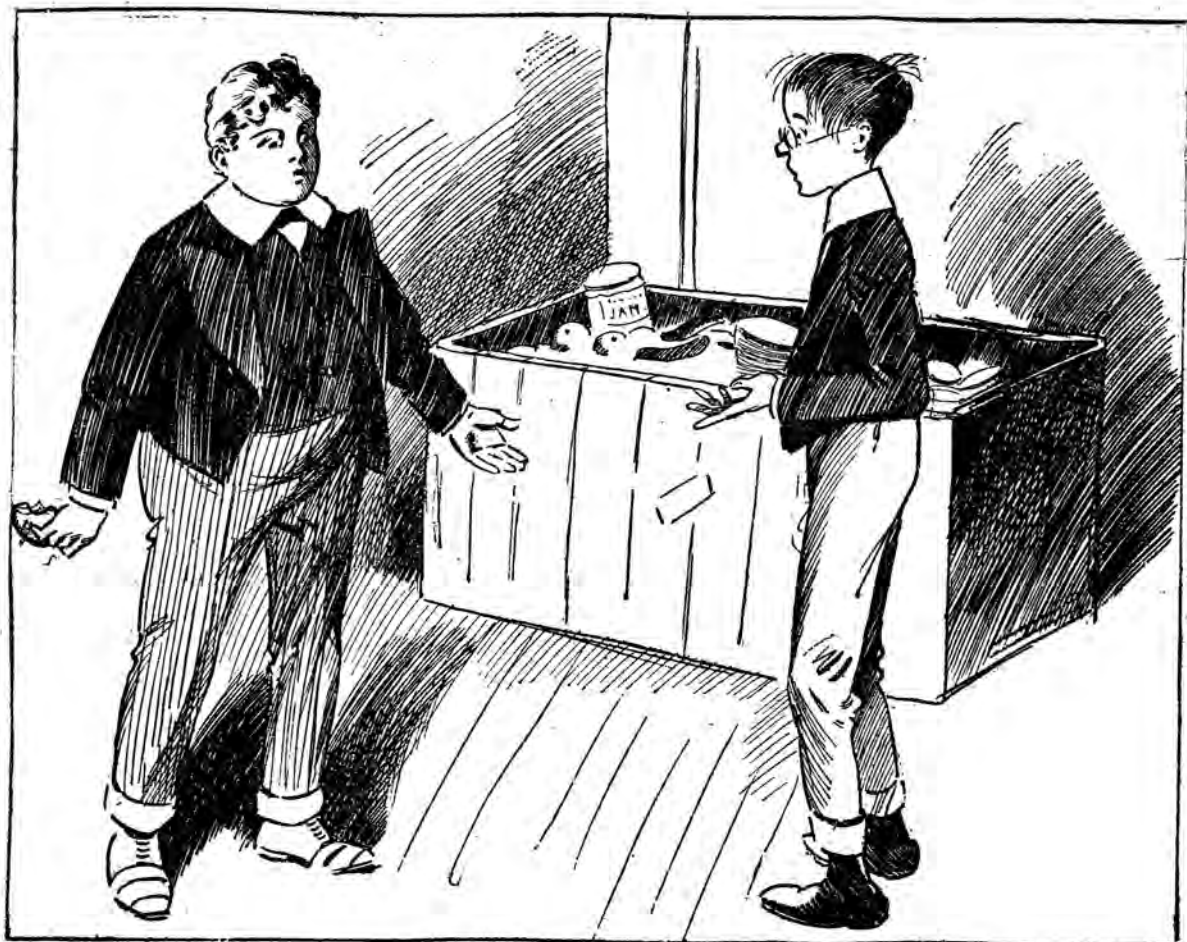
The two hands seized Skimpole and yanked him away; the amateur Socialist of St. Jim's struggled indignantly.

"Let me go, you rough wretches! Release me immediately, while I explain to Captain Bolsover——"

"Throw him down the ladder," said Mr. Thropp.

"No, don't hurt him," said the captain, laughing. "Take him away, that's all. I shall have to speak to Mr. Ratcliff if this nonsense is repeated, my boy, and you will be punished."

"I must yield to physical force," gasped Skimpole. "But on the principle of the thing, I maintain——"



"Quiet Skimpole!" said Fatty Wynn mysteriously. "Close the door and I'll tell you something."

He was jerked down the ladder, and bumped down. He did not renew the attempt to explain matters to the captain. He set his spectacles straight and rejoined the grinning juniors with a gloomy brow.

"Well, how has it panned out?" asked Figgins.

"I am afraid I have not been successful in making the captain see reason," said Skimpole, shaking his head. "He is obstinate and unreasonable. The only resource would be to compel him to turn the ship round—"

"Ass!" said Blake.

"Really, Blake—"

"Oh, ring off," said Blake. "I say, you chaps, I'm feeling better, you know. What do you feel like, Herries?"

Herries looked up with a chalky face.

"Better," he said weakly. "I dare say I shall be all right in a few days."

"In a few hours, you mean," said Tom Merry, laughing. "These things are never so bad as they seem at the time."

Mr. Railton came along the deck, and the boys raised their caps. The housemaster was looking quite well and jovial.

"Feeling better, lads?" he asked.

"Some of us, sir," said Tom Merry.

"How is Mr. Ratcliff, sir?" asked Figgins, with a twinkle in his eyes. Mr. Railton smiled slightly.

"I am sorry to say that he is not by any means better," he replied. "He has gone to his cabin, and gone to bed, and he says he will remain there for a few days. I am afraid the sea has upset him very much. Meanwhile, all you boys are under my charge."

The New House fellows did not look displeased. As a matter of fact, they would have been well content if Mr. Ratcliff had remained in his cabin the whole of the voyage.

"There is a very substantial supper laid below," said Mr. Railton. "You can come down to it whenever you feel inclined, up to bedtime."

And he nodded and walked on. There was a deep groan from Fatty Wynn. The juniors turned towards him anxiously.

"Feeling worse, Fatty?" asked Figgins, sympathetically.

"Oh, dear!"

"Is it very bad?"

"Oh, no! But to think of a jolly big supper laid out all ready—and not to be able to touch it! Oh, dear!"

And Fatty Wynn groaned again.

CHAPTER 16.

A Good Time Coming!

THE stars were coming out in the clear blue sky of August. A keen, invigorating breeze came over the curling waters. Tom Merry felt his heart grow lighter as the last traces of mal-de-mer left him, and he drew in deep draughts of the salty air.

"By Jove, this is all right!" he exclaimed. "I say, I'm beginning to feel hungry."

"Do you know, I am too," said Lowther, in a rather uncertain way. "I don't know that I could eat anything, but I certainly feel rather hollow."

"No wonder!"

"Bai Jove, I wathah think we're all a little hollow now," said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "As a matter of fact, deah boys, I am beginnin' to feel wathah a cwavin' for somethin' to eat myself."

"How do you feel, Fatty?" asked Figgins.

Fatty Wynn groaned.

"It was the pork pies," he murmured.

"Eh?"

"I should have been all right but for the pork pies. It was risky, I knew that at the time. But I was hungry, and they were so nice. I get so hungry in this August weather," said Fatty Wynn, pathetically.

