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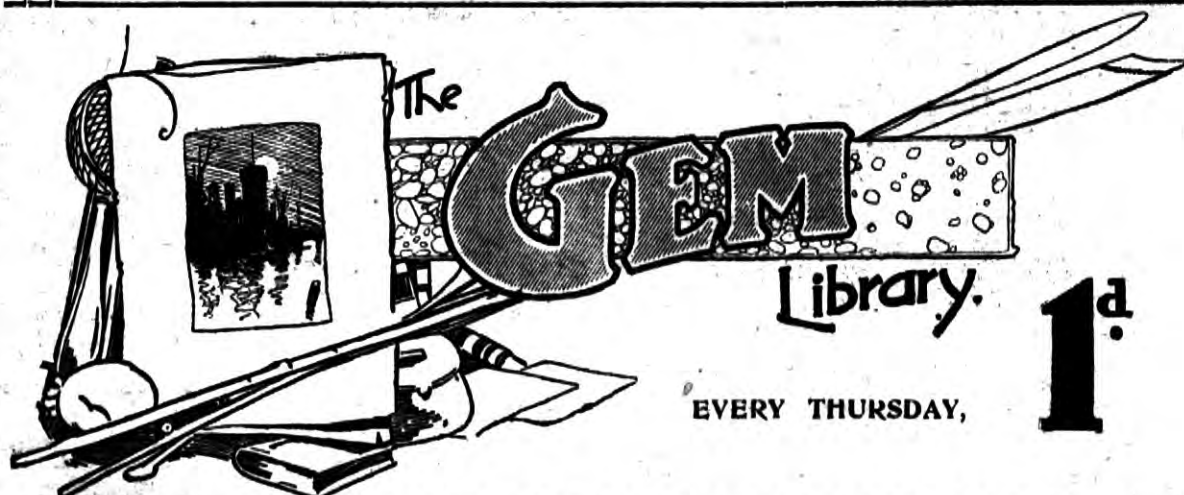
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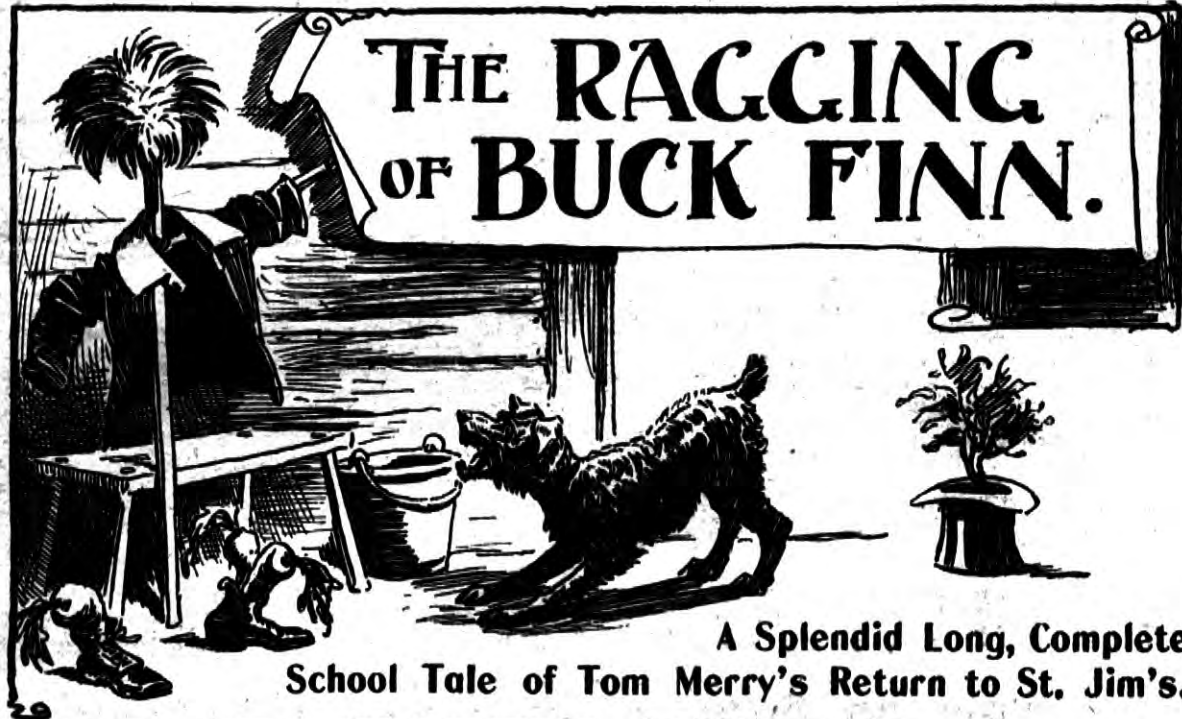


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CHAPTER 1. The Telegram.

"HURRAH! It's from Tom Merry!"

Monty Lowther, of the Shell at St. Jim's, uttered that wild shout as he raced across the quadrangle. It was a crisp winter morning, and the quad at the old school was glimmering with white, the snow inches deep on the ground, and thick on the branches of the leafless elms.

The juniors of St. Jim's were mostly out of doors, getting up an appetite for breakfast by pelting one another with snowballs, when Monty Lowther suddenly gave that shout, and raced away towards the gates.

A youth in uniform had entered at the gate, and the buff-

coloured envelope he held in his hand showed that he had brought a telegram.

Hence Lowther's excitement.

For Tom Merry, the hero of the Shell, had been long away, in strange lands and among strange people, and this day he was expected to return.

Manners and Lowther, his ohums in the Shell, knew that he would let them know what train he was coming by, and the sight of the messenger was enough for Lowther.

He bore down on the startled youth from the post-office with both hands outstretched for the telegram. It was seldom that the cool and drawling Monty allowed his excitement to get the better of him, but he was simply bubbling over now.

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"Hand over!" he exclaimed.

Manners was on the spot the next moment, his usually quiet face full of animation, and his hand also outstretched.

"Hand over!"

"If you please—"

"Hand over!"

"Here, hold on!" exclaimed Digby of the Fourth, dashing upon the scene. "I expect that wire is for me!"

"Rats! It's from Tom Merry, of course!"

"Tom Merry, rats! Blake is with him, and, of course, he would wire to me what train he was returning by!" exclaimed Digby hotly.

"Stuff! That wire's from Tom Merry to Manners or me."

"Boah! Here, Herries, line up, old chap, these Shell rotters are trying to collar our telegram!"

"Hold on a second while I tie Towser up—"

"Come here, you fathead!"

"Oh, all right!"

And Herries, who was giving his dog Towser a run in the snow, left the bulldog to his own devices, and rushed up to his chum's aid. A warm argument immediately began between the equally excited Shell fellows and Fourth Formers, during which the telegraph-boy vainly tried to make his voice heard.

But there was a sudden interruption to the dispute.

Three juniors rushed over from the direction of the New House—a long-limbed fellow with a rugged, honest face; a fat junior with a figure and face like a budding Falstaff; and a keen, canny Scottish lad; no others than Figgins, Kerr, and Wynn—known all over St. Jim's as Figgins & Co.

"My hat!" said Figgins. "Here's a wire from the giddy Gullivers—of course, it's for me. Hand it over, young 'un."

"If you please—"

"Oh, don't jaw—hand it over!" said Kerr. "Can't you see we're waiting?"

"Yes, rather!" said Fatty Wynn. "It's thoughtful of them to let us know what train they're coming by. We must have a bit of a feed ready for them."

"Clear off, you New House rotters!" exclaimed Monty Lowther. "That wire is from Tom Merry, and it's for us."

"Boah! It's from Blake or D'Arcy, and it's for us!" shouted Digby.

"Oh, go and eat coke!"

"Look here—"

"Oh, don't jaw!" said Figgins. "It's for us, of course. Tom Merry wrote to me from New York, and said he would—"

"Of course it's for us!" exclaimed Fatty Wynn. "It stands to reason they will want a feed when they get in, and they know they would have to wire to me about that. I've been planning it ever since they started from Southampton."

"I'm going to have my wire—"

"You're jolly well not going to have my wire."

"I tell you—"

"Look here—"

"Hand over that wire, young 'un!"

"If you please, the telegram is for—"

"Give it to me!"

"But, if you please—"

"Nuff said! It's mine."

"It's mine."

"It's ours."

There was a scuffle in the snow. The telegraph-boy was shouldered by a struggling junior, and staggered against the gate. The envelope fell from his hand, and was pounced on at once by Lowther.

"Got it! Come on, Manners!"

But Manners was lying in the snow with the weight of Fatty Wynn on his chest. It was Digby who "came on," and he came on with a rush that bowled Lowther over, and the next moment Digby had grabbed the telegram, and was scolding across the quad with it.

"Stop him!" shrieked Figgins.

"Stop him!" yelled Lowther.

Reilly, of the Fourth, came out of the School House. Lowther and several more were speeding on Digby's track, and Digby did not see the Irish junior in his haste. He dashed right into Reilly, and they rolled over together in the snow.

"Ow!" roared Reilly. "Ooh!"

Digby jumped up, gasping. But Lowther was upon him, and he went down again with a bump in the snow.

He dragged Lowther down, and Figgins fell over Lowther, and Kerr over Figgins. A struggling heap of juniors rolled in the snow in a gasping mass, and gasped, and panted, and shrieked.

"Hallo! Is that a new winter game?"

It was the voice of Kildare, of the Sixth, the captain of St. Jim's.

He stood looking down on the confused combatants with a grin. Digby looked up from pommelling Figgins, with a red and excited face.

"They want my wire—"

"My wire!"

"It's my telegram from Tom Merry—"

"It's my wire from Blake—"

"It's ours!"

"Rats! It's ours!"

"I tell you—"

"You School House waster!"

"You New House monkey!"

Kildare laughed and walked away. He did not feel inclined to wade in and separate nearly a dozen struggling juniors.

A girlish form crossed the snow from the direction of the Head's house, and a pair of startled blue eyes looked in alarm at the scene. Kildare raised his cap to Miss Cleveland—Arthur Augustus D'Arcy's cousin Ethel.

"What—what is the matter?" exclaimed the girl.

The captain of St. Jim's laughed.

"It's a new game of the juniors, I think—something to do with a telegram. They will be all right."

"Oh, dear! Figgins!"

Figgins was rolling Lowther over in the snow, and jamming as much as he could of it inside his collar. Lowther was struggling and kicking frantically, but most of his kicks took effect upon Digby, who was pinned down by Manners and couldn't get out of reach. The sound of Cousin Ethel's voice wrought a wonderful change in the warlike Figgins.

He released Lowther instantly and jumped up, covered with snow. He blushed scarlet, and felt for his cap to raise it—but his cap was gone.

Cousin Ethel looked at him. Kildare smiled and walked away. The rest of the juniors slowly separated.

"Dear me!" said Miss Cleveland. "Is it a quarrel? I hope not."

"Oh, no!" said Figgins immediately. "We—we never quarrel. This was a—a—a—"

"That's it," said Lowther, scraping the snow from his neck. "a—a—a—"

"Exactly," said Digby, "a—a—a—"

"A little scrap," said Figgins.

"Just for fun," said Kerr.

"It was really a little tussle over a telegram," said Figgins, gaining courage as Cousin Ethel showed no signs of scepticism. "All a joke, of course. I hope you haven't got any snow down your neck, Lowther."

"None to mention, Figgy," said Lowther, with elaborate politeness.

"A little tussle warms you up on a cold morning," explained Figgins. "It was over a telegram, which—which really belongs equally to all of us."

"That's it," said Manners, quite brightly. "It's a wire from Tom Merry, to all the chaps—all of us, you know—"

"Addressed to the whole family, as it were," said Fatty Wynn.

"Dear me," said Miss Cleveland, looking interested. "A telegram from Tom Merry! My cousin Arthur was going to wire to me this morning, to tell me which train he was coming by. Perhaps Tom has wired instead to you."

The telegraph-boy came panting up.

"Where's that telegram, gentlemen?" he asked, in distress. "If you please—"

"It's all right, young 'un, it's for us."

"It isn't, if you please, sir."

"Oh, come, it's for one or another!"

"It's for a lady."

"WHAT!" shouted all the juniors together.

"It's for Miss Cleveland."

The juniors looked at one another with sickly expressions. The telegram, trampled on and very wet, lay in the snow. Figgins picked it up. The wire had been for Cousin Ethel all the time, and the girl's expression was very demure as she took it from Figgins.

"It's—it's wet," said Figgins. "I—I say, we're awfully sorry. We—we thought it was for us, you know."

"Just like a New House bounder, to put his hoof in it," muttered Lowther.

"Why, you were the first who—"

"Oh, rats!"

"You may open it for me, Figgins," said Cousin Ethel; "I think it is from my cousin Arthur."

Figgins opened the telegram.

It certainly was from Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, the swell of St. Jim's. Nobody but the one and only Arthur Augustus would have spent sufficient money on a telegram to make up that number of words.

Cousin Ethel glanced over it, and smiled, and handed it to Figgins again.



"You beast!" shrieked Gore, who was too blinded by pleasure to see the amazed doctor standing at the door regarding the scene. "You beast! I'll—I'll—I'll—"

"It is from Arthur," she said. "Please read it out." Figgins read it out. The message was characteristic of the swell of St. Jim's.

"Dear Cousin Ethel.—I was disappointed to find you were not at Eastwood. We're coming by the 3.30 in the afternoon. Will you mention to the House dame to have Study No. 6 cleaned and dusted ready? Tom Merry says, tell all the fellows, as they may want to meet the train. Blake says, ask Fatty Wynn to get a feed ready. Wally says, ask Jameson if his white mice are all right. Skimpole says, tell the chaps he's going to give a series of lectures on manners and customs in the Wild West. There will be no charge for admission. With kindest regards, from your affectionate cousin, ARTHUR AUGUSTUS D'ARCY."

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Figgins, as he finished. "Isn't that like Gussy? I suppose he's blued half a week's pocket-money on that!"

Cousin Ethel laughed.

"I suppose some of you will be meeting the train?"

"What-ho!" said Lowther.

"Yes, rather!" exclaimed Figgins. "And there will be a celebration feed, Cousin Ethel. You will come, of course?"

"It will be ripping," said Fatty Wynn persuasively. "I've had a Christmas-pudding from my people, and we've been raising a subscription to do this in style."

"I will come, with pleasure."

"Hurrah!" shouted Figgins. "I—I—I mean, I'm glad, Miss Ethel. I'll call for you, if I may, this afternoon."

"Thank you very much, Figgins."

Cousin Ethel tripped away. Glances were cast on Figgins from all sides like an array of daggers.

"Well, of all the cheek!" said Lowther.

"The nerve!" remarked Digby.

"The bounce!" growled Herries.

"What's the trouble?" said Figgins defiantly. "If you're grouching because I'm going to call for Cousin Ethel, you can go and grouse. She would naturally like the best-looking chap to call for her."

And Figgins walked away, followed by a derisive cackle, which seemed to imply a general doubt as to his being the best-looking chap in the party.

CHAPTER 2.

The Return.

"BAI Jove, there's the old place again!"

It was Arthur Augustus D'Arcy who made the remark.

Five juniors were seated in a first-class carriage in the train which had steamed out of Wayland Junction, and was speeding towards Rylcombe, the station for St. Jim's.

Embankments and hills were white with snow, and leafless branches swayed like ghostly arms in the winter air.

Far away across the glistening landscape rose a tower crowned with white—the ancient tower of St. Jim's.

There was a rush of three juniors to see it as Arthur Augustus D'Arcy spoke, and the swell of St. Jim's gave a wail as he was flattened against the carriage door.

"Pway keep off, deah boys! You are cwashin' me! You are simply wuinin' the shape of my coat! Weally, Tom Mewwy! Blake!"

"Yee, there's the old place," said Tom Merry brightly, "and I'm jolly glad to see it again for one."

"Yaas, wathah! But pway do give a chap woom!"

"Looks much as it used to, except that there's snow on it," grunted the unpoetical Wally. "Pongol. Pongol!"

"Pway let that bwute wamein undah the seat, Wally," expostulated his elder brother. "He has wowwied us enough on board the steamah, and in the wilds of Western Amewicah, and weally—"

"Oh, don't you begin, Gus!"

"We shall be at Rylcombe in five minutes," said Tom Merry. "I expect there will be a lot of the chaps at the station to meet us."

"Yaas wathah! Our return in style will cweate quite a fuwowe."

"A which?"

"A fuwowe."

"He means a furore," chuckled Jack Blake. "Yes, rather. It isn't every Fourth-Former at St. Jim's who has been over the Rocky Mountains."

And the juniors grinned contentedly. They had been on their travels, and they had come home safe and sound. Far away had their travels taken them—across the Atlantic, across the Rocky Mountains, across the grasslands of Arizona. They had come back, looking much the same—a little sunburnt, a little older in manner, perhaps, but the same set of merry youngsters.

Tom Merry looked ruddy, and breezy, and happy. Jack Blake was almost bronzed, and the glow of perfect health was in his cheeks. Wally was the Wally of old—happy, healthy, untidy, and irrepressible. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, needless to say, was the beautifully-dressed Gussy so well known at St. Jim's. His skin was slightly sunburnt, but otherwise he was exactly the same as when he had started on the voyage to the West. His trousers were as elegantly creased, his necktie tied as beautifully, his silk hat as glittering, his waistcoat as gorgeous, his gloves as perfectly fitting, his eyeglass as prominent, as of old.

Skimpole looked much the same, but there was a shade of added thought upon his expansive brow. He looked like one who had travelled and seen things. A large leather bag on the rack contained his notebooks, full to the last page of notes to be used in his book of travels. He was sitting now with a book on his knee, jotting down some important points from memory.

In a corner of the carriage sat a lad who was looking out of the window, and keeping very silent and thoughtful.

He was rather below the usual size for his age, and very sparely built, but there was a wiriness in his frame, and a "cute" alertness in his eyes, which would have shown a keen observer that he was "all there," and knew how to take care of himself.

His face was unmistakably American in type. The nose was long and thin, the eyes grey, keen, quick.

He was chewing something as he sat there, quiet and thoughtful. Doubtless he was thinking of the home he had left, and of the new life that was before him.

For Buck Finn hailed from the Wild Western land of Arizona, and he had returned with Tom Merry from the United States to enter at St. Jim's.

He was the son of the foreman of the Arivaca Ranch, the property of Tom Merry's uncle, and on the ranch Tom had met him and made his acquaintance.

Whether he liked him or not, Tom Merry hardly knew; but certainly Buck Finn had some sterling qualities, and, anyway, Tom Merry meant to see him through, as far as he could, in the troubles that were undoubtedly before him at St. Jim's.

"Few more minutes and we're there," remarked Jack Blake, tapping Finn on the shoulder.

The American boy started out of his reverie.

"Gum! Is that so?" he said.

"Yaas, wathah!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, turning his eyeglass upon Buck Finn. "Pway do not be alarmed at the prospect, deah boy. I will take care of you."

Buck Finn looked the swell of St. Jim's up and down.

"I guess I can take care of myself," he remarked.

D'Arcy smiled indulgently.

"My deah chan, I don't want to make any wude wemarks upon the Fah West and its vewy honest and reputable inhabitants. But, as a mattah of fact, you are wathah a new thing in new boys for St. Jim's, you know."

"I dare say I shall wake 'em up a bit."

"The pwopah thing for you to do," said D'Arcy severely, "is to entah the place with a humble and civil mannah, and gwaduallly learn to know the wopes. I am willin' to help you on."

"Thank you for nothing"

"Weally, Finn, I wegard you as a wathah ungwateful wottah. It is no joke for a fellow of my standin' in the Fourth Form at St. Jim's to take up a stwangah fwom an uttally unknown country."

"Don't do it, then."

"Weally, Finn, I shall be stwongly inclined to take you at your word. But I wegard it as a duty to look atfah you, and show you how to dwess in a becomin' mannah, and so forth."

"Batter not start doing that duty," said Buck Finn.

"You may run up against a snag."

"Weally, deah boy—"

"Oh, Gussy means well," said Blake. "You see, as a new boy, you'll have a lot to go through, and you'll need friends. As we've made the journey with you from Arizona, we feel bound to stand by you at first, till you find your footing."

"You needn't bother," said Buck Finn coolly. "I can stand alone."

"Oh, all right," said Blake, reddening. "I shall jolly well take you at your word!"

"I guess I don't mind."

"If you come into the Third Form," remarked Wally, "I'll see you through. I like a chap who can shoot straight and set snares as you do, Finny."

"Good!" said Finny.

Tom Merry laughed.

"Finn isn't likely to come into the Third," he said. "He'll be certain to be in either the Fourth or the Shell. I promised Mr. Polmett to keep an eye on him—"

"You needn't bother," said Buck Finn.

"Rats! I'm going to bother, and when you get to St. Jim's you'll learn that a friend to stand by you is a jolly good thing sometimes."

"I guess they won't eat me," remarked Buck Finn sarcastically.

"They will vewy likely wag you," said D'Arcy.

Buck looked puzzled.

"Wag me! How can they wag me? I'm not a flag to be wagged."

"They will wag you. Most new boys are wagged. A new boy with such a feahfully good opinion of himself as you have is absolutely certain to be wagged," said Arthur Augustus, "and, as a mattah of fact, I feel stwongly inclined to back up the waggahs."

"Oh, you mean they'll rag me," said Buck Finn, who had not at first caught on to Arthur Augustus D'Arcy's beautiful accent. "If they start ragging me, they'll wake up the wrong passenger. You hear me?"

"Oh, he's going to lick the whole Shell and Fourth Form," said Blake. "Go ahead, Finny. You'll find that St. Jim's isn't to be licked so easily when you start doing it."

"I'm not looking for trouble," said Finn, "but I guess an Amurrican isn't going to be bullyragged; not much, sir. Hallo, is this the station?"

"Yaas, wathah!"

