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A LAD OF THE LEAGUE

BY
MARTIN
CLIFFORD.

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NO. 52. VOL. 2.

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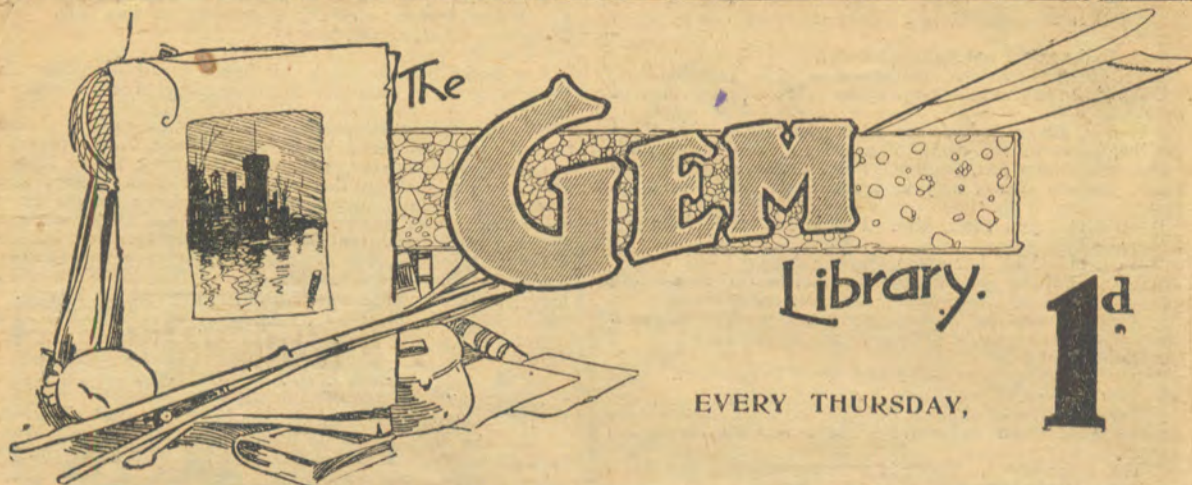
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A LAD OF THE LEAGUE.



A Splendid Long, Complete School
Tale of Tom Merry & Co.

By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

"Bai Jove!"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy uttered the ejaculation in great surprise.

As a rule, Jack Blake's face was as sunny as any in the school, and such an attack of deep and painful thought was so unusual with him that D'Arcy stared at him for some moments in astonishment.

Then he advanced into the study, but even then Blake did not look up.

"I say, deah boy——"

Blake glanced up at last.

"Hallo, Gus!"

He spoke in such a listless and dispirited fashion that the amazement of Arthur Augustus increased.

"Bai Jove! What's the mattah, deah boy?"

Blake did not reply. The swell of St. Jim's looked greatly concerned. In spite of the chipping to which Arthur Augustus was frequently subjected by his chums in Study No. 6, there was a very real friendship between them.

"I say, Blake, this is wotten, you know. You look as if you were in twouble."

Blake grunted.

"Is it tin, deah boy? If you are bwoke, and in want of tin, I twust that you will not forget me. I had a fivah fwom my governah yesterday——"

"It's not that."

D'Arcy wrinkled his brows in thought. He could not imagine what the trouble was, if it wasn't that, but he was very sympathetic, and he tried to work it out. And suddenly a bright idea struck him.

"Ah! I wathah think I know."

Blake started.

"You don't know anything about it, old son."

CHAPTER 1.

Family Troubles.

JACK BLAKE, of the Fourth Form at St. Jim's, sat in his study in the School House, with his elbow resting on the table, and his chin resting in his hand.

His eyes were fixed straight before him, with an unseeing gaze. His boyish face was wrinkled. He was in deep thought—so deep that he did not hear a footstep at the door, or look up when a new-comer glanced into the study.

A DOUBLE LENGTH TALE OF TOM MERRY NEXT THURSDAY.

No. 52 (New Series.)

"Yaas, I wathah think I do, Blake. I felt exactly like that when it happened to me. Your tailah has disappointed you."

Jack Blake could not help grinning.

"No, Gussy, there are worse troubles even than that."

D'Arcy's brows wrinkled up again in an intense effort of thought.

"Weally, Blake, I don't see what gweatah twouble there can be, short of the death of a near wrelah," he said. "But can I help you, deah boy? In a case of doubt, you know, you can always wely upon me to tell you what's the pwopah thing to do."

"I'm afraid you can't, Gus. I've had a letter from my father—"

"Well, old chap, I suppose that's a bothah; but weally, you know, fathahs get into the habit of w'itin' to a fellow at school. It's best to get aside an hour on one evenin' in the week for weplyin', and then you get it off your mind. Besides, I have no doubt your governah means well."

Blake smiled faintly.

"It's not that, Gussy—it's bad news from home. My brother Frank—did you know him?"

"Yaas, wathah! I had the pleasure of makin' his acquaintance when we went to see a football match last year."

"Yes, I remember. Frank is a born footballer, and that's the cause of the row, I believe. He's bolted!"

"Bai Jove! Bolted!"

"Yes," said Blake miserably. "Bunked!"

"Bolted fwom home!" said D'Arcy, looking shocked.

"Weally, Blake, it's wathah bad form for a fellow to bolt fwom home."

"There's been a row," said Blake. "Frank's taken the bit in his teeth and bolted. Dad doesn't go deep into it, but I believe the footer was at the bottom of it. You see, Frank was bent on playing as an amateur for the Millfield United—that's the League team of our part at home in Yorkshire, you know. Dad was against it. I thought they had patched it up somehow, but now—"

Blake did not finish, but he looked intensely miserable.

D'Arcy tapped him on the shoulder.

"Buck up, deah boy! Couwage! How long has he been gone?"

"A fortnight or more. Dad wouldn't have told me, only I wrote to Frank, you see, and I was expecting an answer. Dad says nothing has been heard of him since he went, but he hopes he will return any day. He doesn't know Frank as well as I do. Frank won't give in. He's obstinate."

"Pewwaps it wuns in the family," said D'Arcy thoughtfully.

"Eh?"

"I—I mean you are wathah obstinate, you know, deah boy. I wish I knew where the weckless boundah was, and I would go and weason with him. You know, my young bwothah Wally wan away fwom school once, and I know what it's like to be anxious. If you had any ideah where Fwank had gone, we might go and look for him."

Blake shook his head.

"I haven't. I— Hallo, Mellish! What the dickens do you want?"

"Yaas, wathah!" said Arthur Augustus, turning as he saw the cad of the Fourth looking into the study. "What the dooce do you want?"

"Nothing!" said Mellish.

"Take it and go!"

"Oh, don't get ratty! I thought I heard you call me as I passed—"

"Rot!" said Blake, in his direct way. "You know you didn't! You put your sneaking head in here to listen! Get out!"

"Look here—"

"I am not watty at pwesent, Mellish, but I shall get watty if you do not immediately wefire," said D'Arcy; "and I warn you that if I get watty I shall pwobably Jose my tempah and swike you!"

"Oh, go and eat tinkacks!" said Mellish.

"If you are lookin' for a feahful thwashin', Mellish—"

But Mellish retired as the swell of St. Jim's took a step towards the door. He chuckled to himself as he went down the corridor. Apparently the cad of the Fourth found something amusing in what he had heard in Study No. 6.

Blake rose from his seat with a heavy sigh.

"Well, it's no good moping, I suppose," he said. "I can't help worrying about Frank. He's an obstinate beggar, you see, and dad's got a temper, too. If I knew where the bounder had bunked to I'd go and see him and yank him home."

"But you are youngah than he is, Blake?"

"What on earth's that got to do with it?"

"I should certainly wefuse to be yanked home by my youngah bwothah Wally," said D'Arcy, with dignity; "and

I wathah think that Fwank would wefuse you. You cou go to him and wespwfully wopwesent to him what I thought on the mattah."

"Rats!"

And Blake left the study, his hands thrust deep in trousers pockets, and his brows contracted with son. thought.

His appearance attracted more than one curious glance from the juniors of the School House. Blake, though perhaps a little quick-tempered, was the best-natured fellow in the House, with perhaps the exception of Tom Merry, and always of a sunny disposition. The clouds on his brow made the fellows wonder what was up; and Blake was not inclined to be talkative about his family troubles, outside his own chums. But as it happened there was another junior who had an explanation all ready for Blake's worried looks; and that junior was Mellish, the cad of the Fourth.

CHAPTER 2.

Tom Merry Chips In.

"TOM!"

Tom Merry did not appear to hear; at all events he did not look up from the columns of the "Wayland Chronicle," which he was perusing with great and intense interest.

"Tom Merry!"

"Yes, what's the row?" said Tom Merry, still reading. "Go on; I can read at the same time, Monty."

Monty Lowther reached across and jerked the paper out of his hand.

"No, you can't," he said cheerfully. "And you can't possibly be interested in a local rag, anyway. What on earth do you want to read the 'Wayland Chronicle' for? What do you care for the price of cattle at Wayland Market?"

Tom Merry laughed.

"Not much, but—"

"Or for the fact that John Smith labourer, of no address, was charged before the justices with being found in possession of three small green apples, identified by Farmer Giles as his property—"

"Ha, ha, ha! I wasn't reading anything of the sort."

"What was it, then? The great drapery sale at the Wayland Stores, everything marked down to double the usual price—"

"No, you ass! There's news in one part of the paper."

"Blessed if I know where to look for it, then," said Monty Lowther, turning over the big pages of the "Wayland Chronicle." "Nothing ever happens in this part of Sussex, except our footer matches, and they're not reported."

"Oh, there's something in that rag sometimes," said Manners, looking up from a print he was touching up. "I've sent them contributions to the photography column."

Monty Lowther yawned.

"How awfully exciting! I suppose there was a rush on the number that week, and they sold a couple of extra copies, doubling the usual circulation."

"But there's really an item of interest," said Tom Merry. "Look at the bottom of page five, and you'll see what I was reading."

Lowther turned the pages. The chums of the Shell had finished their preparation, but they had not yet left their study. Lowther wanted to go down to the gym, but something interesting in the local paper had detained Tom Merry.

"Hallo, is this it?" said Lowther, looking interested himself. "Northwood Athletic are meeting Newcastle United on the home ground on Saturday—"

"That's it!" said Tom Merry, with a sparkle in his eyes. "You know Northwood have a big professional club now, and their team was one of the best in the Southern League. They left the Southern League last year, and got into 'the' League, and they've been going ahead since. They're in the running for top of the League this season. This match with Newcastle United will be a ripper."

"By Jove, I suppose so!"

"I've never seen Newcastle play," said Tom Merry, "but you know it's one of the finest clubs in the League. Jack Blake has seen them play, and he says they are ripping—and Blake knows a lot about football for a Fourth-Form kid!"

"Blessed if I see what it's got to do with us, though!" said Lowther. "Northwood's a good step from here—"

"The match is to-morrow, Monty, and we're going."

"Are we? This is the first I've heard of it!"

"You'll follow your uncle," said Tom Merry severely. "Of course, I know that our footer leaves very little to be desired. We are absolutely ripping—especially myself! All the same, we might possibly pick up a few tips from a



"Pway give me a little more woom, deah boys!" gasped D'Arcy. "Weally, I entweat—"

first-class League match. I don't say we should, mind; but it's within the bounds of possibility."

"Oh, don't be funny! There's something in it. It's jolly good for young footballers to see all the League matches they can!" assented Lowther. "Now I come to think of it, it's a good idea to buzz over to Northwood and watch the match. How are we getting over, though?"

"Lots of ways—train, bike, or Shanks's pony."

"The roads won't be fit for biking. And if we walked we shouldn't get there till the match was over and the players gone to bed. As for rail, tickets cost money!"

"Yes, I've noticed that!" said Tom Merry. "I don't know what the fare is, but I do know one thing—I'm stony."

"Moi aussi," said Lowther. "Same here, kid."

"How much tin have you got, Manners?"

"I don't know."

"Well, then, look, duffer!"

"How can I look into my trousers'-pocket? I haven't got the neck of a giraffe!"

"You dummy! Feel, then."

"How can I feel when I'm touching up this print?"

"Look here—"

"Oh, I'll show him how to feel!" grinned Lowther, leaning over the table and giving Manners a fearful pinch.

"You see—Hullo, what's the matter, Manners?"

Manners had jumped up with a fiendish yell.

"You—you horrid ass! You've taken a lump out of my arm!"

"Well, I was going to show you how to feel. Did you feel that?"

Manners did not reply, but he was so evidently going to commit assault and battery on the spot, that Tom Merry pushed him back into his chair and held him there.

"Now keep calm," he urged; "Lowther was only making an appeal to your feelings. How much tin have you got?"

"I don't know—but it's in coppers, and there's not more than four or five."

"Oh, rats; you needn't count 'em then!" said Tom Merry. "We shall have some more tin to-morrow, but not in time. Blake had a letter to-day—"

"Good!" said Lowther. "Blake may turn up trumps—let's see. If he's had a tip, we may as well borrow some of it before he squanders it on riotous living."

"Come on, Manners."

"Can't you see I'm busy?"

"Oh, stay there and take root, if you like," said Tom Merry. "If Blake fails us in the hour of need, I will sell Manners' camera—"

"You'll what?" roared Manners.

"French of the New House wants a camera, and he'd give a guinea for it—"

"That camera cost eight guineas!" hooted Manners.

"Then French would be getting a big bargain! I suppose you like a chap to get a good bargain?" said Tom Merry severely. "Still, we'll keep Manners' camera as a last resource, as he's attached to it! Let's try Blake first!"

Manners grunted. Communism was established in the

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study shared by the Terrible Three, but Manners thought it ought to stop short of cameras.

Tom Merry and Lowther left the study and strolled along the passage, and, as they came near the Fourth-Form quarters they heard the voice of Mellish. Mellish was standing in the midst of an attentive group of juniors, holding forth in tones of explanation, and Tom and Lowther stopped to listen. There were eight or nine fellows collected round Mellish, and he did not at first observe that the chums of the Shell had joined the group.

"You all noticed how he was looking yourselves?" said Mellish.

"Yes, rather!" assented Gore.

"I happened to be passing Study No. 6 while he was talking to D'Arcy about it—"

"Blessed if I can see what you could find out by passing a fellow's study!" said Hancock.

"Well, you see, I thought I heard Blake call me, and looked in—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"And I happened to hear—"

"You often happen to hear things, don't you, Mellish?" remarked Sharp.

"I happened to hear Blake say something on the subject," went on Mellish, unheeding. "I'm not going to tell you what he said—"

"Oh, get on!"

"Go ahead!"

"Only his elder brother has bunked off from home. He had his own reasons for bunking—that's all."

"So, Blake is looking down in the mouth because his elder brother has bunked off from home?" said Jameson of the Third.

"That's it. About his reasons for going I'm not going to tell you anything. He may have broken into his governor's cashbox before he went, or he may not. I don't say Blake said so."

"Dear me," said Skimpole of the Shell, blinking at Mellish through his big spectacles, "that is a somewhat serious allegation to make, Mellish. Of course, if Blake's brother broke into his father's cashbox, he is not really to blame for so doing, as every crime can be traced to the united effects of heredity and environment—"

"Oh, shut up, Skimpole!"

"This is the great truth of Determinism," said Skimpole, who was the genius of the Shell, and always had a collection of the most remarkable ideas that were ever gathered in a single brain. "You see—"

"Are you going to ring off?"

"Everything being the result of either heredity or environment, or both, nobody is to blame for anything. If I were to strike you violently, Gore, for instance, I should not be to blame, as it would simply be an outcrop of heredity, a trace of violent temper inherited from some remote ancestor—"

Gore grinned, and drove his elbow on Skimpole's chest with such force that the amateur Determinist staggered against the wall, and slid to the floor in a sitting posture.

He blinked dazedly at Gore.

"Dear me! I—I—I—what did you do that for, Gore?"

"Don't blame me," said Gore. "That was simply heredity, a trace of violent temper inherited from a remote ancestor. If you don't slide this instant I shall show another trace of violent temper inherited from another remote ancestor."

Skimpole blinked doubtfully at Gore, but the latter was already lifting his boot for a kick, and the Determinist decided to depart. Gore's boot helped him along the passage. The interrupter being gone, questions were

showered on Mellish. The cad of the Fourth grinned knowingly and shook his head.

"I'm not saying anything," he said. "I'm not going to have Blake coming down on me for yarning about his brother. I give you this for what it's worth. If Blake major left home with his governor's cashbox—"

"You said he broke it open just now," said Jameson.

"I never said anything of the sort. I said he might have."

"Well, he might have done anything. My opinion is that you are lying."

"If you're looking for a row, young Jameson—"

"Never mind Jameson," said Tom Merry, pushing his way through the juniors, his brow dark and clouded. "Just answer me, Mellish."

Mellish looked a little alarmed. He would not have been quite so free with his cowardly insinuations if he had known that a friend of Blake's was present. He would gladly have scuttled away, but Tom Merry looked as if he meant business.

"What's it got to do with you, Merry?"

"Just this much—I believe every word you have uttered is a lie!"

"We all know Mellish," said Monty Lowther. "You fellows must be utter asses to take notice of what the young rotter says!"

"Oh, I don't know," said Gore. "I never thought much of Blake."

"A cad like you wouldn't!"

"Why, confound you, you are always rowing with him yourself!"

"But I wouldn't slander a chap behind his back," said Lowther, scornfully. "I leave that to you and Mellish."

"Blake's brother has bolted," said Mellish, looking a little scared. "You can ask him yourself!"

"Blake's brother may have bolted," said Tom Merry; "but I'm jolly certain that he had no dishonourable reason for bolting—and anyway, you can't possibly know anything about it if he had. You have been lying."

"I never said he had. I—"

"No, but you hinted it. Come along."

"What do you mean?"

"You're going to say all this over again before Blake," said Tom Merry, grasping the cad of the Shell by the shoulder. "Come on!"

Mellish squirmed.

"I—I won't! Leggo! I—I was only japing these fellows—it was all a joke. I didn't mean it to be taken seriously."

"Liar!" said Sharp.

"I—I—I—"

Tom Merry flung the cad of the Fourth from him contemptuously.

"Well, if you're ready to eat your words like that, you can go. But mind, if I catch you on the subject again, you won't get off so easily."

"It's nothing to do with you," said Gore. "Mind your own business."

Tom Merry turned on him with flashing eyes.

"It's every chap's business to stop a cowardly back-biter," he exclaimed, "and every fellow who would listen to Mellish's lies without stopping him is as dirty a cad as Mellish himself. That's for all of you."

And Tom Merry strode away, leaving the juniors looking rather uncomfortable. Mellish would gladly have recommenced on the same tack, but his audience had melted away, even Gore deserting him. The cad of the fourth was left alone, with a very spiteful look on his face.

CHAPTER 3.

Skimpole is Sympathetic.

"H AVE you seen Blake?"

It was Herbert Skimpole who asked that question of everyone he met. Skimpole was looking anxious and concerned. He wanted to see Blake, and he wanted to see him badly.

The genius of the Shell had ways which his schoolfellows described as funny, but he had a heart of gold. He was kindness and generosity itself, as his actions showed, and he would give away anybody's property to a beggar at the gate. Generosity could go no further.

Skimpole was a Socialist, and the curious forms his Socialism took, furnished merriment for the juniors of the School House. But everybody liked Skimpole. It was agreed that there was sometimes, on rare occasions, sense in what he said, and that, anyway, he was always a kind, obliging sort of chap.

He would take anybody's troubles upon his shoulders, and was, in fact, much more concerned about others than about himself.

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What he had heard from Mellish was working in his mind now, and he was thinking only of rendering Blake advice and assistance. He had known Blake a long time, and had travelled to America with him, and naturally he wanted to stand by an old acquaintance in the hour of trouble and family disgrace.

"Have you seen Blake?"

"Yes," said Wally D'Arcy, of the Third Form, when he was asked the question. "You mean a chap in the Fourth, don't you?"

Skimpole blinked at him.

"You surely know Blake perfectly well, Wally—a fellow who was in America with us. Surely you are joking?"

"Front name Jack, isn't it?" asked Wally calmly.

"Yes, certainly."

"He digs in Study No. 6, with my brother Gus?"

"Yes."

"Then I've seen him?"

"When did you see him?"

The humorist of the Third Form appeared to make an effort to remember.

"Lemme see—yes, it was in Broadway, in New York. He—"

"Really, D'Arcy minor—"

"But I've seen him since that—when we landed from the steamer at Southampton—"

"I am convinced that you are jesting," said Skimpole; and he walked away with great dignity, leaving D'Arcy minor shrieking with laughter.

"Seen Blake?" said Figgins, of the New House, to whom Skimpole next addressed the question. "Have you looked in the coal-shed?"

"The coal-shed! Is Blake there?"

"Better look."

Skimpole looked. He spent ten minutes in the quest, but Blake was not there. It dawned upon him presently that Figgins had been humorous.

But as he came back, feeling somewhat indignant, he caught sight of the object of his quest. Blake was in a retired part of the quadrangle, walking to and fro in the gloom, with his hands deep in his pockets.

Skimpole hurried over to him.

"Ah, it is you, Blake! I want to speak to you—"

"Oh, don't bother!" said Blake. "I'm worried."

"Yes, I know you are worried, and that's why I have come."

"Well, you are a confounded ass!" said Blake, walking away.

Skimpole stared after him.

"Dear me, that was almost rude of Blake," he murmured.

"Still, as a sincere Socialist, I cannot allow myself to be stopped by a rebuff. I must seek him, and offer my advice and assistance, if necessary."

And he hurried after Blake.