"Couldn't you eat just a little bit?" said Figgins, encouragingly.

"Oh! I—I can't move."

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"We'll help you down," said Blake. "You take one arm, Figgy, and I'll take the other, and Tom Merry and Lowther can take his legs."

"I—I'd rather walk," murmured Fatty Wynn. "Take my arms and bear the weight, and then I think perhaps I can do it."

"Get a good hold, Figgy."

"Right-ho. I've got him."

"I've got him, too. Now, walk, Fatty."

Fatty, with a deep gasp, heaved himself upon his feet. With the sympathetic juniors all round him helping, he staggered towards the stair down to the dining-saloon. He walked slowly, zigzagging, but his helpers were patient. He had to pause for a few minutes at the head of the stair.

"I—I don't think I can do it," he gasped.

"Buck up," said Tom Merry, who was entering into the spirit of the thing. "You're going to have a good supper, Fatty, and forget all your troubles. Shall I take your legs and go first?"

"N—no, thanks: I think I'll walk."

Blake and Figgins helped the unhappy Fatty down. Several other juniors followed to lend their kindly aid. They were half-a-dozen steps from the bottom when a roll of the steamer sent Lowther reeling against Figgins, who fell against Blake; and the next moment six or seven juniors were rolling downward.

"Ow!" gasped Fatty Wynn.

"Ow! Oh! Oh!"

"You ass!"

"Gerroff!"

"My hat!"

"Lemme gerrup!"

They extricated themselves at last. Fatty Wynn was puffing like a grampus, and looking very sick. Tom Merry and Lowther lifted him to his feet.

"All right, Fatty?"

"Put me in some quiet corner where I can die in peace," moaned Fatty. "I only want to die—to die in peace."

"You came jolly near dying in pieces with all these silly asses tumbling over you," remarked Monty Lowther.

"Bring him in here," said Tom Merry. "The smell of the grub will revive him if anything will."

Tom Merry was right.

An appetising scent from several hot dishes on the table reached the nostrils of Fatty Wynn, and he was observed to snuff appreciatively.

"I say, that's nice," he said, in something of his old tone. "That's jolly nice. I—I really feel as if I could eat something, after all."

"Bring him in," grinned Tom Merry.

They helped Fatty Wynn in, and put him into a seat. His eyes glistened as he looked over the well-spread board. Skimpole was there, making a second supper, and several other fellows had strolled in too. The grip of the mal-de-mer had relaxed, and there was a general recovery all along the line.

Tom Merry carved for Fatty, and gave him a generous helping. It disappeared as if by magic. As Fatty explained, he had plenty of room for it. Arthur Augustus came in, and he also made a vigorous onslaught upon the good things.

"Bai Jove, you know, I reel wathah bettah," he remarked. "As a mattah of fact, deah boys, I wasn't what you call seasick at all—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Weally, I wegard this laughtah as diswespictful. I wepeat that I was not what you would weally call seasick. It was just a twidin'—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I think I'll have some more of that beef," said Fatty Wynn. "And while you're carving the mutton, Lowther, you may as well cut for me. I shall be ready in a few minutes. Those sausages look nice, Manners—shove 'em over this way, will you? Yes, I'll have potatoes, and cauliflower, and celery. Rabbit pie—oh, rather—I like that with beef—and some ham and tongue certainly."

By which it will be seen that Fatty Wynn was getting into quite his old form. Fellows were streaming in every minute now, and the table was soon crowded with a jolly party, the room in a buzz of cheery conversation.

Tom Merry filled his glass with ginger-beer.

"A toast, you chaps! Success to the voyage of the Condor, long life to ourselves, and may Fatty Wynn's appetite never grow less!"

And the toast was drunk with enthusiasm.

THE END.

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JOE

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READ THIS FIRST.

Joe throws up office work, and while tramping along a country lane meets Jim, who is running away from Muerte, a bullying circus proprietor. Joe and Jim chum up and join Muerte's rival, Ruabino. From motives of revenge, Muerte bribes Luigi, Ruabino's former lion-tamer, to let loose his one-time charges. Not content with this, Luigi, with Giles, his villainous accomplice, knocks Rubby into the river, from which he is rescued by Joe. Muerte swears he will follow Ruabino's circus and ruin him. This he endeavours to do by dashing his traction-engine into Rubby's caravans, which are, however, saved by Joe's presence of mind. One day Joe's guardian, Silas Read, who treated Joe with great cruelty before he joined Ruabino, turns up at the circus and claims his ward.

Ruabino refuses to give him up, but with the help of Giles, Read kidnaps Joe. The latter, however, escapes; but, coming to a village, is arrested on a charge of poaching. He tells his story, but it is not credited, and he is committed for trial.

(Now go on with the story.)

Silas Read's Humiliation.

Joe's story was repeated in court, and the inspector asked for a remand, when a gentleman rose from the body of the court.

He was a well-dressed, gentlemanly-looking man of about thirty years of age, and he stated that he believed he could give some important evidence concerning the matter.

He gave his name as Charles Smart, and explained that he rented a little shooting-box in the neighbourhood, which he had taken for the shooting.

"It so happens that last night, at about eleven," said the gentleman, "I was returning to my hunting-box, when I saw a lad lying in the woods. He was near the pathway, and was sound asleep. I saw his face distinctly, and recognise this lad as the one. I was about to awake him and ask what he was doing there, when some shots were fired in the neighbourhood. Then, as poaching had lately occurred on the estate, I came to the conclusion that this lad belonged to the party; and as I knew that these poachers were very desperate characters, and I had no weapons, I decided on hiding in the bushes and keeping watch.

"There were either three or four guns going, and I remained in the bushes for upwards of half an hour, when the poachers came that way. I only saw two men, and they glanced at the lad, who was still sleeping soundly.

"From their conversation, I became convinced that the lad had nothing to do with the poachers. I could not catch all their conversation, as they spoke in lowered voices, but I heard one say to the other:

"Don't wake him, mate, else he might be able to identify us. I expect he's a tramp, or a runaway. At any rate, he won't do us no harm."

"Then I heard my own name mentioned, and one of the poachers swore that he would what he called 'do me in' if he came across me. This was, no doubt, because I had made an attempt to put down the poaching.

"At any rate, they were big, powerful men, and after that threat I decided on remaining in hiding, especially as they remained in the vicinity. Another thing I feared was that they might pay a visit to my hunting-box, as they would be sure to know that I lived there alone.

"Now, I remained quite close to that lad for several hours, and he was sleeping soundly all the time!"

"Why did you not wake him?" inquired one of the magistrates.

"Because the poachers were so close that I felt certain they would hear my movement in the bushes."

"Then you were afraid?"

"If you choose to put it that way, yes. I was unarmed, and, being quite a light-weight, should certainly have had no chance against them in a struggle. There is one thing absolutely certain, and that is that the lad could not have committed the robbery. It is only in the interests of justice that I give this information. The robbery was committed at midnight, and, to my certain knowledge, the lad was miles away from the spot. It was not until break of day that I left him sleeping and returned to my shooting-box; then I came on to the town to give information to the police, and, hearing that a lad had been arrested for the burglary, I entered the court and at once identified the prisoner."

"I must ask for a remand," said the inspector.

