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BY
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NO. 34.

VOL. 2.

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CHAPTER 1. Money is Tight.

TOM MERRY went through his pockets slowly and methodically. Manners and Lowther watched him with interest, not to say anxiety.

The three chums were standing in the porch of the School House at St. Jim's. Morning school was over, and the sunny quadrangle was alive with boys. Through jacket-pockets, waistcoat-pockets, and trouser-pockets Tom Merry went, with method and care; but the result was the same in each case. Every pocket was drawn blank.

"Stony?" asked Lowther.

"Looks like it."

Tom Merry drew out the lining of his trousers-pocket to its fullest extent, in the vain hope that some coin might yet be

hidden there. But the hope was unfounded. A piece of string, some cobbler's-wax, and an ancient aniseed-ball came to light; but nothing in the shape of cash.

"Rotten!" said Manners.

"Yes, it's rather rotten," agreed Tom Merry, "and jolly careless of you chaps to run out of tin just when I happen to be stony."

"What the dickens do you mean by being stony just when we've run out of tin?" said Manners.

"Well, we must have some tin," said Lowther decidedly. "We've asked Fatty Wynn over to tea, and the cupboard's empty. We've got to lay in a supply by hook or by crook."

"And a good supply, too," said Manners. "You know what Fatty Wynn has been like ever since he came back from his sea voyage."



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Tom Merry made a grimace.

"Yes, I don't see how we could do it under five bob, kids, to give him a decent spread, but—"

"But we haven't five pence," said Manners.

"Exactly."

"Well, I must say it was rather reckless of you, Merry, to ask a chap—especially a chap like Wynn—to tea, without having a shot in the locker," said Monty Lowther severely.

"It was the only way. Figgins & Co. have got something on—we know that—and it's certain it's something up against the School House. If we can get Fatty Wynn over here to tea, and feed him up to the chin, and get him into a jolly good temper, he's certain to chatter something out."

"Yes; but how are we to fill him up to the chin, when we've nothing in the cupboard but the remnant of an old ham, half a stale loaf, and a pepper-castor, and when all the available funds are comprised in a lucky ha'penny and a French penny?" demanded Lowther.

"That will want thinking out, of course."

"Why, we shall have to have tea in hall ourselves, by the way things look at present," said Manners. "Fancy asking Fatty Wynn to a tea in hall! He would faint!"

"My dear kids, we're not at the end of our resources yet," said Tom Merry placidly. "When in doubt, rely on Tom Merry—"

"Oh, rats!"

"Here comes Blake, and as he looks in a remarkably good temper with himself, I think we're quite safe for the five bob. We'll try, anyway. If he doesn't turn up trumps, there's the only Augustus to fall back on."

Jack Blake, of the Fourth Form at St. Jim's, and Study No. 6 in the School House, was coming out of the house. He glanced at the chums of the Shell, and stopped as they closed up in his way.

"Pax," said Tom Merry, laughing, as Blake assumed a somewhat warlike attitude. "Behold us in the guise of suppliants—"

"What's the little game?"

"We're stony."

Jack Blake grinned.

"Then I can sympathise with you, my sons, because I'm busted myself."

"Well, of all the unreliable rotters, you take the biscuit!" exclaimed Tom Merry, in disgust. "We are looking for a good Samaritan with five spare boblets—"

"Sorry," said Blake. "I blued my last tin on some new tools for my tool-chest. If you can wait till Saturday—"

"Why don't you say till Christmas?"

"Is it very important, then?"

"Awfully important. We've got a distinguished guest coming to tea, and have run out of supplies, and of tin at the same time."

"Then you'd better send your guest a telegram, and say you're dead, and ask him to put it off till next week," said Blake.

"No good; it's Fatty Wynn."

"Oh, I know it's no good trying to stop Fatty from coming to a feed!" assented Blake. "But what on earth are you having a New House bounder to tea for? If you wanted someone to come to tea, I'd have come, if there'd been a decent spread."

"Policy, my dear kid, policy," said Tom Merry.

"Policy! What are you driving at?"

"Thereby hangs a tale. There is something on in the New House—Figgins & Co. are very mysterious, and Fatty Wynn, of course, is in the secret. We're going to feed him up, and get something out of him."

"Well, I wish I could help you. But, I say, if you're thinking of feeding Fatty Wynn up, it's a big job. It can't be done on the cheap."

"Well, we were thinking of starting him on fried potatoes," said Tom Merry. "They're nice, and they're cheap, too. We could keep the delicacies out of sight at first, and get him to lay a good foundation of fried potatoes, and produce the more expensive tommy afterwards, and then there would be enough to go round."

Blake laughed.

"Well, that's a good wheeze. Get him to take in five or six pounds of potatoes, and that would take the edge off his appetite. But, I say, if you are on the borrowing tack, you can go up to Study No. 6, and see D'Arcy."

"Is he in funds?"

"He must be; he had a fiver from his Aunt Adelina yesterday, and he's changed it. He can't have blown it all already."

"Good! Come on, kids, and we'll interview Gussy."

Blake went down the steps of the School House, and the

Terrible Three went upstairs. Between the Terrible Three and Study No. 6 there was something of a rivalry, the leadership of the School House juniors being at stake; but when they were not ragging one another, they were very good friends. And Tom Merry had not the slightest doubt of being able to raise a loan from the obliging Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, the swell of the School House.

A youth with a large head and a pair of big spectacles nearly ran into the Terrible Three as they reached the top of the stairs. He stopped, as Monty Lowther gave him a playful dig in the ribs that took all his breath away.

"Really, Lowther!" he gasped. "Dear me! I wanted to see you particularly, Tom Merry."

"And I wanted particularly not to see you, Skimmey," said Tom Merry, walking on.

Skimpole caught him by the sleeve.

"Hold on a minute, Merry. It's important."

"Oh, buck up, then!"

"As you know, I am a Socialist," said Skimpole, blinking at the chums of the Shell. "On that account—"

"If you're going to talk Socialism—"

"No, no, don't be hasty; I am not. I mentioned the fact that I was a Socialist, simply to explain the other fact—more important at the present moment—that I am stony. As a sincere Socialist, I cannot refuse pecuniary aid to all who ask it—and in consequence my pocket-money quickly goes. But in any case, my allowance is not large enough for the sum I at present require. I believe you have a very generous allowance from your old governess, Miss Fawcett?"

"I believe I do," assented Tom Merry.

"And when you want any extra little sums, she sends them to you?"

Tom Merry laughed.

"Sometimes."

"Good! Then perhaps you will be able to lend me ten pounds."

"Eh?"

"Perhaps you will be able to lend me ten pounds."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"There is nothing comical in that, is there, Merry?" said Skimpole, blinking in a puzzled way at the chums of the Shell. "I asked you if you could lend me ten pounds."

"You are too moderate, Skimmey. You ought to make it ten thousand."

"Really, Merry—"

"Or ten million," suggested Monty Lowther. "You would be just as likely to get it, you know, so you might as well."

"I am particularly in want of ten pounds at the present moment, and I will repay it in a few weeks, out of the profit of the great book I am writing on Socialism. It will be ready for publication as soon as I have completed the four hundred and twenty-fourth chapter."

"My dear ass," said Tom Merry kindly, "I've never—or hardly ever—had such a sum as ten pounds in my life, and I wouldn't have the cheek to ask Miss Fawcett for half as much, if I wanted it ever so much. And, not to put too fine a point on it, I think your modest request is the finest example of pure, unadulterated cheek that I've ever happened to come across."

"Passed unanimately," said Monty Lowther.

Skimpole blinked at the chums of the Shell with a rather worried expression.

"Well, you see, I want ten pounds particularly," he explained. "There's no one else I could think of to ask. Still, if you couldn't manage ten, I could do with five."

"Go hon!"

"I want to buy somebody a present—a person I esteem very much—on her birthday," said Skimpole. "Of course, I can't be mean about a thing like that."

"You mean Tom Merry can't be mean," grinned Lowther. "It's his cash you're thinking of spending."

"Not at all, Lowther. You are quite mistaken. I shall repay Tom Merry to the last farthing out of the profits on my book."

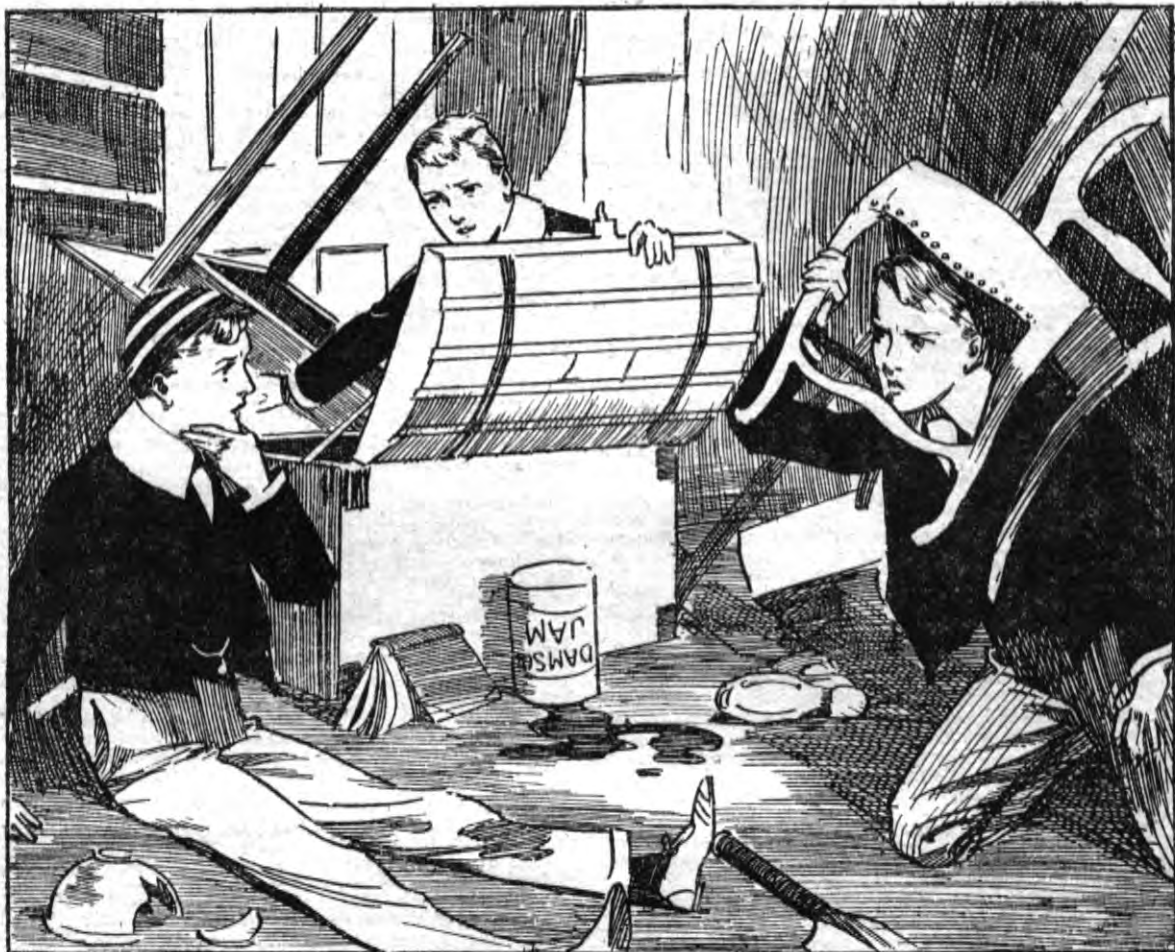
"Well, Skimmey, if you made it half-a-crown, I might manage it next week," said Tom Merry, laughing. "But at present I am stony, and am on the borrowing lay myself."

"Dear me, that is very unfortunate. I shall have to seek assistance in another quarter, I suppose."

"You certainly will."

And the Terrible Three walked on, leaving Skimpole looking troubled. The chums of the Shell chuckled.

"Ten pounds!" murmured Manners. "What I like about Skimmey is his moderation! Nobody in the School House would lend him tenpence, as a matter of fact."



Tom Merry, Manners and Lowther sat up amid the wreckage of the study, and looked at one another with feelings too deep for words.

"And whom on earth can he want to give a present to, at such a figure as ten pounds?" said Monty Lowther.

"Must be somebody very special. I suppose he is going to buy a special set of the works of Scratchford or Blyndman, bound in calf, to present to some sweet Socialist," said Manners, with a chuckle. "Skimpy has been in love before now, you know."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Here we are," said Tom Merry, "and here's Gussy. Come in."

And the Terrible Three entered Study No. 6.

CHAPTER 2.

Arthur Augustus is Very Sorry Indeed.

ARTHUR AUGUSTUS D'ARCY was alone in the study. He was sitting at the table with a thoughtful frown on his face, a pencil in his hand, and a paper before him, upon which he was jotting down figures. He was too deeply absorbed to notice for the moment the entrance of the chums of the Shell Form.

"Thwee pound ten," he murmured—"thwee pound ten. I am afraid that it will not be enough; but on the othah hand, there is no way of gettin' any more. Even if I wote to my govannah and asked him for some cash, it is extremely pwob. that it would not get here in time. It is wathah wotten—Bai Jove! Is that you, Tom Mewwy?"

Arthur Augustus looked up, and turned over the sheet he was jotting figures upon face downwards on the table.

He looked a little pink and confused, and the Terrible Three noted it with some surprise. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was famous for his self-possession, which very seldom deserted him, even at the most trying moments.

"Deep in decimals, Gussy?" asked Tom Merry cheerfully. The swell of the School House shook his head.

"No, deah boy, I am not deep in beastly decimals."

"Learning shorthand?"

"No, certainly not."

"Oh, I thought I saw a lot of dots and dashes and scratches on the paper," said Tom Merry. "It would be a useful accomplishment, too."

"I am not likely evah to need shorthand, I suppose," said D'Arcy.

"Yes, certainly. You'd be able to take down your own speeches verbatim in the House of Lords, you know, when you get there."

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—"

"Or you could get eighteen bob a week as a junior clerk," suggested Lowther, "when Skimpole has abolished the House of Lords, and all you bloated aristocrats have to take to work."

"Weally, Lowthah—"

"But we haven't come here to talk of Gussy's future prospects," said Tom Merry. "What we want to know, Gussy, is this. Can you spring the humble but indispensable five bob to three respectable youths who are down on their luck, the same to be faithfully returned on Saturday, when those three same respectable and deserving youths will receive their respective allowances?"

"Well put!" said Manners, with a nod of approval. "If Gussy can resist an appeal like that, he must have a heart as hard as Skimpole's head."

Arthur Augustus coloured uncomfortably.

"Weally, deah boys—" he began.

"That's how the case stands, Gussy," said Tom Merry. "We're stony-broke to the wide, busted till Saturday. We've got a distinguished guest coming to tea after school—a distinguished guest with a distinguished appetite. Can you lend us five bob? You shall have it back on Saturday. You know I never fail in little matters of that kind."

"Yaaa, wathah!" said D'Arcy. "I know that vewy well, Tom Mewwy."

"Oh, we'll keep him up to it," said Lowther. "You can rely upon me."

"Hearing that you were rolling in filthy lucre, we gave you second chance, after discovering that Blake was broke," said Tom Merry. "It isn't every fellow I would borrow five bob of. You may regard yourself as honoured."

"Distinctly honoured!" said Manners.

D'Arcy's face was crimson.

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—"

"We're not rotting, old chap!" said Tom Merry, somewhat surprised by the evident confusion in D'Arcy's manner.

"We're hard up, and we want you to lend us five bob."

"I should be extremely pleased, Tom Mewwy—"

"So should we, so hand it over!"

"It would be a weal pleasure to me, but—"

"Oh dear, here's another good man gone wrong! Are you stony, too?"

Arthur Augustus hesitated.

"Well, not exactly, deah boy, but—"

"I understood from Blake that you had a lot left out of a fiver sent you by your Aunt Sempronia—"

"My Aunt Adelina, Tom Mewwy."

"Well, your Aunt Adelina, then. I'm not particular as to the name of the aunt, so long as the fiver was all right."

"The fivah was all wright, deah boy."

"You can't have blued it all, Gussy; that's impossible. And if you have, I shall have to keep an eye on you in future," said Tom Merry, shaking his head seriously.

"It has occurred to me several times that your governor is a little too liberal with you in the matter of money. I have thought that if I wrote to him and explained that it was not good for a Fourth Form kid to have so much loose cash, he might send me some of the fivers instead. Do you think he would?"

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—"

"But at present it is five bob I am in want of. If you haven't it, Gussy, don't mind saying so, and I'll go further up the passage."

"I—I—I—"

Tom Merry looked at the swell of the School House in surprise. He could not account for D'Arcy's confusion and blushes. Lowther and Manners were equally surprised.

"It's all right, Gussy, if you haven't the tin," said Lowther. "Don't be worried about it. There are others, you know."

"It isn't exactly that, deah boys. I've got the tin—"

"Then why don't you hand over the loan?"

"You see, I—I—I—"

Tom Merry coloured a little.

"You don't want to lend me the money?"

"It isn't that, deah boy. You see, I—I want the tin for a most particular purpose—"

"Why, what scheme have you got on now?"

"I haven't any scheme on, but—"

"Well, never mind, Gussy," said Tom Merry good-naturedly. "I don't want to pry into your little secrets. I must look out for the tin somewhere else."

"I'm feahfully sowwy, Tom Mewwy—"

"That's all right."

"I mean, I don't want you to think I wouldn't lend you the money," said D'Arcy, greatly distressed. "I'd twust you with anythin'. But—"

"It's all right."

"And you're not watty about it?"

"Not what?" asked Tom Merry.

"Watty."

"Ha, ha! I'm not ratty, if that's what you mean. You have a right to do as you like with your own tin, I suppose."

"You see, I'm in an awkward posish myself. I have barely enough money for what I want, and so, you see—"

"No, I don't see, but it's all right," said Tom Merry, laughing. "Don't trouble to explain. We take your word for everything. Come on, chaps!"

"You are quite sure you are not watty, Tom Mewwy?"

"Ha, ha! Yes, quite sure."

And the chums of the Shell quitted the study. They had not gone a dozen paces down the passage, when there was a patter of feet behind them, and Arthur Augustus caught them up, looking very breathless. The Terrible Three stopped and looked at him inquiringly as he gasped for breath, taking it for granted that he had altered his mind, and was coming to press the little loan upon them.

"I—I say, deah boys, just a moment—"

"Certainly," said Tom Merry politely, "as many as you like."

"I—I told you just now that I was vewy sowwy I couldn't oblige you with a little loan," gasped Arthur Augustus.

"Yes. What about it?"

"I've just wun affah you to say that—that—"

"Yes, go on!"

"That I am weally vewy, vewy sowwy indeed, deah boys!" The Terrible Three looked at one another, and looked at

Arthur Augustus. The swell of the School House beamed at them through his eyeglass.

"I thought I had bettah wun affah you and assure you on that point," he said.

Tom Merry was greatly inclined to burst into a roar of laughter, but he did not. He put his hand upon his heart, and bowed. Manners and Lowther, taking their cue from their leader, put their hands upon their hearts, and bowed also.

Arthur Augustus, not to be outdone in courtesy, bowed more deeply still, and then walked back to Study No. 6 perfectly satisfied, like Pish-Tush in the opera, that all was right as right could be, and everything was quite correct.

"My only hat!" said Tom Merry. "Take me away somewhere where I can cackle in comfort."

And the chums of the Shell went down the passage cackling.

CHAPTER 3.

The Mystery Deepens.

THE bell rang before the Terrible Three could decide in which direction to bend their borrowing footsteps, and they went into the dining-hall. Arthur Augustus came in a little later, and he had the paper in his hand, and conched over it several times in a surreptitious way at the Fourth Form table.

"The young ass is up to something!" Monty Lowther observed to Tom Merry in a whisper. "He was muttering something about three pound ten when we went into Study No. 6, you remember. What is he going to do with three pound ten, that he can't spare five bob out of it as a loan for old and tried friends like us?"

"Something on!" said Manners.

Tom Merry looked puzzled.

"There seem to be a lot of things on just now," he remarked. "D'Arcy has something on, Figgins & Co. have something on, and even Skimpole is going about like a wolf seeking whom he may devour to the tune of ten pounds."

"Well, I think we shall soon be up to Figgins's little game," said Lowther. "It all depends upon whether we can raise the funds to feed Fatty Wynn."

"We've got to raise them somehow."

"Silence at the table!" said Mr. Linton, the master of the Shell. And the chums relapsed into silence.

After dinner, they turned the matter over in their minds as they stood on the steps of the School House looking out into the old quadrangle, bright and green in the autumn sunlight. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy came out, so buried in thought that he did not notice the chums of the Shell standing there.

The little crumpled paper was in his fingers, and it was more thickly covered with figures than ever. Skimpole of the Shell came out a minute later, and spotted D'Arcy near the steps, and blinked at him with satisfaction. He was evidently looking for the swell of St. Jim's. He crossed over quickly and took hold of one of D'Arcy's jacket-buttons—an objectionable way Skimpole had when he wanted to chain anybody's attention.

"D'Arcy, I've been looking for you—"

"Pway welease my button, deah boy!" said D'Arcy politely. "I am afraid that you may make it loose, and nothin' looks more waggad and wotten than a loose button."

"Ah, yes, certainly. Can you lend me ten pounds, D'Arcy?"

"Eh?"

"Can you lend me ten pounds?"

"Weally, Skimpole—"

"I want it for a particular purpose, and I shall be very

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"THE JOKER OF ST. JIM'S."