Jack heard him coming, and quickened his pace, and the genius of the Shell arrived at the School House a bad second. Blake went into the juniors' room, and Skimpole followed him there. Blake had joined his study-mates, Digby, D'Arcy, and Herries. Skimpole came up with an affable smile, and took possession of the top button on Blake's jacket with a bony finger and thumb.

"Blake! My dear old friend—"

Blake was about to jerk him off, but at this peculiar mode of address he stopped, and simply stared at Skimpole. Digby, D'Arcy, and Herries stared at him, too. This was something new, even from Skimpole.

"My dear comrade, companion of my early years and my perilous travels," said Skimpole feelingly, "I am greatly distressed by your misfortune."

"You'll be greatly distressed by my fist if you don't clear," said Blake.

"I am here to offer my sympathy—"

"Off his rocker," said Digby. "You have to treat 'em kindly when they get like this. Be calm, Skimmy."

"I am not off my rocker, Digby, if by that you mean suffering from mental aberration," said Skimpole. "I have heard of Blake's terrible misfortune, and have come to offer him sympathy and advice."

"Mad as a hatter," said Herries.

"My dear schoolmate—"

"Look here," said Blake savagely, "I don't know how much you know about my affairs, but if you think you're going to come the goody-goody schoolboy with me, you're on the wrong track. If you call me your dear schoolmate again, I'll dot you on your silly nose!"

"Yaas, wathah! I wegard Skimpole as sevewal sorts of an ass, and I should wecommend you to give him a feahful thwashin', deah boy."

"Having heard from Mellish of the terrible disgrace that has fallen upon Blake—"

Blake jumped.

"Eh? What's that?"

"Don't think that I blame your brother," said Skimpole.

"That is what I want to explain to you, for your consolation in the hour of trial. A Determinist naturally cannot feel disgrace as ignorant persons do. He knows that every fault is the outcome of hereditament and enviroiny—I mean heredity and environment—and that therefore a thief, instead of being considered a thief, should be regarded as a purloiner of property, acting under the influence of atavism—"

"Will you kindly explain what you are babbling about?" asked Blake quietly, but with a dangerous gleam in his eyes.

"Certainly, though I cannot describe it as polite to call my sympathy babbling. But I can easily overlook your rudeness. That also is the result of heredity and environment. The filthy and sordid surroundings of a slum—drunken and self-indulgent parents—"

"Bai Jove!"

"I am speaking generally. But to return to the subject, I wish to assure Blake that no right-minded person will blame him or his brother—"

"Will you explain what you mean?" roared Blake.

"Certainly. The fact that your brother broke open Mr. Blake's cashbox before fleeing from home—Ow—ow—wow—wow!"

Skimpole's consolations were suddenly interrupted.

Jack Blake sprang at his consoler, and seized him by the throat, and shook him till his spectacles fell off, and his teeth rattled in his head.

Skimpole, too utterly amazed to offer resistance, was shaken to and fro like a rat in the jaws of a terrier.

"Bai Jove," said D'Arcy, "I wegard that as quite the pwopah capah, under the cires. Knock his silly head off, deah boy!"

"Jump on him!" suggested Herries.

"Wring his neck!" said Digby. "He has been asking for it for ages!"

"Dear me! Blake, please do not be so—ow—wow—so—oooooh!"

Jack Blake ceased shaking the amateur Socialist at last, not because his anger was appeased, but because his arm was aching.

"Now, then, you dummy—"

"You—really, you—ow—dear me, I am quite out of breath. I had not the slightest intention of offending you, Blake, but I cannot help thinking that I have inadvertently done so—"

"You dummy! What do you mean by calling my brother a thief?"

"I—I—I didn't mean to do that. I simply mentioned the fact that he had broken open Mr. Blake's cashbox—"

"You—you lunatic, you're not worth jumping on!" said Blake savagely. "Tell me who told you this yarn!"

"I learned the facts of the unfortunate case from Mellish—"

"It's lies—all lies, do you hear?"

"I am not surprised that you should attempt to hoodwink me on that point, Blake, from a false sense of shame. As a matter of fact, I assure you that this is merely a case of atavism, and you have nothing to be ashamed of—"

"I tell you it isn't true! Don't you believe me?"

"Really, Blake—"

"Oh, you're not worth talking to! I'll go and see Mellish!"

"Yaas, wathah, and I'll come with you, deah boy. We'll wag him for tellin' a feahful cwammah like that."

"D'Arcy, wait a moment. Have I offended Blake? Digby, please listen to me. Herries, I assure you I had no intention of—Dear me, how very rude of them to actually take their departure while I am addressing them!"

And Skimpole groped for his spectacles and put them on, looking somewhat disconsolate. He didn't want to think hardly of anybody, but he couldn't help thinking that Blake had received his sympathy in an ungrateful spirit.

CHAPTER 4.

Brought to Book.

MELLISH was not easily found. Jack Blake, quite white with wrath, rushed up and down, seeking him. He ran into Tom Merry and Lowther, who were looking for him, but the chums of the Shell called on him in vain to stop.

"Blake! Here, hold on!"

"Can't stop!"

And Blake was gone.

Tom Merry stared after him in amazement.

"What's up with Blake?"

"Looks off his rocker," said Monty Lowther. "Surely there can't be anything in what we heard that cad Mellish saying?"

Tom Merry shook his head decidedly.

"Impossible."

"Here's Gussy—let's ask him! Hold on, Gus!"
 "I'm in wathah a huwwy, deah boy."
 "Hold on! What's the matter with Blake?"
 "He is wathah excited."
 "Ha, ha! He looked it."
 "That young wottah Mellish has been tellin' a yarn about his wothah Fwank," explained D'Arcy, stopping. "Fwank Blake has bolted from home, and Mellish heard Blake tellin' me, and he's invented a yarn that Fwank wobbled his governah."

"We heard him telling it, and shut him up," said Tom Merry. "I don't envy Mellish when Blake gets hold of him now."

"No, I wathah think he will have a wathah uncomfy time. I don't want Blake to wag him too much, though, and I am followin' him to westwain his wage."

Tom Merry nodded thoughtfully.
 "Good idea! He looked as if he might do the little beast some damage. We've all had some experience of Mellish's slanders, but we don't want Blake to get into a row for handling him too roughly. Come on."

The juniors hurried after Blake. He had looked in several quarters for the cad of the Fourth, without finding him. He arrived at Mellish's study in the Fourth Form passage, and kicked the door open. A junior was sitting at the table eating jam-tarts, and in a second Blake had him by the shoulders, and had dragged him over, his chair going with a crash to the floor.

"Now, then, you young beast—Hallo, Reilly!"
 "Faith, and is it off ye're dot ye are?" roared the boy from Belfast, scrambling up. "Sure, and I—"

"I'm sorry—I took you for Mellish—"
 "Faith, and if ye insinuate that I'm like Mellish at all, at all, it's a fight ye'll have on your hands!" exclaimed Reilly. "Sure, I—"

"Sorry! Where is Mellish?"

"Blessed if I know. I—"

But Blake did not wait for more. He darted out of the study again, and as it happened, met Mellish face to face in the corridor.

Mellish had one look at Blake's face, and saw it white and furious. One look was enough for him. He turned like a flash and ran.

"Stop!" roared Blake.

Mellish would not have stopped for a thousand pounds at that moment. He ran like a deer for safety. He knew from Blake's look that he must have heard the story he had been telling; and Mellish wanted anything on earth but a close interview with the indignant junior at that moment.

"Stop him!" roared Blake.

But Mellish dodged and turned and ran. Blake pursued him at top speed. The hapless prevaricator dodged and turned like a fox with the hounds close behind, but he was hunted down at last, and he was run to earth in the common-room, where he darted behind Lefevre of the Fifth, who happened to be there. Mellish sometimes fagged for Lefevre, a thing no other Fourth-Former would do, and in consequence he was rather in favour with the Fifth-Former. Lefevre pushed Blake back.

"Hold on! What's the row?"

"Let me get at him!" roared Blake.

"But what's the trouble? That's what I say. What's the trouble?"

"He's been telling lies about my brother."

"I—I—I haven't!" gasped Mellish. "It—it—it was only a joke."

"There you are," said Lefevre. "Let him alone! He says it was only a joke."

"Get out of the way!"

The Fifth-Former flushed with anger.

"Hang it, Blake, do you know whom you're speaking to?" he exclaimed.

"Will you stand aside?"

"You cheeky young brat! Do you know I'm in the Fifth, and—"

"I don't care if you were in the Sixth! I'm going to give that hound a hiding!" yelled Blake. "Get out of the way, or I'll shift you!"

Lefevre gasped for breath.

"You—you cheeky imp! What the deuce are you up to, Tom Merry?"

"Shifting you!" said Tom Merry. "What the dickens are you doing in the junior room, anyway? Outside!"

"I—I'll wring your necks—"

"Bai Jove, I should absolutely refuse to have my neck wung! I insist upon your immediately takin' your departure, deah boy."

"Let me—Ow! Oh! I'll—Grrrooo!"

The Fifth-Former, in spite of his angry resistance, was hustled to the door by a dozen juniors, and ejected into

the passage. Then Blake pushed back his cuffs and squared up to Mellish.

"Put up your fists, you rat!"

"I—I won't!"

"Take that, then—and that—and that! Every 'that' was accompanied by a punch, and Mellish threw himself on the floor.

"Get up!" roared Blake.

"Yaas, wathah! Get up, deah boy, and take your gwuel, you know!"

"I—I—I'm hurt!"

"Herries, old man, fetch me your dog-whip, will you?"

"Certainly," said Herries, leaving the room.

"Help!" yelled Mellish.

"You've got to answer for your lies," said Blake, between his teeth. "Get up and fight, or I'll thrash you within an inch of your life."

Herries brought in the whip. Tom Merry closed the door and locked it. There was no escape for Mellish. He was white as a sheet, and for once in his life he deeply regretted having departed from the paths of veracity.

"Now then, which is it to be?" exclaimed Blake.

Mellish rose slowly to his feet.

"I'll fight you," he said sullenly.

And he did.

He had no escape, and he had to defend himself or else be knocked about like a punching-ball, and so he put the best he knew into the fight.

But he was as nothing to Blake. He was quite as big, and a little older; but he had little pluck, and he had usually avoided fights with so much skill that he had had very little practice in the art. Blake knocked him right and left, and whenever he refused to rise, a touch of the dog-whip brought him to his feet again. At last he was quite knocked out, and it was plain that he could not go on.

"Betrah let him off now," said D'Arcy, putting up his eyeglass and surveying Mellish as he lay on the floor, groaning. "There is hardly woom for anothah bwaise on his face, and his nose won't stand much more. I wathah think that he will wemembah this auspicious occasion for some time to come."

Jack Blake panted.

"You'll think twice before you start telling lies again, I hope, you cur!" he said. "You'd better, anyway!"

And Mellish only groaned.

There was an angry hammering at the door, and Tom Merry opened it, and Kildare, the captain of St. Jim's, looked in.

"What's all this confounded row about?" he exclaimed. "And what have you got the door locked for?"

"Only a little argument between Blake and Mellish," said Monty Lowther.

Kildare looked at Mellish.

"What have you been fighting about?"

"His lies," said Blake savagely; "and if he begins again I'll jolly well lick him again!"

Kildare looked at him sternly.

"That's not the way to speak to me, Blake."

"I'm sorry," said Blake penitently. "I know that, Kildare, only—the mongrel said that my brother was a thief, and—Jack's voice broke—"Frank has left home, and Mellish found it out, and then he invented that yarn, and there's not a word of truth in it."

Mellish was sullenly silent. The captain of St. Jim's looked at him with a glint in his eyes.

"Serve him right, then," he said. "I think I know Mellish's ways. He has made trouble in the school before with his falsehoods. If you hadn't licked him I would have done it myself."

And Mellish received no more sympathy than that from anyone. At the same time, his insinuations had taken root.

"Must have been something in it," Gore remarked privately to Sharp, "or else Blake wouldn't have been so awfully ratty about it."

And Sharp nodded assent.

"Oh, of course, it's true," said Dudley of the Third. "I don't see why Blake should fly into such a temper if it wasn't."

But he took care not to say so in Jack Blake's hearing.

CHAPTER 5.

D'Arcy's Treat.

JACK BLAKE, still looking very excited, strode into his study and banged the door. The door was opened the next moment, and Blake looked round impatiently. But it was only Arthur Augustus.

There was a thoughtful expression upon the brow of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. It was evident that something was working in his brain.



"Heavens!" panted Jack Blake. "It's my brother Frank! Come on!"

"I've got a wathah good ideah, deah boy," he remarked. Blake grunted.

"It's wathah wotten for you to have your bwotah disappear in this weekdies mannah," continued the swell of the School House. "You wemembah that some time ago I took up amateur detective work, and was wathah successful."

"I don't remember that part."

"My deah chap, you wemembah that I twacked down some burglahs, and cleahed the name of a gamekeepah who was accused of poachin—"

"No, I don't."

"Then I can only remark that you've got a wotten bad memowry," said D'Arcy, with dignity. "I was most successful as an amateur detective. I was thinkin' that if you like I will undahtake the task of findin' your missin' bwotah. If you like to place the case in my hands—"

"Oh, don't be a duffer, old chap."

"Weally, Blake—"

The door opened again, and Skimpole blinked in.

"I want to speak to you on a most important matter, Blake—"

"Get out!"

"As you seem to entertain a doubt of your brother's guilt—"

"Shut the door after you."

"I am willing to take up the case in my capacity of amateur detective, and sift it to the bottom. You will re-

member that some time ago I was very successful as an amateur detective—"

"Weally, Skimmay—"

"And tracked down some burglars—"

"Bai Jove!"

"And helped to clear a chap who was charged with poaching—"

"Well, of all the cheek, you boundah! It was I—"

"And there is no doubt that I could handle this case quite easily, and get to the bottom of the mystery," said Skimpole, taking out a notebook. "Pleese—"

"There isn't any mystery!" roared Blake.

Skimpole shook his head with a very sage look.

"Come, come, Blake, you must keep no secrets from a professional adviser. Do you know when it was that your brother broke into Mr. Blake's cashbox?"

"You—you—you—"

"And whether the money purloined was in notes or gold? If in notes, the numbers would help us a great deal—"

Jack Blake picked up a cushion.

"I give you one second to get out," he said.

"Really, Blake—"

Bliff!

The cushion caught Skimpole fairly on the chest, and he crashed on the door. He slid to the floor, looking considerably dazed. Blake picked up another cushion from the easy chair, and whirled it aloft.

"Now then, are you going?"

NEXT
THURSDAY

"D'ARCY MINOR'S CHUM."

A Tale of the Boys of St. Jim's.
By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

"Ye-e-e-s; under the circumstances I had better go!" gasped Skimpole, squirming through the doorway. "I shall, however, take up the case, and you can rely upon me to sift the matter to the bottom, and— I'm going!"

Blake made a threatening motion, and Skimpole slammed the door and disappeared.

"The uthah ass!" said D'Arcy. "But you can wely upon me, Blake. I will find the missin' boundah, and bwing him back—"

The door opened again. "Haven't you had enough?" shouted Blake; and he hurled the cushion with unerring aim at the head that looked in round the door.

There was a roar from Tom Merry.

"Oh! What on earth—"

"Ha, ha, ha! I'm sorry. I thought it was Skimmey!"

"Bai Jove, you know, I wegard that as wathah funny!"

"Do you?" said Tom Merry. "Then here's some more fun for you!" And he hurled the cushion back, and the swell of St. Jim's was bowled over like a ninepin.

"Bai Jove! You uthah wottah!"

D'Arcy sat down. He jumped up again and rushed towards Tom Merry.

"Hold on!" exclaimed Tom, dodging round the table.

"Peace, my son—pax!"

"I wufuse to make it pax. You have cwumpled up my waistcoat, as well as causin' me a severe ache in my inward weigions, and I am goin' to give you a feahful thwashin'."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Pway do not win away, Tom Mewwy. It makes me uthah out of bweath chasin' you wound the table, and it thwows me into a fluttah."

"Hold on! Is this how you always receive visitors, Gussy?"

"I wufuse to wegard you as a visitah."

"It's the D'Arcy brand of hospitality," said Monty Lowther, from the door.

"Weally Lowthah—"

"I'm surprised at you, Gussy."

"Undah the cires, I will let Tom Mewwy off that thwashin'," said D'Arcy, stopping breathlessly, "but I considah—"

"Never mind what you consider," said Tom Merry, "we came here on business. Do you know that Northwood are playing Newcastle United to-morrow, on the home ground?"

"I weally was not aware of the fact."

"We are thinking of going," said Tom Merry. "We thought you Fourth Form kids might be glad to come along. It's a first-class League match. You know how Newcastle play, and Northwood are in fine form, too."

Blake's eyes sparkled.

"Good! I'd like to see it, if it can be fixed."

"Then it's a go?"

"Yaas, wathah; I shall be vewy pleased."

"Then," said Tom Merry, looking round, "we all accept Gussy's invitation."

"Eh?"

"We all accept Gussy's invitation to come with him."

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—"

"Gussy being the most suitable person to take the lead on an occasion like this."

"Yaas, wathah, though you don't usually see facts in so clear a light, Tom Mewwy. Of course, when it's a question of makin' up a party, what you wequire as a leader is a fellow of tact and judgment."

"Exactly! It being D'Arcy's treat—"

"Eh?"

"I don't know what the railway fares are to Northwood, but I think they're pretty dear. That can be left to D'Arcy, however."

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—"

"Now, we'll be ready to leave directly after dinner to-morrow," said Tom Merry, unheeding. "We rely on you, Gussy."

"Yaas, but—"

"Now, we won't bother you any longer. Good-bye!"

And Tom Merry and Monty Lowther quitted Study No. 6, leaving Arthur Augustus staring at Blake, and Blake grinning.

CHAPTER 6. Off to the Match.

"READY?"

"Weally, Tom Mewwy, I am wathah surprised at the question. It is only a quartah of an hour since we finished dinnah."

It was Saturday, and a fine, cold winter day. Morning lessons and the midday dinner of the juniors were over, and the party for Northwood were preparing to start.

Tom Merry had looked into Study No. 6 for D'Arcy, and

he found the swell of St. Jim's tying his necktie before his big glass.

"Quarter of an hour!" grunted Tom Merry. "I was ready in five minutes."

"And judgin' by the extwemely untidy state of your attah, Tom Mewwy, I should weally considah that five minutes was quite enough," said D'Arcy, leaving his necktie alone for a moment while he jammed his monocle into his eye and took a survey of the hero of the Shell.

"Why, what's the matter with it?" demanded Tom, indignantly.

"The necktie is cwoked—"

"Oh, rats!"

"And the twousahs look as if they haven't been in the pweess for a week."

"Well, they haven't."

"As this is a wippin' League match, and we are going to see a first-class team, I weally considah that we might dwess decently for the occasion."

"Look here, how long are you going to be?"

"I hope to have my dwessin' completed by anothah five minutes."

"Then we shall jolly well leave you behind."

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—"

"Or, rather, we wou'd do so, only we want you to take the tickets. Now, then, Gussy, be a good chap and hurry up!"

"I wou'd oblige you like anythin', Tom Mewwy, but personal attah is weally the one thing a chap can't huwy ovah."

"B-r-r-r-r!"

Tom Merry left the doorway. Lowther and Manners were waiting in the passage, in coats and caps and scarves. It was a cold February day.

"Isn't the image ready?" demanded Lowther.

"Nother five minuts."

"I'll jolly soon have him out!" Lowther kicked open the door of the study. "Gussy, how long, duffer?"

"Not more than five minutes, I hope, Lowthah. I have only my waistcoat and jacket and coat to put on, and my hair to bwush, and my toppah to—"

Lowther picked up the inkpot from the table.

"Do you see this inkpot, dear boy?"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Would you like the contents over your chivvy?"

"I wegard that as a widiculous question, Lowthah, and I wegard the word chivvy as a vulgah expwession."

"Well, I give you till I've counted three to get out of this study," said Lowther, "then I shall start with the ink."

"I absolutely wufuse to get out."

"One!"

"I decline to be ordahed about."

"Two!"

"I wegard you as an intwudin' scoundwel, and I wequest you to kindly wetire fwom my quartahs."

"Three!"

Up went the inkpot.

"Hold on, deah boy, I'm goin'—"

D'Arcy clutched up the rest of his garments and bolted from the study. He ran into the waiting juniors, and his silk hat went one way and his coat another.

"Hallo," exclaimed Tom Merry, "finished already?"

"No, I am not finished. That wottah Lowthah—"

Monty Lowther came to the door of the study with the inkpot in his hand. Arthur Augustus hastily went down the passage, putting on his things as he went.

"Is my collah stwaight, Tom Mewwy?" he asked anxiously.

"Straight as a die."

"And my necktie?"

"A perfect picture."

"My jacket is wumpled."

"It fits you like the paper on the wall."

"Then pway give me a hand with my coat," said D'Arcy.

"I must go back and bwush my hat a little."

"It's simply perfect."

"Yaas, wathah, but—"

"In my opinion," said Manners solemnly, "any further brushing wou'd rather detract from the general effect than otherwise."

"Well, if you weally think so, pewwaps it will do. At the same time, I wegard Lowthah as a wuff beast, and I wufuse to continue his acquaintance."

Monty Lowther sobbed pathetically, a demonstration of which Arthur Augustus refused to take any notice. They joined Blake, Herries, and Digby downstairs. Herries had his bulldog on a chain. D'Arcy stared at the animal.

"What are you doin' with that bwute, Howwies?"

"Leading him."

"You are not bwingin' him along?"

"What do you think I am leading him for, then?"

"He will not be allowed on the football gwound."