The train slowed down.

Tom Merry threw open the carriage door before it had stopped, and waved his cap wildly from the opening.

There was a roar and a rush of feet on the platform.

"Here they are!"

The next moment the doorway of the carriage was jammed with a wild crowd of juniors.

CHAPTER 3.

Welcome Home.

TOM MERRY was the first out.

He did not step out—he was dragged out by main force. With Lowther shaking his right hand, and Manners his left, he was completely at the mercy of the welcomers. Digby and Reilly dragged him on the platform, and he went over, and Reilly bumped over him.

Blake was next out. He landed in a heap with Herries and Kerr, and Wally fell over him, and yelled.

"Here, draw it mild!" gasped Tom Merry, as he sat up and groped for his head to make sure that it was still there. "Don't make it a massacre of the innocents, you know. Moderate your transports."

"Yaas, wathah!" said Arthur Augustus, taking a doubtful survey of the swaying crowd from the carriage window. "Modewate your twansports, deah boys! I am vewy glad to see your pleasure in welcomin' us home, but weally I must absolutely wufuse to be wuffly handled."

"Give us your fin, Gus!"

"How do you do, Hewwies? Oh! Ow! Don't dwag me out of the cawwiage in that wuff mannah! I feel that I shall fall ovah! Ow-w-w-w-w!"

D'Arcy's feeling was quite prophetic; he did fall over. His eyeglass went one way, and his silk topper another.

"Dear me," said Skimpole, as he stepped out. "The

follows seem quite excited. Doubtless they are glad to see me again. They must have missed me very much." He blinked round through his spectacles. "Dear me! I am treading on something. I wonder what it is I am treading on!"

"It's my neck, you horrid ass!" came the muffled voice of Jack Blake.

"Dear me, so it is. I am exceedingly sorry, Blake—" "Gerroff!"

"Yes, certainly, but—"

Skimpole was dragged off. The somewhat dishevelled juniors were on their feet again, looking a great deal the worse for their welcome. Blake was inclined to begin punching noses, but Tom Merry burst into a laugh.

"Hallo, you fellows, glad to see your chivvies again!" he exclaimed. "Same old long-legged Figgy—same old barrelly Fatty Wynn. Lowther, if you don't stop thumping me on the back you'll get an upper-cut!"

"Ha, ha! Glad to see your old mug again, Tommy!"

"Same here, my son," said Manners. "Did you take any photographs for me in the Wild West?"

"Heaps!"

"Good! Hallo! Who's that merchant in the carriage?"

Buck Finn had not left the carriage. He was looking out with a cool stare at the excited youths from St. Jim's.

As soon as Manners directed attention to him, every eye was turned upon the American boy.

Buck Finn met the general gaze with complete self-possession.

There was nothing shy or constrained about the lad who had been "raised" on an Arizona cattle ranch.

"That's a new kid," said Tom Merry.

"Did you bring it back with you?"

"Yes."

"What is it called?"

"Buck Finn."

"My only Panama hat! Is that a joke?"

"Honest Injun!"

"Buck Finn! Gentlemen," said Monty Lowther, waving his hand, "pray allow me to present Mr. Buck Finn, of the Rocky Mountains!"

"Buck Finn, of Arizona," said the American boy coolly, "who can lick any kid his own weight this side of the pond!"

"Hallo! You'll have a chance."

"Have him out!"

"Yank over the Yankee!"

"Hold on!" exclaimed Tom Merry. "Buck Finn is under my protection—"

"More rats!" said Buck Finn coolly. "I guess Buck Finn's on his lonesome, and he don't want anybody's protection."

"You hear him, Merry?"

Tom Merry laughed good-naturedly.

"Never mind, let him alone."

"Oh, very well, if you make a point of it," said Monty Lowther grudgingly. "It looks to me as if he's got too much cheek for St. Jim's."

"I guess I can keep my end up every time."

"And what do you reckon?" demanded Figgins.

"And what do you calculate?" asked Digby.

Buck Finn's eyes glittered at this evident reference to his American idiom.

"I reckon you're a pair of chumps," he said, "and I calculate I could lick you both into penwipers! See?"

"Come on, then!" roared Digby.

Tom Merry interposed.

"Hold on! No rows to-day!"

"Yass, wathah! This person is a wathah impertinent

person, you know, but undah the cirms, I pwotest against any waggin' on an occasion like this."

"Good old Gussy! Let the Yank alone, then!"

Buck Finn stepped out of the train. Several fellows there were inclined to roll him over on the platform for his nerve, but Tom Merry's word was law on the day of his homecoming. Buck Finn was let severely alone, but there were whispered remarks which indicated that there was a "ragging" to come.

Tom Merry and his companions marched off the platform in the midst of an excited crowd, shouting and cheering.

Blake, in the exuberance of his spirits, pushed the porter's cap over his eyes, and gave the ticket-collector a dig in the ribs instead of a ticket. Jack had enjoyed his trip abroad, but he was highly excited at getting back to St. Jim's. The luggage of the party was piled on the station hack, but the juniors decided to walk. They set out at a swinging pace through the snow.

"Hallo, there's Tom Merry back again!"

It was the voice of Pilcher, the youthful leader of the Rylcombe urchins in their rows with the juniors of St. Jim's. He had suddenly come round a corner with Craggs and Grimes. The three of them stared at the returned travellers, and promptly followed up their stare with whizzing snowballs.

Biff! came the first missile on Tom Merry's chin, and then a second ball caught Jack Blake under the ear. A third knocked Buck Finn's hat off.

"Go for 'em!" shouted Figgins.

The juniors were groping for snowballs at once.

A perfect hurricane of squashy missiles swept upon Craggs, Pilcher, and Grimes, and they speedily abandoned the unequal contest, and took to their heels.

The snowballs followed them up till they disappeared, and the victorious juniors marched on triumphantly to St. Jim's.

There were a score or more fellows at the gates to welcome them in. Caps were waved at the sight of the party, and there were loud cheers, and Tom Merry & Co. enjoyed a veritable triumph as they entered the old school.

Even Taggles, the porter, wore an unusually amiable grin, perhaps partly in anticipation of a tip. Arthur Augustus gave him an affable slap on the shoulder.

"Bai Jove, I'm glad to see even you again, Taggles, deah boy," he remarked.

"Yes, sir. Can I carry anything for you, sir?"

"Weally, you are most obligin', Taggles. No, there is nothin' to cawvy, but I should be glad if you would accept this half-sovereign."

"Thank you kindly, sir."

"But don't spend it in dwink, Taggles. I make a special condish that you don't spend it in dwink."

"Yes, sir. Very good, sir," said Taggles, stowing the half-sovereign away in his waistcoat, and making a mental reservation as he agreed not to spend it in liquid refreshment.

"Here's a tanner for you, Taggy," said Jack Blake. "Catch, old son, but mind, I make it a special condition that you don't squander it in riotous living."

"Yes, sir. He, he, sir. Thank you, Master Blake!"

"Weally, Blake—"

"Come on," said Fatty Wynn. "There's not much time before the feed, you know, and Cousin Ethel's coming."

"Bai Jove, that's wippin'."

And the returned travellers were marched across the snowy quadrangle, and indoors, and a few minutes later Fatty Wynn, with his sleeves rolled up, was busy preparing the feed that was to beat all previous records.

CHAPTER 4.

Buck Finn's Experiences Begin.

"ROT, I call it," said Gore, of the Shell.

"Bosh!" agreed Mellish, of the Fourth.

"Piffle!" said Sharp.

There was a discordant note in the general chorus of welcoming.

Gore, the cad of the Shell, was not slow to express his opinion that the fuss made of Tom Merry was "rot." Mellish agreed with him, and so did the rest of the special set who clustered round George Gore.

"Can't see why they make so much of that chap," said Gore. "He's not rich—not so rich as some fellows in the school, anyway."

"And he doesn't do anything to make himself popular," said Mellish.

"The fellows are all fools."

"Absolute duffers."

"I," said Gore, looking round at his friends—"I should make a better captain for the Shell than Tom Merry."

"Of course you would!" said the chorus.

"Besides, a fellow who goes abroad for weeks at a time,

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NEXT
THURSDAY:

"A LAD OF THE LEAGUE."

A Tale of Tom Merry & Co.
at St. Jim's.

and neglects all his duties in the place, isn't the sort of chap to be captain."

"Of course he isn't!"

"The fellows are a lot of asses! They're making an awful fuss of that chap, just as if nobody else ever went abroad."

"You went to France yourself, last term, Gore."

"I did, and had a jolly time," said Gore. "I don't see so much in going to America. There's railways over the Rocky Mountains now, and it's as safe as going to Margate. But the chap seemed excited because he's come back."

"The seniors, too," said Mellish. "There was Kildare shaking him by the hand in the quad, and Darrel patting him on the back in the passage."

"The masters are just as dotty on the subject. Did you see Railton shake hands with him? Glad to see you back, Merry!"

"And the Head, too! The Head shook hands with the lot of them."

"Can't understand it myself."

"Then there's that wild animal they've brought home," said Sharp. "A native of the Wild West, named Buckle, or something. What do you think of that?"

"I hear he's got cheek enough for a whole Form."

"He'll jolly soon get that knocked out of him," said Gore. "We're not going to have a Yankee putting on side here. Anybody know what Form he's going into?"

"Somebody said the Shell."

"Then he'll get jolly well ragged if he begins any rot," said Gore. "I don't like the look of him. He's too cool. I don't like Americans, anyway."

"I guess that's rather a compliment to them, sonny."

The juniors turned quickly at the sound of the voice. Buck Finn was coming along the passage, and he had stopped as he heard Gore's remark.

The American junior had his hands in his pockets, and he was looking at Gore quite coolly, evidently not in the least afraid of the bully of the Shell.

Gore stared at him superciliously.

"Oh! So you're the new kid?"

"I guess so."

"Named Buckle, or something?" said Sharp.

"Named Buck Finn."

"Ye gods! What a name!"

"Anything the matter with it?" asked Buck Finn pleasantly. "I'm ready to change the shape of his features for anybody who doesn't cotton to it."

"I hear you're coming into the Shell," said Gore loftily.

"I guess so."

"You'll have to learn manners, I fancy. We don't intend to have any giddy Yankees awagging in the Shell. I can tell you. You'll have to learn your place, or else be shoved into it!"

"I guess I shall be all there when you start the shoving," said Buck Finn. "I was raised in Arizona. I guess I've walked over better galoots than you will ever be. Yes, sir, some."

"Perhaps you're looking for a thick ear just now?" suggested Gore. The bully of the Shell towered head and shoulders over the sparsely-built American boy, and he had not the slightest doubt that he could wipe up the floor with Buck Finn. And to a fellow like Gore, the ability to bully was the father of the wish to do so.

"P'raps," agreed Buck Finn readily. "Suppose you try it on?"

"Bump him!" said Gore.

"Hyer, one at a time!" exclaimed Buck Finn, as the grinning juniors closed round him. "Fair play's a jewel! One at a time!"

But Gore & Co. paid no attention to that. They seized hold of the boy from the Wild West, and proceeded to bump him.

It was Buck Finn's first experience of the process of bumping, and he did not enjoy it.

He found himself bumped down, and rolled over, his hat flying off, his jacket round his ears, his collar unfastened, his breath knocked out of his body.

He was left gasping on a mat, while the bumpers walked off laughing.

Buck Finn sat up on the mat, rubbing his eyes, wondering whether he was awake or dreaming. His assailants had vanished. He blinked round him dazedly, and rose unsteadily to his feet.

"Gum!" he muttered. "Holy smoke! I wonder whether it was an earthquake?"

Gore & Co. went off laughing, and Tom Merry met them in the passage. The hero of the Shell stopped.

"Hallo, Gore! Have you seen the new chap—Finn?"

"Finn! Yes, I think I've seen him," drawled Gore.

"Lantern-jawed chap, isn't he?"

"Well, perhaps a little!"

"Nose like a knife-blade?"

Tom Merry laughed.

"A bit—yes. Where is he?"

"You'll find him along there reposing on the mat."

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

Tom Merry looked dubiously at Gore, and then hurried on. He found Buck Finn standing on the mat, and dusting down his clothes.

The American boy's dishevelled appearance brought an involuntary smile to Tom Merry's lips.

"Hallo! Have you been falling foul of Gore already?" he asked.

Buck Finn granted expressively.

"Oh, Gore, was it? I shall remember Gore. The beast! I feel as if I'd been in a motor-car collision."

"Never mind; come along to the feed."

"Good! I'm jolly hungry."

"Then come on," said Tom Merry. "You can have a dust down in my study."

And Buck Finn accompanied Tom Merry to the room in which the feast was to be held.

CHAPTER 5.

A Junior Feed.

FATTY WYNN was happy! The subscription raised by the friends of Tom Merry for the welcoming feed was really a good one, and it enabled Fatty to "spread himself" in the matter of the preparations.

It had been easy to obtain permission to use a room for the feast. A study would not have accommodated half the guests. To say nothing of Miss Ethel and the returned travellers, there were four or five Shell fellows and half a dozen of the Fourth, and a couple of infants of the Third Form, the special chums of D'Arcy minor. Then, of course, there was Pongo.

The room was on the ground floor of the School House, and had a wide window looking out into the snowy quadrangle. There was a big fireplace at one end, and a huge fire was blazing in it.

The heat spread through the room, and was very welcome to the juniors as they came in. The weather was bitterly cold.

Cousin Ethel had helped Figgins to decorate the room. There were chains of coloured paper round the walls, in Christmas style, and masses of holly and evergreens. Over the mantelpiece was a big placard in red ink, done by the artistic hand of Kerr.

"WELCOME HOME!"

Underneath that cheery legend, however, some mischievous hand—probably Mellish's—had scrawled the word "Rats!"

Figgins had scratched out the "Rats," but he had not been able to quite obliterate it, and it still showed up pretty plainly.

There was a long table, gleaming with white cloth and crockery and silver. The necessary articles had been borrowed from all quarters, and it was an understood thing that every male guest was to bring his own knife and fork.

The School House cook, with whom Tom Merry was a favourite—as he was with everybody—had helped Fatty Wynn nobly, and Fatty had been allowed the run of the kitchen; and a promised half-crown from the fund had turned Binks, the butler, into the most assiduous of waiters.

Figgins had called for Cousin Ethel, as arranged, and when he brought her in, in triumph, the other guests were already there.

Cousin Ethel gave everybody a bright smile, and she had another for Buck Finn when he was introduced.

Notwithstanding his independence, the American junior was glad to come to the feed, and the thoughtfulness of Tom Merry certainly made his first day at St. Jim's brighter and pleasanter than it would otherwise have been.

Cousin Ethel took her place at the table, with Tom Merry on her right, and Arthur Augustus fully intended to take the seat on the other side of his fair cousin.

But Jack Blake came up in time.

"Gussy, old man, is that your hat Pongo's got under the table?" he asked.

"Bai Jove!" exclaimed D'Arcy, in alarm.

And he rushed to see.

While he was stooping down and peering under the table-cloth, Blake calmly dropped into his seat. Pongo certainly had something under the table, but it was a sausage he had purloined from the sideboard, and D'Arcy rose with a gasp of relief.

"It's all wight!" he exclaimed. "It's only some gwub!"

"Good!" said Jack Blake.

Arthur Augustus looked at him very expressively.



"Shake, pard!" exclaimed Buck Finn to D'Arcy. "I guess this get-up looks creation!"

Blake was in his place, and showed no disposition what-over to move. D'Arcy fixed his eyeglass full upon Blake, but Blake never turned a hair.

"Anything wrong, old chap?" he asked affably.

"Weally, Blake—"

"You were looking as if something was on your mind."

"Weally, Blake—"

"Sit down, old chap," said Blake. "Come and sit next to me."

Arthur Augustus, with feelings too deep for words, dropped into the next chair. Fatty Wynn was carving a turkey, and his fat face was shining with delight. The turkey was a great success, and Fatty Wynn, when he found time from the carving, showed that his appetite had not become impaired during Tom Merry's trip abroad.

And when the more solid portion of the feast was over, and conversation became more general, the travellers were called upon to tell some of their experiences, and they willingly responded to the call.

Skimpole offered to read out all his notebooks, beginning at the beginning, but as this would probably have occupied several weeks on end, the offer was gratefully but decidedly declined.

Arthur Augustus had some entertaining descriptions to

give of the scenes of his travels, which were quite characteristic.

"People are wathah well-dressed in New York," he remarked, "and I remarked some vewy decently-dressed persons in Chicago. As for the Fah West, the less said about their attire the better. It is pwobably vewy suitable for the country, but I did not see a pwopahly cut coat west of the Wocky Mountains."

D'Arcy seemed surprised by the laugh that followed his remark.

"I hear you were kidnapped, begorra!" Reilly remarked.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"I rescued him," said Blake. "I—"

"Weally, Blake, I am surprised at the statement. Surely you wemembah how I ovaheame that wascal Captain Puntah and wescued you."

"Now, don't you talk absolute rot, Gussy!" said Blake warmly. "Didn't I find you in a garret in the Bowery in New York—"

"I found you in a gawwet in the Bowewy in New York, Blake!"

"I suggested laying for that chap Punter when he came in—"

"Pewwaps you did; but I collahed the wottah!"

"Look here, Gussy—"
 "Look here, Blake—"
 "Oh, you rescued each other!" said Tom Merry. "Let it go at that!"

"I should be vewy pleased, to let it go at that, Tom Mewwy; but as a mattah of fact it was I who wescued Blake."

"Boosh!" said Wally. "It was Tom Merry and I who rescued both of you. You wouldn't have got away if we hadn't chipped in."

"Weally, Wally—"
 "I can recommend the banana fritters, Miss Cleveland," said Fatty Wynn. "I made them myself."

"Then I am sure they are delightful," said Cousin Ethel. And Fatty Wynn beamed.

"Tell us about busting the bronchos," said Digby.

"Oh, that was nothin'!" said D'Arcy.

"Wasn't it?" said Buck Finn. "I tell you, kids, that hoss Colorado couldn't be ridden by anybody on the ranch, and D'Arcy broke him in."

"Mr. Poinsett was kind enough to make me a present of him," said D'Arcy. "He came oveh in the steamah with us. I left him at Eastwood. Tom Mewwy's uncle is an old sport!"

"Is it all right about the millions?" Herries wanted to know.

Tom Merry grinned.
 "Yes, it's all right. They're there; but I hope it will be a jolly long time before they come to me."

"Hear, hear!"

G-r-r-r!
 Wally sprang to his feet.

"What's the matter with Pongo?"

G-r-r-r!

How-wow-wow!

Terrific sounds of conflict proceeded from under the table. Wally had surreptitiously passed a whole wing of a chicken to his favourite, and Pongo had been contentedly munching till a stranger came on the scene. The stranger was Herries's bulldog, Towser. Towser took a part in the proceedings at once. As Wally looked under the table, the two dogs were rolling over on the floor in furious combat.

"Look out! Call that beast off, Herries."

"Are you calling my dog a beast, young D'Arcy?"

"Call him off!"

"Call your dog off!"

"Pongo! Pongo!"

"Towser! Towser!"

Yap-yap-yap! G-r-r-r-r!

Wally plunged under the table from one side with a plate in his hand, with the evident intention of smiting Towser. Herries was on the other side of the table, and he plunged under, too, and his head met Wally's with a sounding crash.

"Oh!"

"Ow!"

Wally rolled over on the floor, and Herries jumped up unthinkingly. His broad shoulders buffed upon the table and raised one end of it a foot or more from the floor. There was a yell of alarm from the juniors, and they clutched at the table to save it; but too late. Along the slope went careering dishes and plates, and there was a terrific crashing on the floor at the end.

"You duffers!" roared Tom Merry.

The feasters were on their feet at once. Towser and Pongo separated and went racing out of the room. Wally crawled out from under the table, rubbing his head. Herries was sitting on the floor, looking dazed.

"Bai Jove!" said Arthur Augustus. "It looks as if the feast was ruined."

And it certainly was.

Fortunately the catastrophe happened at the latter end of the feast; but Herries and Wally received scant sympathy for the big bumps on their heads.

CHAPTER 6.

Buck Finn is Not Caught.

TOM MERRY stirred the fire in Study 10 in the Shell, and the bright glow played on his equally bright face. His countenance was glowing; his eyes sparkling. It was good to travel and see the world, but it was good also to be back in his old haunts. After the Christmas vacation and the run across the Atlantic, St. Jim's was like an old home to which he was returning. Everything delighted him. The feed in the big room downstairs, though it had ended so abruptly, had been a delight. It was jolly to see so many cheerful and welcoming faces round him. But after it was over he was glad to get into his own study with his own special chums, Manners and

Lowther, to have a "jaw" and to look at his old quarters. Outside in the quad there was a mist and a thaw. The windows were streaming wet; the leafless elms weeping. But inside the study all was cosy.

Tom Merry stirred the fire and walked round the room, looking at things. Manners was developing films Tom Merry had brought back from America, and Lowther sat in the easy-chair with his long legs stretched out in an attitude of lazy comfort.

"It's ripping to be back!" said Tom.

"Yes, jolly!" said Lowther. "Glad to see your old chivvy about the place! We missed you—curious, wasn't it?"

"I missed you," said Tom. "I haven't heard a stale wheeze or a rotten, bad pun for weeks. It's jolly cosy here! By the way, what do you think of the new chap?"

"The finny denizen of the West, do you mean? He's a queer fish."

"Oh, dear, is that a pun? Ha, ha, ha!"

"Well, he's a queer bird," said Lowther. "Too independent for my taste. He will be ragged."

Manners looked up from his developer.

"I rather think that will do him good," he remarked.

"He's got too much cheek by half."

Tom Merry nodded.

"Yes, he certainly has plenty of nerve," he remarked. "I'm blessed if I know whether I like him or not. He's the son of my uncle's foreman, you know; and I told uncle that I would look after him as much as I could, and give him a start here."

