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Tale of

TOM MERRY & CO.

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NO. 53. VOL. 2.



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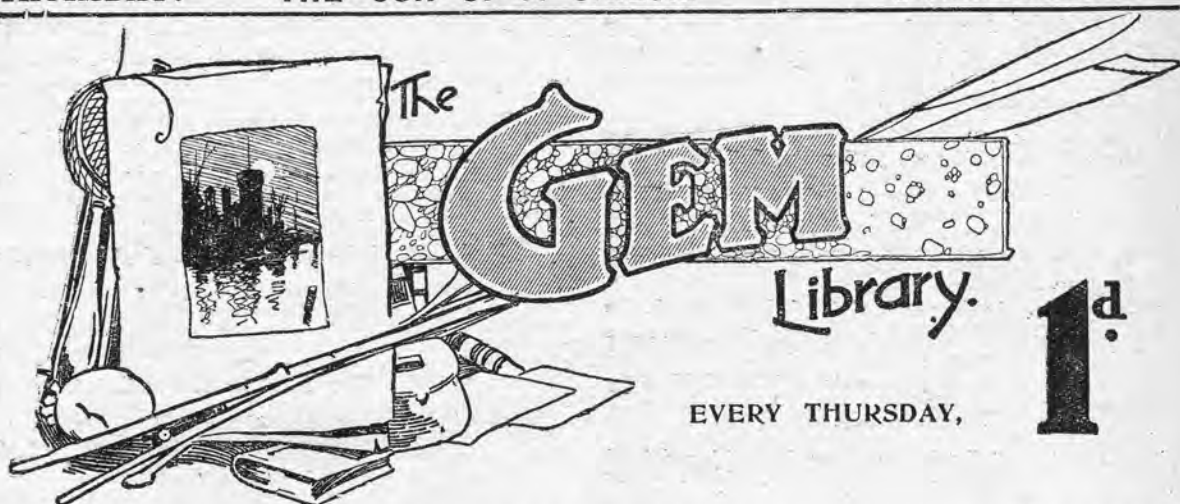
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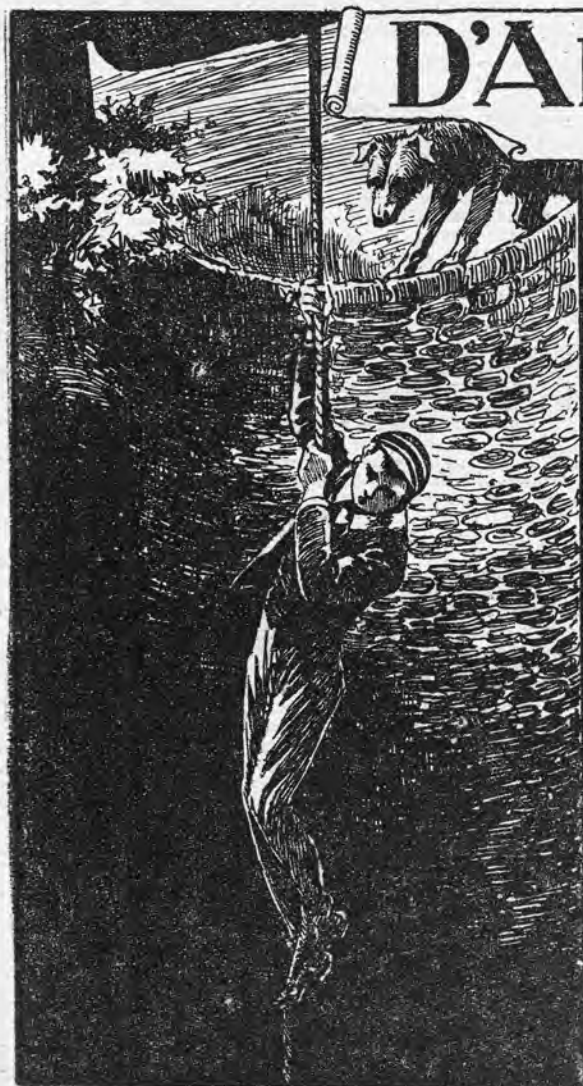
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CHAPTER 1.

A Matter of Taste.

"PERSONALLY," said Tom Merry—"personally I like this natty blue background with the green baskets of pink flowers."

"Loud."

Monty Lowther hastily turned over the leaves of the huge wallpaper pattern-book, and plunged a forefinger down on a brilliant yellow paper relieved with silver stripes.

"There!"

"That thing?"

"Why not, Tom Merry? If a neat, soft yellow isn't better than a gaudy blue—"

"The paper for this study," put in Manners coolly, "is this plain red."

"I don't think!"

"Beastly loud!"

"You fellows don't know what taste is," said Manners.

"The red paper and white paint has it!"

"Rot! The natty blue with pink flowers, more like."

"Not much! Tom Merry means this neat, soft yellow—"

"Do I?"

"Look here—" began Manners wrathfully.

But the trend of his thoughts was interrupted by the door being pushed open at that moment.

The movement admitted the graceful form of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, the swell of the School House. Arthur Augustus screwed his monocle into his eye, and glanced round the Shell study.

"No footah this afternoon, deah boys," he said. "Kildare's ordahs."

"Tell us something we don't know," grinned Tom Merry,

ANOTHER DOUBLE-LENGTH TALE OF TOM MERRY NEXT THURSDAY.

No. 53 (New Series).

looking at the window, against which the rain was driving with almost gale force. "Is croquet off as well, Gussy?"

"If that is meant for humouah, Tom Mewwy——"

"Oh, cut, Gussy; we're busy!"

"I wefuse to cut!"

"Stay, then!"

"I wefuse to stay!"

"Do you?" said Manners, getting up; but Tom Merry pulled him down again.

"Let Gussy decide the question about the paper," he laughed. "We haven't any too much time if we mean to have the materials brought back by the workmen after dinner. Gus, we are going to do up this study this afternoon!"

"Weally?"

"Yes, weally. As the writer of the fashion notes in the 'Weekly,' I suppose you know a bit about taste?"

"Yaas, wathah! In mattahs of taste, I wathah think I stand alone in St. Jim's!"

"Good! Now, what is your candid opinion of this natty blue paper——"

"Wotten!" said D'Arcy promptly.

"What!"

"Isn't that what I told you, Tom Merry?" exclaimed Lowther. "It's loud—beastly loud! But just look at this neat, soft yellow, Gussy. Isn't that——"

"Wotten!" said Arthur Augustus.

Manners grinned with delight, and hastily turned the patterns over.

"I told you fellows this matter ought to have been left to me," he said cheerfully. "A fellow who goes in for photography must necessarily know more about the blending of colours than other fellows. There, Gussy—a plain red with white paint and——"

"Wotten, deah boy!"

"What!"

"Turn the ass out!"

"I wefuse!"

"Cut!"

"I wefuse to cut," said D'Arcy coldly; "I wefuse to be turned out! I want some information, deah boys."

"What about, fathead?"

"About young Wally, Tom Mewwy?"

"Hallo! What has Wally been up to now? Refused to show you proper respect, or something serious like that?"

"Wally nevah shows me the respect due to an eldah bwothah, I wegwet to say," said Arthur Augustus; "but that is not the mattah now. Have you seen the young wascal?"

"Wally? Let me see. Yes, I saw him just after school. Why, ass?"

"Was he with Dudley, do you wemembah?"

"Dudley! Who is Dudley?"

"A Third-Formah, and a wastah!"

"Oh, that thick-headed beggar who has stuck in the Third since the Flood!" said Tom Merry thoughtfully. "Yes, I believe young Wally was with him, now I come to think of it. But why?"

"As an eldah bwothah, I have to keep an eye on Wally."

"Oh, he's all right! Trust the scallawag of the Third to look after himself, Gussy."

"But Dudley is a wastah, and Wally is always with him when young Jameson and Gibson aren't about. You see, deah boy——"

"Oh, that's all right!" laughed the hero of the Shell. "Wally won't be corrupted, Gussy; you can be certain of that. He and his blessed dog Pongo both want chaining up, but they are young sports, you know."