NEXT
THURSDAY:

"D'ARCY MINOR'S CHUM."

A Tale of the Boys of St. Jim's.
By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

"Bosh! What harm is there in a nice quiet animal like Towser? It isn't as if he were a rotten mongrel like your young brother's Pongo."

"Wats! I object to the pwesence of a dog in the party."

"Rot! Towser doesn't object to you, and he's got a jolly lot more reason."

"I wegard that wemark as wotten, Hewwies."

"Oh, come on!" said Herries crossly. "We shall miss the first half if we stay hero till Gussy has done talking."

"Weally, Hewwies—"

But the party were marching off, and D'Arcy followed. Herries did not let go his bulldog. Towser wanted a run, and that was quite sufficient reason for Herries to take him out.

Three juniors were coming over from the New House, and they met the School House party at the gates. They were Figgins, Kerr, and Wynn. They were clad for going out, and they grinned genially at Tom Merry & Co. For once in a while the rivals of St. Jim's met without a House row.

"Whither bound?" said Figgins, the long-limbed chief of the New House juniors. "You ought to be practising footer. We shall jolly well lick you in the House match when it comes off, if you don't."

"Not much fear of that," Tom Merry remarked. "If that was all we had to think of, Figgy, we shouldn't trouble to practise much."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Are you going down to the village for a feed?" asked Fatty Wynn, with a covetous look in his eyes. "If you are, I don't mind coming with you. Of course, Figgy, I want to come to the Northwood match, but—"

"Bosh! You're coming with us. You've just had a feed."

"Yes, but it wasn't much—"

"My hat! It was double what I had, at all events."

"Oh, come, Figgins," remonstrated the Falstaff of the New House, "you know jolly well that there was just the usual school dinner—"

"That's enough for any ordinary octopus."

"Then I only had the sausages and bacon and chips besides, and the rabbit-pie in the study afterwards, as well as the scones and the tarts, and a few nuts and some toffee. I get so jolly hungry in this February weather."

"You don't want another feed—"

"If Tom Merry wants me to—"

Tom Merry laughed.

"But we're not going to a feed," he said. "We're going to see the Northwood Athletic play Newcastle United."

"My hat! So are we!"

"Then we'll go together—that is," said Tom Merry dubiously, "if you New House kids can behave yourselves for a whole afternoon."

"We can jolly well keep you in order, anyway," said Figgins. "Come on!"

And they started.

CHAPTER 7.

At the Football Ground.

THERE was a big crowd round the entrance to the Northwood Athletic Football Ground. The fine sharp winter afternoon, and the prospects of seeing a match between two splendid teams had drawn football lovers from far and near, and all the approaches to the ground were crowded for an hour before the gates were opened.

The gates were flung open half an hour before time for the kick-off, and the crowd swarmed in. The party from St. Jim's arrived just after the gates had opened, and they found the entrance simply blocked.

"Bai Jove," said D'Arcy, "this looks wathah wotten, deah boys."

"Oh, we'll get in," said Figgins.

"Yaas, wathah! We must get a seat in time for the beastly kick-off you know. I hear there is a new playah in the wanks of the Athletic—a weally wippin' sort of wingah, and ewerybody is anxious to see him play."

"That accounts for this confounded crowd, perhaps," Lowther remarked. "Here, don't let those chaps shove us back! Elbows!"

There was a rush of a number of rough-looking fellows to plunge through the crowd, and they had not expected much difficulty with a party of boys.

But they found the juniors of St. Jim's stern stuff to tackle.

The lads stood well together, and gave elbow for elbow, and shove for shove, and the roughs failed to get through.

A red-nosed man in a dirty fur cap glared savagely at Tom Merry, who had just pushed him back in a way he disliked.

"Who are you a-shoving?" he demanded.

"You," said Tom Merry cheerfully. "Didn't you feel it?"

And the juniors chuckled.

"You get outer the way."

"You go and eat coke."

"I'm coming in!"

"All in good time, daddy; you wait your turn!"

"Yaas, wathah!" said Arthur Augustus severely. "I wegard it as extwemely ungentlemanly to shove in this wude way, and I am surpised—"

Arthur Augustus had no time to finish.

A batch had been admitted at the gates, and the crowd closed up, and the roughs took advantage of the opportunity to make another rush.

The juniors stood their ground, but they were rushed apart, and there was a general scramble.

Arthur Augustus found himself whirled away from his friends, and jammed in the midst of a rough crowd.

"By Jove!" he gasped.

He looked round him helplessly.

He was being pushed and rumpled and ruffled, and his struggles only seemed to make the crowd jam tighter about him.

His elegant coat and gloves and silk hat seemed to amuse the rougher section of the crowd, too, and the swell of St. Jim's came in for a few extra shoves on that account alone.

"Pway give me a little more woom, deah boys!" he gasped. "Weally, I entweat—"

"Hallo, 'ere you are agin!" said the man in the fur cap, shoving his bristly, beer-inflamed face close to D'Arcy. "Don't you shove me."

"Weally, my fwiend, I wasn't shovin' you."

"Then don't you do it agin."

"I am bein' shoved myself in the most wude and weekless mannah. I insist upon your givin' me a little more woom."

"Haw, haw, haw!"

"I am quite out of bweath!"

"Haw, haw, haw!"

"Pway—"

"Hallo, there's Gussy!" shouted Blake. "This way!"

The rest of the juniors had got together again. They made a concerted rush for Arthur Augustus, and the roughs had to give way.

"Bai Jove!" gasped D'Arcy. "I was weally feelin' vewy hot and uncomfy. Pway keep close to me, deah boys, and don't get sepawated agin. I cannot undabtake to look aftah you unless you are careful to keep with me."

"Well, of all the cheek—"

"Here we are! Take the tickets, Gussy!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Ten, please, in the gwand stand," said D'Arcy, laying a five-pound note down before the man at the paybox. The man glared at him.

To be asked to change a five-pound note while an eager crowd clamoured for admission was bad enough, but that was not all.

"Wrong entrance!" he roared. "This is the sixpenny."

"Bai Jove!"

"Pass on there!"

"We had better go back, deah boys. It's the w'ong entrance."

"Rats!" said Tom Merry. "It's the right entrance. Get on!"

"But—"

"Sixpence is good enough for us. We're not giddy aristocrats," said Blake. "Tanner a time, old son!"

"But—"

"Get on!"

"I wufuse to get on," said D'Arcy, putting up his eye-glass, and surveying the crowd. "Undah the cires. I think we had bettah go back, and go to the othah entrance."

There did not seem much chance of getting back through that clamouring crowd.

"Go on!" roared Blake. "I'll dot you on the nose if you don't take the tickets."

"I should uttably wufuse to be dotted on the nose."

"I—I—I—"

"Ere's your change, sir," said the man in the paybox, giving D'Arcy a huge pile of small silver. "I've taken for ten."

The swell of St. Jim's had forgotten the banknote he had laid down.

He stared at the heap of silver.

"Bai Jove, I can't cawwy all that, you know. I can't go clinking about like a moneybox. Besides, I am goin' to the othah entrance."

"No money returned."

"Get on there!" said the policeman at the gate. "Can't you see you're delaying the crowd. Get on!"

"But—"

Blake pushed D'Arcy on by main force, and they went forward. The swell of St. Jim's resisted strenuously.

"Blake, pway let me weturn. I insist!"

"Rats! Get on!"

"Pway allow me——"
 "Go ahead!"
 "I insist——"
 "You're not going back. Back up, you chaps!"
 "But I have left my change lyin' there!" howled Arthur Augustus.
 "By Jove, I forgot that!"
 "My change. It isn't much, only four pound fifteen, only I shall be bwoke until next week, and——"
 "It's all right!" called out Tom Merry, who was last in.
 "I've got your change, Gussy. Travel along!"
 "Oh, vewy well; but——"
 Blake dragged him forward. The juniors scrambled on, and secured pretty good places. When they were seated, Tom Merry handed over D'Arcy's change. He had taken it in his handkerchief. It consisted mostly of shillings and sixpences, and weighed a good deal. D'Arcy looked at it in dismay.
 "Bai Jove! How am I to cawwy all that?"
 "In your hat," suggested Kerr.
 "Pway don't be widiculous, deah boy! I suppose I can shove it into my twousahs' pocket, but it will make the twousahs sag."
 "Horrid!"
 "I'll take it if you like," said Fatty Wynn. "We shall all be jolly hungry after watching this match, and I know a nice place in the town where we could get a good feed. On four pound fifteen I could——"
 D'Arcy let the money slide into his trousers' pocket.

CHAPTER 8.

Northwood v. Newcastle United.

"TEN minutes yet to the kick off," said Tom Merry. "Jolly good crowd here!"
 "Wathah too many for comfort," said D'Arcy.
 "I have been tweated vewy wuffly. There was a low wude wottah in a fur cap who——"
 "Who yer talking about?" demanded a voice from the row of seats behind the juniors, and D'Arcy looked round in surprise.
 It was the hero of the fur cap.
 He was glaring at D'Arcy, apparently very much angered by the uncomplimentary reference to himself.
 "Weally, my deah sir——"
 "Tailor's dummy," said the man in the fur cap. "Yah!"
 "I wefuse to be alluded to as a tailah's dummay. Tom Mewwy, will you kindly hold my hat while I thwash this wottah?"
 "Not much!"
 "Dig, pway hold my hat and cane!"
 "I'll hold you if you start making a row here," said Digby.
 "Weally, Dig, it is not I who am makin' a wow; it is this wottah! I am goin' to give him a thwashin'."
 "Keep quiet!"
 "I wefuse to keep quiet. I——"
 "You'll get chucked out," said Manners.
 "I should absolutely wefuse to be chucked out."
 "Let him come on," said the man in the fur cap; "let him come, that's all! Let him come hon!"
 "Oh, sit down!" said Tom Merry. "Curious thing Gussy can't go anywhere without making a row——"
 "I wefuse to admit anythin' of the sort. I wegard it as beastly bad form to make a wow, but undah the cires——"
 "Hallo," exclaimed Lowther suddenly, "there's young Wally."
 The exclamation took D'Arcy's attention off the gentleman in the fur cap. He looked round for his younger brother.

Wally D'Arcy was seated at a little distance, with another junior of the Third Form by his side. The head of a dog was peeping up between them, and the chums of St. Jim's recognised Pongo.

"He's got his dog in," said Herries, with interest. "Towser got loose in the crowd, or I'd have him here. I wonder how he got that mongrel in."

"Smuggled him in under his jacket, I suppose!" laughed Tom Merry. "I say, D'Arcy, that's Dudley of the Third your young brother's with. He's a young rotter, and you ought to keep Wally away from him."

"Yaas, wathah! But Wally is such an obstinate young wascal. He nevah shows me the wespect due to an eldah bwothah."

"More of our chaps here, too," said Figgins, looking round. "There's the Yank."

He waved his hand to Buck Finn, the American junior who had lately entered in the School House at St. Jim's as Tom Merry's Form-fellow in the Shell.

"What-ho!" sang back Buck Finn. "I guess I've got a front seat. You don't catch me getting left."

"What-ho, St. Jim's!" roared Reilly of the Fourth, who was staring across the ground through a field-glass.

"Hallo, Tipperary!" roared back Blake.

The juniors of St. Jim's, in whatever part of the ground they found themselves, hailed one another with a lordly disregard for anybody else. One might have supposed that the League match was being played for their benefit alone, and that the general public had only been admitted as a favour.

There was a buzz of conversation on the crowded benches, and among the swarms of spectators who were standing.

The ground was full, not to say overflowing, and it was not yet time for the kick-off.

The chief topic of conversation seemed to be the new player in the ranks of Northwood Athletic.

His name was Howard, according to the programme, and the chums listened with attention as they heard him discussed by the people round him.

He was a new forward, playing on the right wing, and he had only been on the books of Northwood Athletic a week, but in that short time he had made his mark.

He had played in a League match the previous Saturday, and scored three goals off his own bat, so to speak, against such a side as Sheffield Wednesday.

In a mid-week match he had met a Southern side, and had done even better, and all Northwood was talking about him.

He was expected to do well to-day against the Geordies, and, as a matter of fact, the great hope of the Northwooders lay in the new forward.

For, good as the Athletic undoubtedly were, there was no denying the fact that the splendid Newcastle team was a little bit above their weight.

It was hoped that the new winger would give to the home team that magic touch it required to put it on a level with the men from the north.

"By George," said Tom Merry, "I'm getting awfully keen to see this new chap. I wonder what he's like!"

"Kerr's seen him," said Figgins. "Haven't you, Scotty, old boy?"

"Yes, rather," said Kerr.

"What's he like?" demanded nine voices.

Kerr reflected.

"Oh, an ordinary chap, you know—jolly well built, and looks as if he were a goer. Rather a serious chivvy; same coloured eyes as Blake, and rather like him in features, but, of course, much better looking."

Blake grunted.

"That's not saying much," said Figgins. "Anything else?"

"Not that I noticed. He was pointed out to me by a chap as the new Northwood winger, that's all."

"Well, we shall see him soon," said Digby, glancing at the programme. "I see he's playing right. He'll have to be jolly good class if he's anything like good enough for Newcastle."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"What do you know about Newcastle, Gussy?"

"Nothin' at all, deah boy; but I know United are a wippin' team, you know. I've nevah seen them play, and I haven't wead anythin' about them, and I don't know anythin' weally on the subject, but a fellow told my cousin they were wippin'."

"Then, of course, there's no further doubt on the subject," said Blake. "You couldn't want more conclusive evidence for a court of law."

"Weally, Blake——"

"Still, Gussy's right," said Figgins; "they are ripping. You know they've been in the running for the Cup year in and year out, and a side has to be jolly good to get to the Crystal Palace ground for the final."

"Yes, rather!"

"Besides, they play such ripping scientific footer," said Figgins. "It's an education to watch 'em play. You'll see."

"Bai Jove! Isn't it neahly time for the kick-off, deah boys?"

"Not yet, Gussy."

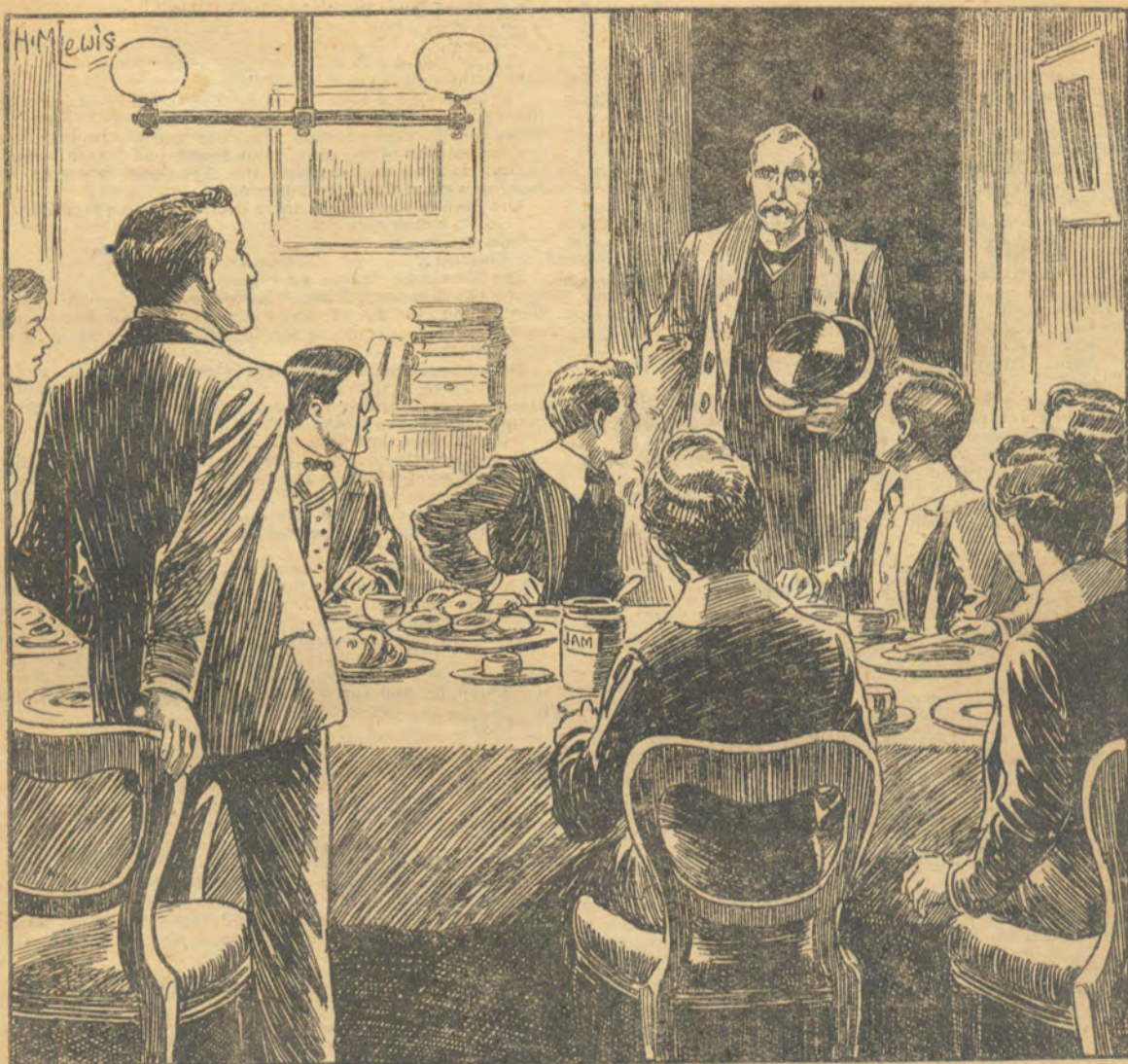
"Pewpaws they might kick off a little earliah to oblige us, if they knew," said D'Arcy. "I don't like waitin', you know."

"Better go and see about it," said Figgins solemnly. "If they knew the one and only Augustus was waiting, of course they'd rush out to kick off, fit to break their necks."

"Pway don't attempt to be humowous, Figgins, if that is the best you can do," said Arthur Augustus. "It is wotten enough to have Lowthah always perpetwatin' wotten jokes, without you followin' in his twack. Ow! What beastly boundah twod on my beastly foot? Lowthah, I believe it was you."

"Good shot!" said Lowther.

"I consider——"



Frank Blake sprang to his feet as an elderly, grave-featured gentleman looked into the room. "Father!" he exclaimed.

"Here they come!"

There was a scamper of feet and a cheer, and Newcastle United ran out into the ground.

A fine team they looked, in their garb of black-and-white stripes; very fit, and very keen, and evidently a winning team.

There was a shout.

"Come out, Northwood!"

"Where are the boys?"

"Buck up!"

"Here they come! Hurrah!"

The Northwood fellows came pouring into the ground. They were in red shirts and white knickers, and looked very fit in them. All eyes were turned upon the new winger, and he was cheered loudly by name.

"Howard! Howard!"

"Bravo!"

Tom Merry uttered an exclamation.

"I've seen that chap before!"

There was a sharp cry from Jack Blake.

They looked at him. He was sitting as if spellbound, staring at the new winger of Northwood Athletic.

His eyes seemed to be starting from his head.

"What's the mattah, deah boy?" exclaimed Arthur Augustus, in alarm.

Blake sprang to his feet.

"Frank! It's my brother!"

CHAPTER 9.

A Lad of the League.

"YOUR brother!"

Blake was staring blankly at the new winger.

He was too far from the players for the winger to have heard his cry, and the young man, known in Northwood as "Howard," evidently had no idea of his presence there.

"Frank!"

Tom Merry whistled.

"My hat! So that's Frank!"

The juniors stared at Blake, and then they stared at the winger.

The likeness between the two was unmistakable.

The winger was older, larger in every way, of course, and his face had a serious and somewhat worn expression that contrasted with Blake's.

But Jack's words were evidently true. It was no mistake. By chance, on the football-field, he had discovered his missing brother.

"Bai Jove," said Arthur Augustus, "I wegard this as extremely cutwious, you know. I told you so, Blake."

Blake stared at him.

"Eh? You told me what?"

"I told you that if you left it to me I should find your missin' bwothah."

"My word!" said Digby. "Of all the——"

"I twust you are not goin' to detwact fwom my cwedit

in this mattah, Dig. I bwrought Blake here, and though I did not exactly foresee that he would wecognise his lost bwothah in this new wingah—"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Tom Merry. "No, I don't think you did exactly foresee it, you young bounder!"

"I did not exactly foresee it," said D'Arcy calmly. "But that is how it has turned out. In all detective work there is an element of chance—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"There is nothin' whatevah to laugh at in that statement, Tom Mewwy, and no weason at all for you to gwin like a Cheshire cat, Figgins. You know vewy well that Sherlock Holmes and Sexton Blake always owe a gweat deal to chance, aided by tact and judgment—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"If I am to be intewwupted by wibald laughtah, I shall wufuse to pursue the subject further," said Arthur Augustus, with dignity. "I can only hope that Blake, on reflection, will give me pwopah cweedit for discowahin' his long-lost bwothah."

"Hallo! Northwood's won the toss!" exclaimed Kerr.

"Good!"

There was a keen, wintry wind blowing, but little sun. Northwood naturally chose the goal the wind was blowing from, and Newcastle were given the kick-off against it.

Two finer sets of fellows had seldom been seen on a British football-ground.

The juniors, who—with the exception of Blake—did not know the Newcastle men by sight—consulted the programme, and found that the Tyneside team was made up as follows:

Lawrence; McCracken, Clarke; Veitch, Willis, Gardner; Wilson, Gosnell, Rutherford, Grierson, Howie.