A Tale of Tom Merry & Co.
By Martin Clifford.

much obliged by the loan of ten pounds, which I will repay out of the first profits on the publication of my great book on Socialism."

"I don't wish to be wude, Skimpole, but I must remark that I wegard you as a howlin' ass, deah boy! I haven't ten pounds. My governah is vewy genewous, but he vewy seldom sends me a tennah, and if I had one I should certainly not feel inclined to give it away. I wegard your wequest as a piece of feahful cheek!"

"I cannot see it in that light myself, D'Arcy, especially as the repayment of the little loan would be so certain and so prompt. However, if you cannot spare ten pounds, I could make ten shillings do."

"I am extremely sowwy, Skimpole, but I haven't any money to lend."

"Dear me, that is most unfortunate! I wanted to make a certain person a present, and I didn't want to be mean about it. I was sure I could borrow a small sum from you."

"At present I am feahfully short of money, deah boy."

"Well, I suppose it cannot be helped. It is very annoying, though." And Skimpole wore an injured look as he drifted away.

Tom Merry looked at his chums with a grin. Arthur Augustus strolled away, still conning over his little paper.

"Skimpole seems destined to meet with nothing but disappointments," remarked Tom Merry. "Surprising that he doesn't come across a chap with ten pounds to give away. I say, there is old Figgins across the way. Suppose we go over and try him for the five boblets?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

It was a rather amusing plan. The rivalry between School House and New House was keen. Tom Merry knew that Figgins of the New House had something "on," and he naturally suspected that it was something to the detriment of the School House. The Terrible Three justly regarded it as a master-stroke of policy to feed Fatty Wynn, and wait for the secret to roll from his lips. To borrow the cash of Figgins to stand the feed was really an exquisitely humorous idea.

"My hat!" said Manners. "It's a ripping idea, and Figgins will want to kick himself hard later on. Let's tackle him."

Figgins and Kerr were going down to the junior football-ground. The Terrible Three intercepted them on the way, putting on their sweetest smiles to show that it was not a House row they had in view.

"Ripping afternoon, Figgins!" said Tom Merry affably.

"It's all right," said Figgins immediately. "What do you chaps want?"

"Five bob," said Tom Merry, with equal directness.

"Ha, ha!"

"What is there to cackle at in that?" demanded Tom Merry. "Haven't you ever borrowed five bob yourself in the wild and reckless days of your youth?"

"Oh, yes, rather—of you before now, too."

"Well, can you spring five bob till Saturday?"

"I would if I could, old chap," said Figgins, "but I can't."

"What about you, Kerr?"

"Same here," said the Scottish partner in the New House Co. "I'd do it like a shot; but under the present circumstances it's impossible!"

"Circumstances! What are you so blessed mysterious about? If you haven't the tin—"

"Well, as a matter of fact, we have the tin," said Figgins. "But—but the fact is, we want all the money we can raise just now, for a—particular purpose."

The Terrible Three stared.

"What's the little game?"

"Well, that's a secret; but we'll tell you in a day or two."

"Oh, right you are! You're getting as mysterious as Gussy and Skimpole. Seems to me that you Fourth-Form kids are going off your rockers," said Tom Merry.

"Whom are you calling kids?"

"Sorry! I meant goats!"

And the Terrible Three walked away, considerably puzzled. It was mystery on mystery, Pelion piled on Ossa, as Manners expressed it. Digby of the Fourth, Blake's chum in Study No. 6, was walking along with his hands in his pockets, whistling cheerily, when the chums of the Shell caught sight of him, and bore down upon him.

"Hold on a minute, Dig," said Tom Merry. "Are you in funds?"

Digby shook his head.

"I've only got eight bob, Tom Merry."

"Eight bob!" exclaimed Monty Lowther. "And what on earth is a kid in the Fourth Form doing with eight bob in his pockets all at once? We had better rob Digby."

"We're looking for some chap to lend us five bob," explained Tom Merry.

"Sorry! I'd do it like a shot, only——"

"Only what?"

"I'm saving six for a special purpose. You can have two if you like."

"What sort of a special purpose?"

"Well, as a matter of fact, that's a little secret," said Digby, showing some embarrassment.

"My hat! I'm getting fed up with little secrets to-day!" exclaimed Tom Merry. "You're the fifth."

"The fifth what?"

"The fifth ass who wants money for a special purpose all of a sudden."

Digby grinned.

"Am I? I didn't know there were so many up to it."

"Up to what?"

"It," said Digby; and he walked away, chuckling.

He left the Terrible Three looking decidedly wrathful. A little mystery was all very well in its way, but, as Tom Merry said, you could get fed up with it in the long run.

What was the "particular purpose" to which so many of the juniors were all at once devoting their spare cash? It was an impenetrable mystery.

"I can't catch on to it," said Tom Merry. "Come to think of it, the little game Figgins & Co. are up to may not be a wheeze against the School House, after all; it may be the same affair that's bothering Dig and D'Arcy and Skimpole. They're all up to something."

"Well, we shall get it out of Fatty Wynn, if we feed him."

"Looks as if we sha'n't be able to feed him!" grunted Manners.

"Rats!" said Tom Merry. "We haven't come to the end of our resources yet, my sons. I saw Herries go round just after dinner to feed his beastly bulldog. Let's go and interview Herries."

"May as well," assented Lowther.

The three chums made their way to the little building behind the New House where the boys of St. Jim's were allowed to keep their pets. A sound of growling and snapping told them that Herries was there, and that Towser was feeding. Towser had been much in the public eye of late. Herries had used the bulldog to track down a couple of tramps who had broken into the chapel at St. Jim's, and stolen the offertory and a valuable chalice. A great many juniors claimed that they had tracked the thieves, or done the greater part of the tracking; but Herries claimed the whole of the honour for his dog, Towser. It was a point upon which Herries, usually quiet and placable, was liable to grow excited, and to argue warmly.

The sturdy Fourth-Former was feeding the bulldog, and he did not look up as the chums of the Shell came in. Tom Merry, Manners, and Lowther stood round him in attitudes of great admiration.

"That's a splendid dog, Herries, old chap!" said Lowther.

"Is he?" said Herries suspiciously. "You said he was a rotten tripehound the other day, when we were tracking the burglars with him."

"Did I?" said Lowther. "That was a little joke, of course. You didn't mind that."

"Blessed if I could see where the joke came in. I put it down to your stupidity, and I didn't mind," said Herries.

Monty Lowther smiled a sickly smile.

"It isn't every bulldog that can track down burglars," Tom Merry remarked.

"This one can't, either, according to what you were saying the other day," said Herries.

"Well, what I really meant was——"

"Another bit, Towser? Good dog! Good doggie! He shall have another bit!"

"He's got a good appetite," said Manners.

"Of course he has," said Herries. "You don't think I'd keep a dog that wasn't in good condition, do you? Every dog that's in good condition has a good appetite."

"I say, Herries, old man——"

"Don't bother now; I'm feeding Towser. If you wouldn't mind, you chaps, I'd like you to clear out for a bit. It disturbs Towser to have a lot of asses watching him when he's feeding."

The chums of the Shell exchanged glances.

"Certainly, Herries; but——"

"Oh, do buzz off! You're worrying Towser, and when he gets excited I can't always hold him. I should be sorry for any of you to get bitten, but——"

"Gr-r-r-r!" said Towser.

The Terrible Three rather hurriedly left. It was nearly time to go in for afternoon lessons, and they walked back to the School House in a rather disconsolate mood. Reilly of the Fourth was standing on the steps, and he nodded with a grin.

"Faith, and is it goin' to a funeral ye are?" asked the boy from Belfast.

Tom Merry brightened up. He remembered that he had

seen the boy from Belfast with a registered letter in his hand after letters were given out that morning. Reilly was sometimes in funds.

"Hallo, Reilly! We're looking for a chap to borrow five bob of."

Reilly looked concerned.

"Faith, and if it was at any other time it's myself would oblige you!" he exclaimed. "Sure I've had a pound from my uncle, but I want it for a particular purpose—"

"For a what?" yelled the Terrible Three together.

"For a particular purpose," said the Belfast boy, in surprise, unable to guess the cause of the wrathful excitement that followed his words.

"Another of 'em!" said Manners darkly.

"You—you young rascal!" said Tom Merry, with a magisterial air. "You're the sixth! How dare you have a particular purpose?"

"Eh, what?"

"I'll teach you to have a particular purpose! Collar him!"

"Faith, tare an' ounds, and what are you after doing, entirely?" roared Reilly. He had cause to be astonished, for the Terrible Three seized him with a simultaneous grasp, rolled him over, and bumped him down upon the bottom step, and flattened his cap over his eyes. Then, somewhat relieved in their feelings, they walked into the house, leaving Reilly firmly convinced that they were stark, staring, and dangerously insane.

CHAPTER 4. A Terrible Guest.

TOM MERRY and his chums went into the Shell class-room for afternoon lessons with the rest of the Form, still in that painful state commonly described as "stony." All whom they had approached on the matter seemed to be afflicted with a shortage of money. In financial parlance, money was tight. Jack Blake had been cashless, and the others had had cash, but were sorry they could not part with it. The bumping of the boy from Belfast had been some satisfaction, but the Terrible Three were growing exasperated.

Tom Merry was just a little absent-minded in class that afternoon, and as it unfortunately happened, Mr. Linton, the master of the Shell, was in a tart temper. Tom had reason to be worried. It was particularly necessary for him to feed Fatty Wynn, if he was to learn that exasperating secret. But apart from that, there was the simple fact that he had asked a fellow to tea, and had nothing to give him to eat. And, as misfortunes never come singly, it happened that the chums of the Shell had lately strained their credit at the school shop to breaking point.

"Five bob," murmured Tom Merry. "That's the lowest it can be done on. But where is the five bob to come from? It might as well be five pounds."

"Merry!"

"Whom can we try next?" ran on Tom Merry's thoughts. "Kildare would lend me the tin like a shot; but I don't like the idea of borrowing outside the Form. That won't do. I might get an advance on my pocket-money from Mr. Linton, if I can catch him in a good temper—"

"Merry!" thundered Mr. Linton.

Tom Merry started, and looked up.

"Yes, sir! Adsum!" he stammered, and the class giggled.

"You will construe, Merry, at once. Do you hear?"

"Yes, sir." He ran his eye quickly over the lines:

"Eneae scopulum interea conscendit, et omnem

"Prospectum late pelago petit, Anthea si quem

"Jactatum vento videat—"

"Construe, Merry," said Mr. Linton grimly.

"Eneae ascended a high rock," stammered Tom Merry.

"And surveyed the wide prospect to see if he could spot five

bob—I mean—"

"Merry!"

"I mean—"

"You will write out those lines fifty times," said Mr. Linton grimly. "Next boy!"

Tom Merry sat down crushed. The whole class was giggling at his slip. Tom was glad when the Shell was dismissed—more glad than usual. As the juniors poured out of their class-room, another class-room door opened, and the Fourth Form came out. An extremely plump youth with a fat, rosy face, came over to Tom Merry.

"When shall I come along, Merry?" he asked.

It was Fatty Wynn of the New House. Tom Merry gave his chums a helpless look. Fatty Wynn always had tea in his study in the New House, instead of in Hall, not only because he could have a better one there; but because he could have it earlier, too. Fatty was always ready for a

feed the moment the class-room doors opened to let him out.

He linked arms affectionately with Tom Merry, and walked out into the quadrangle with him. There was no thought of House rivalry in Fatty Wynn's mind now. The thought of a feed was more than sufficient to banish every other thought.

"When," said Tom Merry, "er—when—"

"Yes, when shall I come over to tea? It was awfully good of you chaps to ask me."

"Not at all."

"It's an honour to us," said Lowther.

"Well, I'd always do my best to do justice to a feed a fellow asked me to," said Wynn. "You can depend on me for that, you chaps."

"Oh, yes, I'm sure of that, Fatty!" murmured Tom Merry.

"Of course, it's for you to fix the time of the tea," said Fatty Wynn. "I wouldn't think of hurrying you, not for worlds. But I think it's a good idea to have tea early—don't you, Merry?"

"Oh, yes, ripping!"

"Good! You see we leave the class-room at half-past four, and we don't have tea till six. Now, as a matter of fact," said Fatty Wynn confidentially, "I've always considered that a rather rotten arrangement."

"Awfully rotten!"

"I can do with my tea immediately after school, you know, and with another one at six," said the Falstaff of the New House, "and I've been so jolly hungry, too, since we had that cruise during the vac. If you fellows have tea early, I can feed with you, and then I can rope in the tea in the hall, and after that I can have a snack with Figgins in the study. There's some chance of getting enough that way."

"That's a really brilliant idea, Wynn, old chap."

"Yes, I thought so myself," said Fatty modestly. "I think of these things, you know. I'm glad to hear that you're having tea early—"

"Eh?" said Tom Merry.

"It suits me better. What time did you say—a quarter to five?"

"I—I don't know if we could be ready so early as that," stammered Tom Merry, glancing at his watch, and seeing that it wanted only ten minutes to the time fixed by Fatty Wynn, and feeling more keenly than ever the fact that there were no eatables of any kind in his study. "Perhaps not quite so early."

"Well, suppose you say ten minutes to five?"

"Er—not quite—perhaps not quite."

"Oh, make it five, then, and that will give me time to get finished in time for the school tea at six," said Fatty Wynn resignedly. "Of course, I wouldn't hurry you chaps for worlds when you're standing a tea. Make it five."

"Right you are!" said Tom Merry desperately. "Five o'clock sharp."

"Good! I may be a few minutes early, in case you want me to lend you a hand in anything. I should be glad to be of use."

"Oh, no—no! We couldn't bear of it. You're an honoured guest, and everything will—will be ready at five o'clock sharp. You come in on the stroke of the hour."

"Oh, good! I say, you might give me a hint of what there is, Merry," said Fatty Wynn, with a gleam of greedy anticipation in his eye. "I suppose sausages—"

"Oh, sausages, of course!" said Tom Merry.

"And rabbit-pies?"

"Plenty of rabbit-pies!" said Tom Merry recklessly.

"Any ham?"

"Heaps of it!"

"That's jolly good of you, Merry! You're standing a decent feed, and no mistake. I hope you haven't made the mistake of getting in small quantities, though."

"I assure you we haven't," said Tom Merry quite truthfully, as the chums of the Shell had got in no quantities at all so far.

"Good! I suppose there will be some of those nice puddings Mrs. Taggles makes?"

"Lots of them!"

"And jam-tarts—"

"Galore!"

"Any cream puffs?"

"Heaps!"

"Marmalade-tarts—"

"Dozens!"

"Apples—"

"Scores!"

"My hat! Merry, you're a—a prince! I shall be there at sharp five!"

"Mind, we depend upon you," said Tom Merry grimly.

"I won't fail! So-long!" And Fatty Wynn walked off



"I hope you won't stint yourself, Fatty," said Lowther. "You don't seem to be in very good form. Don't spare the grub, you know. There's plenty more where that comes from!"

towards the New House. He turned back in a second or two, however. "Sharp five, you know, Merry!"

"Yes, rather!"

"Good!"

And Fatty Wynn walked off with a beaming smile of beatific satisfaction upon his plump features. And Manners and Lowther grasped Tom Merry by either shoulder, and jammed him up against the wall, and glared at him.

"You shrieking ass!" said Lowther, in measured tones. "What do you mean by it?"

CHAPTER 5. The Only Way.

TOM MERRY jerked himself free.

"What's the row?" he demanded.

"You—you priceless idiot! You've described a spread to Fatty Wynn that we couldn't stand him for a sovereign—and we haven't sixpence!"

"We've got to stand the feed all the same," said Tom Merry resolutely. "I had to answer the chap, hadn't I, when he asked me questions?"

"But it will be all out in twenty minutes," howled Lowther. "He'll come along to the study at five sharp, and find nothing there but half a stale loaf."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"It's no laughing matter, you ass!"

"Look here," said Manners, "couldn't we work it off as a huge joke, you know? Give Fatty Wynn the crust, and let him see we were rotting all the time."

"Yes, that's a good way to get information out of him," said Lowther scoffingly.

"Not to be thought of," said Tom Merry decidedly.

"We've got to feed him——"

"But how? There's hardly time to get the grub in if we had the tin, and we haven't any, and there's no time to borrow, if we could find somebody to lend."

"No time for jaw, either, Monty. Come along!"

"Come along where?"

"Follow your uncle," said Tom Merry severely, "and don't ask questions."

"Look here, you image——"

But Tom Merry was going. Manners and Lowther followed him, considerably puzzled as to what he intended to do. They could usually rely upon their leader's ingenuity when in a fix, but at the present moment difficulties seemed to be closing them in on all sides, and they could see no avenue of escape.

"He's bluffing!" growled Lowther, as he followed Tom Merry up the School House stairs. "That's what it is, Manners!"

"Shouldn't wonder!" grunted Manners.

They reached the study in the Shell passage which was shared by the Terrible Three. Tom Merry went in, and picked up a bag that was used to carry football things when the juniors played away. Manners and Lowther watched him.

"No good standing there like a couple of Sphinxes," said Tom Merry cheerfully. "Buckle to."

"Rats! Buckle to what?"

NEXT
THURSDAY:

"THE JOKER OF ST. JIM'S."

A Tale of Tom Merry & Co.
By Martin Clifford.

"Get the place ready for tea. It's twenty to five, and Fatty Wynn will be here at sharp five. In fact, I shouldn't wonder if he puts his watch on, so as to have an excuse for getting here a few minutes early. There's no time to lose!"

"But what are we to do?" demanded Manners helplessly.

"You're to light the fire, boil the kettle, and lay the table."

"I—I'll do it; but what's the good when there's no grub?"

"There will be some grub by the time you've got the kettle boiling. Come on, Monty. You know what Shakespeare says about conjunctures like this?"

"No, I don't; and I don't believe Shakespeare ever gave study feeds, either."

Tom Merry laughed.

"I mean, he was alluding to predicaments and emergencies. He said that desperate diseases are relieved by desperate remedies, or words to that effect."

"Did he? Well, what about it, ass?"

"This is a desperate emergency, and we've got to take desperate measures. The fellows are all gone down to the footer, and the earliest won't be in to tea for another half-hour. There's ample time for us to raid all the Shell studies—"

"Eh?"

"If we can't find enough tommy in the Shell studies, we'll go along the Fourth Form passage. I'd rather stick to our own Form, if possible, though."

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Lowther. "I don't suppose the Shell would rather you did."

"I'm not undertaking all this trouble to please the Shell. We've got to get out of this fix somehow, and that's the only way I can think of. Can you suggest a better one?"

"Ha, ha! No!"

"Then stop criticising your uncle, and come along."

"There'll be a fearful row."

"Will it be the first we've had since we came to St. Jim's?"

"Well, no, not by a few hundred or so."

"Very well, then. As a matter of fact, the Shell won't lose by it. I shall stand the whole Form a feed to make up for it. I shall write to Miss Priscilla Fawcett, and explain to her that I owe the Form a feed, and she will see me through. But never mind that now. The business of the present moment is to rope in the tommy!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You can cackle afterwards, Monty, if you want to, though why you should want to make a curious row like that—"

"Look here—"

"No time. Bring a bag and follow your uncle."

And Tom Merry led the way from the study. Lowther seized a bag and followed him. Manners was already busy lighting the fire to boil the kettle.

Gore's study was next to Tom Merry's, and it was favoured first. Gore's cupboard yielded a good supply. Gore was a fellow usually flush of money, and he "did himself down" well in the feeding line. There was sometimes trouble in the study on that account. Skimpole shared the study with Gore, and Skimpole, as a Socialist, could not refuse Gore's provisions to anybody who asked for them. It was not unusual for Tom Merry to hear a sound of bumping from the next study, and at such times he guessed that the amateur Socialist of St. Jim's had been at work again carrying out his principles.

"This is ripping!" said Lowther, shoving a rabbit-pie, a string of sausages, and a large cake into his bag. "If the other studies turn out as well, we shall be able to do Fatty down in fine style!"

"Good! Now we really sha'n't be long!" grinned Tom Merry. "We'll try Gibbons' room next, and then Norton's."

Gibbons' and Norton's studies both furnished good supplies. Nearly every study in the Shell was visited in turn, and by the time they had finished their round, Tom Merry and Monty Lowther were heavy laden. They made their way back to their own quarters with light hearts and heavy bags, and found that Manners had lost no time. The fire was gleaming cheerily, and the kettle already on the boil. The teapot stood on the little hob to warm. The cloth was laid, and the study crockeryware disposed to the best advantage, and the scene was really cosy in the light of the incandescent burner which Tom Merry had lately rigged up on the gas jet.

"Well, this is ripping!" exclaimed Tom Merry. "Shove out the things, Monty."

"I only hope the Shell won't come in to tea before Fatty Wynn's gone, that's all," said Monty Lowther. "A row with the Form would rather spoil the effect."

"Well, we must hope for the best, that's all. We've done

our best ourselves, and when a fellow's done his best, he can't do more."

"Ha, ha! No. I say, it is a spread!" said Lowther, as he disposed the looted provisions on the table. "It pretty well comes up to the description you gave Fatty Wynn."

"Good! Fatty will be pleased. Hallo, here he is. It's not five yet."

"About five minutes to," said Manners.

Fatty Wynn was looking in at the door with a beaming smile. His smile grew more beaming—in fact, positively ecstatic, as he saw the splendid array of comestibles on the tea-table. He came into the study.

"Am I early, you chaps?" he said affably. "My watch is five o'clock."

Tom Merry knew perfectly well that Fatty Wynn had put his watch forward five minutes, as an excuse for coming early, but he was too polite to make the remark. He shook his head with a courteous smile.