"It's vevy decent of you to say that, Tom Mewwy," said Arthur Augustus; "though, as a D'Arcy, I must wefuse to admit that my young bwothah wequires chainin' up!"

"Then that's settled, and you can cut. I'm a bit surprised, though, at Wally chumming in with a waster like Dudley must be."

"Yaas, I wondah, too. I will wemonstrate with him!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" laughed Tom Merry. "Look here, you fellows, suppose we play odd man out for choice of paper for the room? That will be the simplest method, and directly we have decided I'll slip along and tell the workmen, who are in Mr. Linton's room, to bring us back the stuff. Let's see, we shall want about six pieces of paper, some paint and whitewash. Mine's a head!"

As the others both showed tails, Tom Merry grinned, and the fate of the Shell study was settled.

"The neat blue background and the green baskets of pink flowers has it?" he said. "So-long!"

And he dashed off towards the master's room in order to catch the workmen before they left for dinner. As he went he caught sight of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy talking to Blake, the leader of the School House juniors, but he did not stop, although Jack Blake called out to him:

"Seen young Wally, kid?"

"No, Blake, deah boy," exclaimed D'Arcy, "he hasn't! I have just asked him."

"Hard cheese! Well, Gus, if Wally has really taken up with Dudley or any of his set, it will have to be put a stop to. I mean, Dudley is a couple of years older than Wally, and though the kid has a head on his shoulders, it's only a young head."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"As I said, we shall have to nip a friendship like that in the giddy bud," went on the leader of the School House juniors. "But, first of all, we must be certain that it's going on."

"It is, deah boy! Young Wally was playin' dwaughts with Dudley last night."

"Well, there's nothing very desperate in draughts, old man," said Jack Blake. "However, we'll keep our eyes open, and if I know Tom Merry, he'll do the same. What was that you were saying about the Shell-fish papering their own study?"

"Yaas, wathah! They asked me to choose their papah for them!"

"Humph! This afternoon, did you say?"

"Yaas, wathah! But I can't stop, deah boy. As an eldah bwothah——"

"Why, what are you going to do?"

"Wemonstrate with young Wally."

"I shouldn't do that, if I were you, Gus."

"It is my duty," said Arthur Augustus, with dignity. "I shall wemonstrate firmly, and point out that it would be bettah if he were to drop a wottah and a wastah like Dudley."

"Ha, ha, ha! Well, don't let Dudley hear you wemonstrating, or you may sample a thick ear. But I can't stop talking here all day; I want to see Digby and Herries. This afternoon, you said, the paperhanging wheeze comes off?"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Good!"

And he dashed on in the direction of Study No. 6. The swell of the School House continued his way until he caught sight of a well-known figure from the rival House.

"Figgins! Figgins, deah boy, have you seen that young wascal of a bwothah of mine?"

"Have you seen that ass Tom Merry?" said the chief of the New House juniors, stopping. "Have you?"

"Yaas, wathah! He's in his study choosin' wotten wall-papahs!"

"Wallpapers! What on earth for?"

"To papah his woom this aftahnoon, of course!"

"My hat!" muttered Figgins; and he turned to go.

"But about Wally!" called Arthur Augustus. "Have you seen my young bwothah, Figgins?"

But the chief of the New House juniors had turned the corner in the corridor, and was making his way thoughtfully towards his own quarters.

"Going to paper his room, is he?" he grinned. "Good!"

Arthur Augustus was also thinking.

"I wegard Figgins as a wude beast!" he mused. "I wegard him as a selfish wottah as well! I——"

D'Arcy stopped suddenly, because a skinny hand had suddenly shot out from an open study doorway, and had gripped him by the top button of his coat.

"Who is that? Ah, D'Arcy! Do you know anything about the doctrine of egoism, D'Arcy?"

"No, Skimpole, deah boy."

"We can be certain of nothing but our own existence," said Skimpole, speaking as if he were addressing a meeting of many and no one in particular. "You cannot prove that I exist; I cannot prove that you exist, although I know that I exist myself and you know——"

"You uttah ass!"

"Prove, then, that I exist!"

Before Arthur Augustus had time to even make the attempt Skimpole, the brainy man of the Shell, wandered off on another tack.

"Where is Tom Merry? I must explain to Tom Merry this doctrine of egoism! Where is he, D'Arcy?"

"In his woom gettin' ready to papah the beastly walls!"

"Paper the walls? Then he will want some advice. I must go at once, D'Arcy. Move away!"

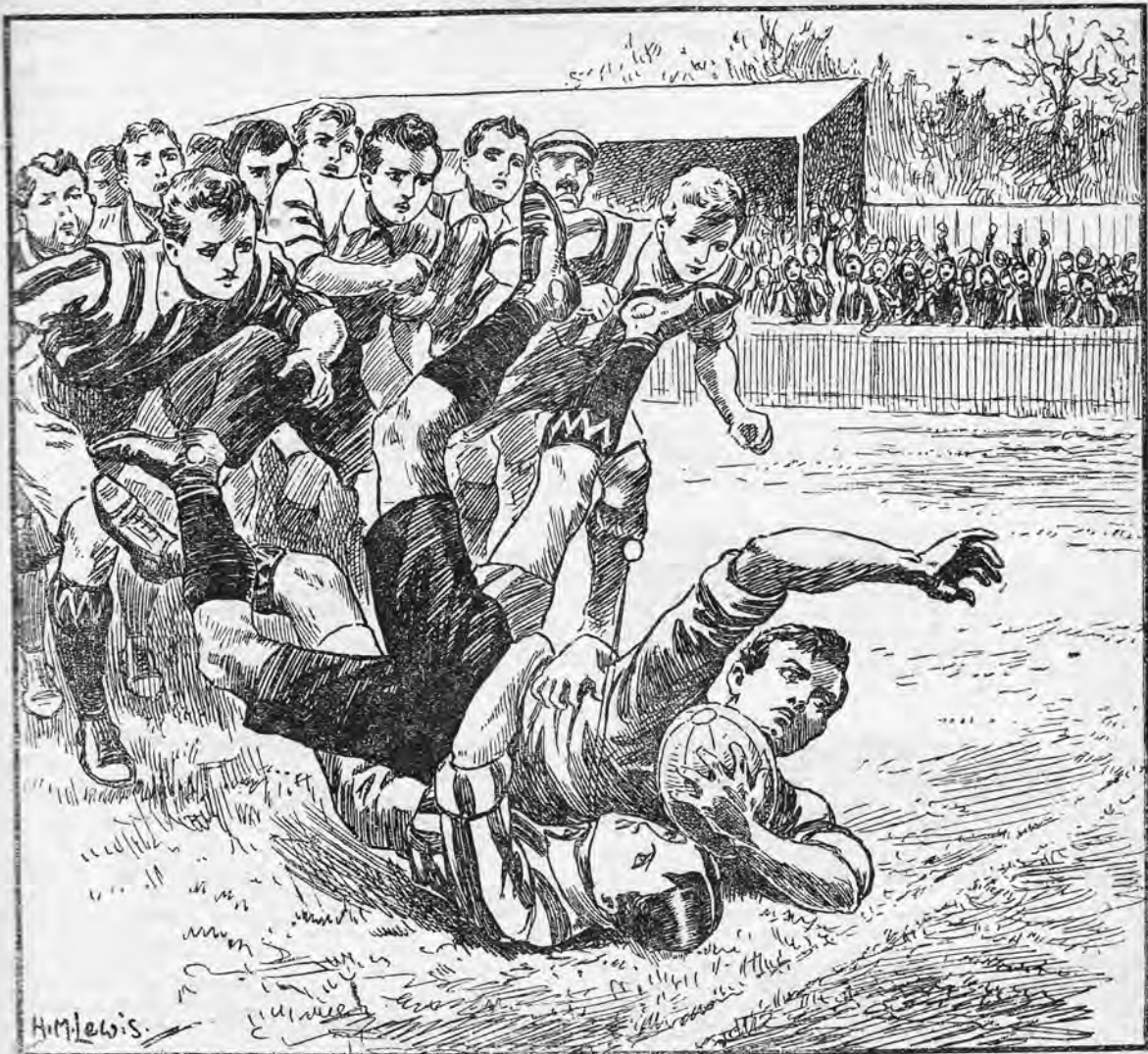
"I wefuse to move away, deah boy! I want to know where my young wascal of a bwothah is!"