"It would be wrong to keep an innocent lad in custody," observed the benevolent-looking old magistrate. "I have the pleasure of Mr. Smart's acquaintance, and am confident that he has made no mistake in the identity of the lad."

"Nor I, sir," said the inspector. "At the same time, the lad's story is so improbable that it requires looking into. I will communicate with Ruabino's circus."

"Then that will settle the matter," said Joe. "It won't matter much now, remaining in custody till you receive his reply. Rubby will come here at once; I know that perfectly well. I don't understand the matter at all, and—"

"No wonder, my poor lad!" exclaimed Smart. "I must say that fate has treated you very badly! If you would care to fix bail, gentlemen, I shall be prepared to offer mine. In fact, I will be responsible for the lad's appearance, and will take care of him until further inquiries have been made."

This was agreed to, and Joe accompanied Smart from the court.

"Did you ever come across such a lot of idiots, Joe?" exclaimed Smart, hurrying out of the town.

"But I don't understand the matter at all, Mr. Smart!" exclaimed Joe. "You certainly never saw me asleep, as you say!"

"What does it matter? I don't want to leave you in prison when you are perfectly innocent!"

"That is true enough, and I have not the slightest doubt that I shall be able to convince them of the fact when they communicate with Rubby."

"There is such a man, then?"

"Certainly. Do you mean to say that you have gone bail for me when you believed I was telling a pack of lies?"

"Well, I won't say that I thought you were doing that exactly; but I certainly thought that you were not telling the truth. What would be the good of telling the truth to those idiots, when they would not believe it? To tell you the truth, Joe, I was very much taken with you! I happened to be in court, and there was a certain amount of coolness about you that pleased me greatly. It is not often seen in a lad of your time of life. Well, I felt positive that you were innocent, and so I determined to get you out of your difficulty. I did it in my own way, and one of my reasons was that I thought you might be of service to me, as I have been, and will be, of service to you."

"I feel that you have been of considerable service to me

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already," said Joe. "I am sorry that you misled the old buffers for my sake, though."

"Pooh; that does not matter a bit, my dear fellow! You may be pretty sure that they always will be misled when they have a case before them! There is not an ounce of intellect in their three noddles! The question is this. Will you serve me?"

"I couldn't possibly leave Rubby! He has no one to go into the lions' cage, but me; besides, I could not leave him. He is the only friend I have ever had, and I will stick by him."

"But suppose I show you the way to make your fortune?"

"I don't particularly want a fortune. It is not a matter of money."

"Well, come to my shooting-box and we will talk it over. I did not hear the whole of your story, as I only came into the court when the case was half-way through. What strikes me as strange is that you should be so far away from the town where you say the circus is!"

"I was carried off in a motor-car. A terrible journey it was, too! I didn't want to tell too much about that, for fear it might get into the local paper, and the man who committed the vile deed—he nearly killed me—might see the account, and then he would know where to find me."

"So you stand in dread of him, Joe?"

"I do. He is the greatest scoundrel I have ever met! There's one thing, Mr. Smart, and that is you ought not to have invented that story about seeing me."

"It was the only one that occurred to me in order to effect your release. I was determined that you should not be kept in a prison cell."

"Why?"

"Well, partly because I wanted to make use of you, and partly for another reason. I once knew a lad whose whole life was ruined by such treatment. He was as innocent of the charge as you are, and the miscreant who committed the deed got off free, while it was through his evidence that the lad was convicted. This may sound improbable to you, but—"

"I don't see why it should, seeing that I have nearly suffered in the same way."

"Very well; then you will be able to comprehend that I am anxious to help you out of a difficulty. It is possible, though not at all probable, that your employer may take the trouble to come and help you, especially if you are of service to him."

"You don't know Rubby, if you think that of him."

"That's true enough, but men are much the same. They only work for their own ends. I used to trust them once, but not since I have been a man. Perhaps I judge them by myself."

"Well, in this case, you appear to have got yourself into a very difficult position, not to say a dangerous one, and you have only done it to get me out of a difficulty that would probably have come all right in the end."

"Perhaps. But you must remember you would have been remanded for, say, a week, and then you would probably have been kept in a prison cell and treated something in the same way as an ordinary prisoner. Now, Joe, prison leaves a certain taint on a lad. It is a thing one never gets over. It is true I wanted to save you from this. Being out on bail is all right for you."

"Suppose I were to make my escape and leave you in the lurch?"

Charles Smart smiled, and there was an expression in his keen, grey eyes that Joe could not understand.

"It would be a difficult thing for you to leave a man like me in the lurch, my lad," he said, after a pause. "I have never yet met the man who could do so—that is to say, not since I have been grown up. It is strange; but, however good and honourable a man may be, you will always find some bad points in his nature; and however vile a man may be, you will find some good ones. I only know one exception to that. I once met a man who had absolutely no good points. He was the greatest scoundrel unhung. But suppose you were to make a bolt of it, I should not care. In fact, if this employer of yours does not turn up, it is a question to my mind whether you had not better do so."

"Not I!" cried Joe. "I'll face it out! I am perfectly innocent, and surely they can't send me to prison?"

"The lad I was telling you of was perfectly innocent, but they sent him to prison on the sworn testimony of the miscreant who actually committed the crime. He could not have known what he stated unless he had committed it."

"Was the lad a friend of yours?" inquired Joe.

"Yes."

"You couldn't help him, then, like you have helped me?"

"Quite impossible. I was powerless in the matter."

"Were there any poachers on your land last night?"

"I have no land. I merely rented the shooting over a

few acres. I don't know whether there were any poachers or not, but I certainly never saw them. I merely invented the story to get you out of prison."

"I say, you can't be very particular about the truth!"

"Well, perhaps not. It all depends on circumstances. I am one of the bad ones with a few good points in my nature, and I expect veracity is not one of them. But never mind about that. I am not at all an interesting subject."

Charles Smart chatted about various subjects, and when they reached their shooting-box Joe found it was a little, four-roomed cottage, two bed-rooms being above a sitting-room and kitchen.

Smart had an ample supply of all sorts of provisions and a large amount of rabbits in the place. These he explained he had shot, and when Joe offered to prepare a meal, he let him do so.

"You're a capital cook, Joe!" he exclaimed, when they were seated at the table. "This promises to be the most sumptuous meal I have had for some time! Now, help yourself to all you require, and don't wait to be asked!"

As soon as the meal was finished Joe cleared the things away, and then Smart seated himself in an easy-chair, and commenced to chat about the shooting.

As soon as it was dark he lighted the oil-lamp and drew down the blind.

Presently Smart ceased speaking and remained in a listening attitude. Joe had heard no sound beyond the wind through the trees, but presently he heard a footstep. The latch of the cottage door rattled, then the door was flung open, and Silas Read—Joe's uncle—entered the little sitting-room, shutting and locking the door behind him.

"Now I understand the meaning of your action, Charles Smart!" cried Joe, turning on his host, whose face was perfectly calm, although there was a very strange expression in his eyes. "You have got me here so that that fiend may get me into his power again!"

"I made no such compact with him," said Smart calmly. "He will tell you that we are strangers."

"I know that you do not always speak the truth," retorted Joe; "and I know that Silas Read never does, unless it suits his purpose!"