"That's all right, Wynn; you couldn't come too early."

"Good! I say, you've got a ripping spread here, you chaps!"

"We've done our best," said Tom Merry modestly.

"Well, as a matter of fact, most of the Form have contributed to this feed," said Monty Lowther, with great gravity.

Manners exploded into a sudden chuckle, and Tom Merry gave him a warning glance.

"Have they really?" said Fatty Wynn. "That was rather decent of them. I suppose they knew I was coming?"

"Well, no, they didn't," said Tom Merry. "They'll know it later."

"They will, by Jove!" murmured Lowther.

"Did you speak, Lowther?"

"Yes; I hope you'll like the feed, Fatty."

"Oh, I'm not a difficult chap to please!" said Fatty Wynn. "I mean, I shall like it first rate. The spread is really decent, and reminds me of that spread in the dormitory at breaking up last term. You fellows have done this well. I suppose there's no standing on ceremony in this study; I mean, you like a chap to begin."

"Yes, rather! Begin on the fried potatoes," said Manners.

Fatty Wynn looked round.

"I don't see the fried potatoes, Manners."

Tom Merry gave Manners another warning glance.

"There aren't any," he said. "We—we were going to have fried potatoes, because—because you're fond of them, but—but we haven't any. What do you say to sausages for a start?"

"Anything, old chap," said Wynn, sitting down in the chair Monty Lowther placed for him with great politeness—"anything! I should certainly like some sausages, and some ham, and some rabbit-pie. I have noticed that they go together very well, except when you're at sea; and it saves the trouble of keeping on helping a fellow. Yes, I'll have a little bread, and some cold beef, and some mustard and pickles."

And the guest of the Terrible Three was soon busy, while the chums of the Shell waited on him and supplied his needs with great assiduity.

CHAPTER 6.

The Price of a Secret.

FATTY WYNN could always be relied upon to do justice to a feed, and on this occasion, fresh from the class-room, with a whole afternoon's hunger stored up, as it were, he was in splendid form. The Terrible Three had seen him eating before, but they had never seen him surpass his efforts on the present occasion. The chums did not eat; they looked after Fatty Wynn. They were in no hurry for their tea, and they would not diminish the supplies; though as a matter of fact, the supplies on the study table were sufficient for any six ordinary youths.

Gore's rabbit-pie and sausages vanished in record time, and Norton's cold beef, and Harris's ham, and Gibbons's pickles. That was simply a start. Fatty Wynn was settling down to business now. A cold beefsteak-pie belonging to Macdonald disappeared, and then Fatty Wynn gave a sigh.

"Anything wrong, Fatty?" asked Tom Merry anxiously. The fat youth shook his head.

"Not at all, Merry. I was just thinking what a ripping spread this is, and how happy life would be if a chap had two or three like it every day."

"Quite right, Fatty. Will you try the apple-pie now?"

"Yes, I think I will, Merry. I think I've laid a pretty good foundation."

"My hat!" murmured Lowther. "I think you have."

"Did you speak, Lowther?"

"Yes; I hope you won't stint yourself, Fatty. You're

not in very good form. Don't spare the grub, you know. There's plenty more where that came from."

"Good! I think I shall make a good tea before I finish. But you fellows are not eating anything."

"Oh, that's all right; we're in no hurry for our tea!"

"Another cup of tea, Fatty?" asked Manners.

"Well, yes, I think so, thank you," said Fatty, who had already swallowed three cups of tea. He drank tea with steak-pie and pickles without wincing; and in fact, with the appetite of a cormorant and the digestion of a horse, there were few things eatable or drinkable that Fatty Wynn would have declined at any moment.

He had surreptitiously unfastened the lowest button of his waistcoat. The apple-pies vanished, and the plum-pudding followed. Then Fatty Wynn started on the tarts. The table was beginning to look bare now.

"Ripping!" said Fatty Wynn. "I shall have to return the compliment to you fellows some time. Pity we can't get up a feed like this on Wednesday afternoon."

"Why on Wednesday afternoon?" asked Tom Merry.

Fatty Wynn coloured a little.

"Ah, I forgot; you don't know!"

"We don't know what?"

"Oh, nothing!" And Fatty Wynn helped himself to more tarts. "Sorry, Merry, but—but it's not my secret, you see."

Tom Merry exchanged glances with his chums. Fatty Wynn, of his own accord, had approached the subject which had been in their minds all the time.

"Oh, I see," said Tom Merry. "And you can't take us into it—eh?"

"Well, I can't very well," said Fatty Wynn reflectively. "I feel jolly well inclined to, especially after you've stood me such a stunning feed, but I suppose I'd better keep mum. You see, it's a secret."

"Another cup of tea, Fatty?" said Manners hospitably.

"I don't know—well, yes."

"Try the marmalade tarts; they're ripping!"

"I've tried them, Lowther; they are! Yes, I'll have some more. What is that cake like?"

"Jolly good! Gore always has decent cake."

"Gore?"

"I—I mean, it's a jolly good cake!" stammered Lowther.

"Try it!"

"Thanks! You can help me; I'll finish the tarts first. But I say, you fellows are not eating anything."

"That's all right. How do you like the tarts?"

"Very good—very good indeed! Blessed if I don't think I might let you into that wheeze after all! I wonder you haven't thought of it yourselves."

"Yes, it's surprising, isn't it?" said Tom Merry, wondering what on earth the secret could be, and more eager than ever to probe the mystery.

"Yes. Hasn't D'Arcy told you?"

Tom Merry's eyes gleamed. Then it was the same secret, as he suspected; the same secret shared by D'Arcy of the School House and Figgins & Co. of the New House.

"No," he said; "Gussy is awfully close sometimes. I know he's saving up his tin for something very important."

Fatty Wynn chuckled.

"So are we all, Merry. I've got twenty-two bob."

"Twenty-two shillings!" ejaculated Tom Merry. "You've got twenty-two shillings, and haven't painted the tuckshop red with them."

"Of course, it's a most particular purpose," said the fat junior. "As a matter of fact, I had twenty-four, but two went. Money does go, and I get so hungry this time of the year, too."

"But you've got twenty-two left."

"Yes, and I'm going to be awfully careful with that. You see, it's tips from a lot of relations, and I lumped 'em together. I don't usually have so much money."

"And you'll be able to carry out the particular purpose?"

"Oh, yes! I've seen a nice little brooch in Wayland that I can get for twenty-one-and-sixpence, and it will do rippingly."

The Terrible Three stared. Why the fat Fourth-Former should want to buy a brooch, however nice, was a mystery to them.

"You're not going to start wearing jewellery, are you?" demanded Manners.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"What are you chuckling at?"

"You see— Yes, I'll have some cake, Lowther."

"Sorry; here you are!"

"Thanks! You're right, this is ripping cake; you may as well give me three or four alices at once, it will save time. I'm much obliged to you chaps for this feed. I never really expected anything quite up to this."

"It's such a pleasure to have you with us," said Tom Merry. "But you were saying something about—"

"Was I? What ripping cake!"

"Yes, but about that brooch—"

"I'm going to buy it, you see. I shall cut over to Wayland early on Wednesday afternoon on my bike, and rope it in. I think it will do very well."

"Yes, but what will it do very well for?"

"Any more tea in the pot, Manners?"

"Yes, rather!" said Manners. "But it's getting rather weak. I'll make some more."

"Oh, don't bother—"

"No trouble at all, old chap," said Manners, jamming the kettle down on the fire and stirring industriously. "It's a pleasure."

"Well, if it's really no trouble—"

"Not in the least."

"I must say that I like fresh tea. Tea that's been standing is awfully bad for the digestion. When you're rather delicate you have to think of these things."

"When you're what?" said Lowther.

"Rather delicate," said Fatty Wynn. "Fellows often think I'm strong and hearty, because I've got a rather good appetite, but really, you know, I'm delicate."

"You look it," said Tom Merry sympathetically. "So buying a brooch in Wayland is part of the scheme you and Figgins are getting up?"

"Yes. Figgins is going to get a muff."

"A-a-a-a what?"

"A muff! One of those little white muffs, you know, that look so ripping. They're jolly expensive, and Figgy is getting his aunt in London to get it for him."

"What in the name of all that's idiotic does Figgins want with a little white muff?" almost shouted Tom Merry. Fatty Wynn chuckled again.

"Have you made the tea, Manners, old chap?"

"Almost ready, Wynn."

"Oh, all right; no hurry, but I'll have some as soon as it's ready. I'll have some more of that cake, Lowther, please. This is a jolly good cake!"

"Is Kerr buying anything, too?" asked Tom Merry.

"Yes, Kerr is getting a silver pencil," said Fatty Wynn, with his mouth full of cake. "He's going to have the initials engraved on the case."

"Eh? What initials?"

"E. C., of course," replied Fatty Wynn unguardedly. "That is—of course— I'll have some more cake, please. It's a pity to leave any when it's so ripping."

"E. C.," said Tom Merry. "That stands for East Central."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Well, what the dickens does it stand for, then?"

"Well, you see, that's the secret. I really wonder D'Arcy hasn't told you. I suppose he is keeping it awfully dark, though, so as to have the matter all to himself. Very likely he doesn't know that Figgins knew the date all along."

"The date? What date?"

"Wednesday, you know—this Wednesday."

"There's a half-holiday on Wednesday."

"There's something else as well. Ha, ha!" Fatty Wynn looked round at Manners. "I'll have some of that tea, Manners. That was a jolly good cake."

"Try some of the biscuits; they're Norton's—I mean Huntley & Palmer's, and they're really good. I can recommend them."

"Well, perhaps I'll have a few."

"Look here, what is going to happen on Wednesday?"

"I don't quite see how I can tell you without asking Figgy. You ought to get it out of Gussy. The young bounder, to keep it so dark! I don't believe he's told even the other fellows in Study No. 6, though Dig knows."

"Oh, Dig knows, does he?"

"Yes, I know he knows. I'm not sure about Herries, but Blake doesn't know. He will be awfully wild when he finds out, too."

The Terrible Three were absolutely mystified. Manners made a gesture towards the teapot, but Tom Merry shook his head. It would have been easy to seize the fat Fourth-Former and pour warm tea down his neck till he confessed. But the laws of hospitality forbade such treatment of a guest. Fatty Wynn had said that he would have a few biscuits. He had a few dozen, and swallowed his sixth cup of tea. He went on crunching biscuits, and passed his cup to Manners to be refilled.

"So you are going to get a brooch, and Figgins a muff, and Kerr a silver pencil with initials on it," said Tom Merry. "Are you going to open a bazaar?"

"Ha, ha! No."

"Is anybody else in the scheme?"

"Yes; Skimpole knows."

"Skimpole?"

"Yes; for he tried to borrow ten pounds of me as I was

coming over here from the New House. Ten pounds! Ha, ha, ha!"

"Now, look here, Fatty Wynn——"

"I'll have another cup of tea, Manners, please."

"Look here——"

"And just a few nuts to finish with."

"Look here——"

A bump at the study door interrupted Tom Merry, and it was hurled open, and Gore, of the Shell, came stamping in, his face inflamed with rage. Fatty Wynn stopped his tea-cup half-way to his lips, and the Terrible Three swung round, prepared for war.

CHAPTER 7.

Facing the Music.

GORE looked excited. It was not difficult for the chums of the Shell to guess the cause of his excitement. But nothing could have been more unsuspecting than the look of innocent inquiry they turned upon him.

"Hallo, Gore!" said Tom Merry. "Anything wrong?"

"Wrong!" roared Gore. "Yes, I should say so. Have you seen Skimpole?"

"Skimpole!"

"Yes, I thought perhaps he was in here, as I heard somebody; and you're always backing up that rotten Socialist."

"Well, he's not here. What has he been doing?"

"Scoffing my grub again," said Gore, almost stuttering with rage. "You know I've licked him time and again for giving my grub away. He'll take anything out of my cupboard and give it to a tramp at the gate."

"Well, as a sincere Socialist, he's bound——"

"Oh, none of your rotting! He's cleared out the cupboard again——everything gone. I had a rabbit pie, a lot of sausages, and a big currant cake, and I was bringing in Mellish, and Lefevre of the Fifth, to tea—and they're all gone."

Monty Lowther chuckled, but Tom Merry remained perfectly grave.

"Hard cheese!" he said sympathetically.

"Do you know where that rotten Socialist is?"

"No, I haven't seen him for some time."

George Gore stamped out of the study. He slammed the door behind him with a force that made the tea-things dance on the table.

"My hat," murmured Tom Merry, "that's only the beginning. The other fellows will be coming in now. Looks as if the game's up."

Fatty Wynn rose to his feet. He had loosened a second button on his waistcoat. That garment seemed to fit him like a glove. He gave a glance over the table, but there was nothing left to tempt him further.

"Thanks, awfully, you chaps!" he said. "You've done me down well, and I'm really much obliged. Thanks again!"

"That's all right, Fatty. About that little affair on Wednesday——"

"Well, you see——Hallo!"

The door of the study was flung open again, and Skimpole rushed in, panting for breath. The amateur Socialist looked in a sorry plight. His collar was torn out, as if someone had clutched him there and he had broken away by main force. His spectacles were half down his nose, and his tufty hair stood on end.

"Help!" he gasped. "Help! They're mad!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"They're after me! I—dear me—oh!"

He leaned against the wall, gasping for breath. There was a sound of pattering feet in the corridor. They pattered on past the door of the study.

"Well, good-bye, Fatty!" said Tom Merry hurriedly.

There was no time to make any further effort to extract the secret now. The manner in which the feed had been provided was certain to come out, and Tom Merry had a natural desire that Fatty Wynn should not be present when it did.

"Good-bye, old chap!"

"I'm sorry about that little secret."

"Oh, that's all right! Don't bother. Manners, old man, you'll see Fatty down to the door, won't you, in case any of the fellows spot a New House cad—I mean, a New House chap? Good-bye, Fatty, and I hope you'll come again."

"Good-bye, Merry, and I certainly will."

And Fatty Wynn went out of the study with Manners. The footsteps were pattering back along the passage now; the pursuers evidently guessed that Skimpole had taken refuge in one of the studies. As Manners and Wynn went towards the stairs, Gore and Mellish and Lefevre looked into Tom Merry's study.

"Is that Socialist beast here? Oh, there he is!"

And they rushed in. Skimpole promptly dodged round Tom Merry.

"Keep off! I say, keep them off, Merry!"

"Let me get at him!" roared Gore.

"Hold on! What's he been doing? Explain yourself, Skimmy, and you shut up for a minute, Gore."

Gore, angry as he was, did not desire to enter into a fistical encounter with Tom Merry if he could help it. He paused, panting, and Skimpole gasped out his explanation.

"I—I haven't done anything, Merry; I assure you that I haven't. I saw Gore coming down the passage a few minutes ago, and I went up to him to ask him if he could lend me ten pounds, and—and he sprang at me like a wild beast, and punched my nose in a way that I can only characterise as absolutely brutal and vindictive, and—and then Mellish kicked me, and Lefevre grabbed hold of my collar. If they are not mad, they must have been drinking, or else——"

"He's scoffed my rabbit-pie!" yelled Gore. "He's boned my sausages! He's wolfed my cake! He's grabbed my grub!"

"I haven't! I haven't done anything of the sort! It is several days since I gave Gore's plum-cake to a tramp at the gate. As a sincere Socialist I could not refuse relief to the needy, and Gore's plum-cake was very useful for that purpose. But Gore has already made a fuss about that."

"I'm not talking about a plum-cake," shouted Gore. "You've scoffed my rabbit-pie and sausages and currant cake——"

"I haven't——"

"And I was bringing these chaps in to tea, and now there's nothing there. We're going to slay the beastly Anarchist."

"We're going to jump on him," said Mellish. "I'm hungry."

"So am I," said Lefevre of the Fifth. "And this beastly Socialism wants putting down. That's what I say. It wants putting down. Skimpole can nationalise the railways and the coal-mines if he likes, but he's not going to nationalise a fellow's rabbit-pies. That's what I say."

Manners re-entered the study, and gave Tom Merry a nod. Tom drew a deep breath. Fatty Wynn was safe out of the School House, and the time for confession had arrived. He pushed Gore back with a forefinger on his chest.

"Hold on a minute, Gore, old chap, while I explain."

"Blow your explaining! Let me get at that beastly Anarchist."

"I'm not an Anarchist, Gore," said Skimpole mildly.

"You ought to know the difference between an Anarchist and a Socialist."

"Let me get at him!"

"An Anarchist destroys, a Socialist builds up. When we——"

"Lemme pass, Tom Merry, you beast! Back me up, you chaps!"

"When we get Socialism, and the sun-burst of freedom——"

"Hold on, Gore! Skimpole didn't wolf your rabbit-pie."

"Rats! Who did, then?"

"I did."

Gore was petrified for a moment. He stared at Tom Merry blankly.

"You did? You took my rabbit-pie?"

"Yes; and the sausages and the cake."

"You—you—you—— Have you turned burglar, then Tom Merry?"

Tom Merry laughed.

"Not exactly. I've only borrowed them——"

"Oh, I see! If it's a joke I don't mind. I suppose you've got them stowed away somewhere. Get them out, then, and hand them over, and it's all right."

"Well, they're stowed away inside Fatty Wynn, you see."

"Eh?"

"And I don't see how I'm to get them out."

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Monty Lowther.

"Besides, they'd be no good now."

"Look here, Tom Merry, if you've scoffed my grub——"

"It was a terrible emergency, Gore. You're not the only one. We've raided nearly all the Shell studies."

"The dickens you have."

"It was the only way. But it's all right."

"All right, is it?" roared Gore. "I'll jolly well show you whether it's all right."

"Yes, it's all right. We're going to stand a feed next Saturday to make up for it, or if you prefer, we'll replace the—borrowed articles. In times of emergency you have to commandeer things, you know. We are willing to make compensation."

"You—you—you—— We want our tea to-night, not on Saturday."

"That's where it comes rather rough on you, I admit. You'll have to wait till Saturday."

"Wait a whole beastly week? You—you rotter!"

"Now, take it calmly, old chap. What's the good of



Skimpole came over quickly and took hold of one of D'Arcy's jacket buttons. "Can you lend me ten pounds?" he asked.

grumbling at what can't be helped? You ought to be glad you were able to assist your Form captain in a time of stress."

"Hallo!" said Macdonald of the Shell, looking into the study. "Do you fellows know—"

"What's happened?"

"There's been a New House raid, I think. My study has been cleaned out of grub—a steak-pie and pickles and biscuits."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"What are you cackling at?" demanded Macdonald indignantly. "It's no joke to have my grub scoffed by a New House rotter. Norton says he saw Fatty Wynn going out of the house. I suppose he—"

"It was I, my son."

"You?"

"Yes. In a time of need the captain of the Form naturally commandeers all the grub he can lay his hands on."

"Does he?" said Macdonald, coming into the study. "Then I suppose he expects to have some trouble on his hands afterwards."

"Look here—"

"Because whether he expects it or not he's bound to get it."

"That's what I say," said Lefevre. "He's bound to have some trouble on his hands. That's what I say."

"I say," broke in Norton, looking in, "any of you fellows seen anybody raiding my study? My cold beef's been scoffed."

Three or four fellows came along after Norton, all looking wrathful. The excitement in Tom Merry's study attracted them there, and they all had questions to ask.

"Somebody's wolfed my ham," said Harris.

"And my pickles," said Gibbons.

"And my apple-pies," said Bland.

"It was Tom Merry!" shouted Gore. "It was these three rotters! They've raided all the studies to feed up a New House waster!"

There was a threatening murmur, and the Shell crowded into the study, and every moment the crowd was reinforced by fresh Shell fellows who had discovered that articles of diet were missing from their studies, and had set out in wrathful search of the raiders.

CHAPTER 8.

The Terrible Three are Ragged!

TOM MERRY exchanged a quick glance with Manners and Lowther. The Terrible Three drew together, placing themselves in a careless way so that they could not be approached from behind. It looked like war, and war with the odds heavily against the chums of the Shell.

NEXT
THURSDAY:

"THE JOKER OF ST. JIM'S."

A Tale of Tom Merry & Co.
By Martin Clifford.

Pom Merry was quite ready to "face the music," and he did not mean to be caught napping.

"Look here, you fellows—" he began.

"Did you scoff the tommy?" demanded Norton.

"Yes, but—"

"You've raided our studies—"

"In a case of emergency—"

"Did you raid our studies?"

"In a case of emergency you chaps ought to be willing to come to the rescue like Britons. I suppose I couldn't send a guest away hungry?"

"Well, you horrid bounder, that would be better than filling him up with our grub," said Harris excitedly.

"What do you mean by it?"

"You see—"

"Where's my pickles?" demanded Gibbons. "I say, where's my pickles?"

"You see, Gibby—"

"Where's my pickles?"

"That's what I say," said Lefevre, of the Fifth.

"Where's his pickles? That's what I say."

"His pickles are gone—gone into the ewigkeit," said Lowther, grinning.

"Where's my cold beef?"

"Gone after Gibbons's pickles."

"Where's my cake?"

"Gone after Norton's cold beef."

"Look here, you fearful rotters—"

"Why don't you listen?" shouted Tom Merry. "We're going to stand a big feed on Saturday to compensate for this little raid—"

"Little raid—you scoffed nearly everything in the whole passage."

"Every chap who considers himself aggrieved can have a good feed on Saturday—"

"We want a feed this evening!"

"You see—"

"Tom Merry need not apologise," said Skimpole. "I am glad to see at last that he is a convert to Socialism—"

"Oh, shut up, Skimmy; don't you begin."