"Jolly good team!" said Blake. "I've seen nearly all of 'em play in the North, and I can tell you you're going to see a good game."

"Yaas, wathah! A fellow told my cousin—"

"Blow the fellow, and blow your cousin! Look!"

"Weally, Figgins—"

"They're kicking off!"

Newcastle kicked off against the wind. Thousands of eyes were on the players now. The juniors of St. Jim's watched eagerly.

Blake's eyes were on his brother. He had not yet recovered from his amazement at seeing Frank Blake in the ranks of Northwood Athletic.

He knew that the new winger, "Howard," was a professional footballer who had been taken on by the club. To discover his brother under the guise of a professional footballer was amazing.

Yet, when he came to think of it, there was really nothing so surprising in it. Frank Blake had left home after a dispute with his father, and he had been too proud to ask any assistance from the home he had left.

His going had broken off all the prospect of his career, and he had taken to professional football, evidently, as a means of earning a livelihood. And what better means could there be than playing the grand old game for his bread, so long as he played it clean and straight?

And that Frank was always certain to do. And Jack, as he watched his brother contending with the giants of the North, felt a thrill of pride.

The talk about "hired gladiators," and so forth, would never have had any effect upon Jack's healthy mind. He knew that a footballer, so long as he played the game, was a man quite as worthy of respect as any other; that the profession he followed was a noble and honourable one, and eminently a useful one, inasmuch as it provided a harmless and instructive amusement for tens of thousands of honest folk who loved the grand old game, but had no opportunities of playing it themselves.

And Frank Blake certainly showed himself worthy of the fame he had already won among the Northwood partisans. His pace was wonderful, his keenness equally so.

It was evident that from the start Newcastle had marked him, yet though they paid him every attention, he outwitted them time and again.

If the rest of the Northwood team had been up to the new winger's form, there is no doubt that the Tynesiders, good as they were, would have gone goalless home from that match.

But that was not the case. Northwood were good, but not up to Tyneside form, and from the rest Frank Blake seemed to stand out head and shoulders in quality.

"Ripping!" said Blake. "Bravo, Franky!"

"Hurrah!" yelled the juniors of St. Jim's.

They already took a personal sort of pride in the new winger. He was Blake's brother, and therefore one of them, and they watched his progress with fatherly eyes.

"Bai Jove!" said Arthur Augustus. "That chap is playin' wemarkably well. I could not have twapped the ball bottah than that, deah boys."

"Go hon!" said Tom Merry.

"Yaas, I am speakin' quite sewiously, you know. I wegard it as wippin'—"

"Hurrah!"

"Go it, Franky!"

"On the ball! On the ball!"

The shouts rang over the field. Frank Blake had trapped the ball, and was off with it like a shot. The other forwards of Northwood were not near enough to help him, having nothing of his pace. But Frank had seen his opportunity, and he was through the Newcastle forwards and making a great break on his own.

The juniors stood up in their excitement to watch him.

"Go it, Franky!"

"On the ball!"

"Play up!"

The Newcastle halves were good, but they did not seem up to the Northwood forward. He dodged Veitch—not an easy thing to do at any time—ran round Willis, who stumbled; Gardner being too far off to take a hand in the proceedings.

McCracken and Clarke were almost upon him, and it was pretty clear that he would never get through the backs. His comrades were well behind, and there was no chance of giving a pass save to the enemy.

"Kick!" breathed Tom Merry.

It was exactly the same thought that was in the mind of the Northwood winger. He kicked.

There seemed to be every chance against the kick, but the winger had judged well. The moment after his toe had touched the ball, he was shouldered over by the rush of McCracken.

But the leather was whizzing on. The shot had been true—true for a corner of the net, and Newcastle's chance depended upon the goalkeeper now. And Lawrence was to be depended upon.

But even Lawrence could not work miracles, and that shot was a little too much for him. The tips of his fingers were one inch from the ball when it bumped in. But it did bump in, and there was a shriek from the Northwood crowd:

"Goal! Goal!"

CHAPTER 10.

Pongo on the Ball.

"GOAL!"

The shout rang and echoed again and again.

"Goal! Hurrah!"

It was a splendid goal, taken almost single-handed against a powerful side, and it was no wonder the Northwood partisans yelled and shrieked and threw up their hats in the air, careless where they came down, or whether they came down at all.

"Goal!"

Frank Blake was a little flushed, and breathing rather hard; otherwise, as cool as ever. The wild shouts rang in his ears, bringing a sparkle to his eyes.

"Goal! Bravo!"

His captain clapped him on the shoulder.

"Well done, Howard!"

Jack Blake was on his feet, waving his cap excitedly.

"Goal! Good old Franky! Hurrah!"

In the general din his voice was lost, so far as Frank Blake was concerned.

Lawrence threw out the leather, and the teams returned slowly to the centre of the field.

Northwood were one up—a goal taken at the start, and a splendid augury to the enthusiastic backers of Northwood Athletic.

"My hat!" said Tom Merry. "I've never seen anything neater; and I've seen some League matches, too!"

"Yaas, wathah! I wegard Fwank Blake as a wippin' playah!"

"Prime!" said Figgins. "Spiffing!"

"Bai Jove! Did you notice how he spwinted, deah boys; he was wunnin' like anythin'. It was weally wippin'!"

"There they go!"

Newcastle had kicked off again. As the game recommenced, it was soon evident that Newcastle intended to pay Frank Blake the compliment of bestowing upon him the most particular attention.

He was well watched, and "paid" was put to all his attempts to capture the leather for some time to come. But he was watching his opportunities, and he kept the Tynesiders busy.

Newcastle were playing a splendid game. The clean and scientific football for which they were famous had seldom been better exemplified. And there was no doubt that, save for the luck of Frank Blake, they were the better side of the two.

Towards half-time, after a long and strenuous struggle,

Newcastle scored. The goat was taken by Wilson, from a pass by Gosnell, and it plumped into the net in a way that gave the Northwood goalie no earthly chance.

The score was level, and for the rest of the first half the sides contended energetically to change it. But neither succeeded in the task.

Most of the play was now in the home half, the Geordies concentrating in a steady and sustained attack that gradually drove the home defence before it.

Five minutes longer would probably have seen the Northwooders broken up, but the shrill blast of the whistle came in time for them.

The interval gave both sides a much-needed rest.

The juniors gasped as the tension was relieved. For some time they had spoken hardly a word, so intensely were they watching the game.

"My hat!" gasped Figgins. "This is worth watching, you chaps!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Northwood's outclassed!" said Tom Merry. "If they're pulled out of the fire, it will be by Howard—I mean Blake."

"Yes, rather!" said Jack Blake, his eyes sparkling. "Did you ever see a forward like Frank before?"

"Never!"

"He's ripping!" said Fatty Wynn. "I say, is there any chance of getting anything to eat in the interval? I'm getting jolly hungry."

"Oh, go and eat coke!" said Kerr. "Where are the sandwiches you shoved in your pocket before you left the New House?"

"I've eaten them."

"Then you can't be hungry."

"There were only a dozen, and—"

"Hallo," roared Wally, from the distance, "how do you like the game, you kids?"

"Ripping!"

"Like some toffee, Gus?"

Arthur Augustus turned his eyeglass towards his younger brother, and frowned.

"No, Wally," he replied stiffly. "No, certainly not; I should not care to devour toffee in public."

Fatty Wynn started up.

"I would, young Wally!" he called out. "I'm famished! Chuck us over the toffee!"

"Right-ho!" said the Third-Former cheerfully.

He extracted a packet of toffee from his pocket, and hurled it with a deft aim. It struck Arthur Augustus D'Arcy's topper, and sent it toppling off. The swell of the School House gave a howl.

"Bai Jove! Why, what—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Sorry!" bawled Wally. "You'll find the toffee among Gussy's feet, Wynn."

D'Arcy clutched at his hat.

"You young wottah—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"If I could weach you I would give you a feahful thwashin'."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Gimme that toffee!" said Fatty Wynn anxiously. "Mind you don't tread on it, D'Arcy."

"Wats! Blow the toffee!"

"Look here—"

"Hallo, I'm treading on something!" exclaimed Blake, and he lifted his boot into the air. A squashed mass of toffee was sticking to the sole. "Is that what you're looking for, Wynn?"

The fat Fourth-Former gave a howl.

"You—you clumsy ass!"

"You can have it."

But even Fatty Wynn did not want the squashed toffee. Blake scraped it off his boot, but the Falstaff of the New House indignantly declined it.

"May as well let Wally have it back, then," Blake remarked. And he took careful aim, and caught D'Arcy minor under the chin with it.

Wally sprang up, startled.

"Wh-wh-what was that?"

"Ha, ha, ha!" cackled Arthur Augustus. "That was a Woland for your Olivah, deah boy."

"You duffer! Hallo! Stop him!"

"Bai Jove, what's the mattah?"

"Pongo, Pongo! Come here, you beast! Good old Pong!"

But good old Pong failed to respond to the call. He had, as a matter of fact, been watching his opportunity of bolting for some time, but the wary junior had kept a tight hand on his collar.

His chance had come now, and Pongo had not been slow to take it.

He was gone, and entreaties and threats were equally

impotent with Pongo when he felt inclined to go a-roaming.

He disappeared amongst countless legs, and Wally shrieked and whistled after him in vain.

"Never mind," said Dudley, "you'll find him coming out."

Wally grunted. He was not so easily consoled. More than once he had narrowly escaped losing Pongo for good, and he was always anxious when his erratic pet left him.

The band was playing in the interval, and the juniors of St. Jim's joined in as they recognised a well-known tune. The band was playing "On the Ball," and a hundred voices joined in with the chorus of the song. The strains ceased as the players reappeared, and the musicians marched off. The spectators were all eagerness for the second half.

The whistle went, and Northwood kicked off, with the wind in their faces now.

The change of ends brought the advantage of the wind to the side of the visitors, and Newcastle were not slow to make the best of it.

The game was soon all in the home half, and Northwood, after a desperate resistance, were forced to concede a corner.

But, to the intense relief of the home crowd, the kick did not materialise.

A sharp struggle in front of goal followed, and then a home back succeeded in clearing, and the ball came out of the press like a pip from an orange.

Then there was a roar from the crowd. A ragged mongrel had whisked into the arena, and was "on the ball" in a flash.

It was Pongo!

Pongo was accustomed to joining Wally in chasing a football about in the quad, at St. Jim's, and he had frequently captured the ball with the loose tag in his teeth, and led his young master a dance to regain it.

He wasn't able to get hold of the match-ball with his teeth, but it bounded along from his nose as he chased it at a great rate.

The crowd roared.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Go it, doggy!"

Wally gave a yell of excitement.

"Pongo! Pong! On the ball, Pong!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The referee's whistle rang out sharply. Several of the players made a rush for Pongo, and the game was stopped. Wally scrambled down to the front, careless of the feet he trod on and the ribs he elbowed.

"That's my dog! Chuck him here!"

Veitch, of Newcastle, had caught Pongo by the collar. Pongo growled and barked, but he was in an iron grip.

With a smile Colin Veitch tossed the dog to Wally, who caught him and hugged him under his arm.

"You young bouncer," he growled, "I've a jolly good mind to give you a licking!"

But Wally never got further than having a "good mind" to lick Pongo. He scrambled back to his seat.

The whistle went again, and the game was resumed, the crowd still grinning over the redoubtable Pongo's first essay as a footballer in a League match.

CHAPTER 11.

An Exciting Finish.

THE second half was keenly contested. As it wore on, the excitement of the spectators became keener than ever, and at times there was a breathless hush upon the crowd of ten thousand eager watchers.

The result of the match meant a step in the League table for either Northwood or Newcastle, and that was important enough to make the players keen. The thousands of eyes hung upon the movements of the teams.

Northwood were outclassed, and even the most enthusiastic of the home partisans had to admit that patent fact. But a moderate side with a single brilliant player had a sporting chance against a side of good all-round quality. And everyone knew that everything depended on the new winger.

Frank Blake was doing the work of a giant. Again and again cheers rang out for some brilliant dash of the new forward. And there was nothing selfish about Frank's play. He never strove to shine when the game demanded that he should give a chance to another player. He was as ready to back up as to lead, as quick to pass as to kick for goal.

And, in spite of the keen wind blowing in their faces, the next goal was scored by Northwood Athletic.

They had succeeded in breaking through the Newcastle defence, and they had rushed up to goal with the ball passing wonderfully well from foot to foot.

The backs were fairly upon Frank Blake, and he had the ball, with no earthly chance of sending it to goal. But there was a tenth part of a chance of passing to his captain at

centre, and that he did, with a pass that landed the ball just where it was wanted.

The Northwood captain kicked in a flash, and the leather banged home into the net before Lawrence knew it was coming.

And once more the Northwood crowd showed startling symptoms of insanity.

"Goal!"

"Goal! Goal! Goal!"

They yelled, they shouted, they raved, they slapped one another on the back.

The second goal with the wind against them! Northwood were a winning team; the match was another for Northwood!

But the Northwooders exulted too soon. Newcastle had no intention of letting the southern side walk off with the match, and they bucked up after that goal as if rather refreshed by their reverse.

During the following ten minutes play was sharp and brisk, and the faces of the Northwood crowd grew longer and longer.

The ball went into the home net from the foot of Rutherford, and five minutes later Grierson headed it in again.

The Newcastle success was swift and crushing. The score now stood with the visitors three to two, and there was a quarter of an hour more to play.

Both sides were worn down by a gruelling game, but it was noticeable that the Tynesiders were the fresher of the two teams.

After the last goal, the home captain packed his goal for some time, content to defend and leave the attacking to the enemy.

And now the clever combination of the Geordies showed to great advantage. They cut through the home defence like a knife through cheese, and only skill and good luck in goal saved Northwood from paying the penalty.

The crowd were growing restive now. Five minutes more to time, and the play was all in the home half, and Lawrence, in the Newcastle goal, was slapping his chest to keep himself warm.

There were shouts from the Northwooders.

"Buck up, Northwood!"

"Don't go to sleep!"

"Give us another goal, Howard!"

"On the ball!"

"Bai Jove," said Arthur Augustus, "I suppose they can't beat the Tynesiders, but I weally wish they would get another goal, deah boys!"

"Watch Frank!" said Blake, his eyes on his brother.

"Yaas, wathah! Bai Jove, he's off!"

The winger had seized a sudden opportunity. A back had cleared with a kick that carried the leather almost to the half-way line, and there was a rush of players after it.

Frank Blake reached it. Twice he was shouldered, but he hardly swerved, and he had the ball at his feet, and with a magnificent dribble he brought it down the field.

A shout rose among the crowd, swelling to a roar.

"On the ball!"

"Go it!"

"Hurrah!"

The Newcastle men, for once, had been outwitted. Their forwards were nowhere, their halves eluded. The backs rushed in too late. There was the Northwood winger, right up to goal with the ball at his feet.

Lawrence seemed all eyes.

If the winger could beat him, he would deserve well of his side. But could he do it? He would have only one chance, for the Newcastle defenders were racing up.

He had time for a single kick!

He kicked!

The shouts died away. A breathless hush fell on the great crowd as they watched the leather whiz.

Lawrence was seen to clutch at it, and his foot slipped on the turf, and the ball escaped his fingers by half an inch.

But half an inch was as good just then and just there as half a mile.

The ball was in the net!

For a moment the crowd hesitated—it seemed too good to be true—and then a tremendous roar burst forth.

"Goal!"

The juniors of St. Jim's were on their feet, yelling like lunatics. Round them was a sea of rolling sound.

"Goal! Goal! Hurrah!"

In the midst of the roar came the pheeep of the whistle.

It was the finish!

Northwood had equalised, and the game was drawn, and the players trooped off the field.

It was only a draw, but it had been so perilously near a black defeat that the Northwooders were as enthusiastic as if there had been a great victory for the home colours.

They raved and yelled and stamped as the players went off, and "Howard" was cheered till the welkin rang.

"Bai Jove!" exclaimed D'Arcy. "That was what I wegard as weally wippin'."

Blake gave his elegant chum a slap on the shoulder that made him stagger.

"What do you think of that?" he roared.

"Ow! I think you are a beastly wuff boundah!"

"Goal!" yelled Blake. "Good old Franky!"

And in his excitement he smote again at Arthur Augustus, but this time the swell of St. Jim's dodged.

The crowd was pouring out of the enclosures, excitedly discussing the match. Even the man in the fur cap, who had intended to wait for the juniors and rag them as they came out, forgot his amiable intentions, and went off talking football with his friends, and lauding the new winger; and remained sober all the afternoon under the influence of his enthusiasm.

The juniors of St. Jim's left the ground, and walked off, every movement made by D'Arcy being accompanied by a clink of small silver.

CHAPTER 12.

Arthur Augustus Thinks it Out.

JACK BLAKE halted in the street, with a shade of deep thought on his face. His chums gathered round him.

"Going to speak to Frank?" asked Tom Merry.

Blake nodded.

"That's what I was thinking of. You see——" He paused.

"Yaas, deah boy," said Arthur Augustus encouragingly. "Go on. If you want any advice in dealin' with this delicate mattah——"

"I don't!"

"Weally, Blake, I was only goin' to tell you what's the pwopah thing to do."

"Don't trouble, Gusey. Look here, you chaps, I don't know whether you're interested at all in my family concerns——"

"I wegard that as wathah wotten, Blake. You know perfectly well that we wegard you as a fwiend, in spite of many disagweicable ways you have, and that as your bwothah, Fwank Blake is our fwiend also. If we could do anythin' to cement this unhappy bweach in your family welations, we should only be too happy."

"Exactly," said Tom Merry. "For once in his life Gussy has stated the exact facts without talking rot."

"Weally, Tom Mewwy——"

"He talks like a giddy gramophone," said Digby. "My sentiments exactly. Good old one and only!"

"Of course, we're all interested in the matter," said Figgins. "As a rule, I believe in sitting on you School House rotters, but when it's a serious matter like this, why we all want to chip in and help."

"You're awfully good," said Blake. "Well, then——"

"Pway just a moment, deah boy. There is already a bweach in your family, but you must be careful how you go to work about it. You must not fail to show Fwank the wespetch due to an eldah bwothah. You see, he might cut up wustly, and get watty, and then there would be two bweaches in the family."

"By Jove!" said Lowther. "It wouldn't do to have a pair of bwatches, would it?"

"Weally, Lowthah——"

"Gussy's right," said Tom Merry. "Let's take counsel with one another about it. We're all anxious to help Blake. First of all, if the question may be asked, how does your governor take it, Blake?"

"He's cut up, of course."

"Willing to be reconciled, of course?"

Jack Blake hesitated a moment.

"I'd better tell you the facts," he said. "The governor and Frank quarrelled on a question of footer. I've no doubt Frank was rather pigheaded. I've often found him so myself when I've been at home. He never would give in to a chap. He used to think that an elder brother ought to order a younger chap about——"

"I must we remark that I quite agree with Fwank on that point."

"But he was a ripping chap all the same," said Jack.

"And he's really an awfully great favourite with the governor, only dad must have lost his temper and ordered him out for his nerve. Then it's just like Frank to take him too seriously, and not go back unless the governor climbed down. And that's a thing the governor never would do."

"Yes, I know. You Yorkshire chaps are obstinate tykes."

"So we are," said Blake, in full assent. "It's really firmness, you know, but lots of people mistake it for obstinacy."



"Go it, doggy!" roared the crowd. A ragged mongrel had whisked into the arena, and was "on the ball" like a flash. It was Ponge, D'Arcy minor's shaggy pet.

Well, dad and Frank will never meet of their own accord, but if they could be brought together, they'd clump up no end on the spot, and admit that they'd acted the giddy goat. But I'm blessed if I can see how it's to be worked."

The juniors looked thoughtful.

It was evidently a serious matter, and they were all interested in bringing it to a satisfactory conclusion, but they realised that it was quite possible that their interference might make it worse instead of better.

"Suppose you wired to your governor," suggested Figgins, "and told him where Frank is to be found?"

"Would he come down from Yorkshire?" said Tom Merry. Blake shook his head.

"He would if Frank asked him to make it up, but he wouldn't come to make the overtures himself."

"I see. Each of the giddy goats—excuse me—is waiting for the other to give in. You couldn't very well wire in Frank's name, as that would be a swindle."

"Yaas, wathah! It is an old maxim, deah boys, never to be a wascal that good may come of it."

"Right!" said Figgins. "But how—"

"Pewwaps I can think out an ideah," said D'Arcy, tapping his forehead with his finger-tips as if to assist the working of the brain within.

"Perhaps you can," said Lowther, "or perhaps you could if you had the necessary apparatus."

"Weally, Lowthah—"

"What if you go round and speak to Frank now, and get his views on the subject?" suggested Tom Merry.

Jack Blake shook his head again.

"No good."

"Why not?"

"He would know he was spotted then, and he'd know I should chip in. He'd make me promise not to give him away to the governor."

"But you needn't promise?"

"Then he's as likely as not to bunk, and leave Northwood."

"My hat! That wouldn't do."

"Wathah not! I have an ideah, deah boys—"

"Oh, ring off, Gussey! You're interrupting the thinks."

"I wefuse to wing off. I have—"

"Lie down!"

"I uttably and absolutely wefuse to lie down. I wegard the suggestion as widiculous. I have a wippin' ideah—"

"Oh, go ahead, then!" said Tom Merry resignedly.

"Let's get the agony over. What is the idea?"

"I wefuse to have it wegard in that light."

"What's the wheeze, ass?"

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

"Are you going to explain," shouted Herries, "or are you not going to explain?"

"Pway give me a chance, deah boy. I have a wippin' ideah. What you want, Blake, is to bwing your governah and your eldah bwothah together unexpectedly."