"I haven't seen him," said Skimpole, "but if he doesn't turn up before tea this evening, let me know, and I'll track him down for you. Perhaps he has run away to London, as he did before Christmas."

"You uttah ass, deah boy! I saw him myself half an hour ago!"

"Then what are you worrying me about him for? Going to paper their room, are they? Dear me! That is the dinner-gong, is it not?"

"Yaas, wathah!" said D'Arcy.



"Sowwy, deah boy!" gasped Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, as he tackled his man low. "But undah the cires, there was nothin' else to do!"

And he hurried away rapidly, forgetting all about the missing Wally in the new interests the dinner-gong awoke in his mind.

And, as it happened, it was just at that moment that Arthur Augustus came near to finding his brother, for as he walked down the corridor a wiry youngster with a soiled collar and still more inky fingers faded briskly into a study. It was a master's study, but that did not trouble Wally D'Arcy, the scallawag of the Third Form at St. Jim's.

"I don't want one of Gussy's long-winded jaws," Wally grinned to himself, "and I'm not having one."

Wally D'Arcy remained in the study peering round the partially closed door while his brother passed, and then was just about to step out into the passage again when he caught sight of Kildare, the captain of the school, walking towards him, talking to Lefevre, of the Fifth.

"Phew!" whistled Wally. "Narrow squeak! Shall I get under the table in case they come in here?"

But there was no need to do that, for the sound of the seniors' voices were already receding along the corridor. The subject of their conversation caused the Third-Former to unconsciously prick up his ears, although he was really one of the last fellows in the School House to listen to conversation not intended for himself.

"Yes, it's a fact," Kildare was saying; "these Wanderers have offered us a game next Saturday on our ground."

"But St. Jim's don't play Rugby."

"No. Still, I don't see how the Wanderers could have known that," came the captain's voice, laughing. "I am sorry, because I dote on the game myself. You might write refusing, but thanking them for the offer, Lefevre, will you?"

And then the voices became too distant for Wally to hear more. The Third-Former came out of the room, glanced indignantly after the two seniors, then scuttled off towards the dining-room.

CHAPTER 2. Unexpected Aid.

"GOOD! I don't think any of the pres. saw us!" And Tom Merry placed a large pail of whitewash in the centre of the study. Lowther followed suit with rolls of paper, while Manners thoughtfully balanced two pots of dark green paint on the wide window-ledge.

"Very good idea of mine ordering the same coloured paint as the one already on," he observed. "We shall only have to give one coat now."

"Good egg!" The chums of the Shell slipped off their coats, rolled their sleeves, and moved with one accord to where the rolls of paper, huge scissors, and paste was.

"Aiter me, Manners!"

"I thought you were going to do the painting, old man?"

"Anyway," said Lowther, "I will look after the papering, so you can settle amongst yourselves who does—"

"Look here, Tom Merry—"

The voices of the chums of the Shell rose, and so they failed to hear a series of polite knocks at the door. Manners seized the paste-brush, Lowther the paste itself, and Tom Merry whipped up the paper. Then they looked at one another wrathfully.

"You can go and eat coke, Tom Merry!"

"Oh, go for a walk, Manners!"

"Lowther, you're a selfish ass! Hallo!"

The knocking had ceased, and the door opened, to admit Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. Arthur Augustus closed the door after himself.

"Hallo, deah boys!"

"Good-bye, Gussy!"

"Sorry you have to go, kid!"

"Which is it to be, Gus?" asked Tom Merry. "By the window or the door?"

"I wefuse—"

"Choose! The window or the door?"

"I wefuse to choose, and I wefuse to go!" said Arthur Augustus, with dignity. "In mattahs of taste I wathah think—"

"Oh, get off!"

"In mattahs of taste I wathah considah I am at the top of the twee," continued D'Arcy, who had quite his share of obstinacy on occasion. "If you fellows will attend to the paintin' and the whitewashin', I'll look aftah the papahin'."

"I don't think!" said Tom Merry. "Throw the ass out, Manners!"

"I wefuse to be thwown out, deah boy, and I considah it wude of you to chawawtise me as an ass. Mannahs, if you wequire a feahful thwashin'—"

"Oh, let the ass, stay!" said Lowther. "He'll do to wipe the brushes on. And, anyway, it's your fault, Tom, for telling him we were going to do up our room."

"All right, then! Only shove the dummy into a cupboard, or somewhere. We aren't having anyone else in, though! Now, look here, Lowther, it stands to reason I'm the proper man to do the beastly papering. How could asses like you—"

"Hallo, you chaps?" inquired a cheerful voice from the doorway. "Don't embrace me, Manners, old kid!"

"What do you want, Blake?"

"Nothing, Tom Merry," grinned the chief of Study No. 6, taking off his coat. "Just you three wire in at the painting, and I'll have this paper hung in no time."

Jack Blake seized the paste-brush, but Manners was quick enough to sit on the paste-bucket, whilst Lowther looked as if he meant to defend the rolls of paper with his life. Tom Merry jerked his thumb towards the door.

"Cut," he said briefly. "We can't have Fourth-Formers fooling about here. We've got some work on! Clear!"

"Right-ho! When the tea-bell goes! No, don't shut the door; Herries and Digby are coming along in a minute."

"Then they can go back again!" shouted Tom Merry. "This isn't a home for stray Fourth-Formers. The window or the door, Blake?"

"Neither, kid! Come in, Digby, old son!"

Tom Merry & Co. made a dash for the door, but they were too late, for before they could get it shut, both Digby and Herries were in the room. Herries was followed by his bulldog.

"Look out, Gussy," said Herries pleasantly, "Towser's in a bit of a temper this afternoon; he nearly ate Gore in the quadrangle. What's the matter?"

"Clear!" said Tom Merry. "Get out of this!"

"Throw 'em out, and the beastly dog with them!" shouted Manners, who was edging away from Towser. "Throw—Look, the brute's wolfing the rotten paste!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Ha, ha, ha! Where's the ha, ha, ha, come in, ass? Herries, if you don't take that brute away I'll do it an injury!"

As Manners spoke he skilfully arranged matters so that the little study table was between Towser and himself. Herries grinned cheerfully.

"Nice, happy family, I must say," he observed. "I believe you are one of those rotters who don't like animals, Manners! Who is going to do the papering, Tom Merry? I'll take that on, if you like."

"You'll take me on in a minute—without gloves! Are you chaps going? I'm asking for the last time! Are you chaps going?"

"Wathah not, deah boy!"

"Then—"

But at that moment the door was pushed open again, and Figgins, Fatty Wynn, and Kerr sauntered into the room. The studies at St. Jim's are not famous for size, and even before the arrival of the New House chums, there had only been space enough to move about with difficulty. Now, the Shell study had the appearance of the inside of a new sardine-tin.

"Hallo!" said Figgins, by way of greeting. "We thought we'd just look in to give you a hand with the papering, Merry. You can safely leave that part to us."

"What wot! I wathah think you've got a cheek, Figgins, deah boy!"

"We've already bagged that item on the programme, kid," said Blake. "I'm attending to it myself."

"He means I am," said Herries. "You see—I wouldn't look at Towser, Manners, if I were you. Towser doesn't like being looked at."

"I'm not looking at the brute! Turn 'em out, Tom Merry! Throw the rotters out!"

"Ah," observed a voice from the doorway, "D'Arcy told me I should find you here, Tom Merry. You intend papering your study, I believe?"

"Turn it out!"

"Clear, Skimpy!"

"Don't be so absurd!" said Skimpole, the brainy man of the Shell. "I have come to offer Merry some advice. Merry, if you will leave the papering to me—"

A chorus of a mixed nature greeted this suggestion, and it terminated in a somewhat plaintive observation from Lowther.