"He doesn't seem to need much looking after," said Lowther. "My idea is that a jolly good dormitory ragging would do him good."

"A lot of the other fellows think so, too," said Manners.

"I suppose you know he's been put in the Shell, Tom?"

"Yes. He's keen enough to get on, too. I fancy he will be all right."

"Yes, when he's been put into his place."

There was a tap at the door. Tom Merry, who had sat down on a corner of the table with his hands in his pockets, looked round.

"Come in!" he called out.

The door opened, and Binks the butlers put his head in.

"Letter for you, Master Merry."

"Hand it over."

Tom Merry smiled a little as he took the letter. Binks vanished. The letter was addressed to Tom in the handwriting of his old governess, Miss Priscilla Fawcett. As Tom had only left her that morning, Miss Fawcett was a good correspondent.

"Any news?" asked Lowther.

"It's from Miss Fawcett," said Tom, opening the letter.

"She must have written it immediately after I left."

He glanced through the letter and laughed. It was in the same strain in which Miss Priscilla usually wrote.

"My darling Tommy,—I am just a little bit anxious about your health still. You had such a colour when you came off the steamer that I could not help fearing that you were feverish. I have sent you a packet of things you will need, which will have reached the school before you. I hope you will carry out the instructions on the bottles and boxes. Take great care, my darling child, not to get your feet wet, and in case of a shower, go in and change your clothes immediately. Do not begin playing cricket until you have well rested after your travels."

Tom Merry grinned. The idea of playing cricket in January was funny; but Miss Priscilla Fawcett had a very hazy idea of the national games, and she had frequently implored Tom not to strive after too many runs at football. The rest of the letter was in the same strain. Tom Merry folded it up and put it into his pocket.

"Anything come here for me to-day?" he asked.

Lowther chuckled.

"Yes, rather—a registered parcel with the Huckleberry Heath postmark! I forgot to tell you, but you know what's in it!"

"Better look, though."

"It's in the cupboard."

Tom Merry crossed to the cupboard. That cupboard contained a variety of things—from broken fishing-rods and tackle and deflated footballs, to pork-pies and tin-tacks and colour-boxes. The registered parcel was there, and Tom Merry opened it.

The contents were as he expected.

He turned out a goodly array of bottles, jars, and boxes. Monty Lowther looked over his shoulder and read some of the titles.

"Dr. Bones's Purple Pills for Pink People"; "Herr

Humbourg's Terra-cotta Tabloids for Tiny Tots'; 'Mixture of Cod-liver Oil'! My only hat, you'd be a giddy invalid if you swallowed a tenth part of that lot, Tommy!"

"She's a good old soul!" said Tom Merry, laughing. "I wouldn't think of telling her what I think of this stuff for worlds! Of course, I'm not going to take any of it!"

"What will you do with it?"

"Well, the pills may as well go on the fire now. I'll tip Binks twopence to bury the rest in the garden."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The chums of the Shell were still laughing as the door of the study opened and Buck Finn put his head in.

"Can I come in?" he asked, in a low voice.

"Certainly!" said Tom Merry, wondering at his mysterious look.

"It's a custom in England to tap at a door before you open it," remarked Monty Lowther, in his blandest tone.

The American, without replying, came quietly in and closed the door. He dropped into the easy-chair Lowther had risen from and stretched out his thin legs.

"I guess this is comfy," he remarked.

"I was sitting in that chair," said Lowther pointedly.

"Were you? Well, I guess you found it comfy," said Finn; "I do. I'll hang out here a few minutes, if you don't mind."

Tom Merry was about to ask a question, when there was a sound of footsteps passing the door. They died away up the passage.

"Anything wrong, Finny?"

"Not with me," Buck Finn chuckled. "There are some galeots along the passage who want to scalp me. Blake told me I could have his 'Magnet,' and said it was on the table in his study. I smelled a mouse, and I found a booby-trap all ready—bag of ashes on top of door, you know, ready to bif on my head."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Yes, funny, wasn't it?" agreed Buck Finn, grinning. "But not so funny for Blake as he expected. You see, I spotted the wheeze and I gave that door a wide berth."

"And what's happened?"

"Well, D'Arcy was coming upstairs a minute ago, and from what I heard I guess he discovered the booby-trap—with his head."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The footsteps were repassing the door. There was a sound of several juniors hunting in the shadowy corridor. The voice of Blake was heard.

"He's nipped into one of the Shell studies, then!"

Buck Finn looked grim.

"I guess I dropped in for a quiet time," he remarked.

"But it looks as if—thunder!"

The door was bumped open, and the chums of Study No. 6 looked in. Jack Blake gave a shout.

"Here he is!"

CHAPTER 7.

The Laws of Hospitality.

BUCK FINN rose quickly to his feet.

Blake, Herries, Digby, and D'Arcy had come along together to interview the cheerful youth from Arizona, and they looked as if they meant business.

D'Arcy had apparently been looking for ashes, and finding them. His hair, usually so beautifully brushed and tidy, was rumpled and unkempt, and simply streaming with ashes. His face was smothered with them—so was his elegant jacket—and his high collar was choked with them round his neck. And the eyes of the swell of St. Jim's were ablaze with wrath.

"Bai Jove, there's the wottah!"

"Got him!" roared Blake.

"Collar the cad!" exclaimed Digby. "Frog's-march down the passage and ducking in the bath-room—that's about right!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Hold on!" exclaimed Tom Merry pacifically. "Hold on a minute! This kid is a guest in this study!"

"He won't be long!" said Blake, striding towards the American.

Monty Lowther stepped in between them.

"Chuck it," he said laconically. "Listen to your uncle."

"Get out of the way!"

"Rats!"

"Peace, my sons!" said Tom Merry. "You can't rush into another fellow's quarters, like a gang of hooligans, in this way!"

D'Arcy turned his eyeglass upon Tom Merry.

"I utahly wefuse to be chawacterised as a gang of hooligans—I mean as a hooligan, Tom Mewwy!"

"Better go slow," said Buck Finn, in a drawing voice;

"I don't want to have to lick you, Blake!"

"Lemme get at him!" roared Blake.

"Pway don't be hasty, Blake. There is somethin' in what Tom Mewwy says. It's wathah bad form to make a wov in anothah fellow's quarters."

"Blow his quarters! That kid has had the cheek to play tricks on us—us—the heads of the Fourth Form at St. Jim's!"

"What has he done?"

"Look at D'Arcy!"

"I'm looking at him—excuse my laughing, Gussy!"

"I wefuse to excuse your laughin', Tom Mewwy! I wegard it as wude and insultin'! I am quite aware that my aspect is wathah widiculous at the pwesent moment, but that is due to the astoundin' cheek of this Amewican person!"

"We laid a booby-trap for him in Study 6," explained Blake.

"And he had the nerve to leave it there for us," said Digby, taking up the tale.

"It might have dropped on me!" said Herries indignantly.

"As a mattah of fact, it dwopped on me, which I wegard as a fah more sewious mattah!"

"We're going to rag him!"

"We're going to scrag him!"

"He's got to learn his place!"

Tom Merry waved his hand for silence.

"Gentlemen—"

"Oh, cut the cackle!"

"Gentlemen, I acknowledge that the new kid has acted in a disrespeful manner towards Study No. 6 in refusing to have a bag of ashes dumped on his head, and in leaving that treat for Gussy. Undoubtedly, under the heinous circumstances of the case, the culprit deserves to be hanged, drawn, quartered, and dotted on the nose. But he is a stranger in the land. In coming here he has placed himself under the protection of this study. The laws of hospitality forbid that we should allow a hair of his head to be touched."

"We don't want to touch a hair of his head. We're going to give him the frog's march."

"The frog's march for a guest of this study is barred. The laws of hospitality—"

"Blow the laws of hospitality! Get aside!"

Tom Merry shook his head.

"Impossible! The refugee has placed himself among our household gods, and clasped, as it were, the Penates to his breast. He is our Themistocles, and we cannot give him up to the Greeks."

"I'll Themistocles him!" howled Blake. "Are you going to shift, and let me get at that American boulder?"

"The laws of hospitality—"

"Br-r-r-r-r!" said Blake.

And he rushed forward.

"Line up!" shouted Tom Merry.

The Terrible Three lined up promptly enough. The chums of the Fourth attacked valiantly, but Buck Finn promptly sided with his hosts, and the odds were made even. The study was a large one for the Shell, but there wasn't much room for eight excited juniors to wage warfare in it.

The table went crashing aside, and Manners's daylight developer went with a bump on the floor. Manners himself bumped over it the next moment, with Herries sprawling across his chest.

Blake was busy with Tom Merry, and Digby with Lowther. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy bore down upon Buck Finn, and they closed, and the encounter was really terrific. They rolled over on the floor, and in a few seconds D'Arcy, he did not exactly know how, was extended on his back on the carpet, and Buck Finn was sitting astride of his chest.

"Bai Jove!" gasped the swell of the School House. "Pway be careful, deah boy! You are wumplin' my clothes feahfully!"

Buck Finn laughed breathlessly. D'Arcy's appeal in the middle of a rough-and-tumble struck him comically.

"Upon weflection, I will make it pax," said D'Arcy. "It is bad enough to be smothahed in ashes, without havin' one's beastly clothes wumpled and wuffed."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I weally fail to see where the cause for laughtah comes in."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Pway make it pax."

"I guess you'll have to explain what you mean by pax," said Buck Finn. "Do you mean travelling packs?"

"Weally, I wegard your ignowance on the subject as astoundin'. Pax is Latin for peace, deah boy."

"Why don't you talk English?"

"Weally, I can scarcely explain while you are sittin' on my chest."

Buck Finn laughed, and allowed D'Arcy to rise. The swell of St. Jim's dusted down his clothes ruefully. "If I had not made it pax," he said wistfully, "I should make it a point to administrah a feashful thwashin' to you, you Amewioan boundah! Undah the circs., you can considah yourself let off. Blake, deah boy, pway make it pax."

"Go and eat coke!"
"I wufuse to do anythin' of the sort. Tom Mewwy—"
"What's this confounded row about?" asked Kildare, putting his head into the study. "Stop that immediately."
The combatants, who were just warming to their work, separated reluctantly.

They looked very dusty and dishevelled, and they bore very plain traces of the combat on their faces.

The captain of St. Jim's could not help grinning as he looked at them.

"Is this how you are celebrating your return, Tom Merry?" he asked.

Tom Merry laughed.

"Not exactly. But the laws of hospitality—"

"But the laws of hospitality!" grunted Blake. "The fact is, Kildare, this new kid is too fresh, and we were teaching him a lesson for his own good when these asses came chipping in."

"As he took refuge in our study—"

"Rats! You were looking for trouble!"

"What has Finn been doing?"

"Shoving a booby trap ready for us," said Blake indignantly. "Well, as a matter of absolute fact, we put it up, you know, but instead of walking into it he left it for us, and, of course, D'Arcy was bound to go and poke his head into it."

"Weally, Blake—"

"You will admit yourself, Kildare, that we ought to make an example of a cheeky young beggar like that."

Kildare grinned.

"I'll admit that you'll get a licking all round if there's any more row in this study," he said. "We've had a quiet time while you've been away. Look out!"

And the captain of St. Jim's quitted the study.

"Bai Jove, you know, I think I had better go and get a wash and a bwash up," said Arthur Augustus. "I am feelin' extremely dusty and untidy."

"You'd better all go," said Tom Merry.

"What about that Yankee bouncer?"

"I guess I stick right here."

Blake hesitated a moment. But it was scarcely feasible to continue the combat after the warning from Kildare. A couple of prefects sailing in with canes would soon have put an end to it.

"Well, we'll make the Yank sit up presently," said Blake.

"Of course, we don't want to be down on a new-comer. All we want to do is to teach him his place, so that he won't be always getting into rows."

"Exactly!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"So just you look out for to-night, Finny!"

"I guess I shall be looking out."

And the chums of Study No. 6, with portentous looks, marched off.

CHAPTER 8.

Buck Finn Prepares for Battle.

THESE was an ominous air of suppressed excitement about the juniors when bedtime came. The intentions of the chums of Study No. 6 were known, and most of the juniors of the School House heartily concurred in them. As a rule, any Fourth Form invasion of the Shell quarters would have been resisted by all Tom Merry's Form fellows, but on the present occasion most of the Shell agreed with them that the new boy was in some need of a lesson.

Buck Finn must have noticed something, but he appeared to take no particular heed of it.

He was coolness itself, and though Tom Merry looked at him searchingly several times, he showed no sign of uneasiness.

Darrel, the prefect, looked into the common-room with his good-natured smile, and pointed to the clock.

"Bed," he remarked.

"Bai Jove, it's bedtime," said Arthur Augustus. "I am feelin' wathah exhausted. Twavellin' does take it out of you, deah boy. Upon reflection, Blake, I weally think we had better leave the waggin' alone for— Ow! What are you tweadin' on my foot for, you ass?"

"Shut up!"

"I wufuse to shut up. You have twoklen on my foot in a beastly wuff way, and I considah— If you poke me in the wibs like that again, Dig, I shall have no alternative but to administrah a feashful thwashin'."

"Cheese it!"

Darrel gave the juniors a curious glance, and left the room. The chums of Study No. 6 glared at the swell of St. Jim's, and the swell of St. Jim's glared at them.

"I uttably and positively decline to cheese it," said D'Arcy. "I weward you as a set of wude boundahs!"

"You shrieking ass! You nearly gave it all away to Darrel."

"You dunmy!" said Herries. "Do you want to have Darrel following us to the Shell dormitory to-night?"

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

"You never think at all," growled Blake. "Look at that Yankee bouncer over there, kids. Looks as cool as a cucumber."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"We'll warm him up presently," said Digby. Buck Finn certainly was looking quite cool.

He strolled over to Tom Merry as the latter rose from his chair, and Tom looked at him inquiringly.

"Can I borrow something of you, Merry?" the American junior asked.

"Yes; what is it?"

"It's in the cupboard in your room. I noticed it while I was there," said Buck. "The cupboard door was open, you know. It's in a tin."

Tom Merry looked puzzled for a moment, and then he understood, and burst into a laugh.

"Yes, certainly, you can have it," he said.

Buck Finn nodded, and left the room.

He went directly up to Tom Merry's study, and looked into the cupboard. The first thing that met his view was the array of medicine-bottles and pill-boxes there.

Buck Finn did not know of the little ways of Miss Priacilla Fawcett, and he stared at the collection of patent medicines in blank amazement.

"Gum!" he murmured. "Fancy Tom Merry taking this stuff!"

He looked at the bottles. There was no doubt about it; the name of Tom Merry was written upon every label.

The American junior looked disgusted.

In the Far West he had rather taken to Tom Merry, and since returning to St. Jim's, the hero of the Shell had given him no reason to change his opinion—till now.

But the patent medicines did it!

"Milkop!" murmured Buck Finn.

He pushed the things aside, and reached out for what he had come for—a tin of cayenne pepper, and put it into his pocket.

Then he closed the cupboard, and left the study. He chuckled as he joined the rest of the Shell going up to bed.

He was prepared for the ragging now.

The Shell were very quiet—unusually quiet—as they went into their dormitory. Had Darrel, the prefect, been of a suspicious nature, he would have thought something was on, from their very quietness.

But he did not notice it particularly, only thinking that the juniors were a little less troublesome than usual.

The light was put out, and the prefect retired, and the juniors lay quiet while they listened to his departing footfalls.

Then Gore sat up in bed.

"Get up, you fellows!"

A match glimmered in the darkness of the dormitory.

Half a dozen others followed, and candles and bicycle lanterns were lighted.

A dozen fellows jumped out of bed. Tom Merry and his chums did not move. Tom did not intend to take any part in the ragging of Buck Finn, though whether to defend him or not he had not decided.

And Monty Lowther and Manners intended to follow their leader, whatever line Tom Merry might take.

But almost all the rest of the Shell in the School House were eager for the excitement of a ragging.

Buck Finn lay in bed, apparently dozing off, but his eyes were only half-closed, and he was quite ready to jump up.

The handle of the door was silently turned, and a face looked in from the passage. It was that of Jack Blake.

Gore grinned at him. It was seldom that the cad of the Shell was on good terms with Blake and his friends, but just now their purposes were one.

"Come in," said Gore. "I see you've got the whole family with you."

There were indeed a goodly number of Fourth-Formers with Blake.

Herries, Digby, and D'Arcy followed him in, and then seven or eight other fellows belonging to the Fourth Form, and the door was closed. Blake grinned at the Shell fellows.

"We've come!" he remarked.

"I see you have," said Tom Merry from his bed; "and now the best thing you can do is to go."

"Rats!"



Buck Finn defended himself to the last; but pillows sent him rolling over, and he went to the floor at last.

"Yaas, wats, wathah!" said Arthur Augustus, turning his eyeglass upon Tom Merry. "We wefuse to go. We are here to wag that wottah for his own good."

"That's it. Where's the Yankee?"

Buck Finn sat up in bed.

"Here I am, I guess!" he remarked. "What's wanted?"

"You are!"

And the Fourth-Formers drew round the American junior's bed, and Gore & Co. joined them. There were nearly twenty of the raggars, but Buck Finn did not seem to be alarmed.

"I guess you'd better go to sleep," he remarked.

"Get out of that bed!"

"Yaas, wathah! We ordah you to immediately wise, you wottah! Get up, or I shall dwag you out by violence."

Buck Finn grinned.

"I guess you'd better drag me out, Gussy."

"I shall be extremely sowwy to use violence," said the swell of St. Jim's, "but if you do not get out quietly, I shall have no alternative but to dwag you out."

"Go ahead, then."

And there were cries of encouragement from Shell and Fourth. They all wanted to see D'Arcy dragging the Yankee out of bed.

"Go it, Gussy!"

"Yank the Yankee!"

"On the ball!"

Thus encouraged, Arthur Augustus advanced upon the

American junior, who showed no sign of getting out of bed of his own accord.

Arthur Augustus wasted no more time in words. He laid hold of the bedclothes. A foot whisked out from under the blankets, and prodded the swell of the School House violently in the chest.

Arthur Augustus gave a gasp and staggered back, and fell with a bump into a sitting posture. There was a roar of laughter.

"Bai Jove, what was that?"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Tom Merry. "It was Finn's hoof."

"Bai Jove! The wottah has stwuck me with his beastly foot. I feel quite out of bweath. Upon the whole, Blake, you can pull the wottah out."

The juniors rushed forward to claw the bedclothes off. Buck Finn sprang up, sheets and blankets falling away round him, and the tin of cayenne pepper was in his hand, and a gleam of battle in his eye.

"Come on!" he said.

But they halted.

CHAPTER 9

A Dormitory Rag.

BUCK FINN stood erect on the bed in his pyjamas, and the juniors clustered round the bed like dogs round a deer, ready to spring.

But that tin of cayenne deterred them.

NEXT
THURSDAY:

"A LAD OF THE LEAGUE."

A Tale of Tom Merry & Co.
at St. Jim's

Buck Finn had perforated the lid, and it needed only a sweep of the hand to send the pungent powder scattering over them. And they did not like the prospect.

Buck Finn grinned at them irritably.

"Come on!" he remarked. "You were mighty hefty just now. Don't be backward in coming forward. I'm ready."

Blake glared at him.

"Put down that tin."

"No fear!"

"We're going to give you a ragging for your own good."

"I'd rather be without it."

"That's not the question. You've got to have it. You will get off more lightly if you take it quietly."

"I guess I sha'n't take it quietly."

"Get off that bed."

"Go and eat tin-tacks!"

There was no more to be said. The raggers had either to rush on and risk the pepper, or else to give it up and confess themselves beaten, and that was, of course, not to be thought of for a moment.

"Come on!" shouted Blake. And he sprang upon the bed. His chums were quick enough to follow him, though Gore & Co. hung back a good deal, preferring to follow at a safer distance.

"I guess you will have it, then," remarked Buck Finn. And he swept the tin of pepper through the air.

Blake closed his eyes involuntarily as the stinging cloud impinged upon his face, and then he started sneezing.

It wasn't an ordinary, common or garden sneeze, but a volcanic one, that shook him from head to foot, and was heard from end to end of the dormitory.

"Atchoo-atchoo-atchoo-schoo!"

Round swept the American junior's arm, and the pepper was scattered in wide sweeps, and there were few of the juniors who escaped it. Back they staggered from the bed, as though it were being defended by a machine gun.

The American grinned.

"Come on!" he exclaimed. "There's plenty left. I guess I haven't used half of it yet, by gum!"

"Atchoo-atchoo-atchoo!"

"Gr-r-r-r-r!"

"Br-r-r-r-r-r!"

"Atchoo-choo-schoo!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Blake wiped the streaming water from his eyes, and sneezed a sneeze that seemed almost like a pistol-shot.

"Come on!" he roared. And the juniors, sneezing wildly, rushed on again.

Again the pepper swept round. But this time the defence was not quite so successful. The juniors were too furious to care for it, and they were already sneezing as much as they possibly could sneeze.

"Collar him!"

"Atchoo-collared him—atchoo!"

"Got the beast—atchoo!"

"Atchoo—drag him off—oo-oo-oo!"

Hands grasped Buck Finn in various parts of him, and he was fairly yanked off the bed. The tin of pepper went flying, sending clouds into the air, and the American junior rolled on the floor amid a heap of struggling and sneezing humanity.

"Got him!"

"Atchoo-choo-choo-oo-oo!"

Buck Finn struggled desperately. Had the juniors been in their ordinary form, he would have had no chance, but they were too busy sneezing to have a tight grip on him.

He wrenched himself loose and sprang to his feet.

"Atchoo-collared him—atchoo!" sneezed Blake.

"Bai Jove—atchoo-oo-oo—go for the boundah—atchoo-oo-oo-oo!"

Buck sprang clear of his sneezing foes, and grasped a pillow from the bed. He swung it round his head, and swiped at Gore as the cad of the Shell rushed at him.