"Yes, if it could be fixed."
"I have thought of a weally wippin' wheeze. Suppose we invited Fwank Blake to tea in Study No. 6 at St. Jim's."

"What then—"
"And send a message to your governah askin' him to come to St. Jim's on important business—somethin' important, such as advisin' you about gettin' a new toppah, or choosin' a new thing in waistcoats—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"
"I weally see nothin' comical in the suggestion. Of course, I do not suggest pweawication in the mattah. You must have some important mattah of that kind on hand, in ordah to bear out the statement in the telegwam. Then your governah can meet your bwothah in the study."

"There might be something in that," said Blake thoughtfully.

"My deah boy, there's heaps in it. You can make Fwank come—"

"That's the difficulty. He's more likely to bolt when he knows I know he's here," said Blake ruefully.

"Yaas; but you haven't heard the west of my wippin' scheme. You wemembah what Mellish and his vascally fwiends were sayin' about your bwothah."

Jack Blake's brow darkened.

"What on earth—"

"Pway be patient, deah boy. I assuah you fwom my gweat knowledge of human nature in general, and of Mellish and his fwiends' natures in particulah, that they will not allow that slandah to dwop."

Blake's eyes gleamed.

"They will keep it up, deah boy, unless they are simply forced to admit that there is nothin' in it. And there's only one way of forcin' them to do that—by gettin' Fwank Blake to show himself at St. Jim's."

"By Jove!" said Tom Merry. "Out of the mouths of babes and sucklings and silly asses—"

"Pway don't be funnay, Tom Mewwy. Blake, deah boy, if you explain to your cldah bwothah, in a pwopahly wespeshful way, how you are situated at St. Jim's, I am quite sure that he will accept your invitation to call."

"I rather think so," said Blake reflectively. "Blessed if I ever knew that Gussy had so much hoss-sense."

"When in doubt, play Gussy," said Monty Lowther.

"I have fwequently pointed out to you fellows that in a case of doubt, I'm the vewy chap to show you what's the pwopah thing to do, but I must wemark that I have nevah been tweated with weal wespesh on such occasions."

"Gentlemen," said Tom Merry, "this must be set right. Gussy has never been tweated with weal wespesh. I move that Arthur Adolphus Fitzgerald has deserved well of his country on the present occasion, and that it be unanimously passed by the meeting here present that he is not invariably a silly ass."

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—"

"Hear, hear!"

"I second," exclaimed Figgins, "that Gussy is not invariably a silly ass!"

"Passed unanimously!" said Blake. "Gussy is not invariably a silly ass!"

"Hear, hear!"

"Weally, deah boys—"

"Hear, hear!"

"I insist upon—"

"Hear, hear!"

And Arthur Augustus gave it up.

CHAPTER 13.

Straight from the Shoulder.

LINK! Click! Click!
The pocketful of small silver clinked musically as the chums of St. Jim's walked off towards the railway-station. Jack Blake was still looking very thoughtful. He would gladly have gone round to the players' quarters to speak to his brother, but under the circumstances, it was better not. The invitation to Frank to come to tea in Study No. 6 was not to be sent until Monday.

Click! Click!

"Oh, I say, keep that old clothes man off!" said Figgins.

"Figgins, I wergard that wemark as simply beastly—"

"By Jove, is it you, Gus?"

"You were perfectly well aware that it was I, Figgins.

It is not my fault if I weceived the change of my fivah in small silvah!"

"Tie it up in a handkerchief, and put it in your hat."

"I wefuse to do anythin' of the sort."

"Perhaps you could carry it in your mouth, as Pongo carries things," Monty Lowther suggested.

"I wergard that wemark as absolutely wibald—"

Click! Click! Click!

Arthur Augustus strode on indignantly, and the small silver clinked away merrily. He drew out a handful of it in despair.

"Bai Jove, I've a gweat mind to chuck it away!" he exclaimed.

"Don't do that!" exclaimed Fatty Wynn eagerly. "I know a jolly place near the station where you can get ripping feeds."

"It's not a bad idea," said Tom Merry. "I'm hungry myself."

"So am I."

"And I—rather!"

"Pewwaps it is wathah a good ideah, now you come to think of it," said D'Arcy, lading out the silver in his gloved hands. "I can't cawwy this stuff wound with me. Pewwaps I can get wid of ten shillin's or so, and change the west into gold— Oh!"

He broke off suddenly.

Two rough-looking fellows had been standing on the kerb, and as the juniors passed, they caught sight of the handfuls of silver.

They exchanged a glance, and one of them, pretending to stumble, rolled right upon D'Arcy, and sent him reeling.

The swell of St. Jim's gave a yell.

He staggered under the impact, and his silk hat fell off, and D'Arcy made a wild clutch at it to save it.

Needless to say, everything in his hands went by the board, and there was a scattering of small silver on the pavement.

"You ass!" roared Blake.

"It was that brute's fault!" exclaimed Tom Merry. "Pick up the money, you chaps!"

The juniors did their best. But the clinking of falling coins had attracted eager seekers instantly from all quarters. It was a rough part of the town, and there were a good many wasters about, who were spending the winter afternoon in leaning up against posts and railings. They scrambled for the fallen silver, and the juniors of St. Jim's quickly had a dozen fights on their hands.

Arthur Augustus recovered his hat and jammed it on his head. He stuck his monocle in his eye, and looked round upon the scrambling crowd of roughs and juniors.

"Bai Jove, this looks like being a wow!"

"Gimme that bob!"

"You ruffian! Get aside!"

"Land 'im one in the eye, Billy!"

"Get aside!"

"Knock his 'ead 'orf, Napper!"

"Take that, then!"

The two roughs, the original cause of the trouble, were sprawling on the pavement, but most of the money was gone. Arthur Augustus did not take part in the scramble. He regarded it as rather unseemly.

"Hold on, deah boys!" he said. "Pway don't get excited! You can let them have the west of it! It's not worth a wow!"

"Rats! They're a jolly lot of thieves!"

"Not at all," said D'Arcy, mounting the high horse in his usual way. "I make them a pwesent of all they can find. Go ahead, deah boys!"

Blake snorted.

"Well, of all the dummies—"

"Wats! Sewamble for the silvah, deah boys—I make you a pwesent of it! Come on, you chaps, or we shall lose our twain!"

The juniors walked on, leaving a dozen or fifteen roughs scrambling for what of the money was still left on the ground.

Arthur Augustus, perfectly satisfied with the way he had settled the difficulty, brushed his silk topper with his sleeve as he walked on.

"You—you ass!" Fatty Wynn said, in measured accents.

"What price that feed now?"

"Bai Jove, I'd forgotten that."

"Forgotten it! Oh, there ain't a word for you!"

"Weally, Wynn—"

"B-r-r-r-r! You want suffocating," said Fatty Wynn. "There's a ripping feed gone! How much have you chaps sayed from the scramble?"

"A bob here," said Figgins.

"Tanner," said Manners.

"Same here."

"Another bob."

"Bai Jove, that isn't vewy much out of four pound ten," said Arthur Augustus. "It is vewy fortunate that we took weturn tickets."

"Yes, you duffer, and more fortunate still that they weren't trusted in your hands."

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—"

"Two-and-six the lot," grunted Fatty Wynn. "Oh, why wasn't D'Arcy suffocated at birth!"

"I should have uttally wefused to be suffocated at birth—I mean—"

"Still, that will do us a cup of coffee and a sandwich apiece," said the fat Fourth-Former. "Come on, I know a place."

Fatty Wynn generally did know a place where provisions could be got. Figgins had remarked that if Fatty took a journey to the moon some day, he wouldn't be there five minutes before he spotted a buffet.

The coffee and sandwiches weren't much after the feed the juniors had promised themselves, but they were welcome to the hungry and cold juniors.

Then they took the train for Rylcombe, and arrived at the village in the dusk of the early February evening.

They walked back to the school, and arrived there in good time for calling-over.

Gore and Mellish, and several of their set were in the hall of the School House when Tom Merry and his friends came in.

They looked at Blake, and grinned at one another.

Their looks were too pointed to be passed unnoticed by Blake, and the junior knew perfectly well what they meant. His face went scarlet.

Jack Blake was not given to wasting words. He walked straight up to Gore. The cad of the Shell looked at him coolly.

"What do you mean?" demanded Blake hotly.

Gore yawned.

"What do I mean by what?"

"You grinned at me."

"Well, it's a free country—I suppose a fellow's at liberty to grin if he wants to?" yawned Gore.

"Not at me," said Blake. "I know what you meant."

"Then why did you ask me?"

"I know what you meant," repeated Blake, unheeding. "You were thinking of the lies Mellish invented about my brother."

"You seem to be mighty touchy about your brother," sneered Gore. "I haven't said that I believe what Mellish said."

"I jolly well know you don't believe it, but you want to make out that you do!" exclaimed Blake excitedly. "And you're a dirty cad!"

"Yaas, wathah! I must say that I quite agree with my friend Blake. Goah is certainly a wotten cad."

Gore flushed red. Although he never cared for a row with Tom Merry, it was different with Blake & Co. They were in the Fourth, and Gore was in a higher Form. The bully of the Shell clenched his fists.

"Well, I'd rather be a cad than a thief," he said.

Blake's eyes blazed. He did not reply; he hit out straight from the shoulder. Gore's parry was too late, and he could not have stopped that blow, anyway. Blake's fist caught him just under the nose, and he went over backwards as if he had been shot.

Blake stood over him with clenched fists, panting chest, and eyes that seemed to flame.

"Get up," he said thickly—"get up, you cur, and take some more!"

But Gore did not get up. He lay, looking dazed and stupid; and Blake, with a savage look of scorn, passed him, and left him there.

Tom Merry slapped Blake on the shoulder, and Buck Finn, the American chum in the Shell, drawled:

"I guess you've got what you've been asking for, Gore, by gum!"

And Gore only scowled savagely.

CHAPTER 14.

Kildare's Advice.

THERE was a serious consultation in Study No. 6 that evening. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy's plan had been adopted unanimously, and the School House chums talked it over to decide about the best way of putting it into execution. Figgins & Co. had offered to take the whole matter in hand, and run it for Blake, and the offer had been firmly, if not respectfully, declined.

"You had better leave it to me," said D'Arcy. "It is my idea, in the first place, and I am bound to be able to handle it better than you chaps. Besides, what is wanted now is a fellow of tact and judgment."

"I move that Gussy rings off."

"I decline to wing off. Undah the cires.—"

"It's about settled," said Tom Merry. "Frank Blake is to be invited to tea on Monday evening, and Blake is to go over with the invitation specially, so as to be able to explain matters to him."

"That's right," said Blake.

"Then the question is, how to get Blake's governor at the school at the same time."

"I have already made a suggestion on that point—"

"But your suggestions are like the suggester—no good," said Lowther. "We want a good idea."

"Weally, Lowthah—"

"How can we get Blake senior here? Suppose Blake falls ill, and we wire his governor?"

"I should wefuse to have any hand in a pwevawication."

"Who's talking about prevarication, ass? Blake would have to really fall ill, of course."

"Blessed if I know how to do it at a moment's notice!" grinned Blake. "I've never been ill in my life."

"Oh, it's easy enough. You can take some of the medicines and pills that Miss Priscilla Fawcett sends to Tom Merry."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Or let Herries play his cornet to you—"

"You let my cornet alone!" growled Herries.

"Or listen to some of Monty Lowther's jokes," suggested Digby.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Look here, Digby—"

"Sha'n't! Blake can, if he wants to fall ill."

"Bai Jove, you know, I wegard that as wathah funny. Ha, ha, ha!"

"You're jolly easily pleased, then!" growled Lowther.

"We're getting off the point," said Tom Merry. "How is Blake senior to be gently persuaded to turn up here on Monday evening?"

"Suppose you wired 'Come at once—important!'" said Manners. "I suppose that would fetch him."

"He might wire back 'Rats!'" suggested Lowther.

Blake grinned.

"You see, a chap can't order his father about," he remarked. "It's a rotten state of things, perhaps, but there you are! We must take things as we find 'em."

"Bai Jove, I've got anothah wippin' ideah!"

"Take it out and bury it!"

"I wefuse to do anythin' of the sort. Suppose we ask the Head to help?"

"The Head doesn't know anything about it."

"He would if you told him, deah boy."

"Did you work that out in your head, Gussy?"

"Pway don't be funny, Lowthah, on a serious subject. A telegram to Mr. Blake in this style: 'Come at once. Vewy important.—Holmes,' would fetch the old gentleman like anythin'."

Lowther gave a sudden yell.

"I've got it!"

They looked at him.

"What have you got?" asked Tom Merry suspiciously.

"The jim-jams?"

"No; the wheeze."

"Get it off your chest, then."

"There's a kid in the Third who can help us."

"Bai Jove! Do you mean young Wally?"

"No. I mean young Holmes."

"Holmes!"

"Yes, of course! He can send this wire for us. Mr. Blake will very likely think it comes from the Head—"

"Very likely! Ha, ha, ha!"

"But as a matter of fact it will come from young Holmes. What do you think of that idea?"

"I think it's an idea you won't carry out," said a voice at the door; and the juniors looked round, startled, and saw Kildare, of the Sixth, looking in.

"Bai Jove!"

The big Sixth-Former came into the study.

"Sorry to spoil a little joke," he said, "but I shall have to nip this in the bud, Lowther. It's not much of an idea, anyway. I looked in to tell you kids that I haven't had the lines this study owes me, and this is the last evening in the week. If they're left over Sunday there will be ructions."

"Weally, Kildare—"

"And now, what is it you want to bring Mr. Blake here for?" demanded the captain of St. Jim's.

The juniors looked at one another. Kildare evidently had his suspicions, and, after all, he was a kind-hearted fellow, and could be confided in.

"Is it something about your brother, Blake?"

"Yes," blurted out Blake. "Keep it dark, Kildare; but this is how the matter stands. I've found Frank—"

"You've found him!" exclaimed Kildare, in astonishment.

"Yes. He's joined a professional football club, and he was playing in the match to-day over at Northwood."

"My hat!"

"I think I can get him here on Monday evening; and if I can get the governor here, too, they'll make it up."

"I see. It's a jolly good motive, I admit, but there oughtn't to be anything like trickery about it."

"Oh, I say—" began Lowther.

"You didn't mean it for trickery, Lowther, but it was

something of that sort. It won't do. Don't you think, Blake, that if you wrote your father that Frank would be here, he would be likely to come?"

Blake looked worried.

"Well, as a matter of fact, the dad is beastly firm," he said. "I've never known him give up a point in dispute."

"But this sort of thing can never have happened before. Surely, in a case like this—"

"Well, perhaps—"

"If your father doesn't want to come and meet Frank, you've no right to dodge him into it," said Kildare quietly.

"But I think it very likely that if you can bring yourself to trust to your father's judgment in the matter—"

"Oh, Kildare!"

"In that case I think it probable that he will jump at the opportunity, and come as fast as an express train can bring him."

"I—I shouldn't wonder. If—if you think it's the best wheeze—"

"I do, undoubtedly, if you are willing to take my advice?"

"Of course we are, Kildare. We know you've got sense."

"Yaas, wathah! I haven't much of an opinion of Sixth Form chaps as a rule, but I must say I have always regarded Kildare as a chap with sense."

"Thank you," said Kildare gravely. "Then that's my advice. And—and as you're so busy doing something useful for once in your lives, you can leave the lines. I dare say you'll have a fresh lot next week."

And the captain of St. Jim's quitted the study, leaving the juniors extremely satisfied with themselves, with him, and with things generally.

CHAPTER 15.

To the Rescue.

KILDARE turned out to be correct in his opinion, after all, and Blake's doubts were set at rest. For on Monday, in reply to Blake's letter to his father, came a wire that completely satisfied the youthful plotters: "Coming at once.—BLAKE."

Blake tore open the envelope when the telegraph-boy brought it, and tossed the boy a shilling in the exuberance of his spirits when he read the message.

Then he danced away in search of his chums.

"Read that!" he exclaimed, thrusting the telegram under the aristocratic nose of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

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

"Read it, duffer!"

"I decline to be addressed as a duffah—"

"Read it!"

"Bai Jove, that's good news!" said D'Arcy, looking at the telegram at last. "Weally, Blake, I think you may congratulate yourself on havin' requested me to take the lead in this mattah!"

"Oh, yes, rather!" grinned Blake. And he dashed off to show the telegram to Tom Merry.

"Good egg!" said the hero of the Shell. "Now, all we've got to do is to get your brother here. You're going to make him a personal visit?"

"That's the idea!"

"And I think I had better come along," said D'Arcy, who was at Blake's heels. "Undah the cires, we can't be too careful. If Fwank Blake should cut up wustly, a fellah of tact and judgment will be required—"

"We may as well all go—or as many as can get leave," Tom Merry remarked. "Gussy wants to come to take care of Gussy, and certainly somebody ought to come to take care of Gussy."

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—"

"Let 'em all come," said Blake. "You can all pay your own fares, and Gussy can pay mine."

"Weally, Blake—"

"Rats!" said Tom Merry. "What's the good of chucking money away? If we can get leave to go to Northwood, we can start early, and hoof it. What's a few miles to us?"

"Yaas, wathah; only it might be wathah exhaustin'."

"You can stay behind."

"Yaas; but you fellows would be bound to get into some twouble."

"Then you can walk."

"Yaas; but—"

"My word! He's all 'buts' to-day. Ring off!"

"Wats! I wefuse to wing off. I was goin' to say—"

But Blake and Tom Merry were walking off in different directions, and they never knew what Arthur Augustus was going to say.

It was easy for the juniors to obtain permission to walk

over to Northwood. Kildare, the captain of the School, gave them the required pass. He knew what they meant to do, and he approved. And he knew that Tom Merry & Co. could be trusted out of bounds at any time.

When they were put upon their honour, there was no doubt that they would "play the game," and the captain of St. Jim's knew it by experience.

After tea the youngsters put on their caps and coats for the start. Figgins & Co. were in the quadrangle, and Blake stopped to speak to them in passing.

"Going to fetch Frank?" asked Figgins.

"Yaas; wathah," said Arthur Augustus. "I'm goin' to walk, and these chaps are comin' with me."

Figgins grinned.

"Like us to come?"

"We should," said Jack Blake. "But there's something else you can do if you want to be obliging. We want a bit of a feed ready for Frank. Will you make it pax, and get tea in our study? I know we can trust to Wynn's judgment in getting the grub."

"Yes; rather," said Fatty Wynn emphatically. "You can rely upon me when it comes to that, Blake; and I'll do it with pleasure."

The chief of the New House juniors nodded.

"Right you are, Blake!"

"Whip round for the tin, you chaps," said Tom Merry.

As most of the juniors had received pocket-money some time on Saturday, they were pretty flush on Monday, and they made up a handsome sum by general contributions.

Fatty Wynn's eyes glistened as he received nearly a sovereign in silver.

"By George! I can get a ripping feed for this!" he exclaimed.

"That's right. We'll undertake to come back with good appetites."

"Yaas; wathah."

And the School House chums left the gates, and took the dusky road to Northwood. It was a long, long walk, but the boys were fit and keen, and they did not care for that.

They were a couple of miles from St. Jim's, and in a lonely and shadowy lane, when Tom Merry suddenly stopped.

"What was that?" he muttered.

"I didn't see anything," said Blake.

"No, I didn't; but I heard something."

"What was it?"

"Hark!"

The juniors listened intently.

Round them were the trees, heavy and dark and silent, save for the rustle of the winter wind in the leafless branches.

Through the silence came ringing a faint cry.

"Help!"

It was faint and far off, but unmistakable.

"Help!"

Tom Merry's eyes flashed.

"You heard that?"

"Yaas; wathah."

"Let's buzz on!" exclaimed Blake, breaking into a run.

The juniors dashed forward. The road they were following was a lonely one, and had an unenviable reputation as the scene of more than one outrage by footpads.

The juniors had not the least doubt that some luckless wayfarer had been attacked by thieves; and, judging from his cry for help, he was probably being hurt as well as robbed.

Not for an instant did the juniors of St. Jim's hesitate to go to the rescue. As for the danger, they not only did not care for it, but they did not even think of it till they were on the scene.

They ran swiftly along the shadowy lane. Two figures came into sight, and then a third, and again the cry rang out through the silent woods that bordered the lane.

"Help!"

A young man in a bowler hat and an overcoat was defending himself against the attack of two roughly-clad men, who were evidently seeking to get him down.

Jack Blake gave a cry.

"My hat! Frank!"

"Frank Blake! Buzz on!"

It was Frank Blake, the young footballer—the gallant lad of the League—who was defending himself desperately against the two ruffians.

Tom Merry & Co. dashed on at top speed. The footpads were too busily engaged to heed them. The attack came wholly by surprise.

Tom Merry and Manners grasped one of the ruffians from behind, and dragged him over in the dust; while Blake, Herries, and Digby seized the other. Lowther and D'Arcy were only a moment behind.

The ruffians uttered yells of surprise and rage as they were seized, but they had little chance of resisting the odds. They were down, and the juniors of St. Jim's were scrambling over them like cats.

"Got 'em!" panted Tom Merry.

Blake sprang towards his brother.

"Frank!"

The League footballer uttered a cry of amazement.

"Jack!"

Jack Blake grasped his brother's hand, and shook it again and again. Frank stared at him in amazement. The two ruffians were squirming under the weight of the juniors, and yelling for mercy now.

"I—I never expected to see you, Jack!" gasped Frank Blake. "What on earth are you doing so far from the school?"

"Thereby hangs a tale," said Blake. "What are we going to do with these rotters?"

The footballer laughed.

"Well, they seem to have been pretty well punished already. I dare say they've had enough."