"Well, we will call this an exception to the rule," said Smart calmly. "Be seated, Mr. Read, and tell me the object of your visit."

Silas Read's lips were quivering with passion, and his voice was tremulous.

"That little fiend incarnate is my nephew!" he cried. "I am his lawful guardian under his father's will! I—I—"

"Don't you think it would be better to calm your temper?" inquired Smart. "You have locked the door, and the key is in your pocket, so that the lad cannot possibly escape. Sit down. How did you discover that Joe was here?"

"I followed him, traced him, and learnt all that had happened," panted Silas Read. "Of course, I do not blame you, because you could not know the facts of the case. This is the second time he has escaped me."

"Quite so! As you say, I could not know the facts of the case. Joe merely told me that you took him from the circus in a motor-car, and that you lashed him severely."

"Not so severely as I shall do when I take him back."

"Of course, that is a matter that does not concern me in any case. I only happened to know that the lad was accused of a crime that he did not commit, and it follows that I would not allow him to suffer imprisonment. Possibly he might have been able to prove his innocence, although even that is doubtful; but I gave evidence that convinced the magistrates it was a case of mistaken identity, and they released him on my bail."

"You say positively that you can clear his name?"

"Yes; there is not a doubt on that score."

"Very well! He must return with me now, and I will be answerable for his safe keeping. What made you take an interest in the boy?"

"I knew that he was innocent."

"How?"

"Say I am a thought-reader."

"I have not come here to play the fool."

"Neither are you playing with a fool. You were quite wrong, Joe, when you thought that I was in collusion with your uncle. I had no idea that you were a relative of his. In fact, I only knew your Christian name, because, as I have already told you, I did not enter the court till most of the evidence against you had been given. I have now heard you speak of your uncle as Silas Read. I knew that was his name before you mentioned it, but you need not be surprised at that, because I have known the man for twenty years. I was a boy then, and boys change more in twenty years than men."

"You are a liar!" cried Read fiercely.

"Joe will be able to confirm that assertion. But what,

then, Silas Read? What are you? Stay, we won't go into that matter at present. I certainly did a wrong action, but it was with a view of getting a good one out of it—that is to say, to obtain Joe's release for a crime that he had not committed. Now, I like Joe; he is so calm, and calmness in a man or boy is good. You are not calm; but, then, knowing you as well as I do, it could not be expected that you should have a single good quality. I am a scoundrel, but, in comparison to you, I am quite good; for of all the double-dyed villains that ever walked this earth, you are the worst!"

"You know nothing about me, except what that boy has told you."

"Then surely I must be a thought-reader to have guessed your character so accurately."

"You liar! We have never met before. You are going on what this boy has said."

"I have already admitted that I do not always speak the truth. Joe knows that. It has nothing to do with the question. I am going to speak the truth now. Joe cannot know whether I am doing so, and it is always well to doubt a man who admits that he has told a few falsehoods for a certain purpose, because it stands to reason that he cannot be a man of honour."

"But you, Silas Read, will know that I am speaking the truth when I tell you that you are the greatest scoundrel that could well be found; that you are a perjured villain, and a common thief; that you sent a lad named Hearn to prison for a burglary that you had committed yourself; and that you got a witness named Giles—"

"I know him!" cried Joe.

"Very likely, my lad. I say that you got this scoundrel Giles to swear the lad's life away. He did not die—better for him if he had done so; but you let him suffer the punishment for your crime, and you swore his life away, for you made him what you are—that is to say, you made him part of what you are—a common thief! You could not make him quite as vile as yourself, because his nature was different. There was much bad in it, but there was just a spark of good, and he would not allow an innocent lad to go to prison for a crime that he never committed."

"Who are you?" gasped Silas Read.

"Charles Hearn, the boy you sent to prison! I have been searching for you for years, Silas Read, and now I have found you. Well, I am not a murderer, otherwise murder would be done this night!"

"You little viper!" cried Silas Read, drawing a revolver, and pointing it at Charles Hearn's breast.

Hearn, who was still seated in his chair, never moved a muscle, except that a smile came over his face.

"I know that you are quite capable of firing a bullet through my heart, Silas Read," he said, after a pause of nearly a minute, during all which time his breast was covered with the revolver. "I doubt if you will do so now, because there is a witness. Of course, you might murder him as well, but I have an idea that his death would not suit your purpose, which I never doubt is a vile one. No purpose of yours could be otherwise."

"Now, I am going to tell you that you are a bully and a coward, and because I have not spoken the truth on many occasions, and because Joe knows I have lied on one, I am going to convince him and you that I speak the truth now, in saying that you are a bully and a coward! You have a revolver in your hand, and could possibly take my life at any moment. Take it, if you choose to run the risk of hanging! Come, why don't you fire?"

"You viper!"

"You have said that before, Silas Read. It proves nothing, because Joe must know you, and he would never believe your word if he should know you. Are you quite sure that you fear to fire?"

"You are nothing to me, you little hound! Of course, I could thrash you for the insults you have heaped on my head, but you are beneath my notice!"

"Well," exclaimed Charles Hearn, "it is quite possible that you might be able to thrash me, because I am a little man, and you are a big one. Still, I will give you every facility for executing your threat."

As Hearn spoke he rose to his feet, stepped up to the ruffian, and struck him a stinging blow across the cheek with his open hand. Then he reseated himself in the easy-chair, crossed his legs, and smiled at his infuriated foe, who had still got the revolver levelled at his heart.

"You see, Joe," exclaimed Hearn, smiling, "he fears to return that blow, much less to fire; and you will notice through life, my lad, that ruffians, as a rule, are but cowards, and that is what gives honest men a pull over them!"

"Do you really pose as an honest man?" sneered Read, still keeping his revolver levelled.

"Not at all!" answered Hearn. "I was speaking from Joe's point of view. I am not such a villain as to allow an innocent lad to suffer for a crime that another had

committed, but I am nothing like honest. I fear the best I could say for myself is that I am not such a scoundrel as you are; but, as you know, that is saying very little."

"You refuse to let that lad go with me?"

"I have not refused!"

"I say he shall come!"

"Quite so; but, then, you are such a fearful liar that what you say does not really signify. No one could possibly believe you unless they were insane, or did not know your nature."

"I refuse to argue with you! I am going now, but—"

"You make a mistake, Silas Read!" said Hearn. "You are not going now!"

"Who will stop me?"

"I shall!"

"You conceited little fool, I could—"

"I may be conceited, but I am not a fool! Perhaps it would be better if I were. I am far worse than a fool, Silas Read, and it was you who made me what I am! You fear me, and have good cause to do so!"

"Ha, ha! You contemptible little brute, I could break your neck, if I chose!"

"Nothing would give you greater pleasure! Listen to me, and be sure that I am speaking the truth now—a thing perhaps I do not often do. I am going to hunt you down! I am going to bring you to poverty and degradation, the same as you brought me! I will put you in prison, and then when you are behind the bars which shall shut you off from freedom for the rest of your life, I will come to you and remind you of these words! You may say that I have not the power, and that I could never bring your crimes home to you. Well, we shall see who is right—you or I! But, so determined am I to punish you that, if I fail in bringing you to justice, I will do so by foul means, the same as you did with me! There is only one thing that can save you."

"I suppose you want me to give you money?"