Gore gave a howl, and rolled over on the floor, and Sharp rolled over from the next swipe.

"Come on, you galoots!"

"Pillows!" shouted Blake. And the juniors grasped pillows and rushed at Finn.

They were still sneezing convulsively, but the odds were too great. There were nearly a score of assailants with swiping pillows and boisters, and Buck Finn had no chance.

"Sock it to him!" roared Blake, as he rolled over under Finn's pillow, and jumped up again in a twinkling. "Down with him!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

Buck Finn defended himself to the last. But swiping pillows sent him rolling over, and he was on the floor at last, with pillows still swiping down upon him.

The juniors sneezed and swiped, and swiped and sneezed, and in the midst of the excitement the door opened.

In the excited scrimmage the boys had not noticed that they were making a terrific disturbance, but it had reached the ears of Darrel, and he realised what was the real cause of the quietness of the Shell at bedtime.

And Darrel came up with a cane in his hand.

"What's the row here—atchoo—atchoo—atchoo!" gasped Darrel, coming into the dormitory, and catching a whiff of the pepper. "By Jove—atchoo-oo-oo!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You young villains—atchoo—atchoo—atchoo!"

"Cave!" gasped Gore.

The Shell fellows dived towards their beds; but the Fourth-Formers could not do so, and Darrel was between them and the door, sneezing.

"Bai Jove," murmured Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, "we're in for it now, dear boys!"

Darrel sneezed, and sneezed, and sneezed, and blew his nose; then he turned a very red and angry face upon the juniors.

"What are you Fourth Form kids doing here?" he demanded.

"Sneezin', dear boy."

There was a giggle. Darrel pointed to the door.

"Get back to your own dormitory."

"With pleasuah, dear boy. I am sowwy you caught a whiff of the peppah; it is weally most unpleasant. Good-night, Dawwel—ow!"

As the swell of St. Jim's went through the doorway, Darrel caught him a lash with the cane on his pyjamas that made him hop.

"Ow—ow! I wegard that as uttably bwutal. Ow!"

"Get out, you others!"

Darrel was standing beside the door, cane in hand, with a grim look on his face. The Fourth-Formers eyed him doubtfully. The Shell fellows grinned at them from the beds, enjoying their predicament.

There was no way of getting out of the dormitory without passing Darrel, and what Darrel meant to do as they passed him was perfectly evident.

"I say, old chap," said Blake persuasively, "we came here to do our duty, you know, as heads of the Fourth Form, by—by showing a new fellow how to—how to behave, and not get himself into trouble by his bumptiousness. Under the circumstances—"

"Are you going?"

"Yes, certainly; but I think—"

"Get out!"

"May as well out," said Digby; and he made a rush for the door. But he was not quick enough to escape the cane, and he gave a wild howl as he disappeared into the passage. His night-shirt was not much protection against the cane.

"Next man in," said Darrel.

"Oh, rats!" muttered Blake. "All together, you chaps! We may get through, or some of us, anyway! Follow your leader!"

And Blake led the rush to the door.

His comrades followed him in a body, only Mellish hanging a little back. Darrel lashed out—twice, thrice, but before he had time for more the Fourth-Formers had scrambled through.

Those who had escaped the cane grinned gleefully as they went down the passage. But Blake and Hancock and Reilly were wriggling in the most uncomfortable manner.

Mellish had hung back, and he was the last to remain, and Darrel looked at him expressively.

"Are you going to stay here all night, Mellish?" he asked.

"N-n-no!" stammered Mellish.

"You had better be going, then."

"Ye-es!"

"Or else I shall come and warm you."

"I—I—I—"

Darrel came towards him. Mellish dodged, but there was no escaping the cane. He gave a shriek as he caught it, and bolted from the dormitory.

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled Gore.

But he left off laughing as Darrel came towards his bed. The prefect had a quick eye, and he had noted which of the juniors had been out of bed, and he visited each one, and gave him cause to remember the occasion. Then he made a collection of the candles and bicycle-lamps.

"You can have these lamps back next Wednesday," he remarked. "If there is any more rowing in this dormitory to-night I shall ask Mr. Linton to give you a look-in."

And he quitted the dormitory.

The Shell were grimly silent. Even the most ardent of the raggers had had enough; and that night there was no more ragging for Buck Finn.

CHAPTER 10.

The Scarecrow.

BUCK FINN took his place with the rest of the Shell in the class-room the next day. Mr. Linton, the Form-master, was very considerate to him, as a new boy from a far-off country, who could not be expected to know all the manners and customs of an English school.

But the boy from Arizona was falling into his place wonderfully well. He had a quick brain and a retentive memory, and he had studied hard in his native place to prepare for his coming to England.

He proved to be fully the equal of most fellows in the Shell, though in some points he was found wanting.

After morning school, when the boys went out into the quad before dinner, Buck Finn was on his guard. He knew that the raggers were not yet over, and he was on the look-out for some fresh attempts on the part of Gore & Co. to put him in his place.

But the raggers were leaving him severely alone at present. Their holding off seemed suspicious to Buck Finn, and he "guessed" that something was behind it, but he could not "guess" what it was.

There had been a thaw, and the snow was gone from the quad save for a little heap here and there. Some of the Third Form espied Buck strolling in the quad, and, of course, the thought at once occurred to them of making a good use of what snow the thaw had left.

"You take his left ear, Jimmy," said Wally, "I'll take his right. Gibby can go for his nose."

"Right-ho!" said Jameson and Gibson.

And this division of labour having been arranged, the three heroes of the Third scraped up handfuls of snow, with a considerable quantity of mud in it, and kneaded squashy snowballs.

But Buck Finn, though he was not looking towards them, seemed to be able to see them all the same. He made a sudden stride towards the infants, and they paused, with the snowballs in their hands, looking rather sheepish.

"I guess you'll drop those snowballs," said Buck Finn.

Wally snorted. He might be in the Third, and the American junior in the Shell, but Wally wasn't going to take orders from anybody under a Sixth Form prefect.

"Then you guess wrong," he replied. "Just guess again."

"Drop those snowballs!"

"Bats!"

Buck Finn said no more. He changed from words to actions. He grasped Wally by the collar, and Jameson by the shoulder. With surprising strength for one so sparely built, he brought their heads together with a bump.

"Ow!"

That monosyllable escaped simultaneously from Jameson and D'Arcy minor. Their snowballs dropped to the ground, and they rubbed their heads. Gibson hurled his ball, and it squashed over Finn's jacket. The next moment Wally and Jameson were plumped down in the muddy quad, and Curly Gibson was laid sprawling across them.

Buck Finn walked away towards the house with his hands in his pockets. His jacket was splashed with snow and mud, and he was going to change it; but his assailants were in a far worse state. They rolled on the muddy ground, and scrambled up dirty and wet from head to foot.

Jameson and Gibson glared at D'Arcy minor.

"You young ass!" growled Jameson. "Why couldn't you let him alone?"

"Clumsy duffer!" said Wally. "Don't blame me. If you two had backed me up properly, we'd have snatched him baldheaded!"

"I'm smothered!"

"So am I!"

"Serve you jolly well right!" said Wally, walking away.

He made a mental resolution on the spot that he would be a little more careful in dealing with the new chum from Arizona.

Buck Finn went up to change his clothes. He looked into his box in the Shell dormitory in the School House, and his face changed. The box had been visited by the raggers, that was evident. Some of the things were gone, and other things were rumpled up, the contents of the collar-boxes turned out, neckties and bootlaces, and socks and handkerchiefs wildly mixed up.

"The pesky scallywags!" muttered Buck Finn. "Where's my other jacket? And the trousers, and the pesky boots? The rotters!"

He left the dormitory. He met the Terrible Three in the hall below, and stopped to ask them about his things.

"Wherefore that worried look, Finny?" asked Tom Merry.

"Some galoot has been raiding my box."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Was it you chaps?"

"Not a bit of it!" said Monty Lowther. "We should never have nerve enough to lay hands upon the belongings of a free American citizen."

"Oh, don't be funny! Do you know where my dads are?"

"Haven't the faintest idea. Better ask Gore."

Finn walked away, leaving the chums of the Shell laughing. He looked round for Gore, and a little later the sound of laughter in the woodshed drew him in that direction.

Gore & Co. were leaving the shed. They grinned hugely as Finn came up. Wally was with them, and, of course, Pongo.

Buck Finn glanced at them with a dark brow, which only made the jokers laugh louder.

"Have you taken my clothes?" demanded Finn.

"Ha, ha, ha," roared Gore.

"Look here, you rotters—"

"Oh, don't ask it," implored Wally. "You ought to shove on a mask or something, you know, before you ask people to look there."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Buck Finn looked and felt greatly inclined to rush at the crowd of them, but he thought better of it. He passed them, and Gore & Co. walked off laughing, and the American junior looked into the shed.

Then he uttered an exclamation:

"By gum!"

There were his clothes! Gore and his friends had fastened up several broomhandles and other sticks, and arranged Buck Finn's clothes on them. The arms were stuck out, and the whole thing was evidently an imitation of a scarecrow, and after the first moment Buck Finn could not help grinning as he looked at it.

On the wall close by the figure were scratched the words:

"BUCK UP, FINNY!"

It was a pun, of course, upon his name, and the youth from Arizona grinned at it. But Gore, who was never good-natured, had carried the joke further than any of the better sort of the juniors would have carried it. He had splashed the clothes with mud, and torn them in several places to render the likeness to a scarecrow more striking. And the clothes, now that Finn had found them, were not likely to be of much use to him again.

"The pesky galoots!" muttered the junior from Arizona. "I guess I'll take their advice, and buck up. And here goes!"

And Finn, with a vengeful light in his eyes, went to look for Gore.

CHAPTER 11.

Fairly in It.

GORE was in his study. He was still grinning over the joke on the American junior. But he had another reason for looking pleased, also.

There was a pie on the table before him, and Gore had given himself a liberal helping. Gore was usually flush of money, and he frequently eked out the school fare with supplies from the tuckshop in this way. He liked Dame Taggles's pies, and he was enjoying this one all to himself. There were a good many fellows who would have been willing to join him, but Gore thought he could manage that pie alone. He intended to try, anyway.

Mellish, of the Fourth, looked in at the door. He had seen Gore in the tuckshop, and he was on the look-out for crumbs from the rich man's table.

"I say, Gore old chap," said Mellish, quite affectionately, "that looks like a ripping pie."

"It is ripping," said Gore.

"It's a jolly big one, too!"

"Yes, it's a good size."

"Half an hour to dinner yet," said Mellish agreeably.

Gore nodded.

"Yes, that's why I've got a feed, Mellish."

"I suppose you don't want me to help you?" suggested Mellish, coming to the point at last.

"Not at all, dear boy. I fancy I can manage this alone."

"I'm jolly hungry."

"So am I."

"Don't be a mean pig, you know!"

"Looking for a thick ear?" asked Gore, half-rising from the table. Mellish did not reply to the question, but scowled and scuttled off down the passage.

Gore settled down to his plate again, but another interruption came. Skimpole shared that study with Gore, and Skimpole looked in. His eyes glistened behind his big spectacles as he saw the pie.

"Dear me," he remarked, "that is indeed a tempting comestible, Gore!"

"No good your being tempted," grunted Gore; "there's none to be given away."

"I can get a plate, Gore, if you would like to bestow upon me a portion of that exceedingly nice pie."

"Go and eat coke!"

"I consider that suggestion frivolous in the extreme. It is impossible to regard coke seriously as an article of diet. Besides, I am hungry, and I should greatly prefer a portion of that pie. As a sincere Socialist, I am bound to consider that I have a right to anything I happen to want."

"Get out!"

"I must decline to get out of my own study. If I may make a suggestion, it would be best for us to content ourselves with moderate helpings of the pie, and give the remainder to the poor. That is the true Socialism. Does that suggestion commend itself to you, Gore?"

"No, it doesn't!" roared Gore. "Get out!"

"Really, Gore—"

Gore jumped up and seized an ebony ruler. Skimpole skipped out of the study and ran. It was his own study, as much as it was Gore's, but the bully of the Shell was not in a mood to be reasoned with then.

Skimpole's footsteps died away, and Gore grinned and sat down again.

"This is all right," he murmured, as he started on a second helping of the pie; "if only I'm not interrupted by a lot more of those rotters! It's good!"

He was too busy to hear a faint footfall, or to see a face that was peering in at the door. It was that of Buck Finn.

The youth from Arizona had tracked the ragger to his study, and he was on the trail for vengeance. He grinned as he saw how Gore was occupied. Silent as a cat, he entered the study on tiptoe.

Buck Finn was too intent upon his own business to have any eyes for the fact that he was himself observed. As it happened, Dr. Holmes, the Head of St. Jim's, was passing along the corridor, and the stealthy movements of the junior caught his eyes and amazed him.

The Head came along the passage quickly, wondering what was going forward.

Buck Finn, without the slightest suspicion that the eye of authority was upon him, crept into the study.

Gore did not look round. He was busy, and he had just filled his plate to the brim with rich gravy. Slowly and cautiously Buck Finn stole behind him and stretched out his hand over Gore's head.

It was at this moment that the Head reached the door.

Buck Finn's hand descended upon Gore's head behind, and the bully of the Shell gave a startled yelp. Before he could do more than that, his head was squashed down into his plate and his features disappeared into the gravy.

Squelch!

"Dear me!" gasped the Head.

Gore struggled wildly, but the grip on the back of his head held his face down well in the plate. He made a tremendous jump to escape, and the table went flying from him, and dish and plate went crashing to the floor.

Gore leaped up, his face streaming with pie. Buck Finn looked at him and roared with laughter.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You beast!" shrieked Gore, who was too blinded by pie to see the amazed doctor standing at the door regarding the scene. "You hound! I'll—I'll—I'll—"

"Ha, ha, ha! This beats cock-fighting!" roared Finn. "It beats taking a fellow's clothes and making 'em up into a scarecrow!"

"I'll—I'll—I'll—"

"Dear me!"

This time the boys heard the doctor's exclamation. Buck Finn swung round, turning rather red.

"Boys!"

Gore wiped the pie from his eyes and nose. He was nearly stuttering with rage, but the presence of the Head prevented him from hurling himself upon Finn.

"Dear me," said the Head, smiling in spite of himself, "you should not have done this, Finn! It is a—very rough joke. If I did not gather that it is done in return for a trick played on you by Gore, I should punish you."

"Yes, sir," said Finn meekly.

"As it is, you may go. Gore, you should reflect that it is neither kind nor hospitable to play practical jokes upon a new-comer to the school, and that it sometimes leads to unfortunate results for the practical joker himself."

Gore could not speak for fury. Finn grinned and left the study, and the Head shook his finger solemnly at George Gore.

"Remember my words, Gore! You should not play tricks upon a new boy, and, under the circumstances, I

cannot sympathise with you at all." And the Head's gown rustled away down the passage.

Gore glared. When the Head was safely out of hearing, he said things—expressive and emphatic things that would have gained him a sound flogging if the Head had been able to hear them.

CHAPTER 12.

Arthur Augustus Catches It.

"I SAY, deah boys—"

"Shut up," growled Blake, "he'll hear you!"

"Undah the cires, Blake, it is imposa to shut up, as I have somethin' important to explain to you. I think—"

"Don't start telling whoppers."

"I wefuse to have any statement of mine wegardad as a whoppah, and I wegard your wemark as extwemely widiculous. I think—"

"No, you don't—you can't!"

"I think," repeated the swell of St. Jim's with emphasis, "that undah the cires, it would be fah bettah to stop this waggin'!"

"Cheese it."

"I decline to cheese it!"

"He'll hear you, you shrieking ass!"

"I wefuse to be chawactewised as a shwiekin' ass!"

Blake grunted. He was strongly inclined to take the swell of the School House by the throat and jam his head against the brick wall. Only the thought that by doing so he would cause D'Arcy to make more noise than ever restrained him.

The chums of Study No. 6 were preparing a pleasant little surprise for Buck Finn. It was dusk in the quadrangle, and Blake, Herries, Digby, and D'Arcy were crouching behind an angle of the chapel wall, waiting for the American junior to come by.

Reilly had made a little wager with Finn that he could not walk as far as the chapel rails and back to the gym in two minutes. Buck Finn had willingly taken on the wager. He was certain that his long legs could cover the distance in far less time.

Reilly, of course, was acting in concert with the chums of No. 6. Finn would come swinging swiftly round the corner, and they were ready for him. Blake had borrowed a pail of whitewash from Taggles' lodge. He had borrowed it without asking the permission of Taggles, it is needless to add. About that time Taggles was looking for his whitewash, and his voice was audible in angry tones round about the spot whence it had disappeared. But that was far from the chapel, and the chums of the Fourth could not hear him—nor would they have heeded him if they had heard.

If Finn passed that corner without being on his guard, he would be transformed into a ghostly object at one swoop of the pail. The Fourth-Formers were chuckling over their kindly intentions, when all of a sudden Arthur Augustus started raising difficulties.

That was not at all unusual with D'Arcy, who usually chose a critical and anxious moment for beginning an argument. Blake let the swell of St. Jim's have the last word, in the hope of getting him to shut up, but D'Arcy was not to be rung off so easily.

"I beg that you will pay a little attention to my we-marks," he said. "I think—"

Digby made an anxious gesture.

"I believe I can hear him coming!"

"All the more reason why I should get on, then. You see, I'm beginnin' to think that this waggin' has gone fah enough. Tom Mewwy says—"

"Blow Tom Merry!"

"Certainly, deah boys, if you like; but he says that it's hardly the thing to keep on waggin' a stwagah in the land, and I for one begin to wegard it as wathah bad form, you know!"

"Rats!"

"If you say 'Wats' to me, Blake—"

"I didn't say 'Wats,' I said 'Rats,'" said Blake gruffly.

"Now shut up, or I shall bang your napper against the wall next!"

"I uttably wefuse to have my nappah banged against the wall!" said D'Arcy, with dignity. "What I was goin' to say is—"

"Shut up!"

"Nothin' of the sort. I wegard this waggin' as wathah bad form, and I must, as a gentleman, wefuse to have any furthah hand in it."

"Don't, then; but shut up!"

"I must withdwaw fwom the entire pwocceedin's."

"Travel off, then!"

"Good!" said Herries. "Buzz off, and we can work it without you! It will come easier without you to help!"

"Weally, Hewwies—"



"Buzz off! What are you hanging about for?"

"Upon reflection, it is impos for me to leave you chaps to be guilty of bad form, eithah. I must wemain and persuade you to give up the ideah."

Jack Blake breathed hard through his nose.

"Do you want to be found dead one of these days, Gussy?" he asked.

"Certainly not, deah boy."

"Then buzz off, quick!"

"I decline to buzz off. As a membah of Study No. 6, I wefuse to be mixed up in any bad form. As a fwiend to you fellows, I must see that you are not led into any bad form by the exubewance of youthful spiwits," said D'Arcy, in quite a fatherly manner. "Pway give up the ideah and come along."

"Quiet; I can hear footsteps."

Digby peeped round the corner and popped back excitedly.

"It's Finn—he's coming."

"Sh! Not a sound!"

"Weally, deah boys—"

"Silence!"

"Undah the cires, it is impos for me to be silent—"

"Will you shut up?"

"I must wegwet that I am compelled to wefuse to shut up—"

"Hallo! Who's that?" came a voice in the gloom.

The footsteps ceased. Buck Finn had evidently heard the voice of the swell of the School House round the corner.

Blake gave a growl, and caught up the pail of whitewash and rushed forward. He did not mean Finn to escape.

D'Arcy sprang after him and grasped at his arm.

"Weally, Blake, I entweat you— Owowowowowow!"

D'Arcy broke off in a wail of anguish.

Blake had raised the pail to swoop the contents at the shadowy form of Buck Finn, and D'Arcy's grasp on his arm had dragged it aside, and changed the direction of the torrent of whitewash.

Down it swept, in a blinding stream, full upon the head of the swell of St. Jim's. In a second D'Arcy was streaming white from head to foot.

"My—my hat!" gasped Blake.

"Ow! Oh, bai Jove! Ow!"

A yell of laughter came from Buck Finn.

It was gloomy in the dusky quad, but he could see the white-streaming form of D'Arcy, and he guessed at once what had happened.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Blake grasped the pail, to give Finn what little might be left in it. But the American junior promptly vanished. His laugh rang back mockingly from the dusk:

"Ha, ha, ha!"

CHAPTER 13.

A Friend in Need.

ARTHUR AUGUSTUS blinked through the whitewash that was streaming over his face. He looked down at his clothes; they were as white as a miller's. Jacket and waistcoat, trousers and boots, all were snowy white.

"Bai Jove!"

Blake, Herries, and Digby stared at him, and burst into a roar. Buck Finn had escaped, but Arthur Augustus had caught it, and the change in the destination of the white-wash struck the chums of Study No. 6 as funny.



Buck Finn looked down at the villagers with perfect coolness from above. "I guess I'm pretty comfy here," he drawled. "I'm staying."

"Well, of all the duffers!" said Blake, wiping his eyes.
 "Ha, ha, ha!" shouted Digby. "Are you fond of white-wash, Gussy?"
 "I wegard you——"
 "Ha, ha, ha!"
 "There is nothin' to laugh at in this howwid accident. I wegard you as a set of beasts. My clothes are attahly wined!"
 "Ha, ha, ha!"
 "I am in a feahful state——"
 "Ha, ha, ha!"

Arthur Augustus, speechless with indignation, marched off. Whitewash was running down his neck, dripping from his clothes, and squelching from his boots as he walked. Seldom had the swell of the School House found himself in such a terrible state.

His only idea was to get cleaned, but as he walked off hurriedly towards the School House he remembered what a strange sight he would present if anyone saw him in the light. He didn't want to run the gauntlet of a hundred pairs of curious eyes. He paused ere he entered the radius of light cast by the School House windows. A voice, singing a snatch of an Irish song, came to his ears, with the sound of footsteps.