"Yaas; wathah," said Arthur Augustus. "I have been stwikin' this one violently, and I must say that he has had a feahful thwashin'."

"And I've nearly squashed this one!" chuckled Manners. "He will want a new eye and another nose to-morrow."

"Ow! Lemme go!"

"Gerroff!"

"Let them go," laughed Frank Blake. "They won't feel fit for any more hooliganism to-night, or for some time to come, to judge by their looks."

The footballer of Northwood was right.

The two footpads had been very roughly used. When the juniors let them go, they crawled away, and disappeared into the darkness with many a groan.

CHAPTER 16.

A Guest in Study No. 6.

FRANK BLAKE shook hands with Tom Merry & Co. as his brother introduced them. He had been saved from a tight fix by the arrival of the juniors on the scene. There was no doubt that the footpads had intended to use any amount of violence to overcome his resistance, and the young Yorkshireman was not the kind of fellow to give in while he could strike a blow in defence of his belongings.

"I'm jolly glad you came up," he said; "but surely you are not allowed so far from the school at this time? I hope this is not an escapade, Jack."

Jack Blake grinned.

"If it is, it's your fault. What do you mean by bolting away from home and making me anxious about you?"

"Jack!"

"Blessed if something doesn't always happen, except when I'm home in the holidays!" said Blake. "Never knew such a chap as you are for getting into trouble. What were you doing here, come to that?"

Frank laughed and coloured.

"I was coming to St. Jim's—"

"Coming to see me?"

"Oh, no! I shouldn't have come in. I was going to take a look at the school, that's all. I wanted a trot for exercise, anyway, and I thought I might as well come in this direction. But you—"

"We were coming for you. It's all right; these chaps know all about it."

"Indeed!"

"We want you to come to tea in Study No. 6 in the School House," explained Blake. "We were coming over with the invitation."

"How on earth did you know—"

Blake chuckled.

"We saw you on Saturday."

"Yaas; wathah. As a mattah of fact, deah boy, it was thwough me. I took up the case of the mystewious disappearance in my capacity of amateur detective, and I took Jack to the football ground at Northwood—"

"Well, of all the—"

"I pwesume that you do not deny, Blake, that I took you to the football-ground? You and Tom Mewwy both agreed that I was leadah of the partay."

"But—"

"Also, that I took up the case in my pwofessional capacity—"

"Yes; but—"

"Therefore, the case is made out."

"There's no connection—"

"Weally, Blake, I have provided you with an explana-

tion. I am not bound to pwovide you with a bwain to undahstand it!" said Arthur Augustus, with great dignity.

Frank Blake laughed.

"Well, whatever the reason, you've found me," he said. "I'm sorry for this, Blake, as you will be bound to tell the pater, and I shall have to leave Northwood."

"Never mind that now," said Blake. "You've got to come to St. Jim's to tea now."

"I'm afraid it's impossible."

"Rats!" said the younger brother cheerfully. "I—"

"Weally, Blake, I should wecommend weatin' your eldah bwothah with pwopah wespsect, or he is almost certain to cut up wusty."

"Dry up, Gussy, and don't interrupt your uncle! You see, Frank, you've got to come. Some of the fellows at the school have found out that you've bolted from home, and they are starting a yarn that you busted the paternal cash-box as a preliminary canter."

Frank Blake started.

"Impossible!"

"Fact, my son!" said Jack, calmly oblivious of the fact that he was eight or nine years his brother's junior. "That's how the case stands. I've bified some of them; but, bless you, fellows are too obstinate to be convinced by mere biffing. Nothing will convince them that you are not scooting from the police—but one thing. You'll have to show up at St. Jim's."

"But—but I—"

"You can't leave me in such a fix, when you've brought it all on me."

"I—I suppose not."

"Come on, then."

Blake slipped his arm through his brother's, and led him off towards the school. Frank hesitated a moment, and then slowly acceded.

Tom Merry & Co. dropped a little behind, from motives of delicacy. The brothers were free to talk unheard.

"Nice sort of giddy goat you are, to hop off like that without asking my leave," Jack Blake said severely. "I—"

"Look here, Jack, I can't go back," said Frank quietly. "It was about the football, in the first place. Perhaps I oughtn't to have lost my temper—"

"No perhaps about it."

"Well, I admit I oughtn't, then; but the governor ordered me out."

"I don't suppose he meant it for a moment. And, besides, it served you right, if you lost your temper to your own father."

Frank Blake looked angry for a moment, and then he smiled.

"Well, I took him at his word, Jack."

"Like a silly ass!"

"I suppose I couldn't do anything else."

"Yes, you could—you could have laid low for a bit. You know the dad; he soon gets over his tantrums, and he'd have been sorry."

"Well, I was in a temper, too."

"Of course you were—silly ass!"

"Look here, Jack—"

"I'm looking—and I can see a champion duffer," said Jack Blake uncompromisingly. "You've played the giddy ex, and you know it. You've got to go back."

"I sha'n't go back!"

"Obstinate ass!"

"It's not obstinacy; I'm a firm chap."

"Rats!"

The brothers walked on in silence. Frank showed signs of hesitating again when the gates of St. Jim's came in sight. But Jack kept a tight hold on his arm.

"You've got me into a fix," he said. "You've got to get me out. Blessed if I can understand you, Frank. You've been away some time; I should think you were anxious to make it up with the dad."

"So I am; but—"

"I understand; you won't give in."

"Well, I'd concede the point in dispute, as far as that goes, but I can't make the first overtures. I can't, and I won't."

"Well, come in and have tea, and stop the cads jawing. I suppose that you can do that much, Mr. High and Mighty."

Frank laughed.

"Yes, rather!"

The juniors and their guest entered the quad, and passed on to the School House. Mr. Railton, the House-master, met them as they went in, and he looked at Frank.

"My brother Frank, sir," said Blake. "You met him when he came down for the sports, sir. He's the new winger in Northwood Athletic, sir."

Mr. Railton shook hands with the young footballer.

A dozen fellows had heard the words, and Gore and

Mellish, who were there, looked at one another with rather sickly expressions. They could guess Blake's motive for thus parading his brother before the house, and they fervently hoped that Jack had not mentioned to the big, muscular fellow the names of his slanderers.

Mellish silently slid away, and Gore looked nervous and uncomfortable. Jack Blake gave him one look, and then passed him without further notice.

Figgins & Co. were in Study No. 6, preparing the tea, and there was an appetising scent of frying bacon and eggs and sausages.

"Hallo! You're early!" exclaimed Figgins, looking up.
 "Yaas, wathah! I hadn't to go all the way, as I met Frank on the woad. Welcome to Study No. 6, deah boy!"

"Well, tea's almost ready," said Fatty Wynn. "It won't take us long to finish."

And ere long the juniors and their guest were sitting down to a solid and appetising meal in the famous study.

CHAPTER 17

Father and Son.

THE study was small, and the juniors were numerous. But the juniors of St. Jim's were accustomed to close quarters upon such occasions.

They left the guest of the evening plenty of room, and that was the principal point.

Frank Blake was hungry, and it was a pleasant experience to the new winger of Northwood Athletic to be entertained to tea by an eager band of schoolboys. And the latter, needless to say, were immensely glad to have a lad of the League for their guest.

They vied with one another in making Frank comfortable. Even Fatty Wynn ate enough for three ordinary fellows, in his hospitable anxiety to do Frank down in the very best possible style.

Nothing was heard in the study but the clink of knives and forks, cups and saucers, and the merry voices of the feasters.

But there was a shade at times on the face of Jack Blake. He was thinking of the reunion that had been planned in Study No. 6. When would his father arrive? He had said that he would come, and Blake had calculated that he would be there about seven. It was past seven now, and he had not reached the school. It would be impossible to keep Frank there after eight, at the latest, and if Blake senior were delayed after that hour, the whole scheme would fall to pieces. And so Jack did not enjoy his tea very much.

A good many fellows came along the passage to look into the crowded study, to see Blake's brother. The news that he was also the famous new winger of Northwood had spread through the school, and it caused keen excitement.

Gore & Co. were frowned into silence on all sides now. The story invented by Mellish was a palpable falsehood; but it was pretty certain, at the same time, that the juniors had taken the only means of refuting it.

Half-past seven rang from the clock-tower. Tea was really over, and Frank Blake laughingly refused to have any more, though Fatty Wynn produced the most tempting jam-tarts and cream-puffs.

"Nuff's as good as a feast," he remarked. "I've had a ripping feed, and I'm awfully obliged. And now, I think, I had better be going."

"Not yet!" exclaimed Blake, in alarm.

"Why not?" demanded his brother.

"We—we haven't seen much of you yet. We want you to tell us about the League matches you've played in, too. Besides—"

There was a footstep in the passage, and a tap on the door.

"Come in!" cried Blake.

His heart was beating hard.

The door opened. An elderly, grave-featured gentleman looked into the room. Frank Blake sprang to his feet.

"Father!"

"Dad!" exclaimed Jack.

The juniors all rose. They were silent. Father and eldest son looked at one another quietly and steadily, and Frank's eyes dropped.

Tom Merry made a sign to his comrades. They understood. Quietly they slipped from the study, and the father and his two sons were left alone. Mr. Blake did not seem to notice it. He came in, and held out his hand to his eldest son.

"Frank!"

"Dad—"

"Why did not you come back, my boy?"

"Dad!" said Frank, choking.

He took the outstretched hand of his father, and the tears were dropping from his eyes.

"You—you came here—for me," he muttered.

"We both owe it to Jack," said Mr. Blake, with an affectionate glance at his younger son. "Thank Heaven for what he has done! My boy—my boy, do you not think that I soon regretted what I had said? That I would have given anything to recall them; to recall my son?"

"Father!"

"I was wrong, Frank; and you were wrong. But now—"

"Now I ask you to forgive me, dad. I was a fool, and a blackguard. I ought to have given in. But I will give in now!" exclaimed Frank. "I won't say a word on that subject again."

Mr. Blake shook his head.

"Nothing of the kind, my boy. I was hasty. I was wrong, but if you had been a little more patient I should have come to see the matter in the proper light. You shall play for your club as an amateur—I know, from Jack's letter, how you are winning fame in the professional ranks—but you shall play for your home team, Frank, and your father will be proud to see you play."

Frank Blake could not speak; he could only press his father's hand in silence.

Jack stole quietly from the study. He met Arthur Augustus in the passage, and in the exuberance of his spirits gave him a tremendous slap on the shoulder. Arthur Augustus gave a whoop.

"Ow! You uttah ass—"

"It's all right!" shouted Blake, dancing round the staggering swell of St. Jim's. "It's all serene."

"I am vewy glad to hear it," said D'Arcy. "But weally I wish you would modewate your twansports a little, deah boy."

Glad enough were Tom Merry & Co. to hear the news. And when Mr. Blake and his eldest son left the school, they gathered to send a ringing cheer after Jack's father and the Lad of the English League.

THE END.

Next Thursday!

Next Thursday!

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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.

Sir Sholto Nugent joins forces with Lords Gethin and Ripley—the commanders of the beaten divisions—and, leaving only a very small force behind, retreats in haste to Harlow. Sam and Steve are left behind, and ask Devine, a young adjutant, for information.

"Why have all our men gone to Harlow? Are the Germans advancing that way?" asked Steven.

(Now go on with the Story.)

Terence Kelly, the Irishman.

"By gum, I should think so!" said Devine. "The German commander-in-chief is movin' in on London, an' he isn't far off it by now. The news came at daybreak. Unless we can stop him at Harlow, he'll be at the City's gates in another day."

"My word! There's only Epping Forest between him an' London now, then?" exclaimed Sam.

"That's it. There'll be the brainiest great fight on record between Harlow and Epping. Very likely they're at it now."

"An' we've got to win," muttered Stephen; "for if London falls—I say, where's Warren's little force hero goin'? Will you be in at the death?"

"That's just what we're wantin' to know," answered the adjutant. "We may get ordered off somewhere else to protect the lines of communication, confound it! Hallo! There's goes the helio!" he added. "We shall know now, one way or the other."

On the crest of a distant hill inland could be seen a little point of light, flashing and winking in the sunshine as the mirror of the heliograph signalled its message across country.

Colonel Warren and his signalling officer were standing apart, watching intently.

"Do you know the code?" said Sam to Devine.

The adjutant nodded, as he kept his eyes fixed eagerly on the flashing point as he walked forward.

"Good business! We're to follow on after Gethin as hard as we can pelt!" he said joyfully. "We shall all be in it, you youngsters!"

The order came that the boys were to wait till they were sent for, for the heliographed message was still running, and the colonel watched it closely. While the boys waited, an orderly stepped out of the field-hospital close beside them.

"There's a patient inside would be glad if you could see him, sir," he said to Sam.

"Call me out in a hurry when we're wanted," said Sam to his brother as he entered the hospital.

He was taken to a cot-bed, where, to his great surprise

NEXT
THURSDAY:

"D'ARCY MINOR'S CHUM."

A Tale of the Boys of St. Jim's.
By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

and delight, he saw the gigantic Irishman Terence Kelly, lying with a bandaged head and arm.

"You, Kelly?" exclaimed Sam. "Well done! I never dreamed to see you alive again!"

"The top o' the morning to ye, sorr," said Kelly, saluting with his sound arm. "'Tis only a bit of a bullet an' a cut that I've got, an' the sight av ye is enough to heal 'em! Begor! We raised the dust among the spalpeens last night, didn't we?"

"How the dickens did you get through. I saw a dozen men round you!" said Sam.

"Thru' for ye, sorr, but a mighty wake lot they were, an' wid a good blackthorn stick I'd ha' broke up the lot. However, I got the rifle o' wan o' them out av his hands an' cleared a space round me wid it, an' before they got a fist on me again I hove the rifle at them an' took to me heels. Barrin' a cut or two an' a bullet, as I said, I took no harm, an' by the same token I got into that dark lane we came up on the way here, in two winks av an eye. I charged down it in the dark, an' the long an' short av it is, I got past the lines in the confusion, an' afthur that, bein' a little wake wid loss of blood, I dropped for a spill. A mounted patrol found me, an' brought me here to hospital."

"Gosh!" said Sam. "I didn't think there was a cat's chance of anybody getting back like that! But you seem to thrive on cuts and bullets that would double up most fellows, Kelly. You've got to get well an' go on another expedition with me, an' we'll do better next time."

"Bether, is it?" said Kelly jocosely. "Begor, bether or worse, 'tis follow you through fire an' cinders I would, an' so wud any bhoys in the Fusiliers! An' av ye'd give me the grip o' your hand, sorr, 'twould put the heart in me that I'd be off this bed an' at the front again in two days!"

"Yes, and proud to do it," said Sam quickly as he gripped the one sound hand of the big Irishman, and just at that moment Stephen's voice was heard calling for him:

"Hurry, Sam!"

Sam dashed out and joined his brother, and in another minute both were before Colonel Warren.

"I called you up for information you may have obtained at Maldon," said the colonel to Sam; "but there is no time for that now, as we have to make a forced march after the main troops. But I know you can get across country here quicker than anyone, and I want Lord Gethin's orders taken to two squadrons of mounted infantry waiting near Writtle. Can you get there in three hours?"

"We'll manage it somehow, sir," said Sam.

"Good! Then take these instructions where to find the squadrons."

The boys saluted and were away at once, when Devine came across them.

"Can't stay," said Sam hurriedly, as the adjutant tried to stop him; "we're on messenger duty."

"I know you are, but you'll travel the quicker for my news," said Devine. "I've got your two horses."

"What!" cried Stephen. "We turned them adrift three days ago, a march away from here, an'—"

"I know—but they galloped into our bivouac just after we joined Gethin, an' knowing what they were, I scoffed 'em for you. If nobody's stolen 'em they're in the cowsheds at the farm yonder, where I put 'em."

"You're a brick, Devine, if ever there was one!" exclaimed Sam. "Come on, Steve; we can cut down our time by half!"

Waving a hurried and grateful farewell to the adjutant, they ran to the farm, and there, stabled with some hospital-corps horses, under the charge of an orderly, were Stephen's bay troop-horse and the black Uhlan charger Sam had captured on the first day of the war, and which whinnied and went frantic with joy at the sight of its young master. In two minutes both were saddled and the boys were flying along southwards at a gallop.

"My aunt, but that's good of Devine!" said Stephen. "An' though you're as rough-gaited an old camel as ever wore out a fellow's riding-breeches," he added, addressing his troop-horse, "I'm uncommon glad to get you back, all the same!"

"There's no doubt about our bein' in time for the fun now, anyway," said Sam; "that is, unless we stop a bullet with our carcasses before we get to the front. Colonel Warren couldn't have known these horses were there, for he hasn't one to his whole command, bar the battery-horses."

"How does he come to send us to Writtle like this?"

"Got the order by heliograph to send to 'em," said Sam. "Gethin evidently couldn't get round to them except by Warren. It shows how keen they are to get every last man up to the front. Look, Warren's streaking out already! He's as quick at movin' a corps as old Nugent himself. Steady that beast of yours, or he'll run himself down before we're half-way."

So fresh were the horses after their long rest and ample

feeding, that the journey was covered in a very short time, for Sam knew how to cut off a third of the ordinary distance. Nothing of any importance happened during the ride, and the morning was still young when the boys found the force of mounted infantry who were eagerly awaiting orders. Sam gave the message to their commander, and hardly had he read it than the force was mounted, and cantering away to the south-west.

"Are you bound straight to the front?" said Sam to a company-officer, as he drew alongside him.

"No, worse luck. We've got to go right round by Ingatestone to escort a transport," said the officer; and Sam pulled up and let the corps go by.

"That won't do for us, Steve," he said. "We're under no orders to go with them, an' I vote we make a bee-line across country for Harlow. The horses are fresh."

"Right!" said Stephen, and away they went due west, saving their horses as much as possible, for they had a long ride before them. For several miles they cantered on, seeing scarcely a soul.

"We're nowhere near any Germans on this route, are we?" said Stephen, after an hour's ride.

"That's where you're jolly well mistaken. We aren't near the main body, but Uhlans an' patrols are quite likely to be met with. You see, we're pretty well in a line between Steinmetz's brigade to the north-east of us, an' Von Krantz, the commander-in-chief, to the west. P'raps we're to the south of 'em both, for I don't know just where they are, but anyway, we've got to keep a sharp look-out, an'—"

"By gum, there's one now!" exclaimed Stephen, reining in his horse, as a motionless mounted figure came into view some way ahead of them. "Shall I try a flyin' shot at him?"

Sam took a quick glance at the mounted stranger, about whom there was a very unusual look. He was evidently no member of any regular force.

"Steady!" said Sam. "Keep that pop-gun of yours down! That's one of the Legion of Frontiersmen."

He held his hand aloft, and the mounted stranger did likewise. They cantered up to him.

The horseman was a strange and picturesque figure to see on an Essex stubble-field. He wore a sombrero hat, a black shirt with chain shoulder-straps, cord breeches, leather leggings, and a Sam Adams' belt with various pouches and holsters strapped to it, and a carbine was slung across his back. His horse was a wiry-looking bay, and he sat in a Canadian cowboy's stock-saddle with a coil of rope hitched on the pommel. Yet he did not appear conspicuous at a distance, and looked the very model of a scout. He had a keen, hard, brown face, and sat his horse with careless ease.

"Howdy?" he said, with a nod and a smile, running his eye over the boys and their horses. "Bound for the front?"

"Yes," said Sam.

"Same here. Been down at Danbury cuttin' off some Prussian transport waggons with the other boys of my outfit; but I guess I'm due at the front to-night. Let's lope along together."

"You're one of the Legion of Frontiersmen, aren't you?" said Sam.

"Yes; Essex command."

Sam had a strong admiration for that well-known corps, yet this was the first member he had seen. He knew they were all old hands at the game, for any man who had done practical work in the wild parts of the earth—either ranching, cow-punching, war, or sport, and knew how to look after himself and make things hot for an enemy, was eligible. There were vaqueros, ex-mounted policemen, big-game shooters, and explorers among them. Some were penniless, some were millionaires, but they were all "hard nuts"; and, indeed, they were Sam's ideal of a corps, and all volunteers. He looked at the horseman with interest and respect.

"I guess you're old dogs of war—eh?" said the Frontiersman, looking at the boys with surprised amusement. "Are you in the regulars?"

"Not exactly," replied Sam. "We haven't any regiment. We were in the Greyfriars Cadet Corps, but it's wiped out."

"What! Not the two young Villiers?" said the man, looking at them keenly.

"That's our name."

The Frontiersman swept off his cowboy hat and donned it again.

"Then, by glory, off comes my hat to you!" he said. "I've heard of you, and if half what they say's true, you're the smartest pair of kids that ever put a leg across a horse. I don't take much stock in the British scout; but I will say that no kid in all the Dominion could beat your record, an'

"We've some sharp young 'uns over there. Say, you ought to be in our corps."

"Well, we hope we will be some day," said Sam, laughing. "I've heard you've all been like thorns in the skins of the Germans ever since they landed, an' that's just what I fancy best. Standin' in a hollow square an' firin' volleys ain't in our line, though it's a good thing, too, in its way. But it doesn't show so much sport. That's a new accoutrement of yours on the saddle-horn, isn't it?" he added.

"That?" said the Frontiersman. "That's my rope. What we use for ropin' stock an' horses out West. Lasso, you call it."

"Is that part of your corps outfit, then?"

"No, it isn't," laughed the horseman; "but we add what we like as a rule, an' I kind of feel uncomfortable without my lariat, so I always carry it. Comes in useful for other things besides ropin'. Say, where are you from last?"

Stephen told him, and as they rode the scout gradually drew from the boys the story of the raid on Maldon.