"Ah, that is because you do not know me! Charles Smart is a very different character to the lad Charles Hearn. All the gold in this world would not stop my vengeance, which, after all, is but an act of justice. And I shall stop at nothing to bring you to justice. No; gold will not save you from my vengeance! There is only one escape for you."

"How extremely kind and accommodating you are, little man!" sneered Read, though Joe knew by his face that he felt far from comfortable. "Perhaps, as you have said so much, and revealed your plans, you will say a little more, and tell me what is this one thing that can save me from the wrath of such a little microbe as you are!"

"Yes; I have no objection to telling you, because I feel certain that if you escape my vengeance, punishment yet awaits you. The only way in which you can escape me is to fire that revolver, and put a bullet through my heart. You have the chance now, and may not get it again. Why don't you fire? Ah, you do not answer me! Do you know why he does not fire, Joe?"

"No."

"Because he is afraid. With all his bounce and brag, he is but an arrant coward. He fears the gallows, and, truly, it would be worth death to bring him to it. He calls me a little microbe, but seems to forget that microbes are dangerous. He will find the most dangerous microbe that ever existed not so dangerous as I am! You notice I slapped his face, and he did not dare to strike me back!"

"You lie!" cried Silas Read, quivering with passion. "I feared to place my hand on you, because I might kill you!"

"Why not? Why not become a murderer? You are everything else that is vile on this earth! Your strength is greater than mine, I know, but your will power is not nearly so great. Then, again, you are a coward! I am not a coward, nor do I fear death. You may believe that, Joe."

"I do, or you would never sit there so calmly while he is pointing that revolver at you. I have told you how that man has treated me—at least, I have told you some of the things he has done. Of course, I retaliated. I tied him to the bedstead, and flogged him till he howled for mercy."

"Ha, ha, ha! Capital! I hope you laid it on thick?"

"Yes. I lashed him as hard as I could, and he cried like a little child."

"Well, that's very satisfactory, because however severely you punished him, it was not as much as he deserved. Fortunately for you, his vile treatment did not send you to the dogs, as it did in my case. Now, Silas Read, I have a revolver here, and I never miss my aim. You see, I have you covered; I am aiming at your face."

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"Now, I am going to tell you that you are a bully and a coward, and because I have not spoken the truth on many occasions, and because Joe knows I have lied on one, I am going to convince him and you that I speak the truth now, in saying that you are a bully and a coward! You have a revolver in your hand, and could possibly take my life at any moment. Take it, if you choose to run the risk of hanging! Come, why don't you fire?"

"You viper!"

"You have said that before, Silas Read. It proves nothing, because Joe must know you, and he would never believe your word if he should know you. Are you quite sure that you fear to fire?"

"You are nothing to me, you little hound! Of course, I could thrash you for the insults you have heaped on my head, but you are beneath my notice!"

"Well," exclaimed Charles Hearn, "it is quite possible that you might be able to thrash me, because I am a little man, and you are a big one. Still, I will give you every facility for executing your threat."

As Hearn spoke he rose to his feet, stepped up to the ruffian, and struck him a stinging blow across the cheek with his open hand. Then he re-seated himself in the easy-chair, crossed his legs, and smiled at his infuriated foe, who had still got the revolver levelled at his head.

"You see, Joe," exclaimed Hearn, smiling, "he fears to return that blow, much less to fire; and you will notice through life, my lad, that ruffians, as a rule, are but cowards, and that is what gives honest men a pull over them!"

"Do you really pose as an honest man?" sneered Read, still keeping his revolver levelled.

"Not at all!" answered Hearn. "I was speaking from Joe's point of view. I am not such a villain as to allow an innocent lad to suffer for a crime that another had

committed, but I am nothing like honest. I fear the best I could say for myself is that I am not such a scoundrel as you are; but, as you know, that is saying very little."

"You refuse to let that lad go with me?"

"I have not refused!"

"I say he shall come!"

"Quite so; but, then, you are such a fearful liar that what you say does not really signify. No one could possibly believe you unless they were insane, or did not know your nature."

"I refuse to argue with you! I am going now, but—"

"You make a mistake, Silas Read!" said Hearn. "You are not going now!"

"Who will stop me?"

"I shall!"

"You conceited little fool, I could—"

"I may be conceited, but I am not a fool! Perhaps it would be better if I were. I am far worse than a fool, Silas Read, and it was you who made me what I am! You fear me, and have good cause to do so!"

"Ha, ha! You contemptible little brute, I could break your neck, if I chose!"

"Nothing would give you greater pleasure! Listen to me, and be sure that I am speaking the truth now—a thing perhaps I do not often do. I am going to hunt you down! I am going to bring you to poverty and degradation, the same as you brought me! I will put you in prison, and then when you are behind the bars which shall shut you off from freedom for the rest of your life, I will come to you and remind you of these words! You may say that I have not the power, and that I could never bring your crimes home to you. Well, we shall see who is right—you or I! But, so determined am I to punish you that, if I fail in bringing you to justice, I will do so by foul means, the same as you did with me! There is only one thing that can save you."

"I suppose you want me to give you money?"

"Ah, that is because you do not know me! Charles Smart is a very different character to the lad Charles Hearn. All the gold in this world would not stop my vengeance, which, after all, is but an act of justice. And I shall stop at nothing to bring you to justice. No; gold will not save you from my vengeance! There is only one escape for you."

"How extremely kind and accommodating you are, little man!" sneered Read, though Joe knew by his face that he felt far from comfortable. "Perhaps, as you have said so much, and revealed your plans, you will say a little more, and tell me what is this one thing that can save me from the wrath of such a little microbe as you are!"

"Yes; I have no objection to telling you, because I feel certain that if you escape my vengeance, punishment yet awaits you. The only way in which you can escape me is to fire that revolver, and put a bullet through my heart. You have the chance now, and may not get it again. Why don't you fire? Ah, you do not answer me! Do you know why he does not fire, Joe?"

"No."

"Because he is afraid. With all his bounce and brag, he is but an arrant coward. He fears the gallows, and, truly, it would be worth death to bring him to it. He calls me a little microbe, but seems to forget that microbes are dangerous. He will find the most dangerous microbe that ever existed not so dangerous as I am! You notice I slapped his face, and he did not dare to strike me back!"

"You lie!" cried Silas Read, quivering with passion. "I feared to place my hand on you, because I might kill you!"

"Why not? Why not become a murderer? You are everything else that is vile on this earth! Your strength is greater than mine, I know, but your will power is not nearly so great. Then, again, you are a coward! I am not a coward, nor do I fear death. You may believe that, Joe."

"I do, or you would never sit there so calmly while he is pointing that revolver at you. I have told you how that man has treated me—at least, I have told you some of the things he has done. Of course, I retaliated. I tied him to the bedstead, and flogged him till he howled for mercy."

"Ha, ha, ha! Capital! I hope you laid it on thick?"

"Yes. I lashed him as hard as I could, and he cried like a little child."

"Well, that's very satisfactory, because however severely you punished him, it was not as much as he deserved. Fortunately for you, his vile treatment did not send you to the dogs, as it did in my case. Now, Silas Read, I have a revolver here, and I never miss my aim. You see, I have you covered; I am aiming at your face."