"How many more?" asked the humorist of the Shell. "Are the prefects coming? And did you leave a card at the doctor's room, Tom?"

"Ha, ha, ha!" suddenly laughed Tom Merry, in his good-tempered way. "This is about the last word in cheek; but now you're all here, I suppose you'll have to stop. We aren't having any more in, though!"

"I should think not!" said Jack Blake indignantly. "It would be like a fellow's cheek to attempt to come!"

"Hear, hear!" exclaimed Figgins warmly. "Merry, if anybody attempts to come in, you may rely upon myself and the Co."

"Yaas wathah! I shall wegard othah awwivals as intrusions."

"We won't admit another one!"

"We couldn't," groaned Fatty Wynn, who was pressed up in a corner.

"Well, I call it rotten cheek, myself," grumbled Manners; "and I insist upon this brute of a bulldog being removed. Remove him, Herries!"

"Oh, Towser's all right!"

"I tell you he isn't! The beast keeps looking at me!"

"Yes; that's because you keep looking at him. I've told you before Towser doesn't like being looked at, and you look at him at your own risk. What's the matter, Blake?"

"Shove the beggar in that cupboard," grinned Blake, as Tom Merry & Co. began another argument about the papering. "He'll be all right there!"

Herries nodded, and, to his surprise, Towser went with unusual willingness into the partially-opened cupboard. Then Wynn made a remark.

"I suppose you haven't any grub, Merry? I get jolly hungry in this February weather!"

"Well, as a matter of fact, we have," said Tom Merry, "because it was our intention to invite you Fourth Form kids in to tea as soon as we'd done up our room—as a sort of celebration, you know. You've saved us sending out invites, that's all. We'll have the spread the moment the study is done."

"Good!" said Wynn. "Excellent! And you must admit that ten fellows will get the papering done quicker than three?"

"Well, there is that—Hallo, what's Skimpy up to?" Skimpole was rapidly measuring the walls of the room with a two-foot rule, muttering figures half aloud as he went.

Monty Lowther began to stir the paste, while Figgins suddenly pelted off for some more paint-brushes.

"I say," exclaimed Arthur Augustus, "what about a plank, deah boy?"

"What about it, ass?"

"To whitewash the ceilin', Tom Mewwy. We can't weach the ceilin' f'rom the flooh. I'll go and discovah a plank."

And he, too, left hurriedly.

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CHAPTER 3.

Skimpole, Paper-hanger.

"N hanging wall-paper," said Skimpole, hastily running his two-foot rule across a recess, "you must be methodical. It is absolutely necessary that you be both methodical and correct. What is the sum total of nine, eight, and ten, Merry?"

"Between twenty and thirty, ass! Here, what are you up to, Skimmy?"

"Don't interrupt me, please! There, I have it exactly! If I cut this one piece of paper into three it will cover this side of the room. Pass the paste across!"

"Go and eat coke! I'm doing the paper-hanging!"

"Excuse me, Tom Merry—"

"Shut up, Blake, unless you particularly want a thick ear!"

"There are four sides to a study," said Skimpole. "I propose we do one side each."

"No fear!"

"Yes, we will!" exclaimed Jack Blake, as he jerked one of the extra brushes from Figgins's hand. "Skimmy, that's the first sensible idea you've ever had. Shove the paste in the centre of the room!"

"Hear, hear!" said Figgins, keeping a firm grip upon the last of the extra paste-brushes he had just brought in. "Merry, you'll have to use your hands to shove the paste on with. Pass me some paper!"

The four juniors took possession of the four walls respectively, and after a growl or two the others began to paint.

Digby and Fatty Wynn were at work on the door. Digby was slashing away at the upper panels, while the fat Fourth-Former was on his knees attending to the lower part of the door. There was a sudden and terrific bump outside, and the door flew open so suddenly that neither junior had time to get out of the way.

Digby yelled as a freshly-painted panel biffed on his nose, and Fatty Wynn gave a gasp as he was bowled over backwards. There was a paint-pot close behind, and Fatty Wynn hadn't time to avoid it. He sat in it, and there was a horrid squelch.

"Ow! Grooooooh!"

"Oh," gasped Dig, "my nose!"

"Ow! My trowsers!"

"Bai Jove, I'm sowwy if I startled you. Deah boys!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, as he marched in with a heavy plank, six feet in length, under his arm. "I've got the plank, you see."

"You utter ass!"

"Taggles wefused to lend me the plank, and I had to abstract it f'rom the shed when he wasn't lookin'. I weally considah that I managed it wathah neatly."

"You shriekin' idiot!"

"I wefuse to be alluded to as a shwiekin' idiot, Wynn. Pway what is the mattah, and what is Dig so excited about?"

"Look at my nose!" yelled Digby.

"Bai Jove, he's been paintin' his nose!"

"Look at my trowsers!"

"Gweat Scott, he's been sittin' in the paint!"

"You utter ass!"

"Weally, deah boys, it's not my fault if you sit in the paint, and if I were payin' for it, I should insist upon your not wastin' it so wecklessly."

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Tom Merry.

"Weally, Tom Mewwy, it is not exactly what I should wegard as a laughin' mattah, a chap spoilin' his t'wousahs," said D'Arcy. "Of course, as a mattah of fact, Fatty Wynn's t'wousahs were a ghastly fit. They had no cweases to speak of, and I am quite willin' to give him the address of my tailah for the next pair."

"You-you-you—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Weally, Blake—" D'Arcy turned towards his chum, and of course the plank under his arm swung round with him. "Weally—" Bai Jove, what's that?"

"That" was a roar from Skimpole, as the plank caught him on the shoulder and hurled him to the floor.

D'Arcy swung round again quickly in alarm, and the other end of the plank swept Fatty Wynn off his feet, and he went over with a yell.

"Bai Jove!"

"Dear me!" gasped Skimpole, groping for his spectacles. "I-I have been overthrown by a sudden terrific shock. It is possible that the terrible earthquake which has lately devastated Italy is visiting this country, and that Sussex is in the throes of a—"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Tom Merry. "It wasn't an earthquake, it was only D'Arcy's plank."

"Lemme get at him!" yelled Fatty Wynn. "I'll—I'll—"

"Weally, Wynn—"

D'Arcy backed away, and the end of the plank went through the window. There was a crash of breaking glass, and a shattering of small pieces on the ground below. The swell of St. Jim's swung round in dismay, and Figgins gave a fiendish yell as the plank smote him on the side of the head.

"Bai Jove!"

D'Arcy was growing quite bewildered by this time. He turned from one to another, apparently unconscious of the havoc wrought by the long plank turning round with him in the narrow study.

Few of the amateur decorators escaped a bump from the plank, and when they rushed upon D'Arcy to seize him, they received more bumps. But they collared him, and then he was bumped in his turn. He went down, with two or three excited juniors sprawling over him, and the plank was wrenched away.

"Got it!" exclaimed Figgins, as he tore it from D'Arcy's clutch, and let it bump down on the floor. "Hallo, Lowther, what are you yelling at?"

"Ow, ow! You dropped that on my toe!"

"Ha, ha!—I mean I'm—ha, ha!—sorry."

"Pway don't be so beastly wuff, deah boys!" gasped D'Arcy. "Weally, you are uttaly wuinin' my clothes."

"Bump him!"

"Tread on him!"

"Sit on his head, Fatty!"

"Ow, ow! Don't! Anythin' but that!"

"Sit on him!"

"Pway don't be such wottahs!"

"Kick him out!"

D'Arcy staggered to his feet at last. He was looking considerably the worse for wear. He jammed his monocle into his eye, and glared at the gasping juniors.

"I wegard you as a set of wuff wottahs. You have wumped my hair and pwactically wuined my clothes. I wegard no one here as a fwien'd except Skimmay."

"And I regard you as a howling ass!" groaned Skimmy.

"Weally, deah boy—"

"Look here, Blake, you ought to keep him on a chain," said Tom Merry. "Herries keeps his bulldog on a chain, and he's not half so dangerous as Gussy."