"Have you heard of the widow Malone, ochone,
 Who lived in the town of Athlone, all alone——"

"Weilly!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus eagerly. Reilly had been a sharer in the plot for whitewashing Finn, and D'Arcy naturally expected help from him. Reilly heard his name called, and looked round. But D'Arcy had forgotten that his appearance, comical in the light, was calculated to be startling in the dark. Reilly gave one look at the figure, looking like a ghost through the gloom, and then uttered a yell and took to his heels.

"Weally, Weilly——"
 "Ochone! Sure and it's a ghost! Ochone!"
 "Bai Jove! What a feahful ass! Weally, Weilly——"
 But Reilly was gone.
 Arthur Augustus paused anxiously to think. How was he to get into the School House without attracting a crowd? If somebody would fetch out a coat and a hat for him—— He turned back towards chapel to find his chums, but they were gone. He could hear Blake's laugh ringing from the direction of the lighted gym., and he had not the slightest doubt that Jack was retailing the story to an appreciative audience.

"Bai Jove!" murmured Arthur Augustus, in great distress. "What the dooce am I to do? I can't march into the house in this state; I shall be wideduled howwidly."
 "My—my 'at! Wot's that?"
 It was the voice of Taggles, the porter.
 Taggles was looking for his pail of whitewash, having guessed that some of the juniors had removed it. He had just caught sight of the ghostly figure of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, and he stopped, his eyes nearly starting from his head.

"Oh, lor! The ghost!"
 "Pway don't be an ass, Taggy, deah boy——"
 "What—what—what is it?"
 "Weally, Taggles——"
 "Jiminy!" said Taggles. "It's Master D'Arcy!"
 "Yaas, wathah!"
 "A-playin' ghost, and a-frightenin' of honest men," said the school porter indignantly. "I'll report yer!"
 "I am not playin' ghost; this is howwid whitewash——"
 "My whitewash!" roared Taggles.
 "Yaas, wathah, but——"
 "My whitewash! You're the young himp who's collared my whitewash to play ghost with!"

D'Arcy sniffed.
 "Weally, Taggles, you can hardly suspect me of delibewately wuinin' my clothes with this howwid stuff——"
 "My whitewash! I'll report yer!"
 "I am extremely sowwy that——"
 "My blessed whitewash! Kim on!"
 Taggles grasped the junior by the shoulder. Arthur Augustus wriggled.
 "Pway welease me, Taggles——"
 "Kim on!"
 "Can I come and clean myself down in your lodge?"
 The school-porter simply snorted.
 "Can you? Har, har! You collar my whitewash to play

ghost, and then you want to clean yourself down in my lodge. Har, har! Kim on!"
 "Where are you dwaggin' me, you howwid wuffian?"
 "You're goin' to the 'Ead."
 "Weally——"
 "Kim on!"
 "I uttally wefuse to go to the Head in this state!"
 exclaiming Arthur Augustus, struggling violently. "Welease me, you wottah! I wefuse to appeah before Doctah Holmes in such an extremely disaweputable state."
 "Kim on!"
 "I wefuse! If you wish to weport the mattah, you can wait till I have changed my clothes. If you do not immediately welease my shouldah, Taggles, I shall lose my tempah and stwike you!"
 "Kim on!"
 "I wepeat that if you do not welease me——"
 "Kim on! Wastin' my whitewash, and givin' me a 'unt for it!" said Taggles indignantly. "That whitewash was worth two shillings."
 "I shall have gweat pleasure in wefundin' the two shillin's, if that is all that is the mattah, Taggles, and I will make it thwee if you let me clean myself down in your lodge."

The school-porter softened at once. As a matter of fact, he was only working up to a tip all the time, though the swell of St. Jim's had been unaware of that fact.

"Well, kim on," he said; and he changed his direction. Gladly enough Arthur Augustus gained the shelter of the porter's lodge.

There he cleaned off the greater part of the whitewash, but what remained was quite sufficient to turn him into a ghostly figure in the dark; and there was evidently nothing for it but to get a coat or change his clothes.

A grinning face looked in at the window of the porter's lodge.

"I guess you'll want some new duds."
 Arthur Augustus turned his eyeglass upon Buck Finn.
 "Yaas, wathah!" he remarked. "This is most unfortunate. I wathah wish I had let Blake thwow the stuff ovah you now, deah boy."

"I kinder guessed what was on," said Buck Finn. "You'll never get that stuff off. Shall I lend you my coat to get into the house?"

"Bai Jove, I shall be feahfully obliged, you know."
 "Come on, then!"
 D'Arcy quitted the porter's lodge, and Buck Finn jerked off his coat and held it while the swell of St. Jim's slipped it on.

Arthur Augustus buttoned it up round his chin, with a sigh of relief.

"That's awfully good of you," he remarked.
 Buck Finn grinned.

"Oh, one good turn deserves another, you know."
 "Yaas, wathah, but this is a gweat welief to me. Ftwon this moment, deah boy, I am stwenuously opposed to any furthah waggin'."

The American junior chuckled. He had held his own pretty well so far with the ragers. But D'Arcy was in earnest.

"I wegard you as a decent sort," he said. "I shall stwenuously oppose the waggahs now. I should be glad if you would come for a little stwoll with me on Saturday, Finnay, and I will show you wound the countwy."

"I guess I'll come."
 And Arthur Augustus entered the School House, and slipped upstairs, the coat concealing his curious appearance, and he was soon busy bathing and changing his clothes.

CHAPTER 14.

A Pull All Together.

ARTHUR AUGUSTUS D'ARCY had made up his mind on the point, and he kept to it, and he argued Blake & Co. into taking the same view.

"You see, deah boys, it's hardly the propah thing to do, to wag a stwagah in the land," he remarked. "I know this American chap is wathah cheeky, and wants sittin' on to some extent, but weally, this waggin' is goin' too fah."

Jack Blake only grunted.
 "Besides, I have now taken him up as a fwiend," said D'Arcy. "I pwesume that no gentleman pwesent wishes to wag a fwiend of mine."

The gentlemen in Study No. 6 grunted.
 "Anybody waggin' a fwiend of mine will have to make up his mind to dwop my fwiendship," said D'Arcy, in a tone of finality.

"Oh, if you put it like that," said Blake solemnly, "of course, there's no alternative but to stop the ragging!"
 "Of course," said Digby.

ANSWERS

NEXT
THURSDAY:

"A LAD OF THE LEAGUE."

A Tale of Tom Merry & Co.
at St. Jim's.

Arthur Augustus beamed.

"I am vewy glad to see you look at it in the pwopah light, deah boys," he said. "In a case of doubt, you know, you can always wely upon me to tell you what's the pwopah thing to do."

"What should we do without you?" said Blake. "Nothing to grin at in dull times—"

"Weally, Blake—"

"We should have to start keeping a monkey in the study, or something—"

"I wefuse to continue a fwivolous discussion," said D'Arcy, with dignity; and he walked out of the study, leaving his chums chuckling.

He met the Terrible Three downstairs, and proceeded to explain his new views to them. They listened solemnly.

"Don't you agree with me?" asked D'Arcy. "You see, it's hardly the pwopah thing to do, you know."

"Yes, rather," said Tom Merry. "It's beasty bad form, isn't it?"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"And when you chased Finn into our study, and ragged him there, you were guilty of fearfully ungentlemanly behaviour."

"Well, not exactly—"

"Regular hooliganism," said Monty Lowther.

"Weally, Lowthah—"

"Horrid!" said Manners. "Finn will think that Gussy was brought up in the New Cut."

"Weally, Mannahs—"

Tom Merry slapped the swell of St. Jim's on the shoulder. "I'm jolly glad to see you improving," he remarked. "I must admit that you have been rather ungentlemanly, as you say so yourself—"

"Nothin' of the sort!"

"But if you mean to improve, I'll help you. There's nothing I like so much as helping you Fourth-Form kids to improve your manners."

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—"

"So buck up, Gussy, and you can depend upon us to help you, and point out little things, whenever we notice you getting out of hand in your manners."

They all looked at him for the moment with indignation, and then looked at him solemnly, and walked off, chuckling.

They were on the steps of the School House, and the chums of the Shell as they came out.

"How are you getting on?" asked Monty Lowther affably. "Do you find that St. Jim's is up to the mark of anything out in Arizona?"

"Some," said Buck Finn. "I guess I like the place, though there certainly are some funny freaks knocking about in it."

Manners giggled, and Lowther turned pink.

"What are you cackling at, Manners?" he asked politely.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, don't, old son; it's not music, you know. I say, Finny, I shouldn't wonder if you are looking for a chance of getting rolled head first down these steps."

"I guess I'm ready to be rolled."

"Then I'll jolly soon—"

"Hold on!" said Tom Merry. "Remember the instructions we have just received from the one and only. No more wagging."

"Oh, don't mind me!" said Buck Finn.

"Don't you be too jolly independent," said Tom Merry.

"When Gore & Co. get hold of you in a quiet corner, you'll want help."

"I guess not. You can go and eat pills."

"Eh?"

"And drink patent medicines."

Tom Merry turned red.

"Now don't you be too funny, Finny, or I shall start on you myself," he said warningly.

Buck Finn chuckled.

"I guess I could wipe up the ground with a milksop," he remarked.

Tom Merry's eyes gleamed.

"Then I'll jolly well give you a chance!" he exclaimed.

"Come over to the gym—"

"No, you won't," said Lowther. "If I mustn't, you mustn't."

"Look here—"

"Rats! Come on! Remember the instructions of the one and only!" grinned Lowther. "You're not going to fight."

Tom Merry gave in. He gave Buck Finn an expressive glance, and walked on with his chums.

"He must have seen Miss Fawcett's patent medicines!" grinned Manners. "And he's set you down as a chap who lives on 'em, Tommy."

"Oh, I don't care!"

The Terrible Three were chatting under the elms, when

there was a patter of feet, and Arthur Augustus came up. The swell of the School House looked a little out of breath, and his eyeglass was dangling at the end of its cord.

"Study on fire?" asked Lowther kindly.

"Certainly not, Lowthah! I was goin' to ask you if you had seen Buck Finn?"

"Yes, met him at the station the day he came."

"Pway, don't be funny! I mean, where is he?"

"He was on the steps of the School House a quarter of an hour ago."

"Bai Jove, then, I missed him! I want to speak to him vewy particularly. I have been thinkin' ovah what you said, Tom Mewwy, and I have come to the conclusion that I owe Buck Finn an apology, you know."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"It is no laughin' mattah for the new chap to wegard me as havin' acted in an ungentlemanly mannah. I am supwised at you, Tom Mewwy. I should be glad to know where he is, so that I can tender an apology at once."

"Better ask further on," grinned Lowther. "Hallo, here's Reilly, and he looks as if he'd seen a joke. What are you cackling at, young Belfast?"

"Faith, and it's funny!" said Reilly.

"Are you alluding to your face?"

"Sure, and I'm alludin' to the omadhaun from Arizona. Gore and his lot have got him in the woodshed."

"Hallo!" said Tom Merry. "More ragging, I suppose."

"Faith, and they're going to anoint him with tar. Ha, ha, ha!"

"I say, this is too bad!" exclaimed Tom Merry. "Gore ought to draw a line somewhere. I think we'd better take a hand."

"Yaas, wathah! Undah the cires, I considah that we ought to chip in, you know, and wescue the pwisonah."

And Arthur Augustus started off towards the woodshed.

The Terrible Three followed quickly, and Reilly joined them. They reached the shed, and heard a terrific din proceeding from within. The door was crammed with juniors watching the proceedings.

Buck Finn was in the hands of the enemy.

He had suddenly been rushed in the quad by a crowd of them, and whisked into the shed before he knew what was happening.

Gore was dipping a tarbrush into a pot, while the youth from Arizona was held in a firm grip by Sharp and Gale and Norris.

The bully of the Shell was grinning gleefully.

Even Buck Finn looked a little daunted at the prospect of being anointed with the horribly sticky mess on the tarbrush.

"Look here," he said, "I guess you'd better go slow. If you touch me with that stuff there will be big ructions, I warn you."

"He's going to thrash the lot of us," said Sharp, in pretended alarm. "Hold him tight before he wades in and whips the whole school."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Buck Finn made a desperate effort to tear himself loose. There was a struggle, and the crowd swayed to and fro.

Tom Merry forced his way into the doorway.

"Here, hold on! Gore—"

"Get out!" shouted Gore. "Mind your own business."

"I tell you—"

"Get out!"

And his friends took up the cry.

"Get out! Leave us alone!"

And Tom Merry was hustled back.

But the momentary diversion had given Buck Finn his chance.

He wrenched himself loose from the hands of the juniors, and made a bound to escape.

"Hold him!" roared Gore.

The juniors crowded to intercept the American youth's path to the door, but the window was near at hand.

Buck Finn made a spring towards it, and plunged through head first.

Gore gave a yell.

"Collar him!"

The ragers sprang after the American.

Half a dozen hands grasped his ankles and legs as he plunged through the window-frame, and dragged upon him.

Finn clutched at the frame of the window, and kicked and scrambled. Tom Merry and Co. rushed to his aid.

"Pull!" shouted Tom Merry. "All together."

The Terrible Three laid hold of Finn by the hands, arms, shoulders. D'Arcy and Reilly grasped him, too. They pulled, and inside the shed Gore & Co. pulled.

"Ow!" gasped Buck Finn.

Gore & Co. hung on like grim death.

CHAPTER 15.

Buck Finn Dresses for the Occasion.

"OW! Oh!"
Buck Finn gasped breathlessly. He felt as if he would be pulled into two pieces by the rival parties. Gore & Co. had no intention of letting go his legs, while the Terrible Three were pulling as hard as they could to get him through the window.

"Ow! Hold on!"
"We're holding on," said Tom Merry encouragingly.

"We'll have you out."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Go it, kids!"

"Hold him!"

"Bai Jove, he's coming!"

"You, you'll have my arms out!" gasped Buck Finn.

"Nevah mind, deah boy, the west of you is almost certain to follow."

"You—you—ass!"

"Bai Jove, I wegard that as wathah ungwateful. Still, we'll do our best. Pull like anythin', deah boys. I can feel him comin'."

"Ha, ha! It's his sleeve that's coming."

It was!

D'Arcy reeled back, with Finn's sleeve in his grasp, and sat down on the ground. The sleeve had come off.

"Ow! Bai Jove!"

"Come on!" shouted Tom Merry. "Lend a hand here!"

"Pway excuse me a moment. I am out of bweath, and the shock has thown me into quite a fluttah."

"Ass! Buck up!"

"I wefuse to be called an ass."

"Ow!" panted Finn. "Ow-w-w-wow!"

He struggled in the little window, and kicked out. His right foot came loose from Gore's grip, and caught Gore under the chin.

The bully of the Shell gave a howl, and collapsed. Buck Finn kicked out again, and Mellish roared with pain as a heavy boot clumped on his chest.

That was Finn's chance.

The grasp upon his legs had relaxed, and the pull on his arms was dragging him through the window. He tore himself loose at last, and went plunging through, and fell in a heap to the ground with those who had pulled him out.

"My hat!" gasped Tom Merry.

The rescuers were on their feet in a moment.

Tom Merry dragged up Buck Finn, and rushed him off as Gore & Co. came pouring out of the shed.

"Come on, kid!"

And for once the independent youth from Arizona obeyed orders.

"Bai Jove!" gasped D'Arcy, as they stopped at last in the quad. "That was a nawwow shave for you, Finny."

"I guess I'll make Gore sit up," said Buck Finn. "And I'm much obliged to you chaps."

"Yes; considering that some of us are milksops," agreed Tom Merry cheerfully.

Finn turned red.

"I—I'm sorry I said that," he replied. "I guess I was mistaken there. But I'm blessed if I ever saw a chap taking so many patent medicines before."

Tom Merry laughed as he walked away. He did not feel inclined to explain. Arthur Augustus tapped the American youth on the shoulder.

"You wemembah we are goin' for a little stwoll to-morrow," he remarked. "It's a half-holiday here on Saturday, you know, same as on Wednesday, the day you came. The weathah looks like bein' wathah good, and I shall be able to show you the village and the countwyside."

Buck Finn nodded.

"I guess I shall like to have a look round," he said. "I'll put on the best duds I've got to do you credit."

"Vewy good. I am glad to see you have such a wegard for good form," said Arthur Augustus beamingly. "It will be a pleasure to take you wound."

Gore was looking sulky for the rest of that day. He would have been glad of a chance to corner the new boy again, but Buck Finn had profited by his experience, and he was too wary.

Neither was there any further ragging in the Shell dormitory.

The chums of Study No. 6 having given up the rag, the Fourth Form paid no more nocturnal visits to the Shell quarters. And in his own dormitory, Tom Merry's influence was enough to put down the rag.

Gore would have kept it up; but Tom Merry spoke plainly on the point

"Nuff's as good as a feast," he said. "You can chuck it now, Gore, unless you are looking for trouble."

At which Gore scowled fiercely.

"You're not going to bully me, Tom Merry," he declared.

Tom Merry nodded.

"I'm not going to bully you, Gore, but I'm going to wipe up the floor with you if there's any more ragging in this dormitory."

And Gore growled and gave in.

Dormitory raggings were over, but in other quarters the new boy had to be still on his guard. But the curious thing was that all the raggings had failed to make the least change in the manners and customs of Buck Finn. He was just as cool, and had just as much nerve as at the start, and, upon the whole, he seemed to rather enjoy a state of warfare than otherwise.

The following day, after morning school, Jack Blake looked round in vain for the swell of St. Jim's. The weather was fine for once, and the juniors were turning out for football practice. But Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was nowhere to be seen.

Jack Blake ran him to earth at last in Study No. 6.

The swell of St. Jim's was standing in front of the tall glass, surveying his reflection in it with much satisfaction.

He really looked very nice.

He was dressed in beautifully-fitting garments, and his waistcoat was a dream of colour, the crease in his trousers was absolutely perfect, and his necktie was a triumph.

"Bai Jove!" murmured D'Arcy. "I weally think that's wathah decent!"

Blake chuckled.

"Is that the rig you're getting up for football practice?" he asked.

D'Arcy turned round. He picked up a glossy silk hat, and began to polish it.

"Football pwactice!" he said. "I am not playin' football this aftahnoon, deah boy."

"What are you doing, then, duffer?"

"I object to the word duffah, Blake. As a mattah of fact, I am goin' to take the new fellow wound and show him the country."

"Oh! Better come and play footer."

"Undah the cirms, it will be imposib' to play footer. Pway do you think this purple tie would be bettah? Blake—Weally, it is wathah wude of Blake to walk away while I am speakin' to him."

Arthur Augustus thought out the problem of the ties, and finally decided to keep on the purple one. Having come to this momentous decision, he donned his silk topper, and sallied forth from the study.

There was no doubt that Arthur Augustus D'Arcy looked a perfect picture. As he went down the corridor, feeling pretty well satisfied with himself, towards the Shell passage, he gave a sudden start. What appeared to be a curious caricature of himself was approaching him.

"Bai Jove!" gasped D'Arcy.

It was Buck Finn.

The American youth had said that he would dress in his best and do his friend credit, and he had kept his word.

But the Arizonian youth had not come to St. Jim's fully provided with articles of attire in the D'Arcy style.

His Eton suit did not fit him well, appearing to be mainly composed of elbows and knees. His boots were large, and far from shapely. He had borrowed a pair of spats from Lowther, but they did not fit his boots, and the effect of them could not be said to be elegant. He had obtained the loan of a fancy waistcoat from Lefevre, of the Fifth, but it was three or four sizes too large for him. He had donned a high collar—also borrowed, and his neck was twisted to a most uncomfortable angle. Added to these attractions were a pair of gloves too large for him, a necktie a little on one side, and a gold chain across his fancy waistcoat that might have been made of anything but gold. But the crowning beauty was an eyeglass which was jammed uncomfortably into his eye.

Arthur Augustus looked at Buck Finn, and Buck Finn grinned at Arthur Augustus.

The youth from Arizona was evidently well pleased with himself.

"Shake, pard!" he exclaimed. "I-guess this get-up licks creation!"

"Bai Jove!" gasped D'Arcy.

"Like it?" asked Finn, with a downward glance at his attire. "Pretty good—eh?"

"Eer—aw—ah—yaas, wathah!"

"I guessed I'd be a bit fashionable this time, though I don't over-dress as a rule," said Finn. "I wanted to do you credit."

"Ya-a-a-as."

"Are you ready?"
 "Er—aw—weady—ya-a-a-as!"
 "Then come on, old chap. Give us your arm."
 And with his arm linked in Buck Finn's, the swell of St. Jim's sallied out into the quadrangle, and walked down to the gates.

CHAPTER 16.

Up a Tree.

ARTHUR AUGUSTUS and Buck Finn attracted considerable attention as they crossed the quad. Tom Merry & Co. looked at them, and Blake and Herries and Dig called out polite remarks from the footer ground. Figgins & Co. passed them, and took off their caps and bowed to the ground with great humility.

Buck Finn looked a little puzzled, and Arthur Augustus was very red.

"Seems to be something up somewhere," said Finn.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"I guess they're surprised to see a chap from Arizona dressing in such style," the American junior remarked. "They didn't reckon I could get out a rig like this."

"N-n-no; I suppose not."

"I never wore a plug hat in Arizona," remarked Finn, taking off his topper and glancing at it proudly, and then replacing it on his head. "I kinder guess that it suits me pretty well—eh?"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"And this giddy waistcoat—what do you think?"

"Wippin'!"

"And the chain—eh?"

"Nobbay!"

"To tell you a secret," said Finn, lowering his voice, "it isn't real gold. It's rolled gold."

Arthur Augustus shuddered.

"You don't say so."

"I guess I do, though; but it looks all serene—eh?"

"Oh, yaas, wathah!"