"You maniac, put that weapon down!" gasped Read, starting back.

"I could bring down a small bird flying about this room. You may be sure I shall not miss you. I still have you

covered, and if this revolver were to go off, you would be a dead man."

"If you don't lower that weapon, I shall fire in self-defence!" cried Read.

"I think not! Even if you did do so, I should have time to return the shot."

Read was terrified. He made a rush to the door, and then he uttered a cry of terror, for Hearn fired.

"I did not aim at you," he said. "I only fired that shot to show you that I am in earnest. It is not my intention to take your worthless life; but if you unlock the door, I shall put a bullet through your hand, and you will find that rather painful."

"Well, what do you want with me?"

"Nothing at present. I intend to keep you a prisoner here for the night. You can sleep in one of those chairs, and you will hand me the key of the door, also your revolver. If you refuse, I shall slightly wound you with a bullet. I have no intention of arguing the matter with you."

Hearn kept his revolver levelled, and for about a minute Read hesitated, then muttering something beneath his breath, he flung the key and the weapon on the table.

Hearn unloaded the revolver, and placed the weapon and the key in his pocket.

"Now, Joe," he exclaimed, "you turn in, and I will keep watch over the scoundrel! He is perfectly safe now, and only becomes dangerous when he has a weaker foe than himself to contend with. In me he will find a stronger one. He will notice that to his cost later on. Good-night, my lad! You need not have the slightest fear that I shall hand you over to that villain's tender mercies."

Joe slept soundly through the night, and soon after break of day he went downstairs.

Here he found Hearn smoking a cigar. He was still seated in the easy-chair, and he was regarding Silas Read with an amused smile.

Read's face was livid with fury, and his dark eyes were gleaming. He fixed a gaze of bitter hatred on Joe, but said nothing when he entered the room.

"You see, I have got our prisoner all right, Joe!" exclaimed Hearn. "The silly scoundrel has given me no trouble, except that he has implored me to let him loose. He talks of having some appointment, but, of course, that has nothing to do with us."

"You silly rascal!" snarled Read. "I tell you that it is of vital importance that I keep a certain appointment. I must go at once!"

"He has been saying that all through the night on and off," said Hearn. "I don't feel at all sure that he is not demented. You are not going yet, Silas Read; I have need of your services. In the first place, light the fire."

"You insolent hound, I'll—"

"Well, that doesn't matter," exclaimed Hearn, picking up a riding-whip. "You can argue as much as you like, but if you don't light that fire I shall thrash you till you obey me. Here, you see, I have a revolver, and you must bear in mind that I shall not hesitate to wound you. Are you going to light that fire?"

"No!"

"Then take that, you hulking great coward!" cried Hearn, lashing him again and again.

Silas Read made a rush at him, but he was very active; and dodging round the room, got in some vigorous cuts whenever the opportunity served.

Read soon found the work too warm, and at last Hearn got in a cut that caused him to leap into the air and yell with pain.

Most men would have stopped then. Not so Hearn. He flogged the bully with all his strength, nor did he desist until Silas Read was completely cowed.

"You know something about wild beasts, Joe," exclaimed Hearn, "so you will know that it is necessary to get the upper hand with them. It will cause him less pain my using the whip than if I wounded the brute with my revolver. Now light the fire, Silas Read!"

"I don't mind lighting it," said Joe. "Ha, ha, ha! You have punished the brute pretty severely."

"Lighting the fire will be no particular punishment to him, and as I intend to keep him here for the present, we may as well make use of him. Light that fire, Silas Read, otherwise I will flog you again; and when I once begin you will find that I shall not stop in a hurry."

"I don't know how to light the fire, you demon."

"Joe will give you instructions, and if you don't follow them exactly, I will flog you till you do. Tell the brute how to do it, Joe."

"Ha, ha, ha! You shove in the paper, put the wood on the top of it, and the coal on the top of that. You will find that way more efficacious than if you shove the coal on the top of the paper."

"Quite so!" exclaimed Hearn. "Go on, you silly brute! I shall lash you if you don't!"

Silas Read obeyed; and the manner in which he flung the things about made Joe laugh. Then, either intentionally or otherwise, he upset the coal-scuttle, and got an awful lash with the whip for his pains.

"You clumsy rascal!" exclaimed Hearn, winking at Joe. "I'll make you pick up every piece of that coal with your fingers. Go on! Don't you dare to talk to me, or I will lash you like so—and so!"

The fire was lighted at last, but Silas Read's task was not complete. Hearn forced him to cook some eggs and bacon, and boil the kettle.

Silas Read did not dare to spring at him because of the revolver, and because he felt perfectly confident that Joe would take Hearn's part.

Read had to cook the breakfast, and he stood glaring at the couple as they ate it, for Hearn told him that he might have some dry bread and water, which was the correct fare for prisoners; but this, Silas Read refused to touch.

"You will have something to answer for!" snarled Silas, glaring at Joe, who was laughing at him.

"You can't expect to get any pity from me, you scamp," retorted Joe. "You have got to remember the manner in which you have always treated me. At any rate, I am likely to remember it."

"Pity from you, you little hound! Do you think I need your pity? I will make you sorry for this before you are many days older!"

"No, you won't, Silas Read," said Hearn. "I am going to track you down, and you will have so much to do to look after yourself, that you will have no time to look after Joe. Just you behave yourself properly now, fellow, or I shall use the whip to you again."

"I insist on going!" cried Silas. "I have a very important appointment to attend to, and nothing shall make me miss it!"

"You will have to miss it. I care nothing for your appointments. Can you eat any more, Joe? I will make the brute cook it if you can."

"No, thanks. I have quite finished."

"Then Silas Read shall wash up the plates. It is a beastly job, I know, but he will have to do it, and woe betide him if he breaks any. Now then, rascal, take them to the sink! You will find water there, and I will give you a cloth to dry them on."

"This is beyond bearing!" cried Read.

"So will the flogging I shall give you be, if you do not obey my commands. Set about your work at once, or I shall set about you!"

At first Silas simply refused to obey, and he even held out for some time while Hearn commenced to flog him. Once he struck at the little man, who immediately sent a bullet whizzing past his head, and followed it up with such lashes that Silas decided on obeying.

Now, washing up greasy bacon-plates is not a pleasant task, even if you have hot water; but when the water is cold, as it was on this occasion, the task becomes downright disagreeable. To make matters worse, Hearn would insist on having the work done properly, and he used his whip with such freedom that Silas uttered several yells of pain.

"My impression of you, Silas Read, is that you are a lazy rascal," said Hearn, when the work was done. "I was thinking of keeping you here as a servant for a few days, but I really don't know that you are worth your salt. What do you think about the matter, Joe?"

"I think you might be able to train him in his duties with that whip," answered Joe. "He has certainly improved since you commenced to flog him. There's one thing to be said, if you let him loose, he may bring his friend Giles here, and the pair of them would be only too glad to have vengeance on me, to say nothing of vengeance on you."

"Yes! I think we shall have to keep him at any rate for a day or so. I shall only feed him on bread and water, so that he will not cost much to keep, and I shall make him work very hard, so that he will really pay for his keep. The house wants a good clean, because it has not had one since I have been here. I'll make him scrub the kitchen floor to commence with."