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—"

"If I weren't in another fellow's study," muttered Kerr, "I'd punch his beastly head!"

"Weally, Kerr," said Arthur Augustus, with dignity—"weally I shall have to wegard that we mark as personal. I don't weally wish to thwash any of you—"

"You've nearly killed most of us as it is, you shrieking idiot!"

"Then I wegwet it."

"Oh, let's get on with the washing, you fellows!" laughed Manners, who had escaped D'Arcy and his plank. "I thought it rather funny myself. What's the plank for, Gussy?"

"To whitewash the ceilin', deah boy."

"Ha, ha, ha! How are you going to whitewash a ceiling with a plank, kid?"

"Mannahs, if that is meant for humouah, I wegwet to say that it is weally wathah flat. I am going to whitewash the ceilin' with whitewash."

"If you could make it convenient to cut, cut, and don't mind us," said Lowther.

"Wathah not. I am going to stand on the plank, deah boy. Ha, ha, ha!"

They all looked at Arthur Augustus gravely, Tom Merry placing the fingers of his right hand cone fashion on his head, while Jack Blake stroked his chin as he gazed reflectively at the floor.

"Going to stand on the plank, deah boy. Ha, ha, ha!" muttered Lowther. "Going to stand on the plank. Going to stand on—"

All turned and looked at Arthur Augustus with the exception of Skimpole, who was still measuring, then all looked at one another.

Then suddenly Tom Merry burst into a roar of laughter, and it was instantly taken up by Herries. Jack Blake waited a moment or two, then rolled on the sofa, and two seconds after that Lowther and Manners doubled up. D'Arcy screwed his monocle into his eye, and viewed them all in turn with withering scorn.

"I am going to stand on the plank," choked Tom Merry.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Ho, ho, ho!"

"Your hand, Gussy!"

"I wefuse to shake hands with you, Tom Mewwy. I wefuse to allow you to shake hands with me, Mannahs. I wegard you as a set of wottahs!"

And he turned his back on them. He arranged a couple of chairs back to back at a distance of about five feet apart, mounted the plank on the top rail of the chairs, and hoisted

the huge pail of whitewash upon the plank. Then he carefully tested the arrangement with his hands, and gingerly clambered up himself. In this position he could reach the ceiling easily, and in a silence which was both dignified and shilly he began to whitewash.

Tom Merry glanced at the form of the whitewasher, and walked solemnly at Figgins. Figgins looked at the chairs, which were already showing a tendency to overbalance, and winked back; then Skimpole's voice broke the pause.

"Talking of Socialism, you chaps——"

"We weren't!"

"Lie down!"

"Talking of Socialism," continued Skimpole calmly, "reminds me. What is your opinion on the doctrine of egoism, Merry?"

"I say, isn't this paste jolly messy," said the hero of the Shell. "I've just got some in the eye."

"Do you consider it possible to disprove the premises that it is impossible to be certain of anything in the universe except your own existence?"

"Eh? What's that, Skimmy?"

"Can anyone be certain that anyone else exists but himself?"

"Lead me that squeegee affair, Blake. Yes, Skimmy, I do."

"Could you prove it?"

"Yes, you ass; I can hear you jawing yards of undilated piffle, can't I? That proves you exist."

"No, Merry; no, I am afraid I cannot agree with you. How do you know I am talking? You do not know it. I may not be talking; you may merely be imagining that I am."

"My hat!" And Tom Merry turned to stare at the speaker.

The brainy man of the Shell was on his knees on the floor, vigorously pasting the back of a long strip of wall paper, his short-sighted eyes blinking rapidly behind his huge glasses. Tom Merry laughed.

"Well, all I've got to say is that if you only exist in my imagination, I must be having a nightmare," he said.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You may laugh, Blake," said Skimpole, looking up over the top of his spectacles, "but you cannot prove that I exist any more than Merry can."

"I could pull your nose and listen to you yell, kid, couldn't I?"

"You could not prove that you had pulled my nose, for if I exist only in your imagination, my nose also exists solely in your imagination, and the yell I might or might not give would——"

"Oh, lie down!" growled Manners.

"Yes, to the uncultured mind I can easily see that the doctrine of egoism must necessarily present many mental obstacles," said Skimpole, warming to his task. "I will even go so far as to say——"

"Well, don't."

"Or if you do, go further, and step over the saying."

"Yaas, wathah! I considah, Skimmy, old man, that you are wathah an uttah ass, you know. Wotten! I've got some whitewash in my eye!"

"Here, Gussy, lend me that plank, and if I don't prove to the satisfaction of all that Skimmy exists, call me a New House rotter."

"What's that?" said Figgins quickly.

"I mean, call me a silly ass, which is the same thing."

At that moment Blake passed the roller, and passed it so skilfully that it hit Skimpole on the shin. Skimpole forgot his new theory, and rubbed his shin.

"Really, Blake, you are clumsy."

"Oh, that's all right! You don't exist, old man, so you can't be hurt."

"A few inches higher and it would have damaged my kneecap, perhaps for life."

"Rot! You haven't got a kneecap; no one has kneecaps. They don't exist, I don't think. I say, I'm blest if I can get this paper to lie flat, Tom Merry. You must have chosen rotten paper."

"You want to squeegee it," said Manners, who had a lot of practice mounting photographs, "and use your hands as well."

"Yes. I say, it's as well you covered up the carpet with newspapers. Gussy is making a beast of a mess."

"Yaas, wathah!" said Arthur Augustus, who was one mass of white spots. "I say, though, my clothes aren't spatted, are they, deah boy?"

"Ha, ha, ha! Not much."

"Well, weally—— Ha, ha, ha! Ho, ho, ho!"

And, to the surprise of them all, the swell of St. Jim's went in howls of laughter. Everyone stopped to look at him, Skimpole appearing indignant.

"I wish, D'Arcy, you wouldn't make that absurd noise,"

he said. "I was in the middle of a great thought. It occurred to me almost the moment you spoke that——"

"Ha, ha, ha! Bai Jove! Well, weally, Skimmy—— Ha, ha, ha!"

"If you are laughing at me, I must regard——"

"Look!" yelled Arthur Augustus. "Look, deah boys!" And look the fellows did. What they saw was staggering, especially to Tom Merry & Co.

"You dotter!" yelled the hero of the Shell. "You utter, consummate, silly ape!"

"Kick him out!" shouted Manners. "I wanted him kicked out before. Kick him out!"

"Really, Manners, I must say——"

"You shrieking ass!" howled Lowther. "You prize idiot, you've hung the paper upside down!"

At that moment, the study door opened, and the inky, cheerful face of Wally D'Arcy intruded itself round the corner.

"I say, chaps, I've got some of the most rotten news you've ever heard," he began. "I—— Ha, ha, ha!"

CHAPTER 4.

Towser Makes Use of His Opportunities.

"DEAR me!" muttered Skimpole. "Extraordinary! How could that have happened?"

"Why, you howling jackass," exclaimed Tom Merry, "you put it upside down, that's all!"

"I wanted him kicked out before," said Manners. "I consider this is your fault, Tom Merry. You ought to have kicked him out!"

"Bai, Jove, Skimmy! Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, dry up, Gussy!"

"I wefuse to dwy up! Ha, ha, ha!"

"It'll have to come down, Skimpole, you idiot!" said Tom Merry. And at that moment Arthur Augustus himself came down.

The two chairs which supported his plank tipped over towards one another, and, with a yell, the swell of the School House dropped. So did the whitewash pail, and if Skimpole, who was on his knees again, had not remained in the way, it is more than probable that Tom Merry's carpet would have suffered, despite its covering of newspapers. As it was, however, Herbert Skimpole's face disappeared.

Manners looked as if he would have been pleased, too, had not Gussy thrown the whitewash brush in his face, while Jack Blake had been doubled up with laughter until one of D'Arcy's artistically-shod feet caught him in the small of the back and doubled him up still more. The only man who seemed to thoroughly appreciate the turn affairs had taken, though, was Arthur Augustus's younger brother, Wally.