"As a sincere Socialist, it is impossible for me to shut up. A really sincere and earnest Socialist is never known to shut up. I was saying—"

"Ring off, ass!"

"I was saying that I am glad to see Tom Merry a convert to Socialism. This raid is perfectly justifiable under the—"

"Where's our grub?"

"Where's my cold beef?"

"Where's my pickles?"

"That's what I say: Where's his cold beef? Where's his pickles? That's what I say."

"Are you going to take this lying down?" shouted Mellish, of the Fourth. "Are you going to stand it, or are you going to rag those rotters?"

"Look here—"

"They've raided our studies!" shouted Gore. "Let's raid their beastly quarters! There's enough of us!"

"Hurrah!"

"Look here, don't you see—"

"Biff them! Kick them out! Heave the table over!"

"Bust up the crockery-ware!"

"Hurrah! Stick your foot through the dish!"

"Your elbow through the bookcase; it was mended yesterday!" grinned Gore. "It will want mending again, to-morrow!"

"Biff that plate at the looking-glass!"

"And the ink over the books!"

The Shell were exasperated and excited, and they were not in a humour to listen to reason.

Tom Merry expostulated, Manners explained, Lowther threatened—all three shouted themselves hoarse; but all in vain. The Shell were in earnest. There was crash on crash in the study. Books and crockery, ornaments, cricket-bats and football-boots, all kinds of property flew through the air. The table was overturned with a terrific crash, and the bookcase went sprawling across it. The fender was dragged out and crashed against the looking-glass, the drawer was jerked from the table and banged against the wall, scattering papers and ink and pen-nibs far and wide. The study was crammed with eager and excited wreckers.

The Terrible Three, of course, were not likely to take the wrecking calmly. They "sailed in" with a will. But the odds against them were hopeless. They were cornered by overwhelming numbers, and though there were an assortment of swollen noses and discoloured eyes among the Shell fellows, Tom Merry was soon on the floor, with Manners and Lowther sprawling across him, and half a dozen of his Form-fellows sitting on top to keep them there.

Gore was in his element now. He would willingly have

given a dozen rabbit-pies to get the Form to back him up in a rag like this. Mellish was enjoying himself, too. He attended to any little bit of mischief that the others overlooked—such as pouring ink into the salt-cellars, and cramming butter into the inkpots, mixing pepper into Tom Merry's handkerchiefs, and pouring pickles over Manners' new sweater.

"Go it!" said Gore. "By the time we've finished, these chaps will be fed up with raiding, I think."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Have the ashes out, too, and pour some water on the fire; that will make a jolly smother. Kick that ashpans over here!"

"May as well shove some of the ashes on them."

"Good! Shake 'em over Merry, and then pour some cold tea over him."

"Hold on!" gasped Tom Merry. "Stop it, you beasts! 'Nuff's as good as a feast!"

"Let him have the ashes," said Lefevre, of the Fifth, "that's what I say!"

"He's going to have them!" grinned Gore. "I'll mix them with his nice curly hair, that Miss Fawcett puts in curling-pins when he's at home at Huckleberry Heath."

"She doesn't!" roared Tom Merry.

"Ha, ha, ha! Hand over that gum-bottle!"

"Here you are!"

"Stop it, you rotters— Oh, won't I lick you for this!"

"You're getting the licking at present."

The Terrible Three struggled furiously. But they were pinned down by sheer weight, and at the mercy of the raggers.

"Here, hold on," said Harris, as Gore started mixing gum with the ashes in Tom Merry's curls. "Hold on; that's enough!"

"I'll do as I like, Harris."

"No, you won't," said Harris, pushing him away. "Get off!"

Gore caught his foot in the overturned table, and sat down with a bump. The opened gum-bottle fell from his hand, and dropped on his chest, and the gum ran over his waistcoat. He sat up with a yell, and the sticky liquid ran down in a stream over his trousers.

Harris gave a roar.

"Ha, ha, ha! It was your own fault, Gore!"

"You—you— I'll—"

"Oh, hold on!" said Norton. "I think we've finished here. Are you sorry you raided our studies and scoffed our grub, Tom Merry?"

"I'll show you presently!" gasped Tom Merry.

"Ha, ha! Come on, kids, let's slide before a prefect comes. We've been making rather a row. I can hear somebody in the passage."

The Shell crowded out of the study. Tom Merry, Manners, and Lowther sat up amid the wreckage, and looked at one another, with feelings too deep for words.

CHAPTER 9.

Looking for Information.

KILDARE, of the Sixth, the captain of St. Jim's, looked into the study. He stared at the scene of the "rag" in amazement.

"What's all this row? Why—what—Merry! What has happened?"

"An earthquake, I think," said Tom Merry, slowly picking himself up.

"Great Scott! How came your study in this state?"

"Looks as if there's been a rag, doesn't it?"

"It— Ha, ha! It does! But this sort of thing isn't allowed, Merry—"

"Well, I shouldn't have allowed it if I could have helped it," said Tom Merry ruefully. "By George, there will be some thick ears in the Shell over this!"

"Who did it?"

Tom Merry did not reply. He was shaking the ashes out of his curly hair. Lowther was dusting himself down, and Manners was vainly trying to rub pickles off his waistcoat, where they were nicely mixed with ashes and cold tea.

Kildare looked at them, and he could not help laughing. But he repeated his question:

"Who did this, Merry? They must be punished. This sort of thing has been put down at St. Jim's for a long time past now, and it's not going to be revived. Come, answer me!"

Tom Merry looked inquiringly at Manners.

"Do you know who did it, Manners old man?"

"Better ask Lowther. Do you know who did it, Monty?"

"Better ask Merry. Do you know who did it, Tom?"

"I'll ask Kildare. Do you know who did it, Kildare?"

The captain of St. Jim's laughed, but he looked vexed as well.

"Look here, I know what you feel about giving anybody away; but this isn't an ordinary matter," he said. "This sort of thing can't be permitted. The raggars will have to be punished—"

"They will be punished," said Tom Merry promptly. "Don't you worry about that, Kildare."

"Come, I must have their names."

"I'm afraid I can't think of them just now."

"You know them perfectly well."

"Still, I don't see how I can call them to mind at the present moment. I say, Kildare, old fellow, don't make a row about this. We deserved it, you know—in a way."

"I haven't the slightest doubt on that point," said the captain of St. Jim's drily.

"We don't mind. We'll get cleaned up; and it's all right. The study won't look the same for some time—"

"Ha, ha! I think it won't!"

"Still, we don't mind. As for punishing the raggars, we'll attend to that, and all necessary whackings will be carried out with promptness and despatch—"

"Well, I'll think about it," said Kildare, laughing; and he walked away.

Tom Merry gave a glance round the study. Even his cheery heart sank a little. The place was so absolutely gutted that it seemed almost impossible to ever get it into order again. Lowther and Manners looked round also, and their looks were expressive as they turned upon their leader.

"Of all the howling asses!" said Lowther.

"Of all the shrieking duffers!" said Manners.

"Hallo, what are you growling about?"

"You dummy!"

"You lunatic!"

Tom Merry stared.

"What's the matter?"

"This is what comes of your giddy raids," said Lowther witheringly. "How long will it take us to clear this muck up?"

"Well, it was the only way; we had to feed up a guest."

"Rats! The feed was all wasted—you never screwed the secret out of Fatty Wynn after all!"

"Well, we were interrupted by those bounders."

"You ought to have foreseen that."

"A chap can't foresee everything."

"Some chaps can't foresee anything, I think," growled Manners. "I think this study wants a new leader."

"Oh, don't grouse," said Tom Merry cheerfully; "it can't be helped, you know. What really worries me is that we haven't got on to the wheeze. What can those rotters be planning for Wednesday?"

"Blessed if I know, or care!" said Lowther. "I'm too dusty to care for anything but a wash just now."

"We must get on to the secret."

"Blow the secret! I'm going to get on to a bath-room!"

"Well, that's not a bad idea," grinned Tom Merry; "we want a wash and a brush-up, and no mistake. Let's get along!"

The Terrible Three left the study.

There was a yell of laughter in the passage. Jack Blake was coming along, and he stopped and held his ribs at the sight of the Terrible Three.

"Ha, ha, ha! My only panama hat!" he roared. "Have you been through a mangle, or bucking against a motor-car in a bad temper?"

"Oh, it's nothing!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, cheese it!" said Monty Lowther crossly. "It's bad enough to be ragged, without having a chap going off like a jumping cracker."

"Ha, ha, ha! Hear me smile! Ha, ha, ha!"

Lowther and Manners dodged past, but Blake stopped Tom Merry. The chums of the Shell looked such disreputable objects, that Blake's laughter was excusable; and Tom Merry, who knew how they looked, was grinning himself.

"Hold on a minute," gasped Blake. "I was coming along to speak to you. I say, there's some secret wheeze on, with both School House and New House fellows in it."

"I know there is," granted Tom Merry. "That's what we were trying to get out of Fatty Wynn."

"Did you get it out of him?"

"Well, we couldn't manage it in the time."

"Didn't you feed him up?"

"Ye-es; but we were stony, and we had to raise the grub by raiding the other studies."

"Well, that was rather cool."

"It was the only way. The other fellows cut up rough, for some reason—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"And they wrecked the study. It was a record rag."

"Well, I should say it was, judging by your appearance," grinned Blake. "And you didn't get the secret out of Fatty after all! That was rather hard cheese."

"Can't be helped. You see—"

"Yes, I see. I expect I should have managed it all right. But the curious thing is, that Gussy is in the wheeze, and so is Dig, and they won't tell me."

"I know they are. It's very curious. Something is to come off on Wednesday afternoon, and Figgins & Co. are buying things, but what the idea is, Fatty wouldn't let on."

"I thought you might have screwed it out of him. I shall have to get it out of Gussy, then, I suppose."

"Skimpole knows, too."

"Oh, does he? The ass was trying to borrow ten pounds of me—"

"Ha, ha! He's been trying to borrow ten pounds of everybody at St. Jim's, I think. It's for the same wheeze on Wednesday, whatever it is."

"Let's make 'em own up, then," said Blake. "I'll screw it out of Gussy if I can, and you bounders screw it out of Skimmy, and we'll compare notes. Is it a go?"

"Right-ho! It's agreed."

"Good! Now you can go and get your wash—you need it."

Tom Merry hurried on after his chums, and Blake walked away with a thoughtful brow. The Terrible Three were some time cleaning themselves down after their rough experience. But they came out of the bath-room at last, looking a little cleaner and tidier. The first person they met was Herbert Skimpole. He came eagerly towards Tom Merry.

"Ah, I was looking for you, Merry!"

"And I was just going to look for you!"

"Were you, really? I want to speak to you."

"And I want to speak to you."

"Come along to the study," said Monty Lowther, with a grin. "We can hold our little talk with Skimmy more comfortably there."

Tom Merry and Manners linked arms with the amateur Socialist, and walked him off. Lowther brought up the rear to cut off any chance of escape. Skimpole, rather surprised, and quite pleased by the unlooked-for cordiality of the Terrible Three, beamed upon Tom Merry through his glasses.

"It's about that loan I asked you for, Merry. You declined to lend me ten pounds—"

"I'm still in a declining state."

"I have noticed that there is a registered letter for you downstairs," said Skimpole. "I happened to see the prefect sign for it. It undoubtedly contains a remittance from your esteemed governess, Miss Priscilla Fawcett."

"Good!" said Tom Merry, Manners, and Lowther, with one voice.

"I was thinking, Merry, that you might probably be inclined to lend me the remittance, whatever the amount, and I will return it to you out of the profits of my book."

"Blessed if I know what could possibly make you think that, Skimmy. Anything wrong with your thinking apparatus?"

"Really, Tom Merry—"

They had reached the study. The Terrible Three marched Skimpole in, and Tom Merry pushed the bookcase out of the way, and closed the door. The amateur Socialist viewed this proceeding in some alarm.

"Now," said Tom Merry sweetly, "what do you want the tenner for?"

"Really, Merry—"

"What is this wheeze that's on for Wednesday afternoon?"

"Really—"

"Do you perceive that muck on the floor—ashes, and gum, and pickles, and tea?"

"Ye-es. My sight is not very good, Merry, but I certainly perceive the muck you describe," stammered Skimpole.

"Would you like to have your head rubbed in it?"

"Dear me! Certainly not!"

"Then you'd better impart the information we're looking for, Skimmy, old man."

And the Terrible Three closed round the amateur Socialist with relentless looks.

ANSWERS

NEXT
THURSDAY:

"THE JOKER OF ST. JIM'S."

A Tale of Tom Merry & Co.
By Martin Clifford.

CHAPTER 10.

Light at Last.

"THREE pound ten!" Arthur Augustus D'Arcy murmured the words to himself as he sat in Study No. 6, with a pencil in his hand, and a fragment of scribbled paper upon his knee. He was alone in the study, and too intently engaged upon his calculations to observe Jack Blake coming in.

"Three pound ten, and half-a-crown makes three pound twelve-and-six."

"Did you do that in your head, Gussy?" asked Blake cheerfully.

Arthur Augustus started, and closed his hand over the paper. He looked up at Blake with a rather guilty expression.

"Bai Jove, you startled me, deah boy!"

Blake closed the door of the study.

"I'm going to startle you some more," he said.

"What are you dwivin' at?" asked D'Arcy, looking rather uneasy.

Jack Blake came back towards him with slow deliberateness, drew a chair up facing him, and sat down upon it. He laid his palms on his knees, and looked straight at D'Arcy. The swell of the School House watched these proceedings with growing uneasiness.

"Now, Gussy, I've got a bone to pick with you."

"Weally, Blake—"

"Do you think you are acting like a chum?"

"Like a what?"

"A chum. There's something on, and you know what it is, and Figgins, of the New House, knows what it is, and I don't."

"Figgins! How does Figgins know?"

"Haven't you put him up to it?"

"I! Certainly not! I should not be likely to speak to Figgins about it. He has always shown too much cheek in that direction already."

Blake looked exasperated, as he felt.

"In what direction? What are you talking about?"

"The fact is, deah boy—"

"What are you keeping it dark for?"

"I am not exactly keepin' it dark."

"Well, you're not telling anybody anything about it."

"Yaas, that is cowwect."

"Well, what does it all mean?" demanded Blake.

"You see, deah boy, it's wathah a delicate mattah. If I were to tell you kids, you would wush in with a lot of pwesents, and spoil the effect."

"We—we should rush in with a lot of presents," said Blake dazedly. "Where—when—why?"

"I suppose Figgins knows the date—though it's wathah a cheek of him to take note of it; but—but pewwaps she told him herself."

"Will you explain what you are talking about?"

"I don't see how I weally can, Blake. I can't have a lot of youngstahs wunnin' into the mattah, and spoilin' the effect. I have managed to waise three pound twelve-and-six, and I'm goin' ovah to Wayland to buy a little watch-bwaelet—"

"What for?"

"For a pwesent, of course. The only twouble is, I don't know much about those things, and I don't know wethah you can get a decent one for three pound twelve-and-six."

"Gussy, I've put it to you as a chum, and you won't let on. Now—"

"Oh, pway don't say that, Blake, deah boy," said D'Arcy, looking distressed. "It is vewy hard for me to wefuse—"

"I've agreed with Tom Merry to get the information and compare notes. He's going to get it from Skimpole if he can."

"What does Skimpole know about it?"

"As much as you do, apparently."

"It is like his feahful impertinence to know anythin' about it."

"Are you going to tell me?"

"You say you have agreed to tell Tom Mewwy?"

"Yes, I have."

"Well, I put it to you—can I tell you, and have you tell him, and him tell Lowther and Manners, and then pewwaps tell all the Shell? It's impos."

"Well, you ought to have told me before I consulted Tom Merry about it, then. Is it anything up against the Shell?"

"Ha, ha! No."

"Against the New House?"

"Certainly not."

"Well, I don't see how it could be, if it's the same wheeze that Figgins & Co. are up to, and it seems to be," said Blake. "Now, I tell you—"

The door of the study opened, and Digby came in. Digby was looking a little troubled.

"I suppose you can't lend me two bob, D'Arcy?" he said.

"I am sowwy, Dig, but it is imposs. I have only three pound twelve-and-six, which I am pweservin' for a vewy important and particulah purpose."

"I've got eight. I was thinking I could get one of those little purses for six, but on second thoughts I think I ought to make it ten."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Can you lend me a couple of bob, Blake?"

"I can lend you a couple of thick ears," said Blake wrathfully.

Digby backed away a little.

"Ah, I forgot, you were not in it. My mistake; it's all right."

"Is it all right?" exclaimed the exasperated chief of Study No. 6. "It isn't all right, my son, by a long chalk. What the dickens do you mean by keeping a secret from your lawful leader, lord and master? Eh, what do you mean by it?"

"You see, this is a rather delicate matter. We can't have a lot of fellows rushing in with presents, and spoiling the effect."

"What effect? Wny presents? You utter dummy—"

"You see—"

"If you don't want me to jam your heads together," said Blake, "you'll explain at once. Human patience has its limits."

"I—I don't know," said Digby, hesitating. "I don't like to keep a chap out of it, especially a chum, but you see, I promised D'Arcy not to tell anybody. He told me about Wednesday being the date."

"You wottah! You heard me speakin' to myself about it, and surprised me into admittin' it, you mean," said D'Arcy. "The least you could do, undah the circs, was to pwomise to wefwain fwom jawin' it all over the school."

"So it rests with Gussy, does it?" said Blake.

"Yaas, wathah."

"Then I give you one minute to explain."

"It's quite imposs. If you would pwomise to keep it quite dark, and not to give a pwesent of a highah value than three pound twelve-and-six, I might do it; only you will have to tell Tom Mewwy now."

"That's your fault."

"Undah the circs, I am compelled to keep it dark."

"Very well."

"What are you doin', deah boy?" exclaimed Arthur Augustus, as Blake picked up his hatbox. "Pway be careful with that toppah, Blake. What are you taking it out of the box for?"

"To jump on it."

"Eh? My toppah! What?"

"I give you ten seconds to tell me the giddy secret," said Blake, placing the hat on the floor and measuring the distance with his eye for a jump.

Arthur Augustus sprang up in alarm.

"Blake! You wuffian! Hold on!"

"Are you going to tell me?" said Blake, raising his foot.

D'Arcy did not reply, but he rushed forward to the rescue of his beloved topper. He fell over Blake's outstretched leg, and tumbled forward, and alighted fairly upon the silk hat. There was a crash.

"Ow! My hat! Ow!"

Arthur Augustus's chest had struck the hat fairly as he fell, and the shining topper was crushed as flat as a pancake.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Blake.

D'Arcy scrambled to his feet. He surveyed the smashed topper with anguish in his eye. Then he turned his glimmering eyeglasses upon Jack Blake.

"What did you do that for, Gussy?" asked Blake innocently.

"You—you uttah wottah! You feahful wuffian!"

"Blaming me?" exclaimed Blake, in surprise.

"Yaas, wathah, you—you feahful beast! I weward you as a wottah! I think it will be imposs. for me to considah you again in the light of a fwient; and I uttahly and absolutely wefuse to tell you a single word about my Cousin Ethel's birthday!"

"What?" roared Blake.

"I wefuse—"

"You shrieking ass!" howled Digby. "You've told him now that Wednesday is Ethel's birthday, and put him up to the whole bag of tricks."

D'Arcy looked witheringly at his chum.

"Is this what you call a pwomise, Dig?"

"Eh?"

"You pwomised to say nothin', and now you have let out the whole thing."

"I?" howled Dig. "Why, you let it out!"

"Pway don't pwewawicate. I am willin' to believe that you meant to keep your pwomise, but you have let the secret out in the most stupid way—"

"Vewy silly ass—"



Tom Merry's study was crammed with eager and excited wreckers.

"You uttah duffah—"
 "Cousin Ethel's birthday!" shouted Blake. "I see. My nat—my only hat! I must go and tell Tom Merry this."
 "Blake, deah boy—"
 But Jack Blake had bolted from the study.

CHAPTER 11. The Secret Out.

JACK BLAKE tore along the corridor. He was naturally excited. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy's cousin, Ethel Cleveland, was on the best of terms with the chums of St. Jim's. Whenever she came to the school there was a silent but none the less keen rivalry for her smiles. D'Arcy considered that, as she was his cousin, he had the first right in every way; but Ethel didn't seem to see matters in the same light.

Most of the juniors flattered themselves that Cousin Ethel thought a little more of them than of the others, each individual arrogating to himself the chief place in her regard.

Cousin Ethel was chummy with all. She was a kind, sweet-tempered girl, and the chums were all proud of her friendship, and all envied D'Arcy the possession of such a cousin. Blake dashed along to Tom Merry's study, and hurled the door open and rushed in. A gasping voice was audible in the study.

"Please don't do anything of the sort, Merry! It would

be most unpleasant for me to have my head bumped in that sticky-looking mess—"

"Then expound," said Tom Merry. "You're generally only too willing to jaw, and now here's a good chance, and you won't take it. What's up on Wednesday—"

"Under the circumstances, I cannot tell you. I do not desire you to all start making presents, and perhaps putting mine in the shade," said Skimpole. "It is quite possible that I may not be able to raise ten pounds—"

"It's all right!" shouted Blake.

The Terrible Three turned round quickly. Skimpole jerked himself from their grasp, and set his glasses straight.

"You've got the secret?" exclaimed Tom Merry.

"Yes. Gusey's blabbed it out."

"Good! Skimpole, you can cut!"

Skimpole did not cut. He remained in the study, and blinked at the chums of the Shell.

"I do not bear you any malice, Tom Merry, for threatening to use me with brutal violence."

"Good! Cut!"