They left the gates of St. Jim's, and strolled down the road. It was pleasant to walk in the lane in the keen, winter afternoon.

Rylcombe village came in sight, with its ancient houses and inn, and the old church with its ivy-covered tower.

There was something very interesting to Buck Finn in the village. The old church had been built before the discovery of America by Christopher Columbus, for instance, and that fact was very curious to the boy from the Far West.

But if the village was interesting to Buck Finn, it was also a fact that Buck Finn was of considerable interest to the village.

Perhaps his gorgeous get-up attracted the attention of the village youths, most of whom were idle that afternoon, and many of whom were looking for trouble with St. Jim's boys to relieve the monotony of a holiday.

Craggs, Pilcher, and Grimes were drinking ginger-beer outside the Rylcombe Arms when the two juniors strolled past.

The three heroes of Rylcombe immediately exchanged glances, and Pilcher deftly jerked the remains of his lemonade from his glass in the direction of the juniors from St. Jim's.

There was a wail of anguish from Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

The ginger-beer had gone over his trousers, and the liquid left a stain on the cloth. The swell of St. Jim's turned his eyeglass upon the humorous Pilcher with a glare that ought to have frozen him on the spot. But the village youth only grinned.

"I guess I'd lick him," said Buck Finn.

Arthur Augustus pushed back his cuffs.

"Yaas, wathah! Pilchah—"

"Hallo!" said Pilcher affably. "Is that you, Gussy?"

"Yaas, it is I. I am goin' to give you a feashful thwashin'."

"Me!" exclaimed Pilcher, in amazement. "What's the matter?"

"You have wuined my twousahs!"

"Dear me!" said Pilcher, looking at Craggs and Grimes.

"I have ruined his trousers. What did I mean by ruining his trousers?"

"Pway take your jacket off!"

"Not in January, old fellow. Ask me in June."

And Grimes and Craggs chuckled.

Arthur Augustus walked up to the table.

"I am goin' to thwash you!" he exclaimed. "You have acted like a wude wuffian, but if you apologise I may look oveh the mattah."

Then the swell of St. Jim's uttered a howl as a cabbage-stump caught him behind the ear. A crowd of the village

lads were collecting, and one of them had quite rudely introduced that cabbage-stump into the discussion.

"Ow! You feashful wottah!"

Grimes jumped up.

"Collar the cad!" he shouted. "Duck 'em in the hosh-trough!"

The villagers gave a yell of approval.

"I guess not!" said Buck Finn, clenching his fists. "I'm not taking any duckings this weather. Go slow!"

"Collar them!"

"Bai Jove, if you appwoach me I shall give you a thwashin' all wound!" said D'Arcy. "On reflection, I will let you off, Pilchah."

"Thank you for nothing," grinned Pilcher. "Collar them!"

"I wogard you as a cad."

"Collar them!"

The village lads gathered round thickly. The juniors of St. Jim's put up their fists. Buck Finn had allowed his eyeglass to drop, but the monocle still adorned the eye of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

His eye gleamed through it with the light of battle.

"Come on, you wottahs!" he exclaimed.

"Hurrah! Duck them!"

"College cad! Collar 'em!"

"We've got to vamoose," whispered Buck Finn. "Come on, D'Arcy, make a run for it."

Arthur Augustus shook his head.

"Come on, I tell you, while we've got a chance."

"I am afraid it's impos., deah boy. It would be a sewious infwaction of my dig. for me to wun away."

Buck Finn snorted.

"Don't be an ass; they're a dozen to two. Besides, it isn't running away; it's a charge, and a running fight—see?"

"Yaas, wathah; that altahs the case. But undah any cires, I could not consent to wun away. I have no objection to a charge and a wunnin' fight."

"Come on, then!" whispered Finn. "Our cake will be dough if we hang on here."

"I'm weady."

The village lads were closing round in a thick circle, but hesitating to rush on. It was the two juniors who made the rush. They charged, and in a moment they were fighting desperately.

D'Arcy's silk hat went he knew not whither, and Finn's topper disappeared under foot. Hitting out right and left, they broke through the crowd and ran.

"After them!" roared Pilcher.

The village lads, shouting and whooping, dashed in pursuit. The juniors gained the lane leading to St. Jim's, and then Arthur Augustus paused.

"Bai Jove, I've dropped my toppah!"

"Come on!" yelled Buck Finn.

"Wats! I've lost my hat!"

"Come on!"

Finn ran straight on. D'Arcy hesitated a few moments, and then followed him.

The village boys were whooping only a few yards behind. Finn stumbled over a stone, and almost fell.

"Buck up, deah boy!" gasped D'Arcy. "Wun like any-thing!"

"We can't get away," muttered Buck. "I'm going up this tree."

"But weally—"

"You cut on, if you think you can get to the school, and tell Tom Merry."

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

Arthur Augustus went whizzing down the lane. He was a good runner, and he put his beef into it this time. Buck Finn shinned up the tree like a monkey, and gained a branch. There was a yell below as Pilcher, Craggs, Grimes & Co. halted.

CHAPTER 17.

The End of the Rag.

BUCK FINN clung to a branch, and looked down at the crowd of village fellows in the road. They roared and shook their fists. Although they did not really mean to hurt the junior, it was probable that he would have a rough time if he fell into their hands. He did not mean to risk it.

"Come down!" roared Pilcher.

"Yah! Come down!" shrieked Grimes.

"Boo, boo! Come down!" yelled the crowd.

Buck Finn looked at them with perfect coolness from above.

"I guess I'm pretty comfy here," he drawled. "I'm staying."

"Yah! College cad!"

"Oh, go and eat turnips!"

"Yah! Come down!"

"Come up and fetch me."

The villagers looked dubiously at the tree. The odds were greatly on their side, but it would not be easy work to climb the tree and fetch the American junior down.

Finn grinned at them mockingly.

"Come up and fetch me, you galoots! You daren't!"

Pilcher's reply was to catch hold of the gnarled trunk and drag himself upward. Craggs and Grimes speedily followed his example.

Buck Finn waited for them with perfect coolness.

As soon as Pilcher came within reach, Finn reached down and grasped him by the hair, and proceeded calmly to shake him loose from his hold on the tree.

Pilcher gasped with alarm.

"Hold on! I shall break somethin' if I fall! Cheese it!"

"Sorry, but you're going down."

"Ow! Leggo, and I'll go down."

"I guess you will."

Finn let go, and Pilcher climbed down. Craggs and Grimes descended too. There was no attraction in climbing the tree at the risk of breaking their necks.

Buck Finn burst into a laugh.

"Ha, ha, ha! You'd better chuck it up, I guess."

"Blowed if I will!" roared Pilcher. "Come down!"

"Rats!"

"Then we'll jolly well bombard you."

The villagers gave a shout. It was a good idea, and they were not slow to act upon it.

As it happened, the other side of the hedge was used as a refuse heap by many of the cottagers, and there were stumps and rotten potatoes, and old cans and kettles galore to be had for the trouble of picking them up.

In a few minutes the village lads were provided with missiles, and they gathered again under the tree with determined looks.

"Now, then," shouted Pilcher, "are you coming down?"

"I guess not."

"Then here goes. Fire!"

Whiz! whiz! rattle! bang! The missiles flew thick and fast. They crashed on the trunk, and on the branches, and Buck Finn had all his work cut out to avoid them.

Crash! crash! rattle! bang! whiz! The village boys warmed to the work.

Pilcher yelled as a tin-kettle hurled by Craggs dropped again on his head, and Craggs received a potato in the eye as he was looking up. But little accidents like these did not deter them. They kept up the fusillade merrily, and it grew warmer every moment.

The assailants were too busy to observe something which was quite plain to Buck, as he looked anxiously towards St. Jim's from his perch.

A number of juniors were streaming from the gates of the school, with D'Arcy at their head, and even at that distance Finn recognised Tom Merry and Blake and Figgins.

Rescue was at hand! But the village lads had their backs towards the school, and they were thinking only of their victim in the tree.

Crash! bang! rattle! crash!

"Rescue, St. Jim's!"

"Hurrah! Go for them!"

The sudden shout made Pilcher & Co. cease their fusillade, and turn quickly round. But they had no time to stand on their guard. Tom Merry & Co. were charging.

Right and left Pilcher & Co. were knocked by the charge of the juniors from St. Jim's.

They put up a very feeble fight, and in less than two minutes they were scattering in a dozen directions.

Tom Merry looked up at the junior in the tree with a laugh.

"You can come down, Finny."

"Yaas, wathah! Pway come down, deah boy."

Buck Finn slid down and dropped into the road.

"Jolly glad you came," he said; "it was getting warm."

"Yaas, wathah! I wan like anythin' to bring wescue," said Arthur Augustus. "Pway keep close to me till we get back to St. Jim's, Finny. I shall make it a point to look aftah you vewy carefully aftah this."

Buck Finn only grinned.

Somewhat disappointed by the briefness of the tussle with Pilcher & Co., the juniors returned to the school. Gore and his friends were lounging in the gateway. Gore had not come out to the fight, neither was he playing football. He preferred to spend the afternoon lounging about with his hands in his pockets. As the juniors came in, the bully of the Shell withdrew a hand from a pocket, with a cut orange in it. He squeezed it down Buck Finn's neck as the American passed him, and there was a yell of laughter from the raggars.

There was a yell from Buck Finn also.

"Ow! What's that?"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Gore.

"Bai Jove, what a disgustin' twick! Goah, you deserve to be wagged."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Buck Finn twisted his neck uncomfortably. It was not a cleanly trick, and it made him feel sticky and dirty. His eyes gleamed as he turned on Gore.

"I guess I've had about enough of this," he exclaimed.

"Put up your fists."

Gore laughed sneeringly.

"You young ass! I could knock you into the middle of next week."

"You'll have a chance, I reckon. Put up your fists."

"Bah!"

Buck Finn hit out, and Gore received his knuckles on the nose. The Shell bully gave a yell.

"You—you—you—I'll pulverise you!"

"I guess I'm waiting to be pulverised. These galoots will see fair play," said Buck Finn. "Come on, old hoss!"

Gore came on. He didn't like fighting, as a rule, except with much smaller boys; but then Buck Finn was a good deal smaller, and did not look like a fighting-man.

But never were appearances more deceptive. The youth from Arizona looked spare enough, but his slender limbs had a wiriness and a strength in them as of steel, and what he knew about boxing was a whole science compared with what Gore knew.

Much to his amazement, the bully of the Shell found himself lying on his back twice in rapid succession, and the second time he was slow to rise.

"Bravo!" shouted Tom Merry. "Two to one on Arizona."

"Huwway! Buck up, deah boy! I could not have given that uppah cut bettah myself."

Gore came up to time, only to be knocked right and left, and finally he went down for the third time, and remained there.

"Nuff?" asked Buck Finn, in his concise way.

"Yes, hang you!"

The boy from Arizona looked round.

"I guess there won't be any more ragging," he remarked.

"If there is, I shall take the raggars one at a time, and there will be ructions every time. I calculate I've had enough."

"Yaas, wathah! I quite approve of the wemarks of my fwiend Buck Finn."

And Arthur Augustus slipped his arm through Finn's as they walked on. The juniors gave the American junior a cheer.

Gore, with his handkerchief to his nose, walked unsteadily away. Tom Merry looked after him with a smile.

"There won't be any more ragging," he remarked.

And he was right. The ragging of Buck Finn was over.

THE END.

NEXT THURSDAY!

NEXT THURSDAY!

"A LAD OF THE LEAGUE."

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THE FIRST CHAPTERS.

The Greyfriars School Cadet Corps, commanded by Captain Sam Villiers, scout, are standing about in small groups, talking anxiously, when the clattering of hoofs is heard, and a young farmer from one of the homesteads on the cliffs comes galloping in on a sweating horse, and reins up hastily.

"The turriners are on us!"

he cries. "There's a whole fleet o' tugs an' barges an' ships o' war headin' in for Frinton Gap, wi' thousands o' men aboard! They're Germans, an' they're goin' to land!"

Captain Sam Villiers was at his side in a moment.

"How far off are they?"

"Four mile out when I left, and comin' in fast. I've tried to send messages at the telegraph-offices, but none can't get through. They tell me all the wires is cut. Let me go! I must push on!"

Nearly all the boys are killed or captured when the first German column attack and capture the school.

However, Sam Villiers and his brother, Steve, manage to escape and gain the British lines.

General Sir Sholto Nugent manages for a time to keep the Germans in check.

At last Sir Sholto Nugent has enough men to fight a decisive battle, and makes a glorious victory of it. Bad news, however, comes from the north. There the British have suffered a terrible defeat. Sam and Steve volunteer to take despatches to the commander of the beaten force from Sir Sholto Nugent. While making their way across the River Blackwater, the two boy scouts are run down and captured by the crew of a German yacht. They are taken on board, and are astonished when brought face to face with Kaiser Wilhelm, Emperor of Germany. The two boys eventually escape, and gain their destination up north.

Sam and Steve, with nine picked men, are sent out by Lord Gethin and Ripley to capture the Kaiser, who is quartered at Strood House, near Maldon. On nearing Strood House, Sam and a man named Kelly round the curve of a lane, and come suddenly upon a tall, dark form, from which shone a dull gleam of metal.

(Now go on with the Story.)

In Strood House.

There was a hasty exclamation, and the ring-bolt of a carbine rattled as the weapon was raised. At the same instant the giant Kelly leaped at that form like a boond hurling itself upon a rival. There was a scuffle of feet, an oath, and a rifle fell clattering to the ground.

Sam jumped forward, to find the Irishman with one huge arm wrapped round a struggling German sentry, and a huge paw clapped over the man's mouth.

"Will I put a foot o' steel into him, sorr, or how?" murmured Kelly. "'Tis good-bye to the expedition if he lets a shout out av him."

But, great as the stake was, Sam could not bring himself to kill a helpless man. He crammed an old neckcloth into the sentry's mouth as Kelly withdrew his hand, and, swiftly unslinging the German's belt, he buckled it tightly round the man's ankles, and whipped his wrists together with a scrap of cord. Bidding the Irishman lay him down and leave him, Sam hurried on along the lane.

"He'll lie doggo till we're done, at any rate," muttered Sam. "I only hope they didn't hear the carbine fall. Ah!"

"Guns!" said Kelly, under his breath. "Is it done for we are?"

A rattle of musketry and the sharp crash of field-guns could be heard, no great distance away. They were very soon answered by heavy firing from the town itself.

"Gethin's attack!" murmured Sam. "His battalions are keeping 'em busy on the other side of Maldon. Confound it, it's too soon! Hurry!"

Darting along the lane, with his companion beside him, Sam gave a low whistle, and up rose his men out of the ditches outside the lane on either flank, where they had been keeping up with him. The end of the dark cart-track was now close, and a second sentry at the top gave a cry, and threw his rifle to his shoulder as Sam and Kelly rushed up.

The rifle cracked, and the ball grazed the Irishman's shoulder, but before the German could fire again Sam's revolver spoke, and the man went down. Leaping over his body they dashed out of the lane, joined by the eight others

all together as they came clear of the hedges, and straight across the grass towards the house they went.

"Rush 'em! It's our only chance now!" cried Sam. The German guard had turned out at the sound of the two shots, and a sergeant and eight men rushed forward to guard the main door. They fired quickly at the attacking party dashed at them, and two of Sam's men went down. Then next moment the British scouts were upon them.

Not another shot was fired; it was a sharp, savage struggle—hand to hand. The Germans, partly taken by surprise at the astonishing appearance of British soldiers in their very midst, could not stand against that fierce onslaught. In less than a minute it was over, and Sam found he had lost three men.

As the remainder of the victorious little force separated, half of them darting round the house, as before arranged, Sam and Kelly dashed through the door and up the staircase. An officer, who came flying down the stairs, sword in hand, fell to Sam's revolver, and the two scouts went up four stairs at a time, Sam slightly leading. He heard an immense uproar outside the house, but there was no time to inquire what it meant, and, without a moment's hesitation, he made for the door of the room which he had long ago settled in his mind was the one to make for.

Reaching it together, the cadet and the Fusilier flung themselves against it, and it burst open as if it were matchwood. The first thing they saw was a tall, commanding figure in uniform of high rank, standing at a telephone-receiver on the wall, and evidently in considerable hurry and excitement to be answered. As the door crashed in, however, he flung the receiver down, and turned to meet the intruders, whipping out a revolver as he did so.

"At him! It's he!" cried Sam, springing to the attack. "Surrender! We have you at our mercy!"

How Sam Changed His Clothes.

Before the first words left his lips Kelly cannoned into him, had his great arms round the tall man, and had swung him aloft. His revolver went off blindly, and scorched the Irishman's face.

With one blow of the butt of his own Sam knocked the weapon flying out of the captive's hand, and Kelly's grip held him fast and helpless, white in the face with the pressure round his ribs.

"Look out, Kelly! Don't squeeze the life out of him!" cried Sam. "You will come to no harm, sir; but you're our prisoner, and must submit. Why, great Scott," he almost shouted, "it isn't the Kaiser at all!"

The captive's white and furious face turned full on Sam, and one glance at him was enough to show that though plainly of high rank in the German Service, he was not the Imperial personage they sought.

"The devil a bit is he, bad scran to 'im!" said Kelly, but without releasing his hold. "He's not the Kaiser at all, at all!"

"The Kaiser!" cried the prisoner savagely in German. "The Kaiser is out of your reach, you cursed night-hawk, if it's him you came to find! You'll soon awing in a rope, none the less; and so shall the careless thieves who let you through! We've got you, never fear!"

"Hang on to him, Kelly!" cried Sam, darting out of the room, pistol in hand.

Bounding up the next two staircases, he flung four doors open, and also ran up a small ladder, leading on to a small square space of leads on the highest part of the roof.

He had more hope of this spot than any, but though there were signs that he was not far wrong, the place was empty at the time.

After as hurried a search as he could make, yet leaving no likely place uninspected, Sam ran downstairs again in despair.

He darted into the room they had first entered, and found Kelly there alone.

"Where's the man—the prisoner?" cried Sam. "Sure, sorr, the bhoys have got him. I thought as we couldn't get our fists on the Kaiser, afther all, you'd like to make sure o' that omadhaun, at any rate, for he's a big swell in the general line, he is inforely!"

"The mou have got him? How?"

"Bedad, wasn't they waitin' below us here for the Kaiser, as yer honour towld him? I just clapped the spalpeen into the bight of a rope I found here, an' lowered him out o' the window to thim, an' two of thim ran him off down the hillside like winkin'—more power to 'em!"

"Great guns!" said Sam. "Well, as our spec. has missed fire here, we'd better get away sharp while we can!" he added, making for the door. "Hallo, what's that?"

"It's surrounded we are, intoirely!" said the Irishman, with perfect calm, picking up the captured officer's revolver from the floor. "An' a jewel of a foight we'll have before they down us, lieutenant, darlint!"

It needed no very keen eye or ear to tell that Kelly had hit on the truth. The noise the German troops made as they rushed to the house, and the hoarse cries and the sharp cracking of rifle-shots, spoke for themselves.

Sam sprang to the window, only to see two of the brave survivors of his little party shot down by a dozen rifles, after the pair had felled three or four of their assailants at close quarters with butt or bayonet.

"Can Steve have failed to cut the wire, or were there others?" groaned Sam, as he made for the landing. "My brave fellows are past help now!"

He had already thrust fresh cartridges into his revolver, and he and Kelly were only just in time to prevent a rush of the enemy up the stairs.

The staircase was narrow, and the two defenders, placing themselves at the head of it, held it boldly against a dozen Prussian Guardsmen, who tried to storm the landing.

"Take that, ye omadhaun, an' that—an' that!" said the big Irishman, as his borrowed pistol told on the Prussians. "Any mother's son av ye that wants to be turned into sausage-meat, step up here, an' I'll oblige ye! 'Tis a poor shot wid a pistol I am, but at close quarters like this, niver a man gets past Terence Kelly! Yerra! There's something for ye to bit on, ye bun-faced Hamburgers!"

The two revolvers told at every shot, and man after man toppled back upon his companions, blocking the stairway, and upsetting the rest.

Kelly emptied his pistol first, and one big German, making a determined run up at that moment, drove his bayonet at Kelly with all his might.

The Irishman twisted aside as nimbly as a goat, and the next moment he had the over-balanced German by the neck and shoulder, and, swinging him bodily off his legs, hurled him down at those coming up.

There was a tremendous shock and a chorus of yells and oaths as the next storming-party were knocked down like ninepins by the hurtling form of their comrade, and all landed in a heap at the bottom.

With another wild whoop, the Irishman darted back to the door of the telegraph-room, tore it clean off its hinges, and rushed back to the landing with it.

"Whirroo! Here's Terence!" he yelled, and the next moment the door went plunging down the stairway on top of the struggling storming-party. The mass of wood jammed with a crash at the bottom of the banisters, blocking the staircase completely.

"Be the howly piker, that's bottled thim!" cried Kelly, snapping his fingers with delight. "Git out o' that, ye spalpeen!" he shouted, hurling his empty revolver through the glass at a face which appeared at the landing window, and the German, who had evidently climbed up by the ivy, vanished with surprising suddenness. "Who gave ye leave to come in by the winder?"

"Here, Kelly! Here's a back staircase!" cried Sam, throwing open a door farther down the landing. "Perhaps we can get out this way! Come on, man!"

Kelly hesitated a moment as if loth to go; but he obeyed the order, and followed his officer.

The stairs came to an abrupt end one floor below, and at the landing at the foot of them was a wide doorway. The rambling old house was full of such holes and corners, but there was no time to speculate on them, for through the newly-found door a couple of Germans came rushing.

Kelly hurled himself at them with another wild yell, his fist caught one under the chin, and sent him flying, and the other hand caught the bayonet which the second man lunged at him. Tearing the weapon from his grip, Kelly drove it through the German's breast, and then, with a ringing whoop, went oharging down the stairs like a bull, bearing down those who were coming up, and fighting his way out into the yard, where a whole mob seemed to close round him.