"Now, let this foolery cease, Hearn!" cried Silas, looking very blank at the little man's words. "You have tried to degrade me in every possible manner."

"You are past being degraded, you utter scoundrel. Your whole life has been one of degradation, but you have come to the end of your tether now. It was a bad day's work for you when you stumbled upon me, for I have been searching for you for years, and I have always vowed that I would one day find you, and repay you for some of the villainy you have done towards me. You shall clean the floor, and after that you shall clean our boots. There are lots of little jobs that I shall be able to find for you."

Silas Read protested; and when he found that it was quite

Joe; but it is evident that he means to do better in the future, and if a man means that he ought to succeed. Tomorrow I hope we shall all be back at the circus."

The Amiable Mr. Morton.

"It is atrocious!" cried Rubby, striking his stick five times on the pavement to mark time to each syllable, and causing people to stop and stare at him. "I never heard of such a piece of impertinence in all my life. The insolent hounds!"

"Fellow!" exclaimed an elderly gentleman, who had stopped to listen. "If you call me that again, it will not go well with you. How dare you, sir? How dare you insult me in such a manner?"

"What?" exclaimed Rubby.

"Don't you what me, sir! I won't stand it. I am not going to be insulted by a man like you; and if that lad there dares to laugh at me, I'll flog him."

"I was laughing at Rubby, old chap," exclaimed Joe.

"Don't you dare to call me that, boy. I won't be called old chap by a boy."

"Now, look here, dear boy," exclaimed Rubby. "I wasn't referring to you."

"I say you were, sir! I am not a fool."

"I am glad you mentioned that. But look here, Whiskers. I want to explain—"

"You insolent rascal! My name is Mr. Morton."

"Well, Morton, dear boy, I wasn't referring to you at all. How could I be, old fellow, when I had never set eyes on your whiskered visage. You may be a very respectable old party, because it is impossible to judge by appearances. Now, take yourself off to your wife, and tell her, with my compliments—Rubby's compliments—to take better care of you. Fancy what a sad thing it would be if you were run into the nearest lunatic asylum, and placed in a padded room. It would not be a difficult matter to mistake you for a babbling idiot. This way, boys, I want to escape from Whiskers' unjust wrath. What a terrible world this is, Jupiter."

"You have a duty to perform," said Jupiter.

"I have about four thousand duties to perform; but then, I'm only a broken-hearted showman, without one friend in all this world."

"In that case you ought to look after yourself, Rubby. You ought to make yourself happy."

"Tell me how, Jupiter, and I will do it immediately."

"You are hungry, and, consequently, low-spirited. You want a good dinner. It will do your body good, and you can do your heart good at the same time."

"How?"

"Take us in, and stand us two jolly good dinners. The kind action will make your heart bound with joy."

"I won't do it. I don't want my heart to bound. I haven't got the money. I tell you I am on the verge of bankruptcy already."

"Then that is the time you should spend all the money you can lay your hands on. Here's an hotel. There's a smell of cooking coming from it. Look here! Roast duck, green peas, and new potatoes, all for a shilling. What's a shilling?"

"Six twopenny seats. Besides, you want me to spend three shillings. Well, come in. It only means quicker ruin. Roast duck and green peas, waiter. Hurry up, we have only got three minutes to spare."

In spite of his alleged poverty, Rubby ordered and helped to consume nine shillings' worth of duck, for they had three helps each. Then he ordered a bottle of claret, and they were just commencing on cherry tart, when Morton came in.

The waiter took his order for roast duck, but went away in a very despondent manner. He knew how rocky was Morton's temper, and he did not dare to tell him straight away that roast duck was off, and that Rubby, Joe, and Jupiter were the cause of its being off.

"You will just behave yourself, fellow, if you are to remain in the same room with me," exclaimed the amiable Mr. Morton.

"Quite so, dear boy," answered Rubby. "I always behave myself—sometimes better than at others, still, I always behave myself somehow. Nice day, isn't it?"

"Well, what is it?" demanded Morton, ignoring Rubby, and frowning at the waiter.

"Very sorry, sir; duck is off."

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Joe. "We have eaten it all, Rubby. The old chap is duckless. He will have to eat his whiskers."

Morton leapt to his feet, seized his stick, which was a thick one, and struck at Joe's head with a force that would have certainly cut it open had not Joe bobbed down sideways.

The stick smashed a couple of plates, a sugar-bowl, and a

couple of glasses, but it did not damage Joe, who came up smiling.

"Have another whack, old boy," said Joe. "See if you can break something else. You will have to pay for that little lot, and I hope they stick it on thick for your bad behaviour. Aren't you ashamed of yourself, showing temper like that, Whiskers?"

"I'll not stay in this place to be insulted in this manner!" roared Morton, striding towards the door; but the waiter barred his way.

"I beg pardon, sir. You must pay for that damage. It will be three-and-fourpence."

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Joe. "You have had a dear lunch, Whiskers. Better have a few more smashes, and make it up to ten shillings."

"You swindling rascal!" howled Morton, turning to the waiter. "I won't pay."

"Then, sir, I shall have to send for Mr. Benson, the proprietor."

"I won't pay three shillings and fourpence. It is a fraud. There is not a shilling's worth of damage done. Send for the proprietor."

It was not necessary. Benson, who had heard the crash, was outside, listening, and now he entered the room. He was a short, stoutish man, with a jovial-looking face.

"What is this disturbance, John?" he demanded, turning to the waiter.

"This gent has smashed that crockery, sir."

"Well, fellow, what of that?" demanded Benson, frowning fiercely at the waiter, who looked quite at his ease, because he knew his employer's ways, just as surely as Joe knew Rubby's.

"Sorry, sir," said John. "I told him the damage was three-and-fourpence."

"You utter rascal!" roared Benson, striking the table with his fist. "How dare you make such a charge? Who gave you authority to make that charge?"

"No one, sir."

"Then take a month's notice, you utter rascal, and don't you dare to expect a character from me! Your action is dishonest! Three-and-fourpence, indeed! How dare you!"

"I told the vagabond it was a fraud," said Morton.

"Fraud! I should think it was, sir," exclaimed Benson. "It is an insult to you as a gentleman, and it is sheer robbery."

"I am willing to pay for the damage, but—"

"I know that, quite well, sir. Three-and-fourpence for two plates, two wine glasses, and a sugar-bowl. I never heard anything so iniquitous. Let me see, the damage will be, two plates, half-a-crown; two cut glasses, two shillings; and one cut sugar-bowl, three shillings. Seven and sixpence in all, if you please, sir."

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Joe, as Benson winked his off eye at the grinning waiter.

"I won't pay it!" howled Morton. "You are a thief!"

"John, go for the police. I do not know how the brawl commenced, nor do I care; but I do know this, Mr. Morton, you shall not come into this house and smash my property, then refuse to pay for it. I have a licence to protect, and I will not allow brawling in the house. Go for the police, John."

"Stay!" cried Morton, who did not like the look of things. "I am willing to pay three-and-fourpence."

"I see you have bruised the table," observed Benson, turning up the cloth. "That will be another sixpence. Eight shillings, if you please. And will you allow me to tell you that had you struck that lad such a blow on the head you might have killed him. Go for the police, John."