"My only Aunt Jane, you old fogies aren't half having a time. Why didn't you take a gate? Ha, ha, ha! It comes of not asking me to the circus!"

"Cut!"

"Clear out!"

"Not much! Look out; Skimmy's choking!"

"No he isn't!" groaned Jack Blake. "Skimmy doesn't exist; he told me so himself!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Figgins. "Yes, that's a fact. It's all right, Skimmy; you haven't got any whitewash in your eyes. You only imagine you have."

"Dear me!"

"It doesn't matter an atom about Skimpole," said Tom Merry. "He deserves to be boiled in whitewash—in oil, I mean! What are we going to do about the wallpaper, that's what I want to know?"

"Pull it off again!"

"We couldn't, Manners!"

"Oh, I expect I could. He's put it on so badly. Yes, it comes off all right."

And while Skimpole was trying to squeeze whitewash from his hair, Manners successfully peeled the paper from the wall. He did it really well, and when the green baskets had taken a more orthodox position than the one Skimpole had given them, Tom Merry had to admit that the papering ought to have been left to Manners, after all.

"Bai Jove! It's wathah fortunate I had done the ceilin', deah boys, because Skimmy soaked up all the wotten whitewash. I considah——"

"And I consider, too," said Skimpole. "I consider you are an idiot, D'Arcy!"

"Weally, Skimmy——"

"I do. I consider you have proved yourself to be entirely devoid of intelligence. In fact, I will go as far as to say——"

"Oh, let's get on with the washing!" said Tom Merry. "What are you doing, Manners?"

"Rolling out the creases you idiots have left in the paper."

"Good! I must say you are improving Blake's blessed batch more than a little. Yes, he is, Blake! I say, though, it doesn't look half bad, does it?"

"But I say," said Wally. "But about the rotten news I have!"

"Oh, never mind about your rotten news!" exclaimed Wynn. "Let's clear up and have that feed Tom Merry promised us all!"

"Feed?" said Wally, brightening up. "Did he say feed, Tom Merry?"

"Yes; but what is this news, young 'un?"

"Oh, never mind my news, as Fatty said! Let's have the feed. I'll tell you then."

"No; tell us now!"

"Better wait for the grub," grinned the younger D'Arcy. "You might forget to give me an invite, if I told you first. It's pretty rotten news, though! What's Fatty up to?"

"I'm going to lay the cloth while the others clean up the room," said Wynn. "You wouldn't believe how hungry I am. I think it must be the smell of the paint. I say, we shall have to be pretty careful not to rot about, though."

"Yaas, wathah! Do you think, Tom Mewwy, that I should have time to change my clothes and put on a clean collah?"

"Nevah mind, though," he said, after a bit. "I might keep you waitin'. I am in a fearful state, but, then, so is Skimminy. I wathah think I can do with some refreshment, Wynn, deah boy."

"Yes," agreed Fatty Wynn, taking the table-cloth from the drawer; "I always do say, and I always shall say it, there is nothing like this cold, February weather to make a fellow hungry. Perhaps you won't believe it, D'Arcy, but I have felt so hungry all the afternoon that once I thought I was going to faint. Let's see, Merry, where did you say the provisions were?"

"In that cupboard, of course. We thought it better to put 'em there instead of in the bookcase. Well, I must say, Gussy has astonished me. He's done the ceiling A1."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"And that door would be a credit to a Turner," went on the hero of the Shell. "Yes; I reckon we have done pretty well, considering we had to put up with having that ass Skimpole in the room."

"Really, Merry!"

"Well, you are an ass, aren't you?"

"No," said Blake; "there isn't a Skimpole, he's only a nightmare!"

"Oh, I say—Ow!"

Everyone in the room wheeled about, and everyone in the room saw nothing but Fatty Wynn standing before the now open cupboard. The New House junior was tearing his hair.

"Look—look, Tom Merry!"

"Why; what's up? Got fatty degeneration of the brain at last, Wynn?"

"Towser—Towser, the rotten bulldog, has wolfed—Where is Herries? Let me get at Herries!"

Herries and Tom Merry arrived at the cupboard at one and the same time, and then both saw Towser. The bulldog was on the first shelf, sitting amongst the wreck of what once had been a prospective spread, and he was quietly demolishing the last of a pork sausage—a Quarry Farm sausage such as Fatty Wynn loved. It was too much for the New House fellow. He sat down.

"You ought to be flayed alive, Herries, you and your beastly dog as well!"

"I wanted 'em kicked out," said Manners pessimistically.

"Look! The brute's eating the ham now. Call him off, Herries, call him off!"

Before the bulldog owner could reply, Towser began to growl, and Herries promptly shut the door and stood with his back to it.

"Towser doesn't like being looked at," he said. "It always riles him."

"I'll rile him!" cried Tom Merry. "Who put the brute in the cupboard?"

"I did," said Herries.

"Well, then, take him out now! He can't have eaten everything."

"I expect he has, old man."

"Take him out and see!"

"No, Merry! No, I shall do nothing of the kind. Towser doesn't like to have his food taken away from him. Besides, it's natural for a bulldog to eat."

"So it's natural for me to eat," said Fatty Wynn. "I call it wicked waste, and—and I believe I am going to faint."

"Well, what are you going to do about the matter, Herries?" asked Skimpole. "I detest overeating more than anything, as I have often pointed out to Wynn, but a certain amount of food is required per diem to keep—"

"Oh, dwy up, deah boy!" said Arthur Augustus. "I ppropose my youngah bwothah wetiwee for his dog and allows Towsah to see him. Towsah always chases Pongo."

"Oh, don't you begin, Gus!" said Wally. "Catch hold of the brute by the collar and haul him out, Herries!"

"No!"

"I will then!"

And, to the surprise of them all, the scallawag of the Third pushed his way to the cupboard, caught the growling



Dudley looked up, still supporting Wally's head above the surface, and treading water. He could see the rope dangling not more than six feet above his head; but how to reach that rope?

Towser by his collar and coolly yanked him out into the room.

"You've had enough, old man!" he grinned. "Let someone else have a go. My only Aunt Jane, he hasn't half walked into this little collection, and no mistake!"

Towser growled again, but as Wally took not the slightest notice of him, got up on the sofa and settled himself for a snooze.

Tom Merry looked at Herries intently.

"Do you mind letting me know what sort of an ass you really are?" he asked politely.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Oh, don't you begin, Gus!" cut in Wally. "I say, there

is one packet of sausages here untouched. That's something, anyway."

Fatty Wynn brightened up.

"Quarry Farm sausages?" he asked.

"Yes; and there is one cake and sardines. It might have been worse."

"But not much," said Lowther. "One cake, a few sausages, and a tin of sardines won't go far amongst eleven, with Fatty Wynn one of the number."

"No, that they won't," said Manners. "I propose Skimpole, the two D'Arcys, Figgins, Wynn, Kerr, and the three Study No. 6 rotters be booted out at once."

"Hear, hear!" said Tom Merry.

"Good idea," agreed Lowther. "I'll do the booting in the case of Herries myself, if you don't mind."

"Yes, I don't think," grinned Herries. "I'm jolly sorry about the grub, you chaps, but it can't be helped. What Gussy proposes is better than your idea, Manners."

"What was my proposal, deah boy?" asked the swell of the School House. "I was under the impression that I nevah spoke."

"I thought you asked the honourable council now assembled into Study No. 6 to help you out with that ripping hamper they sent you from Cleveland Lodge. My mistake, though."

"No, Hewwies, no, it's a wipping ideah! I propose we wetire at once."

"Hear, hear!" said Fatty Wynn. "You are a jolly good sort, Gussy, and I shall have much pleasure in drinking your health. Shall I bring the sausages and the sardines along, Blake?"

"May as well. I say, what is this news young Wally is dying to tell us? What is it, Wally?"

"I'll tell you during the spread, kid," said the "Infant" of the Third. "I know you old fogies. If I told you now, you might forget to press me to stay and help you out with Gussy's hamper. I say, though, some of you won't half get up on your hind legs when you hear!"