"Hold on, Kelly! You'll never get out that way!" shouted Sam, as the Fusilier first began his rush; but Kelly paid no heed, and the young scout was agast to see him go wilfully to what seemed certain death.

To follow him was impossible, for more Germans were running up the stairs, and Sam had not the huge weight and strength of the Irishman, to go slap at them, even had it been any use. His revolver was empty, and he had no more cartridges, so, seeing there was no way of stopping the rush, he slammed the staircase door in their faces, and locked it.

This gave him a minute's respite, and he bolted back to the upper landing again, while they smashed the door down. On arriving there, he found the first storming-party had cleared the main stairs, and two Prussians came up them at

the same time as Sam arrived on the landing. Borrowing a leaf from Kelly's book, he hit the first under the ear with all his strength before the Prussian could use his bayonet, and as the man was caught on the top stair, he fell backwards upon his companions. Sam darted off along the landing, followed by a bullet that seared his cheek, and bolted up the next stairs.

Knowing the house as well as he did, he left the pursuers behind, uncertain which way to go after him once they had lost sight of their quarry. It was only a matter of moments, he knew, and he dashed straight up to the top of the house to the short loft ladder that served the trap-door to the leads.

Through the trap went Sam, the shouts of the searchers coming rapidly nearer. He pulled the ladder up after him, and shut down the trap. A quick glance round him showed two telegraph instruments and a Marconi wireless apparatus.

"It must have been from here they were warned at Maldon," thought Sam, for it was plain this had been the Kaiser's transmitting-station for messages. There was no time for any theories about it, however, and Sam only stopped to swing a cane chair up by the legs, and bring it down on the delicate instruments, which he smashed into wreckage. Then, hurrying to the low brick parapet that walled round the open roof, he cast a rapid glance down, and climbed over, grasping firmly the rain-pipe that ran down the side of the house from the leads to the ground.

Below was a patch of gravel with trees just beyond it; dim figures ran past the latter, making for the front of the house. Sam hung for a few moments, hoping they would soon be out of the way. The noise of the pursuers inside, however, as they reached the upper floor, warned him that delay was impossible, and that he must take his chance. If they caught him on the roof, it was all up.

Hoping that the darkness of the night and the thick ivy would prevent him being noticed by those passing below, he clambered down rapidly, hand-over-hand. Once he nearly missed his hold, and was all but precipitated to the bottom; but he clung on tightly, and flattened himself to the wall when ten feet from the ground, waiting his chance. Four Prussians came running by, bayonet in hand, looking straight before them, and they saw nothing of the dark form crouching against the ivy. The moment they had passed, Sam dropped, and made a dart for the trees.

He paused there an instant, but they gave no shelter, and more Germans were swarming up from both sides.

On every side the enemy were running and searching, while orders in German flew thick. To make a straight dash for it down the hillside was quite hopeless—he would be sure to run into some of them. Crouching against the tree-trunk, Sam watched his chance, and made a dash across for the stables, hoping for a chance to lie up there till things were quieter.

He reached the long building just before another squad came by, and, hurrying down the dark lane behind the stalls, he arrived at the end, where the starlight shone dimly in through a window. Arrived there, he was almost inclined to despair, for to get away through all the swarming Germans outside seemed utterly impossible, and discovery was certain if he stayed.

Just as he reached the place he stumbled and nearly fell over something motionless and soft upon the floor. Stooping, he found it was the body of a German soldier, and beside it was the lifeless form of one of his own men.

"That's Bradley, poor chap!" muttered Sam. "He must have taken refuge here, and the German found him, and they've killed each other. Ay, sure enough, here's the bayonet in Bradley's side, and the German's shot through the throat," he added, turning the prone form over.

"Bradley's fate's likely enough to be mine," he said, "unless—"

A sudden thought struck him, and, bending down, he swiftly unbuttoned the dead German's tunic.

"They say clothes make the man," he muttered; "but let's see how Sam Villiers looks in the Kaiser's uniform!"

As rapidly as the darkness would let him, Sam took from the silent form of the German private his tunic, breeches, boots, and belt.

It was not a pleasant task. If Sam had allowed himself to hesitate and think about it, probably he would have been unable to bring himself to do it. Knowing this, he set about it with feverish haste, and in less than two minutes he had doffed his own Service clothes, and stood up in those of the dead man—a fully-equipped German private of the line.

One slight shiver did Sam give, but his nerves were strong, and once it was done he thought about it no more. It was his only chance. Life was sweet, and his own was valuable to his side. He had no choice.

"Once outside," he murmured, as he strapped to his side the bayonet-sheath, and picked up the rifle, "I may be able

to dodge 'em, for they won't spot me in the dark for anything but a German—nor in the light either, I fancy. Unless I'm shot for a deserter," he added grimly, "I reckon I shall do. But I shall be deuced unhappy till I can get out of these duds, and put on a white man's clothes again. It ain't a part I've any relish to play, this."

He halted for a moment.

"One thing I've got to abide by," he muttered, "while in this rig—I mustn't use these weapons. By gum, no! That would be too ugly a trick. While I'm in disguise under the Kaiser's colours, I can't strike at his men. I must remember that, even if I'm attacked."

He reached down a couple of bales of straw out of the loft, and laid them over the two prone forms. Then, as quietly as possible, he made his way back towards the door. The notes of a bugle outside struck upon his ear, and he wondered what they meant, till, just as he reached the entrance, a German officer suddenly appeared.

Sam's heart gave a bound, and his hand flew to the place where, in his discarded Service jacket, he used to keep his revolver. For the moment he forgot that he was disguised, till he saw that the officer was in a captain's uniform of the same regiment to which the dead private belonged.

"What are you dawdling here for, man?" cried the officer harshly. "Didn't you hear the bugle? Have you looked through this stable?"

"Yes, sir!" said Sam, in the German barrack-room accent, saluting.

"Join your company instantly!" said the officer. And as Sam stepped outside he was pounced on by a sergeant of the line, who pounced on him and shouted at him.

"Get to your place, you loitering fool! Do you want a special bugle-call for your own benefit?" cried the sergeant, swinging Sam into his own file of men, and marching him rapidly round the corner of the house to where four companies of the regiment were drawn up. "Fall in there!" shouted the sergeant. And the six men added themselves quickly to the line, Sam along with them. "Slope arms!" "Column of companies, form!" rang the order along the line. And the company officers shouted their commands. "By your left! Quick march!" Round swung the foremost company, and stepped out sharply towards Maldon.

"Great bean-poles!" thought Sam, as he stepped out with the rest, the pivot-man of the second rank, and with a German private at his right elbow, and a corporal two braces abreast on his left. "I've been an' done it, now! What the dickens will happen?"

The whole transformation had been so quick that it seemed like a dream to the young scout. He had intended to slip away in the hurry of the search, trusting to his uniform to evade discovery. But here was the search abandoned, the battalion drawn up, and Sam whisked into it and marched off, two hundred Germans around and behind him, and a German colonel, riding a big, black horse, ahead. And above it all could be heard the distant thud and mutter of the British guns.

"They're goin' into Maldon," thought Sam. "Of all the unholy fixes, this beats the lot! By gum, there's the day breaking over the Blackwater! We must have taken a dickens of a long time over this business."

The short summer night was at an end, and the dawn was showing grey to the eastward. The cold light of the young day began to show up the marching troops, and Sam wondered if the sunrise would bring his death-warrant.

"Will they spot me for a stranger?" he thought, as he tramped along, the Kaiser's rifle over his shoulder. "There's a good chance they may not, for all the regiments have lost a lot of men an' had their ranks filled up with fresh drafts. I'm about the size of the chap whose togs I borrowed, an' they sit all right on me. Thank goodness I can talk their lingo as well as the best of 'em. It's a Westphalia regiment," he mused, glancing at the uniforms in the growing light. "An' I'd better talk with the proper twang. I wonder if Steve got away? It ain't likely," he thought, with a heavy sigh. "Our expedition's been a pretty ghastly all-round failure, but the excitement ain't over by long chalks!"

The men now marched in easy style, the order being passed round, but despite the rough time they had had of late, they moved with a confident swagger that annoyed Sam. They had the air of already treating England as if it were their own. Sam's right-hand man turned his head and looked at him keenly.

Under the Kaiser's Colours.

"Well, pup," he said in strong barrack-yard German, but not ill-naturedly, "you're one of the new draft. What?"

"Yes," said Sam in the same tone, "the newest draft of the lot, I am." He felt his nerves tingle as he underwent

the man's rough scrutiny. Was he to be found out? The private gave no sign of suspicion, however. "And a deuce of a night I've had of it," added Sam, anxious to get away from personal questions, "and so have we all. Potzansend! I'd give a week's pay for a quart of Pilsener!"

"And little we have to show for it," growled the German. "What in the world will these devils of British try to do next? What for a thick-head business, to try to take the Kaiser!"

Sam bit his lip, and reddened slightly. If only the German knew what a sore point he touched on!

"The English are all mad," continued the private, "but they must have been the maddest who thought they could carry off our Emperor from the midst of us like a cockerel from a hen-roost. Well, we've shown the fools they can't do it!"

Sam, somehow, felt smaller than he had felt throughout the whole campaign. Even the German private's clothes seemed too big for him at that moment.

"They came rather near it, though, it seems," he said. "Wasn't there one of the staff-officers taken?"

"Ay, I heard someone say they'd got hold of Salzburg. And little I care if they have, the cursed, bullying swab!" growled the German.

"Salzburg!" thought Sam. "The Kaiser's right-hand man. If we've got him—"

"But they won't get away with him. He's sure to be brought back," continued the private. "Even Salzburg's a match for any Britisher."

"How did they get hold of him?" said Sam, with an inward smile.

"How should I know?" growled the man. "There was a rope round his middle, and two Englanders ran him down the hill, I heard, laughing as if it were a jest. Such fools they are! But that was before we came. The Emperor should have had a better guard."

"I thought it was to be a secret that the Kaiser was amongst us," suggested Sam.

"Bah! It was given out to be spread abroad, so that it would put heart into us. But he knows we need not that—no!" said the private, throwing out his chest. "He knows he can trust us to take this fool's country for him—yeal! Besides, you cannot disguise our Kaiser. Those who first saw him in Maldon streets knew him soon enough. He will make the Britishers sit up, I promise you!"

"But they do not know he is here," said Sam.

"Donnerwetter! They will soon learn it when we sweep down those fools who are trying to fight us, and march into London," said the German. "And then, mark you well, it will be war. When they learn our Kaiser is here to direct his armies, there will be no more war. They will sue for peace at any price. It is wonderful how stupid they are to try to stop us at all, for they know we must win. There is Maldon again. We enter it. In a week London will be ours just as much as Maldon is now, and the Kaiser's standard shall float over the Mansion House, as it floats over the Moot Hall yonder."

He pointed to the German flag that flapped in the breeze, above the quaint old building whose tower could be seen above the roofs of the town, the outer streets of which the battalion now entered.

"The British are still at it," said Sam, with a grim chuckle to himself, for Lord Gethin's guns were firing every minute or so, and ever and again the shells burst over the town, though the range was too long to do great damage by shell-fire.

"Yes. A little pepper to keep us awake," growled the German. "It has lost us some men since nightfall, I doubt. But wait till we turn our cannon on them in full strength. The British generals Gethin and Ripley have been defeated, and their troops all cut to pieces by Von Krantz. They can do nothing to Maldon, and cannot spare the men to attack it."

"What are we going to do now, think you?" said Sam.

"Go into quarters, unless we are called out to beat off this skirmish of the British. There's little rest for us these days," swore the German, "and profits are getting scarce. Have you picked up anything this campaign?"

"A few little things," replied Sam, thinking of Colonel Pilnitz and Von Adler; "nothing much."

"I did well a week ago, though our company officers are so cursed squeamish one has to be careful. After the skirmish outside Langford I got a gold watch and five English pounds off a dead British officer who was left on the field, and I took a shilling or two and some tobacco off two wounded Tommies. But those pigs of Tommies they are so poor they are hardly worth searching. Still, I got what they had."

"Did you?" said Sam.

He could hardly get the words out, for his blood boiled, and it was all he could do to keep from taking the man by the throat.

"Yes, and one or two more pickings of the like sort. But

wait till we get our foot properly on their necks! They have plenty of money, these pig-dogs of Britishers, and, in spite of the officers, a man who knows his business can do well."

He was fairly startled at the look on Sam's face as he glanced at the young cadet, and there was something in the youngster's eyes that warned him to curb his tongue. The German stared at him in surprise, and a sudden suspicion shot across his countenance. Sam saw it, but the rage that filled him at the man's speech shut out everything else, and his fingers gripped the stock of his rifle till his knuckles grew white. Things looked awkward for the disguised cadet at that moment, but suddenly the order rang out sharply down the line in German:

"Silence in the ranks! Slope arms!"

The freedom of the march was put an end to as they entered the town, and the talking which had been allowed among the men was instantly stopped. All tramped ahead in perfect order at an increased pace, and the High Street came into view.

Troops were marching in all directions; a battery came clattering along at a canter, and messengers, mounted or on bicycles, were flying to and fro. The rattle of the guns in the distance became louder, and the German cannon outside the town were doubling their fire. A shell burst not twenty yards in front of the colonel's horse, and another blew in the windows of the Blue Boar Hotel with a crash as it exploded before the house. The shell-fire was scattered, however, and no great damage was being done.

"If a chunk of shell took off the ugly head of this brute next me, hanged if I'd do any mourning for him!" muttered Sam, under his breath. "It's my first meeting with the sort of soldier that goes through wounded men's pockets on the field."

Maldon seemed to be swept clean of everybody save German troops. It might have been some Prussian garrison town, instead of the peaceful Essex seaport it had been a few days before. An aide-de-camp came galloping up and spoke rapidly to the colonel of the battalion Sam was in, and the column quickened its pace still more.

"My eye, what a chance!" thought Sam. "There's a heap of things I might find out for our side, supposing I can get away, and yet I must let it alone. What a blessed hindrance it is to the work to have notions about honour! But I mustn't even ask this hooligan on my right the things he could tell me. Hanged if I can play the spy in a German uniform; it's too much for my stomach!"

He saw his neighbour steal a glance at him again as they turned the corner.

"An' yet I shall be shot for a spy just the same if they find out I'm British. Stuck against a wall and shot—not as a soldier, but as a sort of criminal. If I've got to die, I don't want it to be in these beastly togs, but in the King's uniform."

Sam's hopes were rising high, for he felt the chance of escape must come sooner or later, and, after all, there was little chance of anybody detecting him for what he was. Suspicion was not likely to fall on him, and unless he came across some German who knew him by sight, the young scout knew he was fairly safe.

They were passing rapidly down the High Street, close to the old Moot Hall, when a sudden sharp order rang out, and the front rank presented arms, keeping them so as they marched, and the other ranks followed suit.

Sam did not see what it was for at first, till he caught sight of a tall, broad-shouldered horseman, on a great iron-grey charger, riding past, with a staff of officers behind him. A big, winged silver helmet was on his head, and one glance told Sam it was the Kaiser.

The boy's heart leaped, and he wished at that moment that the spiked helmet he wore was pulled lower over his eyes.

The Emperor took no more notice of a shell that split into a hundred fragments round the flag on the Moot Hall than if it had been a fly buzzing. He threw an impatient glance at the officer of Sam's battalion, and his stern voice rang out:

"Make more haste, colonel! You are wanted at the front. Bid your men double!"

He glanced swiftly over the ranks as the order was given with the keen, sharp glance his men knew and feared so well.

There was no help for it. His eye met Sam's fair and square for the fraction of a second. In that brief glance the cadet saw the sudden flash of recognition in the Kaiser's face, and the boy's heart sank.

"Halt!" cried the Emperor, throwing up his gauntleted hand, his eyes fixed fiercely on Sam's face.

In that glance the cadet thought he read his death-warrant. The column checked sharply, amid much surprise.

Before the Kaiser could open his lips again a splitting

crash drowned the distant thunder of the guns; a shell burst in a sheet of white flame against the wall of the house next which the Emperor had halted, and the Royal rider threw one arm before his face and lurched heavily out of the saddle.

Stephen Shoots Too Quickly.

A cry of alarm went up on every hand, which even the iron German discipline could not check. The staff-officer riding next the Kaiser threw his arms out just in time to save the stricken monarch from falling headlong on to the pavement, and the other quickly spurred round.

They eased him off his horse, their faces white with anxiety and dismay. The powerful limbs were limp, and the Kaiser's eyes were closed. From the one glimpse Sam caught of his face it was plain by his pallor that the great war-lord was unconscious, if not dead.

"Is he killed? Is he dying?" the hurried word went round, and every soldier in the wide street held his breath.

An orderly galloped off madly for surgeon and ambulance; one of the staff-officers called something to the battalion's commander, orders rang out, and the column moved swiftly on along the street again on its way to the front, despite the tense anxiety of every man, including even Sam, to know what hurt had befallen the Kaiser.

The disaster to their great leader had fallen on the troops like a thunderbolt. Despite all discipline, a buzz of low, excited talk passed from man to man, for no greater sensation could have happened to them.

"Is he dead? Did the shot kill him?" exclaimed man after man, in guttural tones; and all craned their necks as they marched, to see what was happening.

Of all the men in the battalion, no one was more excited or anxious to know what had happened than Sam himself. The last glimpse he got was of the Kaiser lifted into an ambulance, amid a group of dismayed staff-officers, and then the troops swung round a corner and were out of sight. They were marched swiftly on, and not even an officer dared hang back for news.

"If he's done for," said Sam's right-hand neighbour harshly, "we shall make these pigs of Britishers pay a thousandfold for his death! We shall scourge the land with fire and sword till they have learned what it means to kill one of the house of Hohenzollern!"

"But they will not know they have killed him, nor even that he was here at all," replied Sam.

"We shall teach them, none the less!" said the German grimly. "We are going out now to deal with those who are attacking the town. They fired the shell. I, for one, will give no quarter to any Britisher I get within reach of my bayonet to-day!"

All the same, the Kaiser came here as a soldier, and takes the same chances as anyone else," Sam said sharply.

The man glanced at him with sudden suspicion. He began to pay more attention to the boy than he had yet done, and Sam felt that he was undergoing a keen scrutiny. He regretted having made that last remark, which was wrung from him by the German's threat.

"My aunt, but it'll be no end of a go for them if the Emperor's really wiped out!" thought Sam. "And if I get away, by any chance, I shall be the only soul that can let our own side know about it. I don't believe he was killed, though."

They were marching rapidly out towards the west of the town, and were nearly clear of the streets. Gallopers and messengers were hurrying back and forth past them. The men of the battalion called out eager questions to all of them, but none had any news; till at last an orderly came riding by as if he had a spare neck in his pocket.

"His Majesty is safe!" he cried, as he passed. "He was no more than stunned by the explosion of the shell, and is only slightly wounded!"

A cheer rang out all along the ranks; and, to his surprise, Sam found himself joining in it—which was a lucky thing for him, since it would have looked very suspicious had he kept silent.

Strangely enough, he actually felt relieved at the news. Although he knew it would be an enormous advantage to his country if the Kaiser had been silenced for good, Sam could not feel sorry at hearing the stray shot had not caused his death.

"He's still alive an' kicking! I'd give my left hand for another sportin' chance to get hold of him," thought the young scout; "though that'll never happen again. By gum, though, I owe my life to that shell! He spotted me, right enough! He must have remembered my escape from the yacht, an' they say he never forgets a face. Well, black as things look, I reckon we'll yet make him sorry he ever set foot in England!"

A stern order rang out, and silence and the iron German discipline fell on the troops once more. They were clear of

the town now, advancing swiftly to the westward, and the sharp roar and crash of the British guns could be heard more plainly. With it came the rattle of rifle-fire, and stretchers, bearing wounded men, were coming into the town in a continuous stream. An aide-de-camp galloped up, and soon the battalion broke into a fast double.

"Our chaps are giving 'em blazes!" thought Sam exultingly. "Am I ever to get my chance to hook it? An' yet I couldn't stand dyin' in this beastly uniform, an' bein' shot in the back for a German deserter as I ran. I'll have to risk it, though."

Sam hardly realised, inwardly, that he was not only marching with German troops, but was going out under fire to do battle with his own countrymen—at least, the battalion was. It suddenly came upon him with unpleasant force, as the troops topped the crest of a low hill, and heard the bullets whistling around and over them, though at very long range.

Over the undulating country in front several other battalions of German infantry and two field batteries were hard at work—the former mostly in cover, exchanging rifle-fire with the attacking force, and the latter pounding away at a battery of British guns that were so well placed as to be almost invisible, though the havoc these were making among the Germans was plain enough to see. Sam soon learned that the latter believed a big force was moving against them.

"That can't be so," he thought. "Why, Lord Gethin said he could only spare two battalions an' a battery for this attack! They're movin' so well in cover that the German scouts haven't found out how many there are of 'em, I reckon. An' Maldon is a depot for the Germans, an' not a fighting army corps—the beggars can't afford to take any chances of fallin' into traps. They can guard the town, an' that's all they want to do."

Sam was right. Maldon was one of the chief German bases, and it was no business of its garrison to fight pitched battles. The British generals could not stop to besiege and storm it while Von Krantz was marching on London, and well did the Germans know it.

This attack surprised them, and they did not suspect it was only a small force that had assailed their strongly-guarded position. Hence the caution of the Germans. Sam, on the other hand, knew it was only a feint of Lord Gethin's to cover the night attack on Strood House, and he rather wondered that it still went on.

"I wonder where the main body of Gethin's army is?" muttered Sam to himself; "an' whether I shall ever see 'em again? The old colonel-bird in front here evidently means takin' us into action. All the better. If the fight stops, an' we're marched back into Maldon, the dickens of a chance shall I ever get to sneak out past the sentries in this uniform. An' I sha'n't be able to keep up this disguise game long, once we're back in quarters an' the roll-call is read. They'll spot me then."