"And I am quite willing to forgive you. Blake appears to know now what is going on on Wednesday, so perhaps you now may be willing to subscribe together to raise the ten pounds for me—"

"Cut!" roared Tom Merry.

"I am quite willing to accept five pounds, or even four."

Tom Merry took Skimpole by one shoulder, and Blake

took him by the other. They ran him out of the study, and bumped him down in the passage. Then they slammed the door on him.

"And now what's the giddy secret?" demanded the Terrible Three in one voice.

"Wednesday is—"

"What?"

"Cousin Ethel's birthday."

"Cousin Ethel's birthday!"

"Yes."

"My only hat! And—those rotters were going to keep it dark!" exclaimed Tom Merry.

"The unspeakable toasts!" ejaculated Manners. "Going to keep it dark, and not give us a chance to send anything—even a card!"

"Reptiles!" said Monty Lowther.

"It doesn't matter so much about you chaps," said Blake. "Cousin Ethel is in the Fourth, as it were—as D'Arcy's cousin. Fancy the young bouncer having the cheek to keep it from me—me, the chief of Study No. 6! Serve him jolly well right, his silk topper getting flattened."

"Who's flattened his topper?"

"He fell on it," said Blake blandly. "These things will happen, you know, when fellows start arguing and disobeying their lawful lords and masters."

"Ha, ha! Well, we're in the know now. The young ass! Why, if we put our heads together over the matter, we can get up a ripping celebration for Cousin Ethel's birthday," said Tom Merry excitedly.

"I was just thinking the same," said Manners. "I say, isn't it horrid that we're all stony now?"

"I'm not stony," said Tom Merry cheerfully. "There's a registered letter downstairs waiting for me, and it's bound to be something decent. And what's mine belongs to the study, kids, as you know; and under the circumstances Blake takes equal shares if he likes."

"Good!" said Blake. "Much obliged; and if I can't manage otherwise, I'll be glad to. I'm stony at present; but a fellow must do something on an occasion like this."

"Where is Gussy now?" said Tom Merry thoughtfully. "We must have a jaw about this. We don't even know where Cousin Ethel is at present. Let's go and see him."

"What about clearing up this muck?" said Manners.

"Ah, yes; I forgot that. You can clear that up, Manners, while I go and speak to Gussy."

"No fear!" said Manners promptly.

"Then let it wait, my son. We'll tip Mary a bob to put it right; that's the best way. Come along now to Study No. 6."

The juniors left the study. Skimpole was waiting in the passage, and he immediately captured Tom Merry by a button of his jacket.

"Merry, I'd like you to think that over—"

Blake gave Skimpole a gentle dig in the ribs, and the amateur Socialist staggered away. The juniors walked on, leaving Skimpole gasping. They entered Study No. 6, and found Digby, D'Arcy, and Herries there, having tea. D'Arcy and Dig were engaged in an extremely warm argument.

"I thought Herries and Blake ought to know all along," said Dig. "I'm jolly glad you let it out, so there!"

"I am not so much opposed to Hewies and Blake knowin' all about Ethel's birthday," said D'Arcy; "but I wufuse to have the lettin' out of the secwet imputed to me. You gave it away to Blake in the most wicidulously stupid way."

"You gave it away yourself, you ass!"

"I decline to be alluded to as an ass!"

"You gave it away—"

"It was you gave it away—"

"Why, you said—"

"And you said—"

"Oh, ring off, both of you!" said Blake. "It was Gussy gave it away, but that doesn't matter now. I was bound to get on to it."

"Nothin' of the sort, Blake. Dig allowed the secwet to escape him in the most wicidulous mannah—"

"Oh, ring off, Gussy! The secret's out now, anyway. Now, we're thinking of getting up a little celebration on this happy and auspicious occasion, if it can be worked."

"That's wathah a good ideah."

"Where is Cousin Ethel now?" asked Tom Merry.

"She's atayin' with some friends ovah in Wayland," said D'Arcy. "They are also friends of mine, and I am goin' to see her on her birthday."

The juniors exchanged glances.

"I suppose you've been asked if you'd like to bring a few friends?" Blake remarked, in a careless sort of way.

"No, Blake, I haven't been asked anythin' of the sort."

"They'd naturally expect you to take a chum with you."

"If they did," said D'Arcy grimly, "they'd be disappointed. I am not goin' to take any boundahs along with me on Wednesday aftahnoon."

"Now, Gussy, if that's what you call standing by a chum—"

"After the disgustin' way in which you wuined my silk hat, Blake, you can scarcely expect me to wogard you as a chum."

"That's right; blame me!" said Blake resignedly. "I suppose I must bear the blame whenever a clumsy ass falls over his hat in this study!"

"I wufuse to be chawactewised as a clumsy ass!"

"Where is Cousin Ethel staying in Wayland?" asked Tom Merry.

"I wogard that information as quite superfluous," said D'Arcy. "It cannot interest you to know the pwecise address of my cousin."

"Look here, you ass—"

"If you call me an ass, Tom Mowwy, I shall have no alternative but to give you a feahful thwashin'!"

"You're jolly near getting one yourself at the present moment, Gussy!" said Blake warningly. "You've only got to keep on in your present style. We're getting fed up with your funny ways. We're thinking that perhaps Cousin Ethel could be induced to come over here on her birthday."

"Bai Jove, that's a good ideah!"

"We could get up a birthday feed, and celebrate the occasion properly," said Blake. "We wouldn't invite Figgins & Co., as a punishment for their cheek in keeping Ethel's birthday a secret from us."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Well, where is she?" demanded Tom Merry. "I can write to her and ask—"

"I think I'd better write to her," said Blake thoughtfully. "We want to put the matter in the politest and at the same time the most sensible manner possible."

"The mattah had better be left in my hands," said D'Arcy. "I will write to Ethel, and put the mattah to her. I will explain that we particularly want to make a School House celebration of it, so as to put that wottah Figgins down—"

"You ass! Then she won't come!" growled Monty Lowther.

"Weally, Lowthah, I wogard myself as quite capable of writin' a lettah to my own cousin without any beastly assistance from a wotten Shell-fish!"

"Now, look here, Gussy," said Blake persuasively. "I'm the proper person to write that letter, and you know it."

"It would have more weight, coming from a fellow in a higher Form," said Tom Merry.

"Rats, and many of 'em!"

"It's no good arguin'," said D'Arcy. "I'm goin' to write the lettah, or else it won't be written at all. That's settled, and if you make a wow about it, deah boys, I'll go ovah to Wayland on Ethel's birthday, instead of askin' her here at all."

The juniors glared at Arthur Augustus; but the swell of the School House held the whip hand, and they had to give in.

"Well, I suppose we must leave it to that ass," said Tom Merry. "Of course, he'll make a muck of it."

"I see no reason to suppose anythin' of the sort."

"I say, perhaps Figgins knows Cousin Ethel's address," suggested Digby. "He seems to know a jolly lot about Cousin Ethel."

"Good!" said Tom Merry. "We'll go over to the New House and ask him."

"Weally, deah boys—"

"Come on!"

And the juniors hurried out of Study No. 6. Arthur Augustus was left alone. He took out his pencil, and unfolded a piece of paper covered with scribbled calculations.

"Thwee pound twelve and six," he murmured. "All my wescources combined amount to only thwee pounds twelve and six, and it comes to just the same, wethah I add it up fwom the top or the bottom, so I suppose it must be wight. Bai Jove, though, there's that thwee bob that Mellish owes me. Pwaps I can wope that in. I'll go and look for Mellish. That will make thwee pound fifteen and six."

And Arthur Augustus also left the study.

CHAPTER 12.

Figgins Says It Is All Right,

It was dusk in the quadrangle, as Tom Merry & Co. crossed to the New House. The juniors were feeling very well satisfied with themselves, and even the Terrible Three had almost recovered from the Form rag. They had discovered the secret—that was the great point. The feeding of Fatty Wynn had been in vain, and the "rag" had been endured for nothing; but they had found out the mystery, and they were satisfied. A few bumps and bruises and a wrecked study counted for nothing, now that they were in the secret.

Most of the fellows were indoors now, and some hostile glances were cast at the School House chums as they entered the rival house. But the five were the pick of the fighting-men of the School House, and not to be lightly jacked, even in the enemy's quarters. They marched in coolly, and Blake caught sight of Fatty Wynn's plump form through the open door of the junior common-room.

"This way, kids!" he said.

The School House juniors went into the room. Figgins was not visible, but Fatty Wynn and Kerr were chatting together. They looked up in surprise at the sight of Tom Merry. Some of the New House juniors made a movement as if to cut off the School House retreat to the door, but Fatty Wynn waved them back.

"It's all right, you chaps," he said. "It's pax. What do you want here, kids?"

"Come to see Figgins," said Tom Merry.

"Figgins! What do you want to see Figgins for?" asked Kerr.

"We want to know Cousin Ethel's address in Wayland," said Tom Merry directly.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"What are you cackling at? I daresay Figgins knows the address."

"Ha, ha! I dare say he does."

"We're on to your little secret," said Tom Merry, with a sniff. "We know it's Cousin Ethel's birthday on Wednesday."

"You ass, Fatty—"

"I didn't let out!" exclaimed Fatty Wynn, indignantly. "I was too jolly careful."

"We screwed it out of Gussy," said Tom Merry. "Blake did, rather. The whole school can know it now. We're thinking of getting up a celebration."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Kerr and Wynn went off into a yell of laughter. Their merriment was evidently genuine, and it puzzled the School House juniors. They could not see a humorous side to the matter, so far. If there was a laugh, it ought to have been on their side, as they had discovered the secret so carefully guarded by Figgins & Co.

"Blessed if I can see what you're cackling at!" said Blake. "There's nothing funny in a birthday celebration, is there?"

"Ha, ha! That's according," said Kerr, wiping his eyes. "You naturally wouldn't see the funny side of the matter. I suppose you're thinking of a School House celebration, with the New House left out in the cold."

"Well, if Figgins gives us Cousin Ethel's address we'll have you chaps to the feed."

Fatty Wynn's eyes sparkled.

"Oh, there's going to be a feed, is there?"

"Yes, we shall have a little party, if we can get Cousin Ethel to come over."

"I say, Kerr, in that case—"

"Shut up, Fatty—"

"Yes, but couldn't we manage to combine the two—first one and then the other—"

"Shut up!" yelled Kerr.

"Hallo, what's that?" exclaimed Tom Merry, quick to catch a clue. "Are you New House rotters thinking of getting up a celebration?"

"Find out."

"Well, where's Figgins?" demanded Blake. "We want to see Figgins."

"He may be in any minute."

"Where is he, then? It's past locking up."

"He's gone out for a spin on his bike."

"Oh, don't be funny. The gates have been closed half an hour."

"He has a pass from Monteith."

"Well, he ought to be in by this time," said Blake crossly. "I don't like kids being out after dark. It isn't good for them."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Hallo, here he is!" said Herries.

Figgins had just entered the room. He was wearing a Norfolk jacket and knickers, and a cap on the back of his head. His face was flushed with warmth and exercise, and he looked dusty after a long and rather hard ride.

"Figgins, we've come to see you—"

"Thanks!" said Figgins. "Now you've seen me you may as well travel."

"We want to ask you—"

"Not to-day."

"Eh?"

"I haven't any old clothes to give away."

The New House juniors chuckled gleefully. Tom Merry & Co. turned red. They were greatly inclined to go for Figgins on the spot; but that would not have been a judicious way of approaching the subject of Cousin Ethel's address.

"Look here," exclaimed Tom Merry. "we want you to tell us the address of Cousin Ethel in Wayland. We know she's there, and we know Wednesday is her birthday. We're going to get up a little celebration—"

"A little celebration!" grinned Figgins.

"Yes, in the School House—"

"In the School House? Ha, ha!"

"What are you cackling at, you image?"

"Ha, ha, ha! Can't I cackle if I like, in my own house?" demanded Figgins. "Hear me smile! Ha, ha, ha! I say, Kerr—Wynn, it's all right."

"All right?" said the Co. eagerly.

"Yes, right as rain."

"What's all right?" demanded the School House juniors in chorus.

"Oh, you'll know some time. I'm peckish after my ride, Fatty. Anything to eat in the study?"

"Yes, Figg, I've had tea over the way, so I was able to leave you a couple of the sausages."

"A couple!" roared Figgins. "Why, there were nine of them."

"Were there really? I didn't count them I thought you'd like me to leave you a couple. I get jolly hungry in this October weather myself."

"Look here, Figgins, are you going to give us Cousin Ethel's address?"

"Not this evening," said Figgins blandly. "Some other evening."

"We'll ask you to the feed."

"I'm afraid I should have another engagement."

"Poof! I don't believe you know the address."

"Don't I? You'll believe it on Wednesday!" chuckled Figgins.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared the Co.

"Look here, you cackling asses—"

"Oh, travel along, you School House youngsters!" said Figgins, with a wave of the hand. "You're right out of this, you know. It's not much good your trying to buck against the New House when we're in earnest."

"You—you long-legged freak—"

"Long-legged!" said Monty Lowther. "You don't call those things legs, do you? More like pipe stems, to my mind."

Figgins turned red. His legs were long, but they could not by any stretch of the imagination be called plump, and the cycling hose showed off their slenderness to great advantage. It was a rather sore point with Figgins.

"You let my legs alone!" he growled.

"Certainly!" said Lowther. "I wouldn't touch 'em! I should be afraid they might break, and I shouldn't like to be responsible."

That was too much for Figgins. Some of the New House fellows were giggling, as well as the visitors.

"Chuck those cheeky kids out!" exclaimed Figgins, wrathfully. "Come on."

"You couldn't chuck half of us out!"

"We'll jolly well try!"

The New House juniors made a rush.

"Now, then!" roared Tom Merry. "Straight from the shoulder!"

And the School House fellows hit out. Figgins and Kerr and Pratt and French and Jimson rolled along the floor; but the rush was overwhelming. By force of numbers the School House juniors were swept out. Figgins was up again in a flash, and his foot was one of the first to help the School House visitors down the steps of the New House. Tom Merry & Co. rolled in the quadrangle, and the steps of the house were crowded with laughing and jeering juniors.

"Come on!" yelled Digby, making a rush for the steps again. But Blake caught him by the shoulder, and swung him back.

"No good!" he growled. "Better cut!"

And they out.

CHAPTER 13.

Cousin Ethel's Reply.

THE next day was Tuesday, the eve of Cousin Ethel's birthday. The Terrible Three were down early, and they met Arthur Augustus sunning himself on the steps of the School House. The elegant junior gave them a nod.

"Good-mornin'," he remarked. "I hear that you mucked things up, as usual, last night, ovah in the New House."

"Yes," said Tom Merry. "It was all through your not being with us, you know. What we wanted was a really capable leader."

"Exactly!" said Lowther. "Without Gussy, what could be expected?"

"What, indeed?" said Manners gravely.

"I wathah think that you wotahs are wottin'," said D'Arcy. "But, as a matter of fact, you are uttahn' gweat twuths by mistake. If I had been there it is vewy prob that you wouldn't have been clucked out. Figgins didn't give you Cousin Ethel's address?"

"No, he's an obstinate rotter. What is the address?"

"That's tellin', deah boys!"

"Now, Gussy, be sensible!" urged Tom Merry. "You know how ripping it would be to have Cousin Ethel here to a birthday celebration, and what a dot in the eye it would be to the New House. Let me write to her—"

"I wote to her last night, deah boy!"

Tom Merry gave a groan.

"Then you've mucked it up already, and there's nothing more to be done."

D'Arcy turned his monocle upon Tom Merry with a glance that ought to have withered him up on the spot.

"Weally, Tom Mewwy, I fail to see that my w'itin' the lettah is bound to muck up the mattah. As a mattah of fact, I don't want all sorts and conditions of boundahs to w'ite to my cousin. I bar you Shell boundahs."

"When do you expect to get her reply?"

"I expect she will w'ite at once, as I have wequested her to do so. The lettah will come about midday, and Cousin Ethel will be here to-morrow aftahnoon."

"How do you know?"

"Oh, I am pwetty certain she will not wufuse me!"

"Rats!" "Bosh!" "Scat!"

And with those scathing remarks the chums of the Shell passed out into the quadrangle. Jack Blake came out a little later, and joined them, wearing a worried look.

"That ass has written," he said. "I urged him last night to leave it in my hands, and he told me he had written and posted the letter in the school box while we were at the New House. That settled it."

"I wonder if she'll come."

"Well, Gussy is pretty certain to have made a muck of it."

"Blessed if I understand how a Fourth Form kid can have so much beastly nerve," said Monty Lowther.

Blake gave him a freezing glare.

"Gussy may have mucked it up," he said, "but the muck up would have been a dead cert if any of you Shellfish had had a hand in it. Go and eat coke!"

And Jack Blake stalked away. He was arrested the next minute by a bony hand that grasped one of his waistcoat buttons and held it fast.

"I say, Blake," said Skimpole, "I hear—"

"You'll feel, too, if you don't let go my waistcoat," grunted Blake.

"I hear that there is some plan of celebrating Cousin Ethel's birthday. As you know, I was thinking of expending ten pounds in a really decent—"

"Whose ten pounds?"

"To a sincere Socialist a detail like that is of minor importance. However, I did not count upon the inherent selfishness of human nature, and not to put too fine a point on it, I have been unable to raise the ten pounds."

"You surprise me!" said Blake sarcastically.

"I am somewhat surprised myself; however, such is the case. Under the circumstances, I have thought that the best possible present would be a complete set of the works of the famous Socialist Wyndbagge—"

"Oh, travel off!"

"I was thinking that it would be a good idea to purchase those great works by subscription. The whole set can be had for three guineas, bound in morocco—"

"Won't do, Skimmy!"

"Eh? Why not?"

"I believe in supporting home industries," explained Blake. "I'm not going to buy any books bound in Morocco!"

"My dear Blake," said Skimpole, who was never, never known to see a joke, in a tone of patient explanation, "the books are bound in morocco, not in Morocco."

"Well that is lucid, at all events."

"The morocco is a term applied to the binding—"

"Now, look here, Skimpole, it's no use your prevaricating," said Blake sternly. "You said that the books were bound in Morocco, and if they are bound in Morocco, it stands to reason that they are bound to be bound in Morocco, by Morocco bounders. That's enough. I believe in supporting home industries, and I won't hear another word."

"Blake—"

"Cut off, Skimmy. I tell you I won't hear another word."

"It is not necessary for them to be bound in morocco. You can have a complete set bound in russia—"

"Russia! That's just as bad! I don't care whether they're bound in Russia or Morocco."

"I don't mean in Russia. I mean in russia—"

"I don't believe you know what you do mean, Skimmy. Anyway, you can work it out in your own head without bothering me."

And Blake bolted. Skimpole shook his head solemnly.

"The ignorance that obtains among the boys in some public schools would be deemed incredible by the outside public, if they knew it!" he murmured. "Fancy a fellow of Blake's age not knowing the difference between Morocco and morocco! It's amazing!"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was still on the School House steps, and Skimpole made for him. The swell of the School House saw him coming, and went in; but Skimpole quickened his pace and overtook him. It was not easy to escape the bore of St. Jim's.

"D'Arcy! Don't hurry off, old chap, I want to speak to you. I really thought that you saw me coming."

"Yaas, wathah!" murmured D'Arcy.

"I have an idea of raising a subscription to present Miss Cleveland with a complete set of the works of the famous Wyndbagge—"

"You uttah ass!"

"You do not regard it as a good idea?"

"I wegard it as a wotten ideah!"

"But consider. If Cousin Ethel were converted to Socialism, what extensive influence she would wield! Figgins, for instance, would become a convert immediately, and would then spread the light in the New House, which is rather beyond the range of my own propaganda. As you know, Cousin Ethel is rather attached to Figgins, and—"

"I don't know anythin' of the sort, you shwiekin' duffah!" said the indignant D'Arcy. "And if you say anothah word to me I will give you a feahful thwashin'!"

And D'Arcy stalked away, leaving Skimpole staring after him in amazement and dismay.

"Dear me," murmured Skimpole. "I must have said something to offend D'Arcy, quite unintentionally. 'Hallo, Reilly, good-morning! I want—'"

"Top of the morning to ye!" said Reilly, dodging past the amateur Socialist and escaping into the quadrangle.

"Dear me, I cannot help considering that almost rude," murmured Skimpole. "I suppose I shall have to give up the idea of purchasing a set of Wyndbagge's great works by subscription. Yet what pleasure they would have afforded to Cousin Ethel! I can picture her, on an autumn afternoon, sitting in the shade of a tree absorbed in Wyndbagge's masterly exposition of the great truths of Determinism, his wonderful demonstration of the great theory that every effect is the result of a cause, and that every cause is the producer of an effect. But I suppose it is not to be. Perhaps a small volume, however, which I shall be able to present myself to her, will have the effect of opening Cousin Ethel's eyes to great truths of which she has never hitherto dreamed."

And with that Skimpole had to be satisfied.

During morning lessons, both the Fourth Form and the Shell showed signs of restiveness. Figgins & Co. grinned at Study No. 6 in a very exasperating way, and by the time lessons were over, Blake was in almost a homicidal frame of mind. Arthur Augustus, however, looked very pleased with himself as he came out of the class-room.

"I wathah expect there will be a lettah for me in the wack," he remarked.

"Yes, containing a decline with thanks!" growled Blake.

"Oh, wats, deah boy!"

Sure enough, there was a letter in the rack for the swell of the School House, and it was addressed in the well-known hand of Cousin Ethel. Arthur Augustus felt in his pocket for his penknife, while his chums stood round him with eager looks.