"It is a gross robbery!" cried Morton, flinging the silver on the table. "I shall never enter this place again."

"We can do without him, Jack," exclaimed Benson, as the irate man strode from the room. "After all, he is more plague than profit. You see, gentlemen, a man who loses his temper like that ought to be punished. Now, if he had paid the three and fourpence, I should have said nothing about it; it was about the fair price. But when he talked about swindling, well, I'm an honest man, and—"

"Ha, ha, ha! You had better stop there," exclaimed Joe. "You see, it would be a lamentable thing to convict yourself in any way."

"But don't you think he deserved it? And you have got to recollect that I shall lose his custom—at any rate, for a time. There's no other respectable place he can go to in the town, it is true, but he is just the sort to bring sandwiches in his pocket. I may see him back; then, again, I may not. Still, I've got a bit of profit out of him."

"Are you going to sack the waiter, dear boy?" inquired Rubby.

"No fear!" exclaimed the landlord. "Jack and I understand each other."

"You want some understanding, too, my beauty," growled

Rubby, as the pair left the room. "All the same, we have so need to trouble ourselves about them. Now, understand me, Joe, and you, too, Jupiter. Business must, and shall, be attended to. I am paying you both enormous salaries, and—"

"Rats!" growled Jupiter.

"Silence, sirrah! How dare you interrupt me? Take a year's notice. I cannot afford to lose your time. Then there is my own time."

"You can put the value of that down at twopence an hour," observed Jupiter, winking at Joe.

"Take another year's notice. I say, business shall be attended to, and—"

"Well, what's the good of talking, Rubby?" inquired Joe. "Let's come and attend to it."

"What?" exclaimed Rubby, lighting a cigar and watching Jupiter out of the corners of his eyes, as he coolly helped himself to one from the case, which Rubby had left on the table.

"I say, let's come and attend to it."

"Quite so; but I have a duty to perform. I want to convince Silas Read that if he ever attempts your capture again, it will not go well with him. I have found out a little about that man, and am determined to find out a lot more. Very well; we will pay him a visit. Can you find your way to the house where he took you, Joe?"

"Well, yes. I dare say I could do that all right; but isn't it walking into the lion's den?"

"What?"

"Poor Rubby is getting shockingly deaf, isn't he, Jupiter?"

"Yes; but it afflicts him most when you ask him for a rise in screw."

"It is to be hoped he can't hear what we are saying."

"Not he," exclaimed Jupiter, borrowing Rubby's matches to light the cigar he had already borrowed. "He's as deaf as a post, and as stupid as an owl."

"Oh, you beauties," cried Rubby. "I shall turn you both into clowns, so that I can have the pleasure of lashing you round the ring. But what do we care for a thieving brute like Silas Read? Nothing! We are men—at least, two of us are. I shall shake his teeth down his evil throat—by proxy. I will make him see the error of his ways—by proxy. Jupiter and Joe, come with me."

"All right," exclaimed Joe. "I don't care. In fact, I shall be very glad if you can convince him not to attempt to catch me again. I have an idea he will make a try. But aren't you going to pay for the dinners, Rubby?"

"Dear me, I was forgetting that part of the business."

"It would not have mattered, the waiter would have reminded you," said Joe. "Here he comes with the bill."

Rubby paid it, and, having tipped the waiter, accompanied his two companions along the country lane which led out of the town.

It was a beautiful morning, and for the first mile or so Rubby admired the scenery, and bemoaned his fate that he was a miserable showman, and quite unable to take long country walks each day; but when they had covered about five miles, he commenced to grumble at the distance and the heat.

Then Joe struck across country, and Rubby grumbled at the hedges, while a farmer came and grumbled at them.

"Jest you go back," he cried, waving his stick menacingly.

"But, dear boy," exclaimed Rubby, "we are doing no harm!"

"You are on my land, and if you don't get off it, I'll know the reason why."

"How far does your land extend?" inquired Joe, for Rubby gave a sort of silent introduction, then seated himself on the grass, and left Joe to bear the brunt of it.

"To yon lane, young shaver; and that's to where you are going; and if ever you come on my land again, I'll lay my stick across your shoulders."

"That wouldn't be legal, old fellow," said Joe.

"No, and it ain't legal for you to trespass on my land."

"Your parents ought to have taught you that two wrongs do not make a right."

"And your parents ought to have flogged some of the cheek out of you."

"Well, how far does your land extend in the direction we want to go, which is straight across there?"

"And that's the direction you ain't going in."

"Still, I am seeking for information."

"You will get a bit more than you are seeking for if you ain't careful, my lad! I don't allow boys to cheek me!"

"But, my dear fellow, how far does your land extend?"

"To the next field."

"Very well, that is about a quarter of the distance to what we should have to cover if we went back. Now, it cannot make any difference to you whether we go on or go back, and it makes all the difference in the world to us. We have done no harm in walking across the grass up to this spot, and we shall do no possible harm in continuing our walk across the field."

"You get off my land sharp, I tell you!"

"Exactly. We will get off as quickly as we possibly can; and in order to do that, we will cross the field and get on someone else's ground. You want to get rid of us, and we want to get rid of you. Very well, the quickest way to succeed is to cross the field."

"I tell you that you will go back!"

"Listen to reason, my dear fellow!"

"Bust you! I ain't likely to hear any reason from you!"

"You want us to get off your land quickly?"

"I know I do!"

"Come along, Rubby, we will get off this way."

"I tell you that you won't!" roared the farmer. "You will go back, else I'll know the reason why!"

"The reason why is quite plain. It is because we are going on."

"I say you ain't!"

"I refer you to the great and only Ruabino, than whom no greater nor more wonderful man is on this earth! You notice he is on your earth at the present moment—resting, after his tiring walk across your land. Signor Ruabino, may I ask your nobleness what I am to do?"

"Go on arguing the point while I rest," said Rubby.

"Get off my land!" howled the farmer.

"I refer you to my legal adviser, dear boy," answered Rubby calmly.

"If you don't get up, I'll lay this stick over your shoulders!" roared the infuriated man.

"Dear boy, I refer you to my bodyguard, Jupiter," said Rubby.

Jupiter stepped forward, and the farmer hesitated. He was in a furious passion, but he was not angry enough to strike Jupiter, who not only looked remarkably strong, but was so.

"Well, seeing as you've got so far, you can go across," growled the farmer; "but you can jest give me your names and addresses, and I'll summon you; I will, straight!"

Rubby pulled out a business-card and flicked it towards the farmer.

"Now shift!" roared that worthy, picking up the card.

"I must rest, dear boy," said Rubby. "I am tired with a very long walk. You can argue the matter with my advocate, but I mean to rest. If you get tired of the argument before I am rested, you can fight Jupiter. He is a grand boxer, and will be able to give you some wrinkles—to say nothing of a pair of black eyes to take home to your wife."

Then the farmer let himself go—that is to say, with his tongue. The names he called the imperturbable Rubby were extraordinary. Joe sat down, and Jupiter followed his example. Then the farmer made himself fearfully hot and very red in the face by raving at them; but as his ravings had not the slightest effect on Rubby, the furious man might just as well have kept cool.

(Another long instalment next Thursday. Order your copy of "The Gem" Library in advance.)



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