CHAPTER 5.

The Challenge.

"DO you mean to stand there—sit there, that is—and tell me Kildare has refused to play the Wanderers? Rot!"

"Piffle!"

"You are talkin' wound your hat, Wally!"

"Very well, then," said Wally D'Arcy, "don't believe me. Pass me some more of the ham, and get on with the circus!"

Tom Merry rose to his feet.

"If there is anything in this, you chaps," he said darkly—"if there is anything in it, Kildare has—has exceeded his authority!"

"Hear, hear!"

"Speech, Merry!"

"Speech!"

"So he has! Here young Wally tells us that a challenge arrives at St. Jim's—not addressed to Sixth Formers only, mind—a challenge to St. Jim's, and Kildare, Lefevre, and the others coolly refuse it. But you are rotting, Wally!"

"Yaas, wathah; you must be wotting, Wally!"

"Well, I'm not. I thought it would stir up you old fogies, though. Hair-curler, isn't it, Gus?"

"I wish, Wally, you would not use those wemarks. I considah—"

"Ring off, Gus!" said Tom Merry. "Look here, you chaps, what right has Kildare or anyone else to refuse a challenge—"

"None—"

"Of course he hasn't! Like his cheek, I say!"

"Of course it's like his cheek," went on the hero of the Shell, bringing his fist down on the table. "When a challenge is sent to a school, the majority should decide whether it is to be accepted or not. And whoever heard of St. Jim's refusing a challenge?"

"My hat, no!"

"The Wanderers—who are they?" asked Skimpole.

"A touring Rugby fifteen," explained Tom Merry. "Public school men—those who are just leaving, and that sort of thing; having a last flare-up before they begin life. Why, the local paper has been full of them! They've played heaps of matches in the county."

"And won most of 'em, too," said Jack Blake. "What I propose is—"

"I propose—"

"My idea is that we—"

Tom Merry, Figgins, and Jack Blake looked at one another.

"I would suggest—"

"Suppose we—"

"If you fellows will only let me get a word in edgeways, I'll explain my idea—"

"Weally, Tom Mewwy," said Arthur Augustus—"weally, we aren't gettin' on with the washin', deah boy!"

"It is these silly bounders— Order!—order for the chair!"

"Who is in the chair, if I'm not?"

"I am—"

"The fact of the giddy matter is," said Wally D'Arcy coolly, "most of you kids are off your respective rockers. If you will only keep cool for a minute, I'll soon settle this matter for you."

"Weally, Wally—"

"Oh, don't you begin, Gus! Tom Merry, when he has his steam up, is enough for one afternoon; and as for Blake and Figgins, well, the brook isn't in it with them. The idea is: Ought this challenge to be refused?"

None of the Fourth-Formers and Shell fellows spoke, but they one and all glared at Wally as if they expected him to suddenly foam at the mouth.

Wally went on cheerfully:

"You want a cool head for this matter. Well, I've put it to you. Ought this challenge to be refused? Of course it oughtn't! What remains, then? That it must be accepted—"

"Weally, Wally, I must considah your wemarks out of place—"

"Order—order! We have decided that the challenge must be accepted, and the point now is how to get Kildare to accept it. I'm waiting for ideas!"

"You are asking to be booted out, you mean!" said Tom Merry.

"Yes; only I can't see the fellow who could manage it, old son. Now, how are we to induce Kildare to accept this giddy challenge? I propose a deputation from the Third be elected to interview him."

"And whom shall we appoint to sweep up the bits afterwards? Just you dry up, kid, or there'll be trouble. I think it is agreed that I conduct this matter—"

"Wats!"

"What rot!"

"I don't think!" said Jack Blake. "If you will only allow me to speak—"

"You are talking, aren't you?" asked Wally. "It isn't our fault that you can't say anything worth listening to."

There was some commotion as the question arose as to whether Wally should be turned out or not, and it was terminated suddenly by Tom Merry.

"My hat—my only hat!"

"What's it now?"

"What's up, Merry?"

"I've got it—I've got the very idea! If only you fellows would show the foresight to leave these matters to me each time, and—"

"Oh, dry up!"

"Yaas, dwy up, Tom Mewwy! If you have an ideah, explain what it is, and we will considah—"

"Out with it, kid!" said Blake.

"Why can't we accept the challenge ourselves? Why can't we write and contradict Lefevre's beastly letter—"

"Because there would be such an epidemic of thick ears afterwards that we shouldn't recognise each other—that's why, duffer!"

"Don't you believe it—I mean—"

"And what would be the good of accepting the challenge if the fellows wouldn't play them? My hat! Do you mean that we juniors are to play them?"

"Of course I do!"

"Well, what's to stop it?" went on Tom Merry. "Surely some of you muffs must be able to play Rugby? Jack Blake, for instance. He comes from Yorkshire, and I never knew a Yorkshireman yet who couldn't kick a Rugger ball—"

"I have played a little. And there's Fatty Wynn, too. Every Welshman can play Rugger as soon as he's born, you know."

Fatty Wynn grinned.

"Yes, rather!"

"But Kildare wouldn't let us take them on—the dignity of the thing—"

"Weally, Blake, I cannot agwee with you there. In mattahs of dig. I wathah think—"

"Oh, you ring off, Gus! I say, I don't think it could be worked, Merry. We haven't any goalposts or anything."

"Soon get those—borrow 'em somewhere; or, if it came to that, sub round, and have some made. I tell you, it's as simple as Skimpole."

"Would the doctor let us play, though?"

Tom Merry did not answer, so Figgins added his contribution to the discussion.

"Why ask?" he suggested. "He has a lot to worry him just now."

"But he would have to know, ass! The game is to be played on our ground."

"I mean don't mention the matter until it's all fixed up," returned Figgins, looking as if he were troubled at Tom Merry's simplicity. "If only you people would let the New House settle these matters—"

"Hear, hear!" chimed in Wynn and Kerr heartily.

"Suppose we send a letter to the secretary of the Wanderers," said Tom Merry—"I know where they are staying—and they happened to agree to play us, how are we going on? There might be a row, and then we should have to get out of the compact on our necks."

"I don't see why," said Blake. "I don't see what should make the Head stop us playing Rugger for; and you know it would just show those blessed seniors up. They'd be on their necks—not us. The question is: How about the ground?"

"Oh, that's all right, as it happens," said Tom Merry. "Figgins and I had booked it for a practice Soccer game."

"Like your wotten cheek, bai Jove!"

"Trust Tom Merry for cheek," said Blake. "He wallows in it. Still, if we have got the ground, I don't see what can prevent the Rugger match coming off. Just think of it, you fellows! The first Rugger game played at St. Jim's, excepting the game we had in the class-room once when Fatty Wynn was showing us how they played in Wales!"

"Right!" said Wally. "From the chair I propose that a letter be written and sent to the sec. of the Wanderers offering them a game. We can settle the minor points afterwards. Let Gus write the letter. Of course he will have to explain that we are juniors. I say, though, one or two of the seniors may like to play!"

"If we're short I may play one or two," said Figgins; and though Blake and Merry glared at him he did not appear embarrassed. "Get on with the letter, Gussy!"

"Yaas, wathah! What shall I say, deah boy?"

"That it has come to our knowledge that the Wanderers are without a match for Saturday, and though St. Jim's is a Soccer school we shall be very pleased to give them a game. Then add that we shall be composed principally of juniors, and ask them to reply by return."

"Deah sir—Keep the wotten table steady, Wally, or I shall weally have to give you a faithful thwashin'!"

"Shut up, you chaps!" said Tom Merry. "Let the one and only go ahead. Now how are we to send the letter? It won't do to drop it in the school box, Blake."

"Not much! We can send young Wally to express it at the post-office. There'll be just time enough if Gussy doesn't go to sleep. I say, this is something like a wheeze!"

There was silence in the study for a few moments, then the letter was handed round. It was formally approved of by all, sealed, and handed to Wally.

Wally took it and grinned.