If ever the sound of fighting was music to anybody's ears, it was so to Sam's that day, for he knew it was his only chance of escape.

On went the battalion, pushing rapidly ahead, past the batteries and a corps of cavalry that were waiting in reserve. Then, before another five minutes were up, they came full across the British front, at a range of about nine hundred yards.

"Double!" came the order again; and the battalion ran quickly ahead, right across the zone of fire.

Now the bullets came thick and fast, humming their deadly message in the ears of the men, and German after German dropped in his tracks, some silently, and some with screams of pain. The battalion did not stop to reply. Its business was to cross the British front, and take up a position where it could fire on the flank of the British force, which had now taken cover, and was pouring a deadly rifle-fire into the German lines.

"Whoo-oo-crash! A shell from the British battery came singing in, and burst with deadly effect three ranks behind Sam, blowing six or seven men into eternity in the fraction of a second.

Another exploded overhead and to the right, blasting a gap through the line of Germans beneath it, and a third fell in the thick of the second company, exploding so violently that it blew itself into dust, and did the less damage. As for the bullets, the air seemed full of their shrill song. One took the corporal on Sam's left full in the throat, and he went down without a sound. Another struck the barrel of the young scout's rifle, and yet another grazed his forearm, cutting a furrow that bled copiously.

"Phew!" thought Sam. "It'll be a queer go if I meet my death from a British bullet. Hallo, that was near!"

A leaden messenger struck one of the cartridges in his bandolier, and, glancing sideways, scored the cheek of the German on Sam's right—the man who boasted of his looting exploits—who swore savagely. The shot gave Sam great

delight, though it had bruised him heavily in glancing, for he had conceived a very strong dislike for his neighbour.

"For all I know, one of my pals in the Fusiliers may have fired that shot," was the thought that occurred to Sam. "If so, he'd be a bit surprised if he knew how near he came to polishing me off. Ah, the major's down!"

It was the queerest experience Sam had ever felt, and one he never forgot. In a sense, the men were his comrades for the time, and yet every shot that ended the life of one of them was an advantage to him and to his country, nor did he know which moment might be his last at the hands of his own countrymen.

The whole passage across the zone of fire did not take three minutes, and it was accomplished with a loss of fifty men out of the four hundred. Then the battalion reached shelter behind a rise of ground, and, doubling round this, went down a narrow cut or gully with a stream at the bottom, curving round the British position, and out of reach of anything except a stray dropping shell flow and again.

Forward they went, as fast as the men could travel, till at last they were halted at the end of the little valley. Here they were split up into half companies in line, and took cover.

"We'll soon be at the beggars now!" growled the private on Sam's right, mopping his wounded cheek with his sleeve. "We'll leave our mark on the cursed Britishers once we're given our chance. I've a toasting-fork for any that come in my way," he added, patting his bayonet grimly. "A long thrust home, and a good twist of the steel—that's the medicine for their sort. Unless they run before we get to close quarters, which is their pet way of fighting, the cowards!"

"Have you ever found them run from you?" retorted Sam. "If so, you're the first that ever did!"

The words left his lips before he thought, nor did he particularly regret them. For a very little he would have felled the man on the spot, to prove to him that he lied. But the German, much surprised at the speech, stared at Sam with a sudden look of suspicion, and watched him narrowly.

The young scout saw it, but made no sign. His blood boiled, and he would almost have welcomed discovery and a personal set-to with the man at that moment.

"If this fellow doesn't keep his infernal tongue quiet, he'll be the end of me an' himself, too!" muttered Sam under his breath. "What are we waiting here for, I wonder? How precious careful the beasts are of themselves!"

A moment's reflection, as he grew cooler, showed Sam the reason.

"The other German battalions'll make a front attack, an' then this lot will be swung in on the British flank!" he muttered; "that's about the size of it. An' it'll be a good move, too, for the British companies'll stand a smart chance of being cut off. They probably don't even know this lot's here, for it came down well under cover, an' we're out of sight, though no great way off 'em. If I could only let our chaps know!"

Sam cudgelled his brains in utter perplexity, but he was forced to admit there was no way of doing it.

To attempt to get away from where they were would lead to his being shot down for insubordination as soon as he left the lines.

There was no possible chance just then of slipping aside and making a bolt for it.

Just as he was at his wits' end to know how to warn his own side, a mounted man in khaki serge suddenly appeared on the crest of the hill, not eighty yards away, on the left, and Sam's heart leaped for joy, for a single look showed him it was a British scout.

"Thank Heaven!" exclaimed the young cadet, under his breath. "He's seen us, an' he'll warn 'em!"

One swift glance did the scout cast over the German battalion drawn up in the gully below, and he swung his horse round and drove home the spurs.

Six or seven Germans gave a shout as they caught sight of him, a sharp order rang out, and a scattered volley of shots were fired, as the scout dashed away at a gallop.

Most of the riflemen were too far below the rise of the ground to have much chance of hitting him, for they could only see his head; but before the horseman disappeared he had to dash past in full view of the spot where Sam and his nearest companions stood, and for a few seconds he gave an easy mark.

The German on Sam's right, who had so angered the boy, threw his rifle to his shoulder to fire, when Sam, with a quick movement of his arm, struck the barrel up, and the bullet flew high over the head of the scout, who was instantly lost to view beyond the high ground.

A shout of anger burst from the German, and he glared wildly at Sam.

"What did you do that for, curse you? Spy—Spy!" he yelled to those around him, and he raised his bayonet to drive it through the cadet, who dashed the blow aside with the butt of his gun.

At the same moment the sharp orders ran down the line for the battalion to take open order and rush up the hillside.

"Column of companies! Left half-turn! Double!" rang out the cry, and the spatter of useless rifle-shots that had followed the scout from below drowned the voice of the enraged private.

Luckily for Sam, those within reach had been too intent on the sudden appearance of the scout to notice Sam's quick action which had saved the horseman's life.

"Seize him! Arrest him, I tell you!" screamed the private.

"He made me miss the shot! He's a—"

"Silence in the ranks!" cried the company commander fiercely, as the order of the men changed swiftly, and the rush up the hill began. "What's that man out of his place for, sergeant?"

"I tell you," raged the private, trying to get at Sam, who was now removed six yards away, with two other men between, "He's an Englander, a sp—"

"Silence! Don't you hear the order!" snapped a big, red-faced sergeant, striking the man heavily across the face.

The blow deprived the private of speech for the moment, and in the thick of the rush all hope of calling attention to his discovery was gone, for the swift tramping of over three hundred feet, the rattle of a brisk musketry fire at short range, which met them as they topped the hill, and the general excitement drowned all else.

The infuriated private found himself pressed onward willy-nilly, and as for Sam, he ran with the best of them, and thanked his stars there was no chance of anybody attending to the man while the change of position lasted.

"I've got to take any sort of a chance to run for it now," he thought, "or I'm done for certain if that chap starts talkin' an' they've time to attend to me."

A rattling volley met them on the open ground, thinning out the foremost ranks of the Germans heavily.

It was easy to see now how close they were to the British position, and what a sudden and effective attack the three hundred Germans could have made on its flank.

But now the tables were turned, for the scout was out of sight when the battalion came up the rise, and he had had time to ride back and warn the British riflemen.

The German colonel dared not leave his men in such a trap as the gully now it was known to the British that they were there, and so he was forced to lead them out across the open to where they could take cover and return the fire.

The bullet-swept space was soon passed, and a long hedge and ditch reached, with an old embankment of earth in front, and behind this the German commandant brought his men as quickly as he could, and set them out in a long firing-line, with the bank before them.

Sam, being on the left of the front company, had farthest to go, and was right at the far end of the line when he reached his place, and the men were bidden to lie down and fire.

There was but a single corporal on the outside of him, and four numbers away was the man who had been Sam's neighbour on the march.

He at once raised the alarm again, pointing to Sam. His voice was scarcely heard above the din of the volley-firing, and he was sternly ordered to lie down.

Frantic with rage, he sprang to his feet, showing himself above the bank, pointing towards Sam, and shouting.

But before three words had passed his lips he paid the penalty. Throwing up his arms he fell back limply—a bullet through his head.

"He won't rob the wounded any more," thought Sam, with a sigh of relief; and even as the thought occurred to him the corporal on his left, showing himself a shade too much as he took aim, rolled down the bank like a log, with a raw, red smear upon his forehead, and lay still.

"Gum! Here's my chance!" muttered Sam. "It's now or never!"

Beyond the bank was a wide stretch of open, furzy country, and a long ridge of sandy rabbit-warren, not six hundred yards away, showed where the British firing-line was hidden, for the deadly rattle and spit of musketry poured from it, and the faint haze of the so-called smokeless powder drifted over it.

The two forces were firing at each other as fast as they could load before coming to close grips.

Sam fixed his eye on a gorse-bush not far to the left of him, and decided that if he could slip behind it without being seen he would stand a fair chance of getting away, for he was now the end man of the whole line.

Watching his opportunity when the company officer and nearest sergeant had moved up the line, Sam made a quick run under cover of the bank, and gained the bush.

A sudden cry told him his action had been seen, and

keeping the bush between him and the others, he ran for his life.

Two or three bullets whizzed after him, the men doubtless thinking he was a coward bolting for shelter in a panic, or else a deserter.

He was now nearly clear of the end of the distant British firing-line, and one rapid glance decided him on his course.

At any cost he resolved to free himself of the chance of being re-taken by the Germans, and, jumping out of the ditch, he sprinted straight across the open ground towards the distant ridge, meaning to take his chance of stray bullets, and get round it into the British position.

Away he went, sprinting for his life, straight for the ridge and the line of bushes that sheltered his own countrymen in the fight.

He did not expect to find any riflemen behind the ridge so far along, but just as he was nearly upon it he saw that a scattered line of skirmishers were in front of him; and then for the first time only—strange as it seems—he remembered that in the uniform he wore he was in as much danger from his own side as from the Germans in a fight.

He shouted as he ran up, when suddenly a slight, agile figure rose out of the bushes in front, and presented a carbine at him.

His heart leaped into his throat, for one glance showed him that it was his own brother Stephen, the best shot of his corps, with his finger on the trigger of the levelled weapon.

"Steve, it's me!" he shouted.

But the words came too late. The carbine cracked venomously, and Sam pitched forward on to his face.

Back to the Colours.

As Sam saw the black rifle-muzzle facing him, and the cry broke from his lips, he threw himself headlong to the ground. At the same moment the shot rang out, and he heard the smack of the bullet as it sped clean through his spiked helmet.

Stephen turned white as death when he heard himself called by name in that well-known voice, and saw his victim apparently pitch forward on his face. For a moment he stared, dumbstruck, and then rushed forward with a cry of horror.

"Sam," he gasped, dropping on his knees beside his brother, "have I killed you?"

"Not that I know of," said Sam, raising himself. "I ducked in time. Couldn't blame you. I ought to have sent word about this fancy dress of mine before I arrived. I've seen you make better shots than that," he added coolly.

"My word!" gulped Stephen, who was trembling violently. "If I'd shot you! I—"

"Hold up, Steve old boy! It's all right! By gum, but it's great to see you again! I didn't know if you were dead or alive!"

"Nor I you," returned Stephen. "I was goin' to get into Maldon by hook or crook an' find out. We thought—"

"Hallo!" cried an astonished subaltern, running up. "What's this, Villiers? Have you captured a German?"

"No, sir," said Stephen. "It's my brother Sam!"

"That's me!" said Sam, rising to his feet. "I'm just out of Maldon, an' this is the only rig I could get away in."

"Great guns!" said the subaltern. "Well, get back into cover, quick! We shall attack in a brace of shakes!"

"My only aunt!" said Sam, hurrying behind the ridge, and taking off his tunic, hurled it away from him.

"Steve, I've been sufferin' for ten mortal hours to get out of this beastly kit, an' I'll go naked as Adam before I'll wear it any longer!"

He pulled off the spiked helmet and kicked it high in the air with as much zest as ever a Rugby forward kicked a goal.

"Well, leave the trousers on, old chap," said Stephen, lying down and slipping fresh cartridges into his rifle, "or the adjutant'll complain that you ain't decent. There's some kit there belongin' to a chap who's just been taken off by the ambulance."

"There'll do me!" exclaimed Sam, snatching up a Service cap and a revolver that lay scattered with some other things on the grass. "Now there's nothing German about me but the trousers, an' I'm ready for anything the day brings!"

"For goodness' sake, Sam, let's hear how you got out of it all, an' what you did!" said Stephen. "We know nothing except that two of the men got back and brought Salzburg with 'em."

"They did—eh?" cried Sam. "Good business! You see—"

His words were cut short by a light gun-shell that burst just in front of the ridge, blowing a barrow-load of sand all over the boys, and nearly choking them. Then came such a fusillade from the Germans opposite that the whole atmosphere was piping with bullets, and so hot did the fight wax that there was no time or chance to explain anything.

An order swept down the line, and the men moved swiftly to the left along the ridge, while two galloping Maxims dashed up with a horse apiece, swung round just under the crest of the warren, and poured a rattling fire across at the German battalion.

"That'll give 'em pepper!" said Sam enthusiastically.

"How many men have we got in this show, Steve?"

"Only two line battalions and a battery," answered his brother, shouting to make himself heard above the din. "Gethin's gone off westwards with his whole army; so we're stuck here. We can't retreat unless we drive 'em right back first, because of their guns. I don't think the beggars know how weak we are."

"No, they don't!" said Sam eagerly. "I was in that corps that's shootin' at us half an hour ago. Where's one of the officers? I know just where those Maxims could be placed so as to blow blazes out of 'em!"

He turned to go, when he found Devine, the adjutant, hurrying towards him behind the ridge.

"Hallo, Sam!" he exclaimed hastily. "Back from the dead again? What's this about your having come through the German lines? D'you know how their men are placed?"

"Rather!" said Sam quickly. "I was with the battalion your scouts found. If you had those Maxims on a place I passed on my way here you could rake 'em right along the line. An' it's easy to get there, too!"

"Here, come an' see the colonel!" said Devine eagerly. "It's been the deuce of a job to get any information at all for either side."

Sam accompanied him with all speed to Colonel Warren of the Fusiliers.

"By Jove, they're three to one! But if we can turn the flank of that battalion an' break 'em, we may be able to drive the whole force back!" muttered the colonel.

"Well done, my lad, you've brought me just the news I wanted! Here, Devine, get those guns away!"

The sharp commands began to pass all along the line, and the order of the force altered at once.

Sam hurried back to his brother, and was only just in time to reach his place.

"By gum, the colonel ain't waiting to let the grass grow!" he said. "He's nipped on to the opportunity like a bird!"

"Are we goin' for those chaps in front?" said Stephen eagerly.

"Yes; my late comrades. An' now I'm out of their uniform it'll be real jam to go an' have a smack at 'em! There was one beast who boasted he'd robbed wounded Tommies!" said Sam grimly. "Keep on the outskirts, an' then we'll have a chance to cavort on our own."

Back from the ridge went the corps, still keeping under cover of it, and they were moved swiftly and quietly away to the right and round the base of a small hill.

When they halted they were well out on the flank and half-way towards the German position, screened from view, while a single company left behind at the ridge poured in as rapid a fire as they could to keep the German battalion busy.

Suddenly there was a loud rattle and crash from the hill behind. The two Maxims, which had disappeared from their former positions, re-opened right on the flank of the German force which Sam had marched with. The two machine-guns were now so placed that they could send in their deadly hail of lead with terrible effect, for the bank behind which the Germans lay did not shield them from the guns' new position.

The second British battalion, a good way off to the left, was redoubling its fire, and the battery hurled in shells at the other Prussian troops as fast as the men could serve the guns. On the boys' side they could see how the Germans were wavering under the fatal hail, but not a shot did the waiting riflemen fire.

"They'll let us loose soon," said Sam. "We're doubling the beggars up!"

"Fix bayonets!" The order ran quietly through the waiting Fusiliers.

Stephen placed the deadly blade on his barrel, while Sam hitched his revolver to hand.

The stammer of the guns raved and spat.

"Charge!"

How the German Forces were Repulsed.

The clear notes of the bugle sounded the famous call—the most thrilling that a soldier can hear. Out rushed the Fusiliers, their eyes fixed on the foe, and their weapons gripped handily—two hundred and fifty tough, seasoned dogs of war.

With a fierce cheer they leaped upon the bank, and hurled themselves upon the German battalion, who met them desperately with the bayonet; but nothing could withstand the British rush, and man after man was hurled down.

A great red-faced Prussian broke his bayonet in the body of a Fusilier subaltern, scarcely more than a boy. Clubbing his rifle, the Prussian then aimed a terrific blow at Stephen, who was exchanging quick thrusts with another private. Sam's revolver spoke just in time, and the red-faced Prussian went down. Then came such a press from behind that the fight became a rough-and-tumble, in which bayonet, butt, and pistol were used anyhow and anywhere.

Shaken by the Maxim fire the Germans gave back from the very first. Though in equal numbers with their attackers they were too demoralised to stand up to such a charge, and in less than a minute, after losing a third of their number, they fairly broke and fled. The Fusiliers pursued them, and scattered them like leaves, and Colonel Warren at that hour would have given all he owned for just one troop of horse to make the rout complete.

Yet so smartly did his men move, and so well had he planned the manoeuvre from Sam's report, that the want of cavalry hardly mattered. On swept the Fusiliers, straight up to the next German force, that was answering a tremendous fire from the other British companies and guns, and were losing heavily. The British fire ceased like clockwork as Colonel Warren charged in with his men, and as he took the Germans on their flank the rest of the British charged their front.

Caught between two fires, the Germans sprang to meet the charge. The British were but two short battalions against a full regiment, but the attack was so deftly delivered that the Germans were caught on both sides and suffered fearful losses. One wild, straining struggle, and the entire German force, after falling back step by step and contesting the ground stubbornly for several minutes, fell into sudden confusion and broke badly.

The cheers were loud and long as the enemy were seen flying in companies and squads and battalions, leaving over two hundred dead on the field, while the Maxims that had once more galloped round and changed their ground, hastened their foes' flight, and gave them a terrific bucketing.

Keenly the British commander watched to see if the other forces would join them and show fight again, for if

they did he knew that his little force would still be in grave peril. But the German bugles were crying and calling all down the line, the guns were hurriedly limbered up, and the whole force, mustering its broken battalions as swiftly as it could, fairly showed its heels and retreated with all speed towards the town.

"Good-bye, my late giddy comrades!" murmured Sam, as he saw the Kaiser's troops running before the parting cannonade of the British guns. "I wasn't with you long, but I had quite enough of you, and the only keepsake I want to give you is a load of shrapnel about your coat-tails!"

So, while the battery hammered the flying battalions, the Germans hurried back into Maldon much more quickly and eagerly than they had left it, with the marks of the British lion's teeth on them.

Sam Tells His Story.

"Great gattings," panted Stephen, unfixing his bayonet; "that was hot stuff!"

"Not punctured anywhere, are you, kid?" said his brother.

"No; but these bayonet charges aren't in my line. I ain't heavy enough, Sam; an' I can't use the weapon much. It's sheer luck I didn't get stuck like a pig. However, it's all in the day's work. There goes the call 'retire'!"

"Warren's drawin' his men off quick," said Sam, as the British troops were rapidly swung round and marched away under the cover of the slopes, leaving Maldon behind them. "He don't mean wastin' 'em for nothing; an' they might do us a lot of damage yet, if they find out how they've been spoofed. Here, let's fall in with our old company in the Fusiliers. Gum, he's shoving us along at a pace!"

"I thought it was queer, the Germans bolting back like that," said Stephen.

"We'd got 'em licked for the time, an' they had to save themselves, for it ain't their business to get into hot water outside an' lose a lot of men. They're there to hold the town and seaport, an' sit tight in it. I bet they get everlasting socks from the Kaiser for makin' such a mess of it. I wonder how he's gettin' on, and whether they've patched him up yet."

"Patched him up!" exclaimed Stephen.

"Yes; he got knocked out of time by a shell," said Sam.

And as they marched away on the flank of the Fusiliers he told his brother the whole story of the raid on Strood House and the journey through Maldon in the ranks of the German troops.

"My eye, what a shave you've had!" exclaimed Stephen at last. "You got out of it jolly smartly, old boy. I'd almost given you up for lost, though I'd a feeling inside me that somehow you'd turn up again with a whole skin."

"I was afraid you were done for, too," said Sam, "when I found the wire wasn't cut at Strood House. I thought the sentries must have caught you in the act, and shot you."

"Not cut? I did cut it!" said Stephen indignantly. "Within twenty minutes from the time I left you, too, and then I went away as quick as I could and got through the lines again to our troops, as you told me."

"Right," said Sam. "But there must have been more wires than one, then. Of course, you couldn't find that out. Anyway, they managed to raise the alarm in Maldon at once, for the troops came down on top of us at Strood House before we'd time to turn round. Well, it's no good cryin' over spilt milk, but I'm sick about it. There goes the halt for the troops."

The relating of Sam's adventures had taken a good deal of time, and the little force had reached Witham by the time they were told, and there the halt was sounded. But on the bivouac ground, where the combined armies of Lord Gethin and General Nugent had been the day before, there

was now not a trace to be seen, save for a field hospital and some empty commissariat waggons. They had hardly halted five minutes when Devine, the adjutant, came hurrying up.

"Colonel Warren wants to see you boys at once," he said.

And the brothers hurried off with him.

"Where's Gethin and all the troops?" asked the cadet, as they went.

"Gone inland to Harlow as fast as they can travel," said Devine. "Didn't you know? The whole three army corps left this morning, soon after you got into Maldon. We were the only ones left behind, to keep the attack going."

"Why to Harlow? Are the Germans advancing that way?" asked Stephen.

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