"Well, why don't you open it?" howled Blake.

"I haven't a paper-knife here."

"You—you—you—"

"I'm feelin' for my penknife—"

"Stick your thumb into it!" said Herries savagely.

"I am surprised at your suggestin' such a thing, Hewwies. I have nevah been guilty of openin' a lettah by stickin' my beastly thumb into it."

"Well, buck up with the penknife!" grunted Digby.

"I am huwwyin' as fast as I can." D'Arcy felt in one pocket, and then in another. "Bai Jove, I appeah to have mislaid my penknife. It is very unfortunate, as I am weally eagh to open this lettah. Has any of you chaps got a penknife?"

"You—you—you image—"

"I wefuse to be addressed as an image. Follow me up

to the study, deah boys. I am almost certain there is a papah-knife there."

Blake gripped D'Arcy by the shoulders as he was walking off to the stairs. He swung him back with a whirl that made his head swim.

"Stand there, you image! Now open the letter."

"I wufuse to open the lettah unless—"

"Here's a pocket-knife!" howled Herries.

"I cannot open a lady's letter with a gweat wuff pocket-knife like that."

"Try the small blade, you—you—"

"Hallo! What's the row?" exclaimed Tom Merry, coming up with Manners and Lowther. "Is that a letter from Cousin Ethel?"

"Yes, and the young demon won't open it because he hasn't a paper-knife—"

"Ha, ha, ha! Scrag him."

"I wufuse to be scragged, and—"

"Here's a penknife, Gussy."

Tom Merry extracted a little silver-handled penknife from his waistcoat-pocket, and Arthur Augustus deigned to accept it.

"Thank you vewy much, Tom Mewwy. Pway open it for me."

He handed it back, and Tom Merry gravely opened it, while the juniors stood round Arthur Augustus watching him like hungry tigers, or like a football team watching a player of the opposite side taking a penalty kick.

"Thank you vewy much, Tom Mewwy," said Arthur Augustus, taking the opened penknife, and slitting open the envelope with it. "There is your knife, deah boy. If you fellows will etand back and be quiet, I will pwoceed to wead this lettah."

"Read it out," said Lowther.

"I shall pwobably wead it out, Lowthah, but I must wead it to myself first."

"Buck up, then, you horrid rotter!" yelled Blake.

"I wufuse to be called a howwid wottah!"

Blake glared, but Arthur Augustus was impervious to glaring. It was better to "give him his head," as every interruption made it longer before the letter was read. He opened it with great deliberateness, and adjusted his eye-glass, and read it through. His face was seen to fall, and he ejaculated "Bai Jove!"

The juniors were on tenterhooks.

But D'Arcy did not acem in a hurry to explain. He slowly read the letter through a second time, and then folded it and put it into his pocket, and walked off.

The juniors glared at him in blank amazement for a moment, and then there was a general whoop, and they rushed at him. Half a dozen pairs of hands seized him, and he was yanked back.

"Bai Jove! Pway don't be such wuff asses, deah boys"

"What's in that letter?"

"What does she say?"

"Is she coming?"

"Bai Jove, I forgot you wanted to know," said D'Arcy.

"Pway excuse me. No; she is not comin'."

"Not coming?"

"No, it is imposs."

"Read it out, then," growled Tom Merry. "I'm pretty certain it's your fault."

"Weally, Tom Mewwy!"

"You have made a muck of it. But read the letter out."

"I wufuse to admit that I have made a muck of it."

"Read the letter out."

"Vewy well. Don't croud me like that. 'Dear Arthur, I am sowwy it will be impossible to accept your kind invitation to a celebration in the School House on the occasion of my birthday. I have already accepted a similar invitation from Figgins—'"

"What!"

It was a general howl.

"Pway don't intewwupt me, deah boys—"

"Look here, are you rotting, you ass?"

"I am not wottin', and I wufuse—"

"Go on with the letter."

"Vewy well. 'I have already accepted a similar invitation from Figgins, to have tea in the New House on Wednesday afternoon. I hope I shall see you then. Your affectionate cousin, ETHEL CLEVELAND.'"

"That is all, deah boys, except that she sends her kind wegards—"

"Figgins!"

"That's where he was gone last evening!"

"He's done us!"

The School House juniors were furious. D'Arcy put the letter in his pocket. Of all the group, he was the only one

just then whose manners had the repose that stamps the caste of Vere de Vere.

"We've been done," growled Monty Lowther. "Catch Figgins inviting us to the feed. Of course, he'll keep us out."

"It's all D'Arcy's fault," said Manners.

"I weally fail to see how you make that out, Mannahs."

"Of course it is," said Tom Merry hotly. "If you had told us before that Wednesday was Cousin Ethel's birthday, we should have had time to act."

"Yes, rather! It's all Gussy's fault."

"Weally, deah boys—"

"Figgins & Co. have done us, all through that howling ass."

"I wufuse to be alluded to as a howlin' ass."

"Bump him!" yelled Lowther.

"I wufuse to be bumped."

"You can refuse till you're black and blue in the chivvy, but you're going to be bumped all the same," said Jack Blake. "Collar him!"

"Weally, Blake— Pway don't be wuff! I say, deah boys— Gweat Scott! Ow!"

Arthur Augustus was collared by the indignant juniors. He had said that he would not be bumped; but he was bumped, and bumped all along the passage and back again, and finally bumped on the steps outside, and left there gasping. And Tom Merry & Co., somewhat relieved in their feelings, consulted as to what was best to be done.

CHAPTER 14.

Skimpole Asks a Little Favour.

"H A, ha, ha!"

That was the greeting Tom Merry & Co. received from Figgins & Co. when they went out into the quad. Figgins knew that D'Arcy had written, and he knew, of course, what the reply must be. And the downcast looks of the School House juniors sufficiently showed that the reply from Cousin Ethel had been duly received.

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

"Oh, don't make that row!" said Blake. "I should think you might be satisfied with having faces like that without going in for a cack'le warranted to kill at forty rods. Go and bury yourselves."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The School House juniors marched off, followed by that irritating "Ha, ha, ha!" from Figgins & Co. The New House Co. were jubilant.

"We've done them this time," Figgins remarked—"done them brown."

"Done 'em to a turn," said Kerr. "Caught them fairly napping."

"All the same," said Fatty Wynn thoughtfully, "it might have been better in some respects to meet them half-way."

"How do you make that out?"

"Well, if they're thinking of giving a feed, it seems a pity that we shouldn't go to it."

"We're going to have a feed ourselves, in the New House."

"Yes, I know. Still, a feed is always a feed. No harm in having two."

"Oh, rats!" said Figgins.

Meanwhile the School House chums were talking it over. There seemed to be no way out of the difficulty. Cousin Ethel had promised to attend the birthday celebration in the New House. D'Arcy was pretty certain to be asked, as he was Ethel's cousin, but would Figgins & Co. ask the rest? It was doubtful. And even then their presence at a feed in the New House would really only grace the triumph of Figgins & Co.

"It's a rotten go!" said Tom Merry. "If we could see Cousin Ethel, we might be able to work it somehow. Gussy will have to tell us where she is."

"He's likely to, after that bumping we gave him," grinned Digby.

"Oh, I forgot that! Anyway, we'll try."

They tried. But Arthur Augustus was adamant. He had had to change his clothes after that bumping, being dusty and dishevelled from head to foot. He was fairly on his dignity now, and immovable.

"You have tweated me with gwoss diswespect," he said. "You have wumped my jacket, disawwanged my tie, and made my hair untidy. I wegard you as a set of wuff boundahs, and I wufuse to speak to you."

"Where is Cousin Ethel?"

Arthur Augustus turned on his heel.

"Where is Cousin Ethel?" roared Tom Merry.

"Wats!" said D'Arcy. And that was the only reply they could extract from him.

During afternoon school Tom Merry thought the matter

out. He confided to Lowther, during the lessons, that it was absolutely necessary to see Cousin Ethel.

"I'm going over to Wayland," he said.

Monty Lowther stared.

"On spec?"

"Yes. I suppose Cousin Ethel is bound to go out sometimes, and you remember she is fond of walks in the afternoon. She may go out shopping. I'm going to buzz off to Wayland immediately after school, and chance it."

"Merry, you are talking," said Mr. Linton.

"Ye-es, sir."

"Take fifty lines."

"Yes, sir," said Tom Merry, with a grimace.

But when afternoon school was dismissed, Tom Merry carried out his plan. Wayland was out of bounds, and Tom Merry presented himself with an ingratiating smile before Kildare to ask for a pass.

"Well, what do you want, Merry?" grinned Kildare, who knew that smile of old.

"Can you let me have a pass, Kildare? I want to go to Wayland."

"What for?"

"Important business."

"Hum! Wayland is a long way, and you won't be back by calling over. I'm afraid I shall have to ask you to be a little more explicit, Merry."

"Well, you see, Kildare, Wednesday is Cousin Ethel's birthday," said Tom Merry glibly. "I want to see her to make the arrangements for a little celebration, if possible. Cousin Ethel is staying in Wayland now."

"Oh, I see! In that case you can have the pass; but mind, don't be late."

"I'll be back jolly early, Kildare."

The Sixth Form prefect wrote out the pass, and Tom Merry pocketed it in great glee.

"Thanks awfully, Kildare; you're a trump!" he said.

And he hurried away to rejoin his chums.

"It's all right," he said. "You chaps can come as far as the station with me, if you like. We've got good time to catch the five if we don't stop for tea."

"But what are you going to do for tea?"

"I'll get a snack in Wayland."

And the chums of the Shell went down to the gates, and set out at a brisk walk for Rylcombe. Tom Merry caught the train, and Manners and Lowther saw him off. Wayland was a good distance by road, but by train it was not a long journey, and ere long Tom Merry stepped out at the junction. Meanwhile, the captain of St. Jim's had received a second application for a pass out of bounds, this time from Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

"Where do you want to go?" demanded Kildare. "I've already given Tom Merry a pass for Wayland."

"Bai Jove, I wondah what he's gone to Wayland for? I want to go on important business, Kildare—extremely important business, deah boy."

Kildare laughed.

"So did Tom Merry. Come, out with it!"

"You see, Wednesday is my Cousin Ethel's birthday, and I want to go to Wayland to buy her a little present."

"I suppose I must let you have a pass, then," said Kildare. And he wrote it out, and the swell of the School House thanked him effusively and retired. Kildare settled down to work, and five minutes later came another tap at his study door.

"Oh, come in!" said the captain of St. Jim's resignedly.

It was Skimpole who came in. He blinked at the senior.

"If you please, Kildare, can you give me a pass to go to Wayland?"

"How many more?" exclaimed Kildare.

"I do not understand you. I require a pass to go to Wayland on important business, and though I disapprove entirely of the system which requires boys to account for their goings and outgoings—I mean their incomings and outgoings—still, to avoid trouble with the masters, I have come to request you to give me a pass."

"You're jolly near getting a licking instead," Kildare remarked.

"I fail to see anything provoking in a plain statement of my beliefs," said Skimpole. "I really must have the pass, you know, as I have important business in Wayland. What I want cannot be obtained in Rylcombe."

"And what do you want?"

"Wednesday is Miss Cleveland's birthday. You are acquainted with Cousin Ethel, of course. I have decided to purchase a copy of 'Socialism Simply Stated,' as a present for Cousin Ethel, and in this dull village such a book cannot be obtained, or even ordered with any certainty of receiving it. For that purpose I am going over to Wayland, and—"

"Oh, you are going over, are you?"

"Yes, certainly. I am asking you for a pass as a matter of form."

Kildare reached his hand out towards a leather belt Skimpole backed away a little in alarm.

"I hope you are not thinking of proceeding to violence, Kildare," he said. "Such an absurd and antiquated method of argument is—"

The Sixth-Former burst into a laugh.

"Oh, get out!" he said.

"But the pass?"

Kildare hesitated a moment, but his good-nature prevailed, and he wrote out the pass. Skimpole took it.

"And now, Kildare, if you don't mind—"

"Well, what is it?"

"Would you mind lending me my fare to Wayland? I am unfortunately quite destitute of ready cash, owing to a conscientious thoroughness in carrying out my principles."

There was a very curious look on Kildare's face as he laid a sixpence on the table.

"Thank you!" said Skimpole, putting the sixpence in his pocket. "One more thing—"

"Don't limit yourself," said Kildare. "My time is of no value, and I really have never looked forward to anything so pleasant as a conversation with you."

"It is very kind of you to say so, Kildare. It has never struck me before, but when I come to think of it, my vast brain power would naturally be more appreciated in the higher Forms than in the lower. The lower Forms mock at my advanced ideas. If you like, Kildare, I will often drop into your study of an evening to have a chat."

"You'll come in some time when I've got my football boots on, won't you?" said Kildare.

"Oh, really, Kildare—"

"If you wouldn't mind getting out of my study, Skimpole, it would save me the trouble of slinging you out," suggested Kildare.

"There was one more thing I was going to ask you. The book I have mentioned, 'Socialism Simply Stated,' costs three-and-six. Considering that it may open one's mind, and make all the difference between darkness and light to the intellect of the reader, it must be admitted that it is dirt cheap at the price. But it unfortunately happens that



YOU CAN START NOW!

(The First Three Sets are on Page iv. Cover.)

I have no cash. Would you mind lending me the three-and-six, the amount to be repaid out of the profits of my forthcoming publication on Socialism?"

Kildare rose from his chair, took the amateur Socialist by the ear, and led him gently to the door of the study. There he gave him a gentle kick, which helped him out into the passage without the trouble of walking. Skimpole sat down on the linoleum, and blinked at Kildare through his glasses.

"Cut!" said the captain of St. Jim's.

"Am I to take this as a hint, Kildare, that you do not wish to lend me the three-and-six?" asked Skimpole, blinking.

Kildare burst into a laugh and closed his door. Skimpole picked himself up and drifted disconsolately down the passage.

"It is no use going to Wayland unless I have the cash to pay for the book," he murmured. "The soulless booksellers would not even order it for me without the cash. They would greet with ribald laughter any proposition to reimburse them out of the profits of my great book on Socialism. I suppose I had better take this sixpence back to Kildare."

He returned to the captain's study. He tapped at the door and opened it, and blinked into the room. Kildare looked up furiously from a Greek exercise.

"Kildare, as I— Oh!"

Liddell and Scott came hurtling through the air, and crashed on the door. Skimpole popped out of the study as the heavy lexicon plumped on the floor. He went rather hurriedly down the passage.

"Kildare seems to be annoyed about something," he murmured. "He usually such a good-tempered fellow, too. Apparently he does not wish me to return his sixpence. Ah, I will purchase six stamps, and send them to the Fund for the Propagation of Determinism among the Sandwich Islanders. An excellent idea!"

Skimpole carried out the excellent idea. But whether the sixpence ever reached the Sandwich Islanders we are unable to state.

(Continued on page 22.)

NEXT
THURSDAY:

"THE JOKER OF ST. JIM'S."

A Tale of Tom Merry & Co.
By Martin Clifford.

GRAND FOOTBALL PUZZLE-PICTURE COMPETITION.

FIFTY POUNDS IN CASH PRIZES.

Specimen Picture.



APPLEBY.

First Prize—**£13 0 0: ONE POUND A WEEK FOR THIRTEEN WEEKS.****Second Prize—****£6 10 0: TEN SHILLINGS A WEEK FOR THIRTEEN WEEKS.****And 122 Cash Prizes of 5s. Each.**

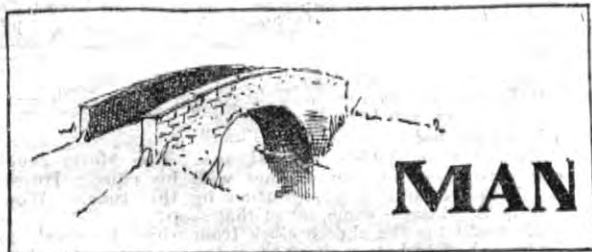
The First Prize will be awarded to the person who gets all or, failing this, most of the pictures right. The Second Prize will go to the reader nearest to the First Prize Winner, and so on. In the event of ties, the Prizes will be divided—that is to say, if two competitors tie for the first place, the first and second prizes will be divided between them, and so forth.

What Competitors have to do.—The Competition is very simple. We are publishing thirteen sets of Puzzle Pictures, each set consisting of six pictures. This is the Fourth Set. Keep this set until you have all the others. Each of these pictures represents the name of a well-known Association Football Player.

All you have to do is to write carefully under each picture the name of the Player you think it represents. Then place the set away until the others have appeared, when the latest day for sending in competitions will be announced. The Editor of the GEM LIBRARY will not be responsible for any loss or delay in transmission or delivery of the lists by post, nor for any accidental loss of a list after delivery. There will be attached to the final list a form to be signed by each competitor, whereby he agrees to these conditions, and no list will be considered unless this form shall have been duly signed by the competitor. No questions will be answered. Read the rules. The Editor's decision is final.

The easiest way to solve the Pictures is to get the issue of "The Boys' Realm" now on sale, price 1d. During the next thirteen weeks "The Boys' Realm" will publish a column of brief biographies of notable footballers, in which will be included all the names of the Players illustrated. Girls may compete. All competitors may get anyone to help them.

THE FOURTH SET (Nos. 1-18 are Reproduced on Page IV. Cover).



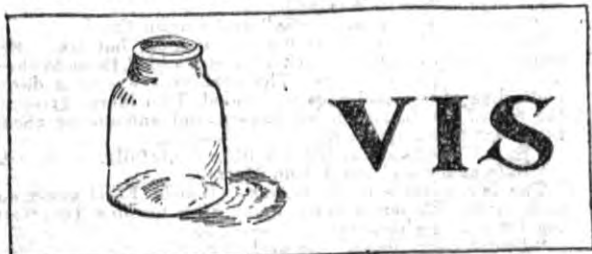
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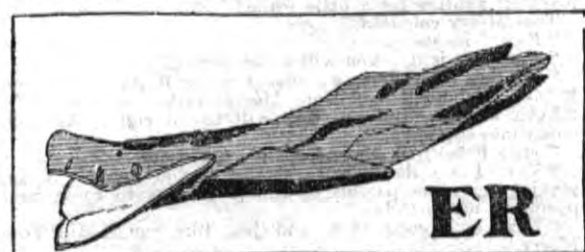
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No. 22



No. 23

No. 24

KEEP THESE PICTURES BY YOU UNTIL NOTICE IS GIVEN TO SEND IN.

CHAPTER 15.

A Little Shopping.

"COUSIN ETHEL!"

Tom Merry uttered the exclamation as he raised his cap.

Fortune had favoured the hero of the Shell. In the old-fashioned High Street of the market town, he had come almost face to face with Cousin Ethel, and his quest was over almost as soon as it had commenced. He hurried towards the girl with a look of delight that brought a smile to her lips.

"Tom!"

"I came over to see you," said Tom Merry, as they shook hands. "I wanted to see you so particularly that I came over on the chance."

"That was very venturesome of you," said Cousin Ethel, laughing. "You might never have met me. Why didn't you get my address from Arthur?"

Tom Merry laughed, too.

"Gussy isn't on speaking terms with any of us at present," he explained.

"Dear me!"

"It's nothing serious, you know; only his dig."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I'm jolly glad I met you," said Tom Merry.

"And I am very pleased," said Cousin Ethel. "I am just going to do some shopping. Would you care to walk with me?"

"Yes, rather!" said Tom Merry promptly. And he walked by Cousin Ethel's side. "This is really fortunate. I didn't care to ask that rotter Figgins for you—I mean—I—" He broke off in confusion, but Cousin Ethel was looking straight ahead, and did not seem to have heard the unfortunate expression applied to Figgins, and Tom Merry quickly recovered himself. "I—I didn't ask Figgins, I mean. But it's all right now. I want to speak to you about Wednesday."

"Wednesday is my birthday," said Cousin Ethel.

"Yes, that's it. We were going to have a celebration in the School House, and we hoped you would come."

"Yes, Arthur wrote and asked me. It was very, very kind of you all."

"It seems that that chap Figgins—"

"I've promised Figgins."

"Rather unfortunate, isn't it?" said Tom Merry. "Of course, we should have had Figgins & Co. over to our feed —"

"And now it will be the other way about."

"I—I don't know—"

"Surely you and your friends will not refuse to come."

Tom Merry laughed.

"Not much. But we may not be asked."

"Why, Figgins told me that all my friends would be present!" said Cousin Ethel, looking puzzled. "Of course, I should expect to see you all."

"The rotter!" muttered Tom Merry. "He was keeping it dark till the last moment, I suppose, to tantalise us."

"Did you speak?"

"Yes. Figgins has forgotten to ask us, but I suppose he will do so to-morrow. I—I suppose it wouldn't be possible to excuse yourself to Figgins, and—come to the School House instead? We'd ask Figgins over."

Cousin Ethel laughed.

"I'm afraid not, Tom. It would hardly be fair on Figgins, would it?"

"Well, after the rotter's stolen a march on us—I mean, perhaps not. Of course, you know best. If we're going to make a party of it, I suppose it doesn't matter whether it's held in the School House or the New House."

"Of course not," said Cousin Ethel brightly; "especially as you will make it—make it—what do you call it when you leave off fighting for a little while?"

Tom Merry coloured.

"Pax?" he suggested.

"Yes, that is it. You will make it pax."

"Oh, yes, of course, we should make it pax on Cousin Ethel's birthday," said Tom Merry, rather reproachfully. "Even Figgins—I mean, that will be all right. Are you going into this shop?"

Cousin Ethel had stopped outside a grocer's.

"Yes. I am doing some shopping, you know. I am making up some parcels of things to give to some poor people on my birthday."