"Gee-whizigig! That's the greatest bit of night-work I ever heard of!" exclaimed the Frontiersman. "If you'd got your paws on German Billy, and brought him home across a cayuse, these old pelicans at the War Office would ha' made you a duke. It was only bad luck you didn't get Wilhelm; an' that feller Salyburg is a warm baby, you bet. They'll be almighty glad you've got him prisoner, Say, hold on!"

"Look out ahead!" said Sam, at the same moment as the words left their new comrade's mouth, and all three reined up abruptly by the side of a hedge.

Sam's quick eye had caught a moment's glimpse of the top of a dark helmet moving rapidly along on the other side of the farther hedge of the field they were in.

"Well done! You've got the eye for this work," said the Frontiersman quietly.

And the next instant a German soldier on a black horse was seen travelling as hard as his mount could lay hoofs to the ground. The boys and the Frontiersman were screened from his sight for the moment by the hedge, but they could see him plainly as he approached.

"Despatch rider," said the Frontiersman, under his breath.

"Carrying papers to Von Krantz, sure," added Sam. "He's making that way. There's nothing else he could be riding here at such a pace for."

The Frontiersman nodded, and the three sat silently watching the German approach. At first it seemed as though he would pass within a few yards of them if he kept on his way; but Stephen's troop-horse, which had never been used for scouting till he had it, pricked up his ears as he caught the wind of the German charger, and gave a loud neigh.

The German wheeled his horse sharply away as the sound reached him, and, ramming the spurs home, he galloped off at the utmost speed his mount could show. The three scouts at once dashed out in pursuit.

"Hold back, and I'll try a flying shot!" cried Stephen, unslinging his carbine. "We must have those despatches."

"Put up your gun, an' leave him to me!" said the Frontiersman, spurring ahead. "He's my meat."

The wiry bay horse shot forward with such speed that the heavier mounts of the two boys were outdistanced. The scout drew no weapon, but deftly unhitched the lariat from his saddlehorn and rode out in a long, sweeping curve.

"Great James! What's he think he's goin' to do?" exclaimed Stephen, disappointed of his shot.

"Keep that carbine slung, an' see," returned Sam, as the cadets both galloped after fugitive and pursuer as fast as their horses could go.

The German found himself slowly overtaken, and, turning in his saddle, with a heavy revolver in his hand, he fired rapidly at his pursuer. The Frontiersman swung himself easily in the saddle, and the coiled rope went whirling round his head in long, oval curves. As the second revolver-shot spoke the lariat shot out like a long brown snake, and the noose flew straight over the German and settled over his shoulders and body.

Round came the bay horse, the rope tightened with a twang, and the German was jerked clean out of his saddle and landed on the turf; while the black charger rushed blindly on—riderless.

"My eye!" gasped Stephen. "Did you ever see anything like that in your life?"

"No, by gum; an' never expect to again!" said Sam, lost in admiration. "But I'd give all Cotehall Towers to see him within twenty yards of the Kaiser, I know that!"

They dashed up to the spot where the Frontiersman had already dismounted and was bending over the fallen German. The latter, helpless, with the noose pinning his arms to his sides, and the wind-knocked out of him by the fall, glared up at his captor with a face so full of rage and

blank astonishment that Sam and Stephen gave a shout of laughter.

"Don't jolly the fallen foe. You don't know when your turn'll come," chuckled the Frontiersman, running his swift fingers over the man's uniform.

In a leather pouch on the inside of the jacket was a sealed packet, which the captor drew forth.

"Got 'em in once! This is Von Krantz's billydoo," said the Frontiersman, stowing it in the pouch at his own belt—"from Steinmetz, if I'm any judge."

A burst of German profanity came from the prisoner's lips, and he frothed with rage as the despatches were taken.

"Dutchy, you don't know when you're well off," said the Frontiersman, drawing a dirk from its sheath at the man's belt, and picking up the fallen revolver. "If it hadn't been for this hyer bit of string, you'd have bitten on a bullet, an' you know it."

"Verfuchite Engländer!" spat the German furiously.

"You ain't no sort of a scout," added the Frontiersman, loosening the lariat; "an' this serves you right, for blunderin' across the country as if you owned it. You oughter—"

Before he finished the sentence he dropped flat on the grass, and two rifle-shots rang out in quick succession from the hedge two hundred yards away. Stephen reeled giddily, and clutched at his brother's arm with a gasping sob.

How Stephen Tackled the Prussian Lancer.

The Frontiersman dropped to the ground almost before the sound of the first shot reached them, and lay as flat as a crouching partridge, just behind the prostrate form of the despatch-rider. With one jerk of the hand, he pulled the noose tight round the man's body again, and slipped his carbine-sling over his own head.

"Steve, where are you hit?" cried Sam, for the moment forgetting all else in an agony of anxiety for his brother.

"Down! Get down, you chump!" hissed the Frontiersman, pulling him by the ankle.

And, remembering the danger they were in, Sam followed the scout's example, and threw himself flat, bearing Stephen with him, for the boy was unconscious.

Sam was only just in time, for another bullet buzzed over him as he dropped. The faint film of smoke from the distant bridge showed where the shots came from.

"Screw yourself into the tarnation earth!" said the Frontiersman, levelling his carbine. "That's it; keep behind this swab here! Now then, you with the rope on, if your snipin' partners don't let up they'll stand a smart chance of baggin' you. Ah, I see you, you son of sin!"

Another shot grazed the ammunition-belt of the prisoner, and though no ordinary eye could see anything through the distant hedge, the Frontiersman rested his carbine across his captive's body with a cool, steady aim, and fired.

A man leaped into the air on the other side of the hedge, his arms flung out above him, and dropped back limply.

"Got him!" observed the scout. "I always said those darned cross-belts the Dutchies wear are no good. You can see the glint of 'em through half a forest, let alone a hedge! Say, step out o' that, an' show yourselves!"

Another shot came from the hedge, and yet another; but so flat did the three comrades lie, screened slightly by the rise of the ground, that they presented scarcely any mark, and the bullets passed a hand's-breadth over them.

"Dutchy, I'll trouble you for the loan of your headgear," said the Frontiersman. And, pulling off the German captive's helmet, he put it on the end of his carbine, and raised it aloft for a few seconds.

The firing ceased.

"That gives you somethin' to think about, don't it, ye galoots?" said the scout, watching the hedge like a lynx during the pause that followed.

Then, quick as lightning, he fired again. There was a thick, coughing cry, just heard across the open space, and something heavy rolled over behind the hedge, and was still.

"Nothin' shows like a patch o' white face in an openin' among foliage," remarked the Frontiersman, jerking out the spent cartridges. "That's all right. There was only two of 'em there; but lie close, for there's more around, an' they may be waitin' for us to git up!"

"All right, you call it!" said Sam despairingly, for he had been too anxiously attending to Stephen to take any part in the sniping. "If my brother's done, I don't care whether I get through or not! He's unconscious, but I can't find the wound. They've got him!"

"Let's see!" said the Frontiersman, turning his attention to Stephen, whom he looked at closely and handled skilfully while lying flat. "I guess you're a better scout than surgeon. There's nothin' the matter with him but the wind

from the bullet; it's passed a twentieth of an inch from his temple. Look, here's the mark!" he added, pointing to a bluish spot on the boy's forehead. "When a high-power bullet passes so close to just that place at close range, it knocks you out of time. I've been there."

"He isn't wounded, then?" exclaimed Sam.

"Wounded, my aunt! This is all he needs."

The scout took from his belt a small metal flask, and poured some of the contents between Stephen's lips. It was strong, raw, "tanglefoot" whisky, and the boy coughed as he opened his eyes.

"D'you feel all right, Steve?" said his brother eagerly.

"Right enough! My head aches a bit, that's all," said Stephen. "Have I been to sleep?"

"Something like it," said the Frontiersman drily. "Keep flat down behind this hyer galoot, or maybe you'll go to sleep for good an' all. Keep your eyes skinned, Sam Villiers, while I do a crawl. Don't you move!"

The scout moved off through the grass like a snake on his belly, and disappeared round the curve of the hillock. The horses were waiting together fifty yards away by the hedge, and to reach them a space of perfectly open ground would have to be covered. In less than a minute the scout was back, arriving so invisibly that Stephen, still rather damaged, did not see him till he had joined them.

"Two of 'em finished—there's a third sneaked away, an' signalling away like fun to some Uhlans two fields away," said the Frontiersman. "We've got to make a dash for the horses, an' do it quickly, for likely there's more snipers in hiding, waitin' for a fair plug at us. It's a wonder the fools ain't shot our horses. Now for it!"

They sprang up, and sprinted for their mounts, Sam helping his brother along by the arm; but the boy was now himself again, and needed no aid.

A couple of rifles cracked from some bushes a long way off, but the three comrades travelled swiftly, and the bullets went wide of them. In a trice they were in their saddles and dashing away at full speed, bending flat along their horses' necks. As they did so, eight Uhlans came into view, riding as hard as they could gallop.

The late prisoner, who had been left with the lariat round him, had struggled to his feet, and was shouting to the German horsemen with all his might, and one turned and galloped towards him.

"Dog-gone him!" said the Frontiersman. "He'll give it all away. The right thing would ha' bin to plug a hole through him before we left, an' shut his mouth for good; but I never could stomach them Injun tricks, often as I've seen it done. They'll know I've got the despatches."

The Uhlans, who had neared the prisoner, now swung out again, yelling to his mounted comrades.

"The one in the black shirt!" he bellowed, in broad Prussian dialect. "He's got the despatches! You've to get him at any price!"

"Will you take six to four, or two to one bar one?" said Stephen, who had quite recovered from the shock of the bullet, and was bucketing his horse along at the top of its speed.

"Don't shout too soon," said Sam. "The odds aren't anything like that; an' those despatches are anybody's prize at present."

"It's cut an' run," added the Frontiersman, lifting his wiry horse along like a streak of light. "There's no waitin' for a scrap till these yere papers are safe in camp. If we can't beat that outfit, I'll quit ridin' an' buy a bicycle."

Sam was not nearly so sanguine of their chance, for the Uhlans had cut in across them when first they appeared, and were no great way behind. Uhlans need no teaching how to ride; and they came along with their lance-pennons whistling, their eyes fixed only on the Frontiersman, who was now several yards ahead of the boys.

"Scatter, you two!" cried the scout. "I can manage 'em!"

How Stephen Hoodwinked the Uhlans, and narrow'y Escaped with His Life.

Sam and Steve pulled out sideways a little way, but they kept on the same course. They would not leave the scout, for they knew he meant them to save themselves; and, knowing how important it was that the despatches should not be recaptured, they were willing enough to risk their lives in hindering the pursuers.

How determined the Uhlans were to take the Frontiersman was soon seen, for only four of them, mounted on magnificent horses, were able to equal the speed of the scout's mount; and, fast leaving their comrades behind, they came right past the boys within a dozen yards, and did not even turn aside to attempt a lance-thrust at them, for fear of losing ground in their race after the scout.

Sam drew his revolver and fired twice; but the pace so furious, and the ground so broken, that he missed.

Not so the Frontiersman, who, as the Uhlans drew near, turned in his saddle, with his long-barrelled six-shooter in his fist. To use a pistol backwards from a galloping horse is the most difficult of all shooting, and, expert pistol-shot as the scout was, he fired twice before he touched the leading Uhlans, and then only drilled him through the left arm.

The man only rode the faster, but the third shot dropped him in a heap; and two more bullets were spent before the next was sent reeling out of the saddle.

The scout had but one shot left in his weapon; and the Uhlans, having no pistols, trusted to their lances. The Westerner had evidently miscalculated the speed of their horses, for they were drawing up to his fast, and at any moment a spurt might enable them to drive a lance home in the Frontiersman's back.

"They'll get him!" cried Stephen; and suddenly a thought shot through his brain as he rode, wild with the excitement of the moment. "By gum, if this crock of mine has wind in him for one dyin' effort, I'll try it! Hi!" he shouted. "Pass me somethin' as I come by you—not the despatches—an' I'll draw 'em off!"

"Not on your life!" cried the scout, over his shoulder. "Pull off wide, I tell you!"

But Stephen, bent on his plan, lifted himself on to his horse's neck as if he were an American jockey riding a Derby finish, and drove the spurs home. The troop-horse, snorting wildly and angrily, made such a sprint forward that he passed the two Uhlans, and, the scout swerving just then, Stephen came for one brief instant right alongside him.

The Frontiersman had too much pride to help the boy's ruse even then; but Stephen reached out, and made a hurried grab as they dashed together, as if taking something from him, and then swerved sharply off to the right, and tore away in the opposite direction, thrusting his hand into the breast of his jacket.

It was all done in a moment—almost too quickly for the eye to follow; but one of the Uhlans shouted to the other, and directly afterwards dashed in pursuit of Stephen, leaving his comrade to follow the Frontiersman alone.

Feeling his horse beginning to fail, Stephen rode as he had never ridden before.

The Uhlans, uncertain whether or not the coveted despatches had been passed to the boy, dared not leave it to chance, and pursued him fiercely.

Sam, who had been too far away to the left to help, turned off also; for he saw that his brother had sacrificed himself to give the scout a better chance to escape with the papers.

Sam came flying along with drawn revolver, his heart in his mouth, for he saw the boy's horse was foundering, and would soon fail him altogether.

"Pull aside, and let me get a shot at him!" he cried eagerly.

"No. You'll only plug me!" shouted Stephen, who had less faith in his brother's shooting. But a few seconds later he was forced to turn to escape the lance, and, wheeling with a wrench that wrung his horse's shoulders past repair, he pulled up short.

The Uhlans were too late to catch him with the lance, for he was on the off-side of the boy; and, plunging past, he wheeled round, and came at Stephen again like a flash of light.

"Look out! The quarry!" yelled Sam, as he fired rapidly at the Uhlans.

Both Stephen and the German had been far too intent on each other to see what Sam meant, or to attach any meaning to his warning cry. The boy had pulled up almost on the very brink of an old quarry-pit, with a sheer drop of thirty feet close against him, and the Uhlans was charging blindly, with his eyes fixed on his victim, and his weapon in rest.

Sam had swung his horse round, and fired his last three shots in despair. One missed, one hit the Uhlans' shoulder-strap and glanced off, but the third, by good luck, struck him fairly in the lance-arm.

It did not stop him even then. Stephen saw there was no chance to escape the long weapon by flight, and, instead of turning, he spurred his foundered beast slap at the German with its last effort. He threw himself suddenly flat along its neck, and the aim of the lance—spoilt and thrown high by Sam's lucky shot—passed over the boy's body, and the horses met breast to breast with a tremendous shock.

Stephen flung his arms blindly round the Uhlans as they came together, and the next instant horses and riders reeled over the edge of the quarry, and were hurled into the pit below.

The Great Array at Harlow.

What happened to him, Stephen never quite knew. He did not realise that he was being pitched into space; and his one idea in the brief instant when they left the quarry's brink was that he must keep his grip on the Uhlan's arms at all costs, to prevent him using a weapon. Then he felt himself wrenched free from his hold, and the wind rushing past him, a scream from the German ringing in his ears.

Then came a tremendous scratching and shaking, and the cadet felt absolutely dazed by the shock. How long he remained so he could not tell, till he saw Sam's scared face just above him, and felt his brother's hands lifting and hauling at him.

"What's the matter?" gasped Stephen.

"Great Scott! I didn't think there was a ghost of a chance that you hadn't broken your neck!" exclaimed Sam. "You can thank this bush for saving your life," he added, helping Stephen to crawl out of a high clump of shrubs into which he had fallen, and which he had crushed nearly flat. "Are you much hurt?"

"Smarting as if I'd been whacked with barbed wire," said Stephen; "but no bones broken, I think. You looked as scared as an owl when you came up."

"So would you if you could see yourself. Your face is all over blood!"

Stephen looked as if he had come out of the fiercest battle ever fought, so gory was he; but he soon found his wounds were only skin-deep, and a score of scratches from the bush were only payment in return for having flattened it out. The springy branches and twigs had broken his fall completely.

"Scratches, that's all," said Stephen, wiping his face. "I couldn't tell what had happened to me at first, but I remember now. Where the dickens is the Uhlan?"

"There!" said Sam grimly, pointing to the lancer's horse which lay dead close by. Under it was the body of its late rider, crushed out of all recognition.

Stephen turned away, with a shudder.

"An' there's my mount," he added, looking with a sigh at the motionless form of the bay troop-horse that lay just beyond, with its neck broken. "Well, say nothin' but good of the dead, he was rough in his gait, but he served me well, an' I'm sorry he's gone."

"It's lucky for you that you fell clear of him, an' the Uhlan, too," said Sam. "We'd better get out of this. You'll have to ride behind me on the Imp," he added, walking towards his black charger, which was waiting for him close by. "I galloped round like one o'clock an' got into the quarry by the lower slope, when I saw you go over. But I never expected to find anything but your corpse."

"I never saw the beastly quarry at all," returned Stephen, as he got up behind his brother. "I'd enough to get lookin' after the Uhlan, for I fancied I was goin' to get stuck like a pig. You got him in the arm, didn't you? I say, did Buffalo Bill get away all right?"

"I don't know. Never saw him after you turned off," replied Sam, as they rode out of the quarry. "The lancer was hard at his heels, an' I fancy the chap's revolver was empty."

"I hope he did get away. I took a jolly lot of trouble to draw 'em off, an' I nearly overdid it, too," said Stephen, mopping his cheeks again. "Well, we're out of it, anyhow. I hope we don't meet any more Uhlans, for this horse is done up, an' he'll never carry a double load clear of 'em to-day."

Sam took a careful survey before he started out again; but they had travelled a long way from the point where they had been surprised, and no traces of the enemy were in sight.

"We ought to be outside the range of 'em here," said Sam, urging his horse to a canter. "The sooner we reach Gethin's force the better, for our report might be useful; besides, which, I'm famishin' for a meal, an' we're both of us on our last legs. We've had the dickens of a time of it since we last slept."

Hollow-eyed and weary, but still alert, the brothers jogged on, till the uplands of Harlow came into view, and, as they saw ahead of them the distant outposts, and the great bivouac of the two British generals with the main force, a cheer broke from both of them.

"By gum! What a set-to it'll be when all that lot fairly gets to the final grips with Von Krantz's army!" said Stephen.

"An' it'll happen within a few hours at the latest," put in Sam. "Hallo! Who's coming up across the heath there?"

Great guns! It's our friend who ropes Germans round the neck!"

"He's got through them! Hurrah!" shouted Stephen, as the Frontiersman suddenly came cantering down towards them from the left, his horse in a lather, and sorely distressed.

He and the boys waved their hats to each other as he rode up.

"Got the dispatches safe?" cried Stephen.

"Thanks to you," said the scout. "Gee! but I'm glad to clap my peepers on you again, you bet! I'd never have held my head up again if you had come to harm through what you did. If ever there was a white man," he said to Stephen, "it's you!"

"Oh, it's nothing to shout over!" said Stephen. "My giddy Uhlan fell over a cliff, so I was all right. We were in a stew to know whether you got clear with the papers."

"Shucks!" said the scout. "If I couldn't handle one bung-eyed Dutchman with a spiked pole in his fist I'd get off and chase myself! But you did me a real good turn when you drew the other daisy off. There's nothin' like makin' sure."

"What became of your man?" said Stephen, who was curious to know.

"Well, I guess he won't draw any more pay from the Kaiser. Seem' he was so eager to be on the soil o' this country, where he didn't belong, I pinned him to it with his own lance. So if he ain't satisfied now, he's mighty hard to please. One single Uhlan don't amount to shucks; but I'll allow-I was kind of surprised to see what good horses some of 'em have."

"They get the pick of the light cavalry horses," said Sam; "an' they can ride a bit, too, though they haven't a seat like yours. The dispatches are safe, an' that's the great thing."

"I owe 'em to your young brother, though he did go plumb against orders," said the Frontiersman, "an' I shan't forget to give him the credit when I deliver up these yere papers to old Gethin. Say, it warms you up a bit to see the boys drawn up to the old flag like that!" he added, as the combined forces of Lords Gethin, Ripley, and General Nugent came into view on the long hillside.

"It'll be the biggest battle on record!" exclaimed Stephen, his eyes glistening.

"An' the last stand, too, if London's to be saved," added the scout. "I reckon Johnny Bull'll put up a big fight against the Dutchies this time. An' if he don't win—"

"Don't win? He will win! He's got to!" said Stephen sharply.

"I say, if he don't win," said the Frontiersman grimly, "it won't be for want o' courage, nor want o' skill. The blame for the ruin o' Britain'll rest on those who let things slide, an' cut down our forces, and caused all this muddle an' misery an' blood. If Britain had bin guarded as she should ha' been by those in charge of her, d'ye think we'd ever ha' had the Germans here at all? Would the Kaiser an' his spike-hatted conscripts have dared to as much as set out across the North Sea, if we hadn't as good as chucked the opportunity at 'em?"

"We know that," said Sam sourly. "We know whom we owe all this to. Plenty of folks pointed it out before, but they weren't listened to. It's been muddle all the time, an' it's muddle still! Even now we're all at sixes and sevens. It ain't Gethin's fault he was whacked up north, nor Ripley's. They'd not half the guns they wanted, an' the reserves weren't there to back 'em. It ain't much better now, an' we've lost a heap of men; but talking won't mend it."

"I reckon the country'll know what folk she can't trust next time," said the scout, with a shrug of his shoulders; "but fight's the word now, young 'un, not talk, as you say. Here's the picket."

The guard let them through, and after inquiries they were passed through the inner lines, where the boys were at once among friends, and greetings were given them on all sides as they rode in together on the black charger.