"That is a good idea, and just like you," said Tom Merry.

"Wait a few minutes for me."

"A few hours if you like."

Cousin Ethel laughed, and entered the shop. Tom Merry waited ten minutes, and when the girl came out she handed

him three or four parcels. The junior received them willingly enough, and accompanied the girl cheerfully to the next shop. It was a greengrocer's.

"Wait a couple of minutes," said Cousin Ethel brightly.

"Yes, rather, as long as you like."

Cousin Ethel kept him waiting only six or seven minutes this time. Then she bestowed her purchases upon him—a bag of potatoes, a bundle of carrots, and a cabbage, and a paper bag stuffed with apples. Tom Merry began to look a little serious. It was not easy to dispose of his burdens, but he bore them gallantly.

"You are sure you don't mind carrying these things?" said Cousin Ethel anxiously.

"Of course not."

"I could carry some of them."

"That you won't."

"If you are tired—"

"My dear Ethel!"

"Very well; wait a few minutes while I go in here."

Miss Cleveland entered a draper's shop. Tom Merry stood up outside the shop window, and waited. Naturally, Cousin Ethel was longer in that shop than in any of the others. Ten minutes crawled by, and she had not made her appearance. But Tom Merry was not lonely. Several very small boys had gathered round, and were regarding him with great interest.

"I'll have a 'aporth of the carrots, please," said one little ragamuffin.

"Ow much the cabbage?" said another.

"Wot price the hables?"

"Gimme a apple, mister."

"Mean 'og, e's got a 'ole bagful, too!"

Tom Merry's complexion gradually assumed a crimson hue. Every minute a fresh ragamuffin arrived on the scene. There were soon a dozen or so of them gathered round the unhappy junior, greatly interested by his crimson complexion and his varied burdens.

"Get off, you young rotters!" he growled. "I'll box your ears!"

There was a general cackle from the ragamuffins. Tom Merry's threat was an empty one; he could not have boxed anybody's ears without letting his parcels fall right and left, and they knew it.

"Gimme an apple!"

"Wot price the cabbage?"

"Where's yer barrer?"

"Get away, you little beasts!"

"E's getting waxy! Chivvy 'im!"

Two or three pebbles were thrown. Tom Merry caught one with his nose, and another with his chin. He was breaking out into a perspiration by this time. Would Cousin Ethel never come out of that shop?

He could see the church clock from where he stood, and he knew he had been waiting there for a quarter of an hour. It seemed like a week. The hand slowly crawled round the dial. Would Cousin Ethel never come?

Twenty minutes! There was a light step beside him, and Tom Merry gasped with relief as Miss Cleveland joined him.

"Have I kept you waiting long?" she asked.

"Oh, no, no!" gasped Tom Merry.

"There are only three more shops to go to," said Cousin Ethel. "Perhaps I had better carry this little box."

"Oh, no, give it to me, do please! I can put it under my arm."

"If you would rather—"

"Please!"

The cardboard box from the draper's was added to Tom Merry's pile. They walked on, followed by a whoop from the ragamuffins. Tom Merry was glad that they turned a corner before entering a stationer's. He felt that he could not have endured to stand in the High Street again, the object of the kind attentions and pleasantries of all the little ragamuffins in Wayland.

"I sha'n't be a minute here," said Cousin Ethel.

She was right; she was not one minute, but six. She brought out a couple of packages, and added them to those under Tom Merry's arms. The next visit was to a dairy, and a bag of new-laid eggs was added, Tom Merry gripping the top of the bag with his fingers, and announcing cheerfully that he had it all right.

"Sure?" said Cousin Ethel a little doubtfully.

"Safe as houses!" said Tom Merry.

The last place was a toyshop. Cousin Ethel came out with three little boxes in her hand, after keeping Tom waiting for only six minutes.

"I must carry these," she said.

"Oh, no!" said Tom Merry valiantly. "You've got your little dog to lead, and I can't have you carrying parcels as well."

"Very well," said Cousin Ethel, with a charming smile.

Tom Merry received the rest of the burden. Cousin Ethel walked off homeward, and Tom Merry followed, almost staggering under his load.

Bump, bump, bump! Cousin Ethel looked round. The apples were dropping out of the bag, and already three big ones had rolled off the pavement.

"Dear me!" said Cousin Ethel.

"It's all right," said Tom Merry hastily. "I'll save them."

He jerked the bag of apples a little higher up under his arm, and the bag of eggs broke loose, the top of the paper bag tearing in his fingers.

Crash!

"Oh!" gasped Tom Merry.

The eggs were smashed to a pulp. Cousin Ethel's face was a study.

"I—I am awfully sorry, Ethel!"

The girl laughed.

"Never mind; we must go back to the dairy and get some more."

Tom Merry shuddered. But back to the dairy they went, and a fresh bag of eggs was obtained. Tom Merry insisted upon carrying them, and somehow he managed it. But as he followed Cousin Ethel and her little dog, he almost regretted his gallantry.

"You will come in to tea, won't you?" said Cousin Ethel sweetly, as they stopped at a garden-gate on the outskirts of Wayland.

Tom Merry would gladly have accepted the invitation. He had had no tea, and he was very hungry. But it was already dusk, and there was no time. It was a long walk back to the station.

"I—I'm sorry," he said. "I should like to awfully, but I shall have to cut back."

"You can't even spare a little while?"

"I'm afraid not. Thank you so much!"

"I must thank you," said Cousin Ethel, taking her parcels. "H'm! If you won't come in, I think you may put the parcels down here, and I will send out for them. I am so sorry you can't come in and have some tea. But I shall see you to-morrow, in the New House at St. Jim's."

Tom Merry shook hands with Cousin Ethel.

"Good-bye," he said; "or rather, au revoir!"

"Au revoir!"

And Tom Merry raised his cap, and went down the street. There was a rather curious smile upon Cousin Ethel's face as she walked up the garden-path. Tom Merry hurried to the station, and there he had the pleasure—or otherwise—of waiting ten minutes for a train to Rylcombe. But it came puffing in at last.

"I'm glad she didn't notice that I alluded to Figgins as a rotter," he murmured, as he took his seat in an empty carriage. "I—Hullo, Gussy!" he broke off, in amazement, as the elegant figure of the swell of St. Jim's came flying across the platform just in time to jump into the carriage.

Tom Merry held the door open, and gave D'Arcy a helping hand in. D'Arcy sank breathless upon a seat.

"Bai Jove, just caught the beastly thing, you know."

The train snorted out of the station.

CHAPTER 16.

Arthur Augustus Does the Thing in Style.

ARTHUR AUGUSTUS laid a little parcel on the seat, and fanned himself with a cambric handkerchief.

Tom Merry looked at him curiously.

"I didn't know you were gone to Wayland," he remarked.

"And I didn't know you were," said D'Arcy. "Pway, what have you got?"

"Eh?"

"What have you bought?"

"Bought! Did you see me, then?"

"No, deah boy, not till I saw you in this cawwiage."

"Then how did you know I had been out shopping?"

"Guessed it, deah boy. What have you shopped?"

"A jolly lot of things—stationery and drapery and grocery, and cabbages and apples and eggs—"

Arthur Augustus adjusted his eyeglass, and favoured Tom Merry with a stare.

"I pwesume you are wottin'," he remarked.

"Certainly not! Cousin Ethel—"

"You haven't seen her?"

"Yes, I have, though!"

"Did that wottah Figgins give you her address?"

"No; it was by chance. I came over on spec."

"Oh, I see. And you say you have bought gwocewy and cabbages and eggs and things to give Cousin Ethel on her birthday?"

"Ha, ha, ha! No!"

"I asked what you had bought for a F—" ay-pwecent.

"Oh, I see. Nothing! My present's coming down from London; I sent a postal order for it last night," explained Tom Merry. "I've been shopping with Cousin Ethel, and she let me carry the parcels for her."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"What are you cackling at?"

"I wufuse to have my laugh chawactewised as a cackle."

"Well, what are you laughing at, then?"

"I suppose there were a lot of parcels?" grinned Arthur Augustus.

"Yes, rather! I was glad I was there, because really, I don't see how Miss Cleveland could possibly have carried half of them herself."

"Ha, ha, ha! I wathah think she wouldn't have bought so many if she hadn't had you with her to cawwy them, Tom Mewwy."

"Oh, yes; she's getting things to give to some poor people on her birthday."

"Yaas; but I suppose the shop persons would have sent them home, wouldn't they?"

"I suppose she never thought of that—girls never think of things, you know."

"No, not when they don't want to, deah boy."

"What do you mean, ass?"

"Ha, ha, ha! She tweeked me the same way once!"

"The same way! What are you driving at?"

"I weally don't know how I had offended her," went on D'Arcy meditatively; "girls take offence at things, and you never know why; but on that occasion our conversation had been on the most indiffewent subjects. I remember that I had just asked her if she did not think Figgins a long-legged fweek, and then she began shoppin'—"

"Began what?"

"Began shoppin', and loaded me up with boxes of sweets, and bundles of cawwots and turnips, and things. I nevah weally felt so awfully widiculous in my life, you know."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"The cwucious part of it was that I nevah could guess what I had said to offend her. Girls are cwucious cweatures."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The train snorted into Rylcombe. It was a sharp walk to St. Jim's to get in before the juniors' bedtime. Tom Merry rang a mighty peal on the bell, and Taggles came sniffing down to the gate. As both the juniors had passed, Taggles had nothing to say, but he murmured things uncomplimentary to juniors as he closed the gate after them.

"Good-night, Taggy," said Tom Merry genially. "I'm always pleased to give you a little exercise of an evening, you know."

The school-porter grunted. The juniors crossed to the School House, Arthur Augustus carrying his parcel very carefully.

Tom Merry glanced at it as they entered the lighted hall of the house.

"What have you got there, Gussy?"

"A nobby little watch-bwacelet," said D'Arcy. "I was afwaid I shouldn't be able to get one for three-pound-twelve-and-six; but the jewellah chap knew me, you know, and I wewferred him to my gwernah, so he took the three-pound-twelve-and-six, and let me have the watch, leavin' the west ovah."

"My hat! And how much do you owe him?"

"I forget wethah it's four-pound-ten, or five-pound-ten; it's on the bill, and I believe I've got it in my pocket somewhere."

And Arthur Augustus joined the Fourth Form, who were going up to bed. There was a great deal of curiosity expressed as to the contents of the precious little packet, and in the dormitory D'Arcy opened it to show his purchase to his admiring Form-fellows. It was a very pretty little watch-bracelet, and the monogram of Cousin Ethel had been cut on the back of the watch.

"My hat!" said Blake. "I wish I were a giddy billionaire! I'm stoney, and all I can give is a fretwork letter-rack."

"I suppose that must have cost two or three pounds?" Mellish remarked.

Arthur Augustus smiled.

"I suppose so," he assented.

"And I shouldn't wonder if you lose it before to-morrow too."

"Wats, deah boy!"

The Fourth Form went to bed. Half an hour after "lights-out" Mellish sat up in bed, his eyes glittering mischievously in the dark.

"Any of you fellows awake?" he whispered.

TH

There was no reply; and the cad of the Fourth stepped out of bed.

Arthur Augustus was dreaming sweet dreams of a new and unmatchable pattern of fancy waistcoats, when he stirred and awoke.

"I think I will have crimson bars and black spots," he murmured. "I—er— Oh—I have been dreamin'! I wonder what woke me up?"

There was a slight sound in the stillness of the dormitory. Arthur Augustus sat up in bed, and peered to and fro in the gloom.

"Is that someone moving about?" he exclaimed.

There was no reply. Arthur Augustus shivered a little. He was certain he had heard someone moving about, and as that someone had not answered, he naturally thought of burglars. The remembrance of how Tom Merry had been kidnapped on one occasion was fresh in his mind.

"I say, Blake, Dig, Herries! Wake up!"

"What's the matter, you image?" came a sleepy voice from Blake's bed.

"I wufuse to be called an image, and there is a burglah in the woom."

"Well, let him burgle, can't you, without bothering me?"

"I think it is extremely pwob. that he is goin' to sawwy me off, and hold me to wansom."

"He wouldn't get anybody idiot enough to ransom you."

"Weally, Blake—"

"Oh, go to sleep!"

"I cannot go to sleep while there is a burglah in the woom," said D'Arcy, getting out of bed. "I have a vewy valuable watch lyin' on a chair beside my bed, and the wotah may have twacked me fwoom Wayland on purpose to steal it. Get up, old chap!"

He jerked the bedclothes off Blake. Jack gave a roar, and tumbled out of bed, and groped for Arthur Augustus.

"Are you looking for some matches, Blake?"

"No; I'm looking for you!"

Arthur Augustus backed away in alarm.

"Pway, deah boy, don't be an ass, with a burglah in the woom—"

There was a flare of a match. Digby was sitting up in bed, with a vesta between his finger and thumb. Two or three heads were looking excitedly from the bedclothes.

"What's the matter?"

"Who's that up?"

"It's Gussy," said Blake. "Playing the giddy ox, as usual, too."

"There is a burglah in the woom, deah boys."

"A burglar! My hat!"

Blake lighted a candle-end at Dig's match. Two or three other candle-ends were lighted, and several fellows looked up and down the dormitory. There was no sign of a burglar. D'Arcy's valuable parcel still lay on the chair beside his bed, tied up with string, and apparently quite safe.

"It's all rot!" said Mellish, who was in bed. "There isn't any burglar; it's only some more of Gussy's piffle!"

"If you make disrespectful allusions to me, Mellish, I shall thrash you."

Mellish snored. Blake took the swell of St. Jim's by the back of the neck, and ran him back to the bed he had left, and bumped him on it.

"Now get to bed," he said. "If you make any more row to-night we'll lock you out of the dormitory, and you can sleep in the passage."

"I should utterly wufuse to sleep in the passage, and I am quite certain that there was somebody movin' about in the woom."

"Oh, cheese it, and go to sleep!"

Blake got into bed again, and the candle-ends were blown out.

Arthur Augustus took his valuable parcel off the chair and stuffed it under the mattress of his bed.

"I am quite certain that there was somebody in the woom," he murmured. "That will be safah there, I think. Good-night, Blake deah boy!"

Blake snored.

CHAPTER 17.

Fatty Wynn Purchases a Present.

Cousin Ethel's birthday dawned fine and clear—a bright October day. There was a great deal of subdued excitement among our friends that morning. Arthur Augustus, still quite convinced that there had been a marauder in the dormitory over-night, took his parcel out from under the mattress as soon as he was dressed, and carried it down to Mr. Railton. He asked the housemaster to lock it up in his desk until it should be wanted—which Mr. Railton willingly did. The swell of

St. Jim's saw it safely locked up, and felt easier in his mind when he left the housemaster's study.

"Is your parcel all right?" Mellish asked, meeting him in the passage.

"Yaas, wathah!" said D'Arcy. "I have asked Mr. Waitton to mind it for me until Cousin Ethel comes this afternoon."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I fail to see anythin' funny in that, Mellish."

"There are lots of funny things you don't see," replied Mellish, walking away, and leaving the swell of the School House considerably puzzled.

Just before morning-school Figgins came over to see Tom Merry & Co. They received him rather grimly, but Figgins was geniality itself.

"We've got a little celebration on in the New House this afternoon," he said. "We should be pleased if you fellows would come."

"Oh, we'll come," said Jack Blake.

"I ought really to have asked you yesterday," said Figgins blandly. "It's curious how these little things slip one's memory."

"Yes, isn't it, you rotter?"

"Is that the way you usually accept invitations, Blake?"

"I wegard that wemark as somewhat wude of Blake. We shall all be vewy pleased to accept your wemarkably kind invitation, Figgins," said D'Arcy.

"Wemarkably so," assented Lowther.

"Weally, Lowthah—"

"We're coming, of course," said Tom Merry. "As a matter of fact, Cousin Ethel told me yesterday that she expected us."

Figgins stared.

"Hallo! Have you seen Cousin Ethel, then?"

"Oh, yes! I helped her do some shopping in Wayland yesterday," said Tom Merry carelessly.

"Oh, you did, did you? I—"

"I don't suppose she'd come to a feed in the New House at all," Digby remarked, "unless there were some School House chaps there to make the meeting respectable."

"Yaas, wathah! We shall certainly give the gathewin' a tone."

"Well, you're all invited," said Figgins. "Of course, we expect you to behave yourself. I suppose that's rather sanguine of us, considering—"

"Weally, Figgins, I can only wegard that wemark as—"

"And, of course, Gussy will be expected to wear only one eyeglass at a time—"

"Weally, Figgins—"

"And Lowther will be politely but firmly requested not to make any of his rotten jokes. That's about all. Good-bye!"

And Figgins walked away, Arthur Augustus gave his broad shoulders a withering glance, and Monty Lowther turned pink.

"Figgys is right, you know," Digby remarked thoughtfully. "On an occasion like this, Lowther ought to agree not to be funny."

"Yaas, wathah!"

Tom Merry passed his arm through Lowther's, and walked him away before he could make any rejoinder. The juniors went in to morning school. They were looking forward eagerly to the half-holiday—much more eagerly than usual. As Tom Merry remarked, football they always had with them—at least, during the season; but Cousin Ethel's birthday came only once a year.

The presents were beginning to arrive. Many of them came by post, and it really looked as though Cousin Ethel would require a special vehicle to carry them all away when she left St. Jim's. After morning school, Tom Merry went over the quad to ask Figgins what time Cousin Ethel was coming. He met Fatty Wynn near the New House door, his plump face wearing a slightly worried look.

"Hungry?" asked Tom Merry sympathetically.

"Well, no," said Fatty Wynn. "I've just had dinner. I had only four helpings—old Ratty looks at you so if you want much. He had his eye on our table, and I thought I'd better not have any more, and there wasn't much on the bone, anyway. But I've had some tarts at Dame Taggles's shop since then, and I'm not what you'd call hungry, though I'm not full. I get awfully sharp set in this October weather. I was thinking—"

"Then don't, Fatty, if it makes you look like that."

"But, seriously, Tom Merry, you know I told you I was thinking of getting a nice little brooch for twenty-two bob?"

"Yes; haven't you got it yet?"

"Oh, it's all right! I've only got to walk down to Rylcombe for it. The trouble is that I've broken into the twenty-two bob. I suppose you couldn't let me have a couple of bob till Saturday?"

Tom Merry laughed.

"That's all right. Here you are."

"Good!" said Fatty Wynn, jingling the shillings into his pocket. "I'll let you have it on Saturday, safe as houses. And I'll cut off to Rylcombe at once, before I bust it again. I can feel myself getting hungry."

"Buck up, Fatty, while there's time. Where's Figgins?"
"In his study. You'll find him there. He's making arrangements with Kerr. If he asks after me, tell him I'm gone to Rylcombe."

And Fatty Wynn hurried down to the gates. It was a fine October afternoon, and it was a pleasant walk to Rylcombe through the lane. The leaves were browning in the autumn, and fluttering from the trees in the wind. Fatty Wynn had no eyes for trees or leaves or any of Nature's beauties just then. A walk always made him hungry, and he was pretty sharp set by the time he arrived in Rylcombe. He passed the tuckshop, and paused. For two whole minutes Fatty Wynn heroically struggled with himself, and then he slowly bent his steps towards the tuckshop.

"After all," he murmured, "there was that other little brooch at eighteen-and-six, and it was very pretty—in fact, on second thoughts, I like it better than the more expensive one. It was more—more chaste in design. Perhaps I ought to have something to eat, as I feel so very faint. I've got to walk back to the school. I'll have a bob's worth, I think, and then repay Merry his two bob, and get the eighteen-and-sixer."

Mrs. Murphy smiled benignly as Fatty Wynn entered. He was her best customer, as he was Dame Taggles's best customer in the school shop.

"We have some nice little veal-pies to-day, Master Wynn," she said—"fresh made."

Fatty Wynn wavered. The sight of the crisp crusts of the veal-pies settled him. He ordered them recklessly, and settled down to eat. He gave up the idea of immediately returning Tom Merry's loan. After all, that would do very well on Saturday. The veal-pies were excellent, and so were the ham-patties that followed, and a cold chicken was delicious. And, of course, eating made Fatty Wynn thirsty, and ginger-pop refreshed him and made him ready to eat again.

"Some of the usual jam ones, Master Wynn?" asked Mrs. Murphy, alluding to the tarts upon which the fat Fourth-Former had now fixed his eyes.

"Ye-es, I think so, Mrs. Murphy," said Fatty Wynn. "Not—not more than a dozen, though. I—I've got to do some shopping yet."

The tarts vanished at an alarming rate. But Fatty Wynn had been doing some reflecting. He remembered a little scarf-pin in the jeweller's, marked at nine-and-six. It was really a nobby little scarf-pin, and would make a pretty present. It wasn't quite up to the form of the brooch, perhaps, but it was very pretty. And Fatty resolved that the scarf-pin it should be; and then, feeling a little freer in mind he ordered right and left. He was only brought to himself when he saw Mrs. Murphy totting up the account on her slate, and caught sight of the figures.

"How much is it, Mrs. Murphy?" he asked, with a slight inward tremor.

"One pound and fourpence, Master Wynn."
Master Wynn gasped. He had had no idea that the sum was mounting up like that. But he reflected that he had never before reached his present ecstatic feeling of complete fulness under a pound.

What on earth was to be done? The scarf-pin would have to follow the brooch at twenty-two shillings, that was clear. Mrs. Murphy did not believe in credit. Fatty Wynn paid up, and received one-and-eightpence change.

"I—I wish I hadn't passed the tuckshop," he murmured. "What can I get for one-and-eight? It will have to be a packet of hairpins now!"

And a packet of hairpins it was!

CHAPTER 18.

Cousin Ethel Arrives.

TOM MERRY looked into Figgins's study in the New House at St. Jim's. Figgins and Kerr were very busy. There was a little heap of money on the table, and Kerr had a pencil and paper before him. Figgins had a wrinkle in his brow.

"Hallo!" said Tom Merry. "Busy?"
"Yes," said Figgins, without looking up. "Cut along."
"What time is Cousin Ethel coming?"
"She's driving over from Wayland. She'll get here about five. Cut along."

"Where is the party going to be held?"
"In Study No. 3, on the ground floor; we've got permission. Cut along."

"What time shall we get here?"
"Soon after five as you like. Cut along."
Tom Merry laughed.
"I've got some more to say."

"We haven't time to listen. Cut along."

"You'll have to find time, Figgys. As this is a national occasion, as I may say—I mean as it concerns both Houses—we should like to have a look-in at providing the feed. We were thinking of standing one independently, and my idea is that we should all club together over this."

"Can't have you School House chaps running the show. Cut along."

"We don't want to run the show," said Tom Merry, laughing—"at least, I don't. And most of the chaps are stony, too. But I've had a decent remittance from Miss Fawcett, and I want to stand the School House whack myself."

"And you won't want to run it?" asked Figgins suspiciously.

"My dear Figgys, I'll leave it all to you, to muck up in your well-known style."

Figgins grinned.

"Well, in that case, Merry, we don't want to prevent you from taking a share if you like. We three have been saving up for it, and we've got two pounds."

"Then put this one along with them," said Tom Merry, laying a sovereign on the table.

"Well, that's decent, Merry, if you mean it."

"Of course I mean it," said Tom Merry. "As a matter of fact, if we're all coming, there will be more School House fellows than New House at the feed."

"Yes, that's so. Well, I'll say we're much obliged, and—and if you like, you can shove your oar in in making the arrangements," said Figgins, with an effort.

Tom Merry shook his head.

"Not a bit of it. Good-bye."

And he walked out of the study. He met Arthur Augustus D'Arcy on the steps of the New House. The swell of St. Jim's nodded to him languidly.

"Is Figgins in his study?" he asked.

"Yes. I've got the time. Cousin Ethel's coming at five, and the feed's soon after, in Study No. 3, on the ground floor of the New House. It's a big room, and looks out on the garden. It will be all right."

"Yass, wathah! But I want to speak to Figgins about another mattah."

And Arthur Augustus ascended to Figgins's study. Figgins and Kerr were going over their calculations, looking a little less wrinkled since Tom Merry's contribution had been added to the cash. Arthur Augustus tapped at the door and went in, and the chums of the New House gave a grunt.

"Don't come in, Gussy. Travel along. Go and see Pratt. He's in his study."

"I want to see you, Figgins. I object to this celebration bein' held in the New House at all, but I have conceded that point—"

"Thank you for nothing."

"But there is one point that I must absolutely insist upon—"

"Are you going out on your feet, Gussy, or on your neck?"

"There is one thing I must insist upon, as Ethel's cousin—"

"Outside, ass! Can't you see we're busy?"

"I insist upon makin' a—"

"Chuck him out!" said Kerr impatiently.

Figgins jumped up. Arthur Augustus gazed at him calmly through his monocle.

"Upon makin' a contribution to the feed," he went on.

"Undah the circs., and especially as I have just had another wathah decent remittance from my governah, I shall insist strongly upon contwibutin' a soveveign towards the celebration."

"Ha, ha, ha! Shove it over, ass!"

"Weally, Kerr—"

"Why couldn't you say that at first?" grinned Figgins.

"This makes us all right. The spread will be really ripping, Gussy, and you shall have a place of honour at the board."

"I should natuwallly expect that, Figgins."

"You mightn't get it, all the same. Your contribution is accepted, and if you would add to the favour by calling on somebody else just now, we should be in your debt for ever."

To this ribald remark D'Arcy deigned no reply. He walked out of the study, leaving the chums of the New House chuckling.

As five o'clock drew near, a considerable crowd gathered at the gates of St. Jim's. Tom Merry & Co. were watching for Cousin Ethel, and a great many other juniors came along to wait as well. Fatty Wynn had come in, and was head over ears busy in making the preparations for the feed. Figgins and Kerr came down to the gates, looking a little tired, but very pleased with themselves.

"Everything going all right?" asked Jack Blake.

"Ripping," said Figgins. "We've got some flowers in

the room, and they look nobby. The presents are on the table."

"Bai Jove, I'd bettah cut off and ask Mr. Wailton for mine!" exclaimed D'Arcy. And he dashed off towards the School House.

"I think I'll get mine, too," Tom Merry remarked.

And a good many more followed Tom Merry to the House to get the presents and arrange them on the table for Cousin Ethel's inspection. Figgins grinned at Kerr. They were left to greet Cousin Ethel.

There was a rattle of wheels in the lane, and a trap dashed up, and Figgins sprang forward to assist a charming girl to alight. The juniors, in the exuberance of their feelings, gave Cousin Ethel a cheer.

"Many happy returns!" said Figgins, in a low voice, as Cousin Ethel entered the quad with him, smiling brightly at the other juniors. "You—you—"

"I had your card this morning," said Cousin Ethel softly. "It was such a pretty one."

"I—I was afraid you might think it was like my—my cheek to send it," stammered Figgins.

"I thought it was very sweet of you," said Cousin Ethel.

Figgins would have given worlds to be able to squeeze Cousin Ethel's hand at that moment. But it was impossible, and he satisfied himself with escorting her in great state to the New House. Tom Merry & Co. had taken in their presents, with the exception of D'Arcy, who was looking for Mr. Railton. They were on the steps of the New House, and they raised their caps and grinned a hearty welcome. Cousin Ethel entered the House in the midst of quite an ovation.

"This way," said Figgins. "We've got one of the nicest rooms in the whole House."

"How pleasant!" said Cousin Ethel.

The room certainly did look pleasant. It was a large room, with wide windows looking out on the gardens, and there was a bluish of geraniums at the windows. Flowers were standing about the room in jars. Art jars were rather at a premium in the New House, but Kerr had artistically decorated a number of marmalade jars by sticking old stamps over the outsides, and the effect was very good.

The table in the middle of the room was laid, and the white cloth and the crockery gleamed in the sunlight. The pile of presents at the table was enormous. Cousin Ethel gave her hat to Figgins, who carried it away as carefully as if it had been made of the most delicate porcelain, and her gloves to Kerr. Tom Merry received her parasol. Very sweet and pretty the girl looked in her white blouse and belt, with a bunch of carnations in the latter that hardly rivalled the bloom of her cheeks. Cousin Ethel was evidently in a happy mood, and pleased to be there and to be made so much of; and that evident fact made everything go swimmingly.

The pile of presents almost hid Cousin Ethel when she sat down. And she was so pleased with everything, and so surprised that there were any presents at all—and so surprised, too, that each junior had thought of exactly the thing she would have wished for if she had thought of it. Figgins's white muff was a marvel, and just the thing for the autumn. Fatty Wynn's packet of hairpins caused more than one grin round the table, but Cousin Ethel did not smile. Everything pleased her, and not for some little time did she observe that Arthur Augustus was absent.

She was about to ask after him, when there was a patter of rapid feet in the passage, and the swell of the School House came hurriedly in.

"Bai Jove! I say, Ethel, I'm sowwy I'm late!"

"How do you do, Arthur?"

"I'm awfully sowwy, but that boundah Wailton has gone out for a stwoll, and I had to hunt for him, you know. I had left this locked up in his desk. It's a little present for you, Ethel, if you will honah me by acceptin' it."

"Thank you very much, Arthur. Please untie it for me, Manners."

"Tea's ready!" said Fatty Wynn.

The juniors sat down at the table.

CHAPTER 19.

The Birthday Party.

COUSIN ETHEL poured out the tea, as in duty bound. Figgins and Tom Merry passed the cups down the table. Arthur Augustus wanted to make himself useful, and he passed some, too, and succeeded in upsetting one over Monty Lowther. Monty looked daggers at him, but bore the warm tea without a murmur on his legs.

"Bai Jove! I'm sowwy, Lowthah!" said D'Arcy.

"Oh, it's all right," said Lowther.

"I am afraid it will soil your twou— Pway don't tweod on my foot, Kerr. You will spoil the polish on my boot, you know."

Meanwhile, Manners was untying the string of the little parcel, and Cousin Ethel unwrapped the paper with a charming smile of anticipation. A cardboard box was exposed to view, and Cousin Ethel removed the lid.

Then she gave a start.

"Do you like it, Ethel?" said D'Arcy, beaming.

"Really, Arthur—"

"Wathah nobby, isn't it?"

"I suppose you think so," said Miss Cleveland. "But I cannot say I think there is anything very humorous in a joke of this sort, Arthur."

"A-a-a-a joke!"

Figgins was looking daggers and scimitars at D'Arcy. He didn't know what the School House swell had done, but it was evident that he had displeased Ethel.

"I—I—I don't quite understand, Ethel," said D'Arcy.

"I—I thought you would like that for your birthday, you know. I—I—" D'Arcy broke off, for he had looked into the box, and what he saw there took his breath away.

Instead of the morocco case containing the watch-bracelet, a cake of soap was reposing in the cardboard box.

Arthur Augustus stared at it in stupefaction.

"You—you aas!" muttered Figgins fiercely. "Nice time this is for your little jokes, isn't it? You—"

Blake and his chums were looking at D'Arcy as if they could eat him. Cousin Ethel went on pouring out the tea, as if nothing had happened.

Arthur Augustus found his voice at last.

"I—I—I do not understand this," he said feebly. "I—I—"

"Better shut up!" whispered Blake. "You'll only make matters worse."

"I—I refuse to shut up! There was a watch-bracelet in that box when I gave it into Mr. Wailton's charge. Someone has played a twick on me!"

There was a tap at the half-open door. Mellish of the Fourth came in, with an ingratiating smile upon his face, and a morocco case in his hand.

"I say, D'Arcy, I found this in the dormitory—"

"Bai Jove! Thanks awfully, deah boy! I say, Ethel, this is what I weally meant to give you, you know. Some wotten cad has taken it out of the box, and put that wotten cake of soap in there instead."

"I—I wish I knew whom it was," muttered Tom Merry.

Blake snapped his teeth.

"Mellish, of course," he muttered. "It was he who was out of bed last night in the dorm., and that's what he was doing. You ought to have guessed, D'Arcy."

"Weally, Blake, how was I to guess? I shall give the wottah a feahful thwashin'."

"Don't make a row now—"

"I pwesume you know me bettah than to think that I could possibly be guilty of makin' a wow in the pwesence of a lady, Blake!"

"Oh, cheese it!" muttered Blake.

"Thank you so much!" said Cousin Ethel. "This is very beautiful, Arthur, and I am so pleased. The boy who played that trick upon you must have been a very mean and foolish fellow indeed!"

Her eyes seemed to linger for a moment upon Mellish, who coloured uncomfortably. But Figgins, who saw nothing, was pressing the cad of the Fourth into a seat.

"You'll stop to tea, old fellow," he said genially. "It was very lucky you found the watch and brought it over."

"Well, if you'd like me to stop, Figgins—" Mellish sat down.

The tea proceeded. It was a high tea, and there was something of almost every sort of eatable on the table. If Cousin Ethel had eaten a tenth part of what was pressed upon her from all sides, she would have exceeded the finest performance of Fatty Wynn.

The cake was a marvel. It had been made by the best Rylcombe baker, under the personal supervision of Fatty Wynn, and it was a wonderful success. Cousin Ethel made such a pretty figure at the table, and her enjoyment of the little celebration was so evidently unaffected, that more than half the juniors felt themselves in love with her on the spot. Everybody was jolly, but the jollity was subdued, the juniors being just a little afraid to let themselves go in feminine company. Lowther told funny stories, and even Figgins laughed at them; as clear a proof as could be obtained that Figgins was in the best possible temper. Figgins, in fact, was so pleased with himself and everything and everybody, that Cousin Ethel couldn't help smiling several times when she looked at him; and Figgins smiled back, and then everybody else smiled.

The happy celebration was at its height when a junior in glasses peered into the room, and discerning the company at the table, came right in. It was Skimpole, of course.

"Ah, Miss Cleveland," he said, "you will excuse my not being here to greet you, but Figgins most unaccountably forgot to invite me!"

Figgins turned red, and Cousin Ethel smiled demurely.

"Oh, it's all right, Figgins," said Skimpole, beaming through his glasses. "I don't mind at all; I dare say you had many things to think of. But I am glad to have the opportunity of wishing you many happy returns of the day, Miss Cleveland. And I did wish to present you with a copy of Socialism Simply Silly—I mean Socialism Simply Stated. You confuse me by kicking my leg, Blake. But owing to unforeseen circumstances I cannot get a copy of that book. Don't pinch me, Digby. It hurts; and I do not approve of foolish jokes. Under the circumstances, Miss Cleveland, I hope you will deign to accept this copy of a poem by myself, written out in my own hand, inscribed to you."

"Thank you very much," murmured Cousin Ethel.

Skimpole's poem was added to the pile. Skimpole blinked round cheerfully at the party.

"If you would care for me to add to the festivity of the occasion by reading my poem out," he said, "I should not refuse."

Blake dragged him down into a chair.

"Feed, ass, and shut up!" he whispered.

"Well, I don't mind having something, Blake, but I cannot say that—"

"If you say another word you'll get elain!"

"Really, Blake—"

Blake gave him a ferocious look, and the amateur Socialist accepted a helping of cake and relapsed into silence.

"Bai Jove," murmured D'Arcy, "if it wasn't for the presence of a lady—"

"Pass the cake!"

"Yaas, wathah! But as I was sayin'—"

"Pass your teacup!"

Blake kept a watchful eye upon Skimpole, and stopped him with ferocious threats in a whisper whenever he showed a desire to speak. The celebration proceeded, and all was gaiety. Figgins made a speech, rather hesitatingly, but it

had a reception that encouraged him, and he soon found his depth, and as he voiced the sentiments of the whole party in his observations upon their friendship with Cousin Ethel, and his wishes concerning her future welfare, his remarks were unanimously endorsed. And Cousin Ethel made a shy little reply that captivated every heart. Then Skimpole rose to speak, and Blake dragged him down again.

No one who was present is ever likely to forget that birthday celebration. Even Blake admitted that the New House had for once scored a success. Tom Merry acknowledged it freely, and congratulated Figgins in his cordial way, and Figgins gave him an expressive thump on the shoulder. And when it was all over, and the time had come to part, and Arthur Augustus presented his arm to Cousin Ethel to show her to her trap, which was drawn up outside the New House with its lights gleaming through the dusk, it was Tom Merry who took the proffered arm, and walked D'Arcy off. And Cousin Ethel, apparently having seen nothing of that curious incident, accepted Figgins's assistance in mounting into the trap. It was over before D'Arcy had finished remonstrating with Tom Merry. Then the good-byes were said, and the presents stacked in the trap, and Figgins—as founder of the feast and head of the affairs—shook hands with Cousin Ethel a second time, and if he squeezed that little hand the merest trifle, no one made any remark upon it.

The juniors stood hat in hand while the trap drove off, and Cousin Ethel waved her hand; and so she went—to join in a perhaps more pretentious party that evening, but not one that she would enjoy half as much as that birthday celebration in the New House at St. Jim's.

THE END.

(Another splendid long, complete tale of Tom Merry & Co. next Thursday, entitled "The Joker of St. Jim's." Please order your copy of "THE GEM" LIBRARY in advance.)

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LAST WEEK'S OPENING CHAPTERS.

David Steele, fifteen years of age, is forced through circumstances to leave the little North-country village which had been home to him all his days.

Wrexborough is his destination. He tramps on hour after hour, but at last, being too tired to move, falls to sleep on the banks of a canal. He is awakened by voices, and overhears a vile plot. He resolves to frustrate it, and is successful in saving the victim's life. It is necessary for him, though, to resort to the canal, and he and his wounded companion float down with the stream.

Micky Jones, the son of John Jones, had been left in charge of the barge Annie May. Micky did his duty by falling to sleep. The rising wind did not trouble him at all, and as he had neglected to make the barge fast to the bank, it began to swing out into the canal.

But this was how it happened that Mr. Jones's absence and his son's carelessness saved two lives: David Steele's senses had almost left him when his companion's head grazed the barge, and one of the arms that had been clutching him so tightly relaxed its hold and shot upwards, and then the boy felt himself drawn up to the surface, and his lungs were filled with a blessed draught of air.

The next morning the rescued man tells David he is Mr. Scott, a wealthy Wrexborough mine-owner. He exacts a promise from the boy not to say a word about the attempt on his life, and later on orders Mr. Grafton, his manager, to find David some work to do.

(Now go on with the story.)

David Makes a New Acquaintance, and Finds Cause to Suspect Him.

Before Grafton departed it was settled that David was to enter upon his work at the mine two days later. The boy himself, in his eagerness to begin his new life, would have been willing to start the next morning; but of this Scott would not hear. David must have a thorough night's rest, he declared, before thinking of starting his duties at the mine.

"Besides, we have to find a home for you," he said cheerily. "I have my eye on one already—with Mrs. Nichols, a good soul, who, since her husband was invalided by an accident a few months ago, is very glad to add to the family income by letting her rooms. I will take you down there to-morrow, and I am sure she will do her best for you when I tell her you are a friend of mine."

"She ought to," broke in Grafton, as he took up his hat to leave. "for you've been a good friend to her and poor Nichols since he broke his leg. There aren't many employers who look after their men as you do, sir."

And with a hearty good-night to Mr. Scott, and a kindly shake of the hand to his new subordinate, Grafton took his departure.

The next day found David settled in his new quarters.

Scott had said rightly, that Mrs. Nichols would do her best to make the boy at home. She gave him the warmest of welcomes as she installed him and his few belongings in her neat little back bedroom; and from her conversation David learnt, somewhat to his embarrassment, that the Wrexborough pitmen

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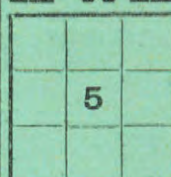
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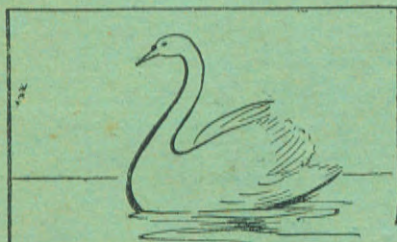
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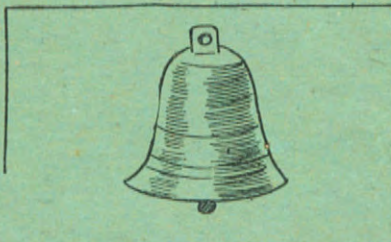
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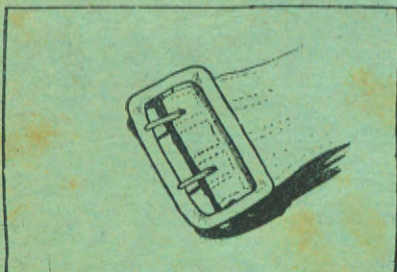
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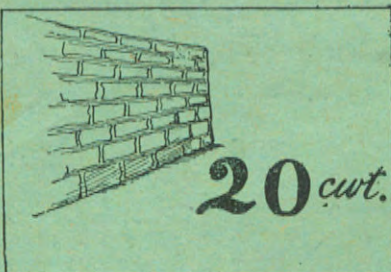
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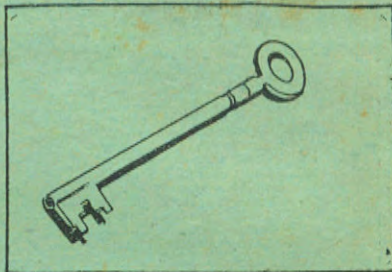
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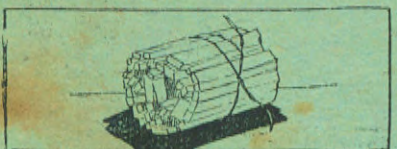
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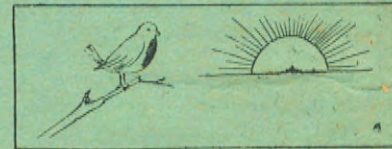
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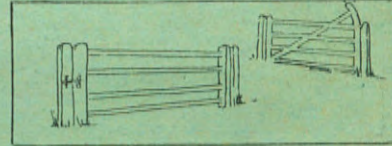
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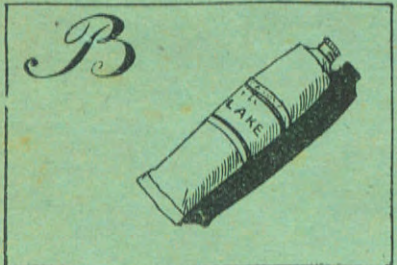
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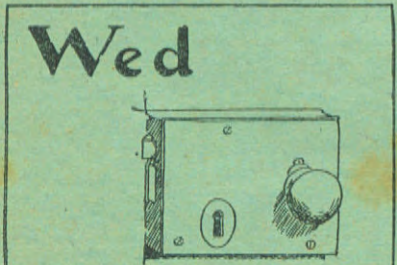
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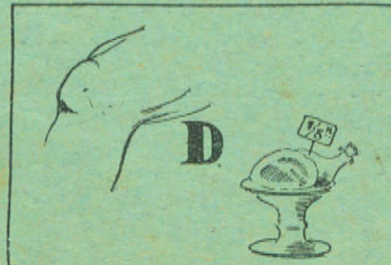
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