"You seem kind of popular with the British Army," said the Frontiersman. "Say, d'ye think you can get me a quick interview with this byer lord, so I can pitch the dispatches in quick?"

"Rather!" said Sam, as they rode in towards headquarters. "There's Howard," he added, catching sight of Lord Gethin's aide-de-camp. "Hi!"

In a few words Sam told the importance of their mission, and the scout was admitted to Lord Gethin's tent at once.

In about three minutes he came out again, looking very cheerful.

"He's a white man, that!" he said to the boys. "A proper sort of soldier. One of the best! I've got to go and look after my horse now. See you later."

"Lieutenant and Sergeant Villiers," said the aide-de-

ANSWERS

NEXT
THURSDAY:

"D'ARCY MINOR'S CHUM."

A Tale of the Boys of St. Jim's.
By MARTIN CLIFFORD.



camp, with a grin, appearing at the tent-flies, "inside, please!"

Once more the brothers stood before Lord Gethin and his staff, and after the salute was given, the famous general 'rankly held out his hand.

"You're not in the Service, but I wish I'd a few more who could do such work!" he said. "I have heard how pluckily you aided Commandant Fenne, of the Frontiersmen, in his smart capture of these despatches. They are of the greatest aid to me. But I have yet to thank you for your assault on Strood House."

Sam flushed rather painfully.

"I—I'm sorry we failed, sir," he said in a low voice.

"Failed!" exclaimed Lord Gethin. "It seems to me you performed a miracle! The capture of Salzburg is of the greatest importance, and is as valuable a service as you have yet done us. Now, tell me quickly, what happened at Maldon, and what you saw there. I only heard of your escape from the colonel of the Fusiliers, who have just arrived."

Sam related as quickly as he could the details of the Strood House expedition, his disguise as a German private of the line, and the mishap to the Kaiser in Maldon High Street. The general listened intently.

"A first-class piece of work," said Lord Gethin. "Your pluck and resource are so well known now that I need hardly congratulate you again. But what about the German plans, and their expectations of fresh troops? Could you not have found out something about that while you were in their ranks?"

Sam reddened, and drew himself up.

"I am a British officer, though only of a dead Cadet Corps, sir," he said softly. "There is a difference between scouting and spying. I put on the German uniform to effect my escape, but I could not ferret out their secrets while I had it on."

Lord Gethin nodded.

"Quite right, my lad! I apologise to you. In fact, I didn't suppose for a moment that you had done anything of the sort. I may tell you that, on General Nugent's application and mine, you have already been gazetted as D.S.O.,* and your brother is also recommended for it. He will certainly get it, too."

Sam stared in amazement for a moment, and then, flushing with gratitude, he stammered out his thanks. With a kindly smile Lord Gethin dismissed the boys, and turned to the urgent work before him.

"Hallo, Lieutenant Villiers, D.S.O.," said the aide-de-camp, grinning, as the boys joined him outside. "Don't bust the buttons off your tunic."

"What on earth does it mean, givin' rewards an' titles before the campaign's over?" exclaimed Sam. "I thought they always waited till after the war?"

"I b'lieve they're so keen on the work you kids have done, that they want to encourage you," said Howard.

"An' you deserve the D.S.O. six times over, too," he added. "It's jolly decent of Gethin," said Stephen, his eyes glistening. "By gum, though," he added, with a hollow groan, "I b'lieve I'd swop a field-marshal's job for a square meal an' a sleep just now. I'm nearly droppin'."

"You'd better mess with the Fusiliers, an' then turn in," said Howard. "There'll be no fighting till to-morrow."

"Well, we shan't want eighteen hours sleep, even then," said Sam, though he could scarcely keep his eyes open, and every muscle ached. He saw the black charger fed and watered in the White Hussars' lines first, and then both boys got their rations as quickly as possible, and dropped asleep almost before they could finish them.

They slept like the dead that night, nor did any of the noises of the great bivouac arouse them. When they awoke, reveille was long past, and they found themselves lying snugly among some fodder sacks, where a couple of troopers of the White Hussars had carried them, to be out of the way, and they had not even awakened in the process.

They broke their fast with the Fusiliers, and Devine heard their adventures since the parting at Witham. The calm before the storm seemed to be hanging over the forces, and all were resting or preparing for the great affray. And although the two great armies were but a few miles apart, and the upshot of the war was so soon to be decided, it was the easiest day the boys had had since first the Germans landed at Frinton. They were not sorry, however, to ease the strain for a time, and a supply of money arrived for them from Captain Villiers, who was reported to be "going strong" with his company on the flanks of the enemy near Royston.

Sam gave nearly the whole of the money to his brother,

* Distinguished Service Order. Given to officers only for active service of very special merit.

who, with its aid and an order from Lord Gethin through his aide-de-camp, procured a good horse for himself, though horses were harder to get than diamonds at the time.

About noon skirmishing broke out on the flanks of the army, and messengers were galloping hard to and fro. Suddenly, at two o'clock, the British forces began to draw back, quickly and quietly, and fall southwards towards Epping.

"Good man!" said Devine. "Gethin's got a great position prepared for us there, they say. We all wondered how he'd expect to hold this place. He's just spoofed the Germans, an' kept 'em off while he got ready. If we can't wipe 'em out at Epping, we can't do it anywhere!"

"Of course we shall do it!" said Stephen. "D'you mean to say you think we shan't?" he exclaimed, looking at Devine's face.

"I can tell you nothing about it," said the adjutant grimly. "Thanks to our precious rulers, we've got the biggest task on hand now that ever even the British Army had to face, an' all the odds against us. We shall either win or smash up. If we do the former it'll be a miracle. We've been let down, but we shall do our best. You kids had better get your mounts if you're goin' with the forces."

"Old Devine's got a liver on him," said Stephen, as they rode out. "Never heard him croak like that before."

Sam said nothing. They went well ahead with the advance-guard, and the huge force fell back upon Epping. There were some expectations of a German attack on it while it was moving; but it was so perfectly handled and guarded that the enemy were given no such chance.

At five in the evening the position was taken up, and the British Lion bared his teeth and claws to fight for the stronghold of the whole Empire. London, the huge city which was a pivot for all Greater Britain, lay a few miles behind. And in front, bent on reaching it, were the enormous armed hordes of the Kaiser.

The Germans, held back by the guns and regiments left to check them, now followed on rapidly. It was plain they meant to wait no longer, but to strike at once, and strike hard. They had the advantage of fully 20,000 more men than the British, and their batteries held the best and heaviest artillery.

With a roar and a boom of shells the battle began, and the distant, almost invisible, enemy began to pour their fire into the British position, while musketry and machine-gun were keeping up one tremendous, infernal tattoo on the flanks. Lord Gethin's batteries replied, and the game of war, like pawns on a chessboard, began in bitter earnest.

Sam and Stephen, in spite of all they had gone through, were almost dazed with the uproar—the hail of shells, and the vastness of the two opposing forces. The biggest engagements they had been in—the storming of Colchester, and the rout of Von Adler at Southminster—were nothing to this.

They could not see much of the battle. The deadly struggle at their own end, where the batteries above the Fusiliers were answering the German guns to the right, and the conflict of a corps of British mounted infantry below with a number of German sappers, who were trying to bridge the stream in front, gave them enough excitement, and the whole plan of the great battle was too big for them to see.

The sky was overcast, but no rain fell, and a great dry wind roared and whistled across the country—a fit accompaniment for the battle. Every here and there, a shell would set the stubble and grass fields alight, and clumps of dry gorse were blazing among the spluttering rifles. The awful din and slaughter, all at long range, continued till nightfall, and, just before dusk, a Prussian battery took up its place on the fringe of the forest, far to the right, and poured in a cannonade that told heavily upon the entrenched regiments on the boys' side.

Sam, sitting behind a gun-emplacement, watched this battery for some time with a thoughtful face and knitted brows. He could not see much more than the faint "smokeless" puffs from the guns, as they were whirled away by the gale, and, as the dusk came down, it shut out the view altogether, and the gun-fire ceased. Devine came by, dusty, worn-out, and blood trickling down his face from a fragment of shell, but he was alert and cheerful.

"Hallo, kids!" he said. "We're hittin' it! It's gone the best with us, so far; an' to-morrow, when it comes to grips, we'll twist their tails! There'll be lots of skirmishin' an' cutting-out expeditions, all right," he added, as he hurried on. "Just in your line—you'd better join one of 'em. They'll be glad of you. That battery up there has been givin' us socks!"

"Shall we, Sam?" said Stephen eagerly, slinging carbine.

"We won't join anything, but ourselves," said Sam. "We haven't any instructions, so we'll make 'em on our own."

It's been strikin' me all the evenin' that that German battery yonder is in a rum place."

"There's no gettin' at a battery," said Stephen; "but why a rum place?"

"It's right to leeward of the big grove at that end of the forest, an' it's in among the trees. There's a sixty-mile-an-hour gale blowin', an' the forest's as dry as tinder—there's been no rain for six weeks. Now, it seems to me, Steve, with a couple of torches, we'll up-wind of the battery, if we can creep there."

"Burn 'em out, d'you mean?" exclaimed Stephen. "By gum! Can it be done?"

"Once the wood's afire, the flames will travel quicker than a horse gallopin'. I know every yard of the place, an' if you're game to come—"

"Let's try it!" cried Stephen eagerly. "Even if they get us afterwards, we'll have done some good! Gosh! Won't the chaps be pleased, if we can shift those guns?"

Sam made his way at once to the rear, where he stole a length of thick, tarred oakum from the transport. This he cut into two pieces a foot long, giving one to Stephen and keeping the other himself. A box of wind vestas, with long tops, was the next thing he required, and armed only with these, the oakum, and his revolver, he set out at once, with Stephen and his trusty carbine beside him.

Stephen was out of his district here, but Sam knew the eastern side of Epping Forest and its outlying coppices like a book.

Before long, they were worming their way through dense scrub and over mossy clearings in the inky darkness of the night, twice passing close to a Prussian patrol.

The journey, yard by yard, took over three hours, nor had Stephen the least idea where they were when they halted in the forest. The roar of the wind in the trees had helped to deaden all noise on their way.

"Wait here, with your oakum an' vestas ready," whispered Sam. "When you see my match strike, light your torch an' touch up this dry bracken an' gorse in as long a line as you can."

He disappeared, and Stephen was left with beating heart—for he heard the tramp of a German sentry not far off, though he could not see the man—and presently the faint light of Sam's match could be seen to gleam for a moment away to the right, followed by a strange glare.

Stephen set light to his oakum torch instantly, and ran along, touching off the dry scrub as he went. It blazed up like tinder, caught by the wind, and away-raced the flames towards the pine-trees, gaining at every yard. In Sam's direction, a similar blaze was rushing along before the gale, and, a moment or two later, Sam himself dashed up to his brother, as the two fires met at their edges.

They darted out of the forest, and ran along the open ground outside, till once more Sam went down flat, and bade his brother creep. Presently they stopped, and, right in among the trees, Stephen saw the long, grim, black Prussian guns, their muzzles pointed towards the British position. The gunners were sleeping round them, the gun-horses were hobbled close by, and the sentries paced outside with their carbines.

Suddenly one of the sentries threw up his head, and sniffed at the wind like a dog. He listened, and the dull, crackling roar through the forest was plainly heard, rushing along like an express train. The sentry squibbed off his rifle hurriedly.

"Fire—fire!" he cried. "The forest is alight, and sweeping down on us!"

The guard sprang up hastily at the cry, and, even as they did so, the great wall of flame came swiftly up before the roaring gale. For some moments all was confusion. The hoarse shouts and oaths of the artillery officers brought the men together, the horses were limbered up with feverish haste, and away went the battery at a mad, headlong gallop—racing with death, for the wall of living flames rushed after close at the back of the flying guns.

The Gun that Saved the Fusiliers.

Yelling, spurring, galloping, the Prussian artillerymen urged their horses to their utmost speed. The great guns went thundering along before the rushing flames, crashing over the stumps of trees, while the sparks flew all round them from the pursuing wall of fire.

"By gum, we've got 'em!" exclaimed Stephen, wriggling with excitement as he lay in the bushes. "They can't get clear!"

"They'll do it easy enough," returned Sam, watching keenly. "We've shifted 'em out of it, an' made 'em lose a lot of their gear, an' that's all we could hope for."

During the first minute or two it certainly looked as if Stephen were right. Swiftly as the guns were limbered up, it yet took some time to get them fairly horsed and in retreat. That delay gave the flames time to come up so close that for a brief space it looked as if the battery must be overtaken and annihilated.

The frantic, maddened horses galloped as if their hearts would burst as the gunners flogged them on—a useless thing to do, for the flames were enough in themselves to make the beasts use their utmost strength and speed.

Through it all, separated from the forest in their little thicket, and well out of the track of the fire, the two brothers watched the rout of the battery.

Once the horses got fairly into their stride, however, they began to outdistance the flames, and at the first opportunity they swung out into an open space, cleared the forest, leaving it on the left, and dashed furiously ahead over the grass. The whole tract behind them, wherever there was bracken and furze, was now alight and in a mass of flames that swept along before the gale.

"I told you they'd get caught!" cried Stephen, pointing to the forest. "There's one overtaken, at any rate. No, it isn't, though; it's the gun they never limbered up at all!"

"Yes, they had to abandon that one," said Sam gleefully: for in the thickest part of the fire, just opposite, a deserted gun was standing, with the flames flickering around and over it. "Where are the horses—stampeded?"

"No," said Stephen. "Can't you see 'em tethered out to the right there? Look round the bush."

Sam did so, and saw the four powerful horses that should have drawn the abandoned gun. They were straining at their tethers, squealing and rearing with fright at the rushing flames, of which, however, they were well out of reach.

"Good biz!" said Stephen. "I don't like wipin' horses out; it's a different matter from Prussians. The crew of that gun had no time to get at the horses at all. They were needed to save the other pieces, an' they rode off on the limbers, or they'd have got cooked!"

"Did they, though?" exclaimed Sam, his face suddenly changing.

"Look at 'em!" chuckled Stephen, nodding his head towards the north, where, in the glow which the fire sent up, the battery could be seen disappearing at a breakneck pace over the rise of a slope. "They can't pull up now, even if they want to, till the horses run themselves down. They're trained to stand gun-fire an' shot an' shell, those horses, an' most things beside; but you can't trust any geegoes in the world when it comes to a big flare. Look at those just beyond us there!"

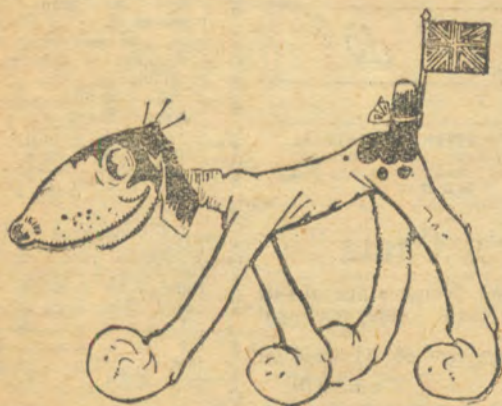
"Yes, they've been through a dozen actions, most likely, an' yet they're in a lather with fright," said Sam. "I say, if we— There goes the gun!"

The Stolen Gun.

A loud crash in the burning forest told that the abandoned gun had exploded a cartridge; another shortly followed suit, scattering the blazing embers so far and high that some of them nearly reached the boys' hiding-place. The tethered horses whinnied and squealed again as the sparks showered among them.

"We'll get a couple of new mounts, anyway!" said Stephen

I am Homeless Hector.



See this week's CHIPS.

NEXT
THURSDAY:

"D'ARCY MINOR'S CHUM."

A Tale of the Boys of St. Jim's.
By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

gleefully. "Bags! I'll have that big chestnut; he's a better horse than that new one of mine. We'll take all four into camp; our gunners'll be glad of 'em."

"Horses?" exclaimed Sam. "Better than that. We'll bag the gun!"

Even Stephen was taken aback for a moment.

"Can we? But it's blown up. There goes another cartidge!"

"Only rounds of ammunition in the cases on the ground. Give the fire five minutes, an' we'll yank their old popgun out of that," said Sam, "provided we can do it before the beggars come back."

"My eye, but it'll be red-hot!"

"Don't talk rot! The fire's swept past an' over it; can't you see? It's bare already, an' it's only the burnin' bracken close to the ground that's made the shells go off."

Indeed, the fire had gone as swiftly as it had come. Sweeping through the wood and burning everything in its track that was dry enough to catch fire, the body of the flames were now exhausting themselves half a mile away, and where the fire had passed there was now only a blackened track of smouldering grass and scorched trees. The remaining flames were dying out even as Sam spoke, and the gun stood up, practically unharmed, amid a waste of smoking turf and blackened saplings.

"By gum, you're right, Sam!" cried Stephen eagerly. "Let's be at it!"

"In a couple of minutes," said Sam, holding him back. "It won't do to take the horses on to that hot ground, or we shall stampede 'em an' do no good."

Just then, however, a stray eddy of wind drove some smouldering bracken out of the forest, and part of it fell among the dry brambles of the coppice in which the boys lay. In a few seconds the wind blew them into flame, the little wood began to roar and crackle, and the fire came sweeping down on the brothers just as it had done through the forest, only on a small scale, and the boys had to scuttle out as fast as they could on to the open ground.

"I believe I can hear horses gallopin'," said Stephen suddenly.

"Come on, then. We'll have to try it now, an' take the chances," said Sam, running to where the horses were tethered. He swiftly soothed a couple of the frightened beasts, as he well knew how, and loosed them. "Take one of 'em, Steve!" he cried, jumping on the back of the heaviest. "It's impossible for the two of us to handle four horses at once on that hot ground. We'll have to haul the gun out with a couple, an' hitch the others on when we get 'em clear of the wood."

"Right-ho!" said Stephen. "Only let's look sharp, whichever we do."

They urged the horses forward at a smart canter, straight for where the gun stood in the scorched wood, not more than twenty yards in, with its muzzle pointing towards the British position, as may be remembered. Onward they rode, scattering the burning rubbish behind them, and Sam swung his horse round smartly as they came abreast the limber, and sprang down, his brother following suit on the other side.

Round the piece itself, however, the hot ashes and burning grass were fetlock-deep, and now the trouble began. The horses reared and plunged frantically, and Sam was fortunate in getting his mount hitched to the trail before it became unmanageable. Stephen, however, was overpowered by the big black horse he had charge of, and it nearly dragged him off his feet.

"Bring him to it, for goodness' sake! Hitch him!" cried Sam, running round to help. For a moment it was touch and go, but by a lucky and skilful catch of the chain Sam managed to hitch him to his place.

The moment the two horses found themselves hitched they started off furiously, and it was all the boys could do to scramble on to them in time. The gun was a

heavy pull for only two, but the sparking ashes were better than any spur, and the piece of artillery went lumbering over the burnt ground at the pace of a hansom cab, to be pulled up short as soon as they were on the cool turf.

"Hold her there while I get the others," said Sam, springing down and running for the second pair of horses.

"Look sharp, for goodness' sake! Here come the Prussians!" cried Stephen.

Out in the distance, in the direction which the escaped battery had taken, six horsemen came riding at a hand-gallop, and their dark forms could be seen dimly in the starlight.

Sam gave them but one glance, and he and Stephen hitched the second pair of horses in their places in silence, and as swiftly as they could. They were not as smart at the work as artillerymen, but they had been long enough with the forces to know how a gun is limbered up, and the knowledge that death awaited them if they delayed, made their fingers nimble. Sam seized the driving-reins and jumped up on the limber. Stephen sprang into the saddle of the near leader, and away went the gun as fast as the well-trained horses could drive it.

The Germans were yet three hundred yards away, and they seemed to pause in surprise as they saw the gun start. Sam and Stephen worked up their horses to a gallop that brought the gun along like an express train, and Sam was nearly jerked off the limber as they bumped over a log. He braced himself with his feet against the bar, like a driver at the Agricultural Hall, knowing it was no case of winning or losing a prize, but of being shot without trial if he failed in his driving.

The Prussians behind shouted loudly, but their voices were drowned by the gale, and Sam, with a good lead in hand, turned sharply down a road through the forest, and tore down a long incline.

"Sit tight, Steve! Left wheel!" he yelled a couple of minutes later, as he turned down a side road, and shortly afterwards he left this altogether and dashed down a long, grassy ride through the woods. He was now well out of the part the fire had devastated, and knowing the whole east side of the forest thoroughly, he took the short cut and came out again upon another road.

"We've shaken 'em off now. They won't find us!" he cried to Stephen, when suddenly they saw ahead of them a full company of Saxon riflemen marching rapidly along the road in front, going in the same direction.

"Look out ahead!" cried Steve.

"Shut your mouth! Chuck your cap away, an' don't say a word!" answered Sam hurriedly. "We've got to bluff it."

There was no time to wheel or turn. Sam jerked his Service cap away, and forced his horses—which he had allowed to slacken their pace—to their sharpest gallop once more.

"Forward!" yelled Sam at the top of his voice to the company in front, in gruff German. "Gun forward!"

Well was it for Sam at that hour that there was no English accent in his German. All infantry give way to a gun going

into action, and the thundering piece of artillery would have made a path for itself if they had not. The company of riflemen opened out smartly, and left the way clear, the gun dashed through them in the darkness, and was away round the curve of the road in a twinkling. One glimpse of the riflemen and their staring officers was all the boys had, and they did not want a longer look. In a couple of minutes the Germans were half a mile behind.

"I'll bet they wondered where we were goin' at this time of night," called Sam, with a laugh, as he eased his horses again. "Lucky it was too dark for 'em to see our khaki jackets. The caps wou' have done us."

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