"Nice mothers' meeting you'd have made of it if I hadn't been in the chair!" he said. "So long!"

And he slipped off as hard as he could go.

CHAPTER 6.

Wally's Chum.

"HALLO, Dudley!" sang out Wally. "Going for a constitutional, my son?"

Dudley, a big, loose-limbed fellow, turned. He had rather a heavy by no means brilliant face, which somehow always seemed to wear an expression of discontent, but there was nothing in the least striking-looking about him except, perhaps, the untidiness of his attire and the great size of his hands, which latter characteristic had earned for him the name "Paws." But for their mutual untidiness he and Wally contrasted in almost every way, and judging from appearances—a not always reliable method—the contrast was all in favour of the younger lad.

"If you've nothing on, come down into the town with me," went on Wally. "I'm taking Pongo."

"I don't mind."

"Good! My hat! There isn't another fellow in the college Pongo takes to like you—bar myself, of course."

"He's a ripper!" said Dudley, putting his hands into his pockets, and looking enviously at the rough-haired little mongrel. "I wish you'd sell him, D'Arcy!"

"Go on wishing, then, my son!"

"I suppose you wouldn't exchange him for that fishing-tackle of mine?"

"Not for two motor-cars and some yachts," grinned

Wally. "If it came to giving Pongo or Gussy away, I believe I'd have to toss up."

Dudley laughed, too.

"I wouldn't exchange him myself if I were in your place," he said. "Got any lines?"

"Two or three hundred—not many!"

"I got five hundred this morning, you know."

"Yes, I know," chuckled Wally. "Like your giddy cheek, telling Selby you thought Virgil rot, and that it was waste of time doing the stuff. Mind you, I jolly well agree, Dud, but I'm bothered if I'd have had the cheek to explain my views to Selby."

"I don't like Selby."

"My hat, neither do I! When are you going to do the lines, though? I thought they had to be shown up before brekker to-morrow?"

"So they have, an' so they will be, Wally."

"Good man! Got a store of the things?"

Dudley laughed again; but it wasn't quite such a pleasant laugh this time. There was a harsh note in it.

"Not exactly a store," he explained. "Do you remember the five hundred Selby gave me last week?"

"Yes. Ha, ha, ha! For letting off crackers in class, wasn't it?"

"That's the lot! I'm showing 'em up again; it'll save a beast of a lot of time!"

"Showing up again? Don't follow, kid."

"Why, I gave Selby the lines in the corridor one day, you know, and as he was just going out he couldn't destroy 'em. He scrawled his name along the bottom, and gave 'em back to me."

"Well?" said Wally, looking up.

"Well," answered Dudley, looking at the younger lad out of the corners of his eyes—"well, I have just cut Selby's name off the bottom of the dose, and he shall have them again to-morrow. Twig?"

He laughed loudly, but he was still watching Wally D'Arcy furtively. Wally was looking down at the rain-soaked road, flicking the few winter weeds at the roadside with his stick. He did not answer just then, and Dudley broke the silence which followed.

"Hallo! There goes Pongo after Farmer Hodge's donkey again! I believe the little beggar thinks Nicodemus wants exercise. My hat! Call him off!"

Wally whistled his shrill whistle, and as the dog came splashing through the mud towards him, turned to the big Third-Former.

"I say, that isn't quite cricket, is it, Dud—the lines, I mean?"

"What isn't cricket? What do you mean?"

"Showing up the same dose of lines twice."

"Why not?"

Wally thought. Perhaps he could not have explained why it was not what he termed "cricket," still, it was not according to Wally's unspoken code of honour. Wally D'Arcy was as strict a stickler about the cricket of a thing as his elder brother was in "mattahs of dig."

"Blest if I know," he said at last, "except that Selby left it to your honour to throw the lines away."

"What about Selby's honour, anyway? I didn't think it particularly honourable when he called you a liar before the class because he pretended to think you kicked a football in his face on purpose, and wouldn't let you explain—"

"Yes, and if you remember, I took myself away from the coll. in consequence," laughed Wally. "We came out quits in that deal, because Selby had to climb down just as much as I did. But that hasn't anything to do with the lines, Dud."

"Well, Selby does a lot of things that aren't cricket, doesn't he?"

"Y-yes! Yes, I suppose he does from our point of view. Still, two wrongs—oh, bother it all, it hasn't anything to do with me! I know I'd burn those lines myself, that's all. I say, where is Pongo?"

He whistled again. The call was unanswered, and the two juniors looked anxiously about them.

"There's a caravan coming up the road!" exclaimed Dudley. "Ten to one he's gone to have a look at that—"

"Or slipped back to give Nicodemus some more exercise!"

"Well, he's all right if he has done that. I believe he is down by the caravan, though; isn't that him slinking along by the hedge?"

Wally nodded and pelted on ahead. Pongo was a dog who possessed many good points, but he had at least one bad one. If there was a chance for causing a row and getting himself into trouble, Pongo was the dog to rise to the occasion. He seemed to have an undying hatred of a monotonous life.

It had ceased to rain now, but the road was fearfully wet and greasy, and run as hard as they could, the two juniors

were unable to reach the caravan before Pongo had effected what it was obvious had been his intention.

He had crept along by the hedge until he was level with the caravan; then he sprang out suddenly, and began barking at the horse's nose.

The horse reared—a most unusual thing for him to do—so unusual, that the swarthy, gipsy-looking man seated on the shafts was not prepared for the manoeuvre.

With a yell he toppled backwards, and Wally and Dudley arrived on the scene just as the gipsy rolled in the mud.

"Collar Pongo!" panted Dudley, but it was too late.

The gipsy was on his feet again, his dark, drink-inflamed face glowing with rage.

The next instant he had caught Pongo by his collar, and was thrashing him brutally with his short horsewhip.

"Come on!" yelled Wally. "You coward! Come on, Dud!"

But Dudley had already flung himself at the gipsy, and it was as well for Pongo that he had.

"Let the dog go!" muttered the big Third-Former. "Let him go!"

He had his arm round the man's neck, and was attempting to prevent the heavy whip being used on Pongo. He succeeded in this for a moment or two, then the gipsy suddenly spun round, bowled Dudley over, and flung Pongo into the caravan. After that he slammed the door to.

"Now I'll attend to you, my lad," he growled. "No, my young shaver; the dog stays where he is—"

"Let him out at once!" exclaimed Wally. "If you don't—"

"He stays there until you hand over half-a-sovereign for damage done," said the man, leering. "That's the verdict up to the present."

Wally and Dudley were standing a few feet away now, perplexed. It was obvious to both that the man had been drinking, and it was also obvious that the odds were about a hundred to one against anyone coming along that muddy road on such a dreary afternoon as that one was. The question was, what was there to be done?

"Anyway, I'm not going to square him," said Wally indignantly, "not to the extent of half-a-sov., I mean. If the brute hadn't been half-tipsy, he would not have fallen. I say, you there, let the dog out and promise not to touch him again, and I'll give you half-a-crown—"

"Half-a-sovereign, my lad."

"Rats! Look here—"

"Don't argue with him, Wally," said Dudley. "He won't understand verbal arguments. This sort'll appeal to him more!"

And before Wally had grasped what was going to happen, the bigger lad had flung himself at the man again. His fist shot out and it got home, sending the man staggering against the caravan; and before the gipsy could counter, Wally joined in.

"That's it!" muttered Dudley. "Pepper away, and I'll let Pongo out. All right, you brute!"

Dudley had no idea at all of the art of boxing, he had never had a pair of gloves on in his life; but he had a big arm and a bony fist, and he could hit sledge-hammer blows until further orders. Only about one in three reached home on that occasion, but they were blows the gipsy did not forget for a long time. Still, the man was a good deal more than a match for the two juniors, and he removed Wally from the fight early on with a blow which sent the younger scion of the house of D'Arcy into the hedge and almost stunned him. That seemed to affect Dudley in a curious manner.

His face flushed, and his eyes sparkled as if he had suddenly gripped his teeth, then he began lashing out with all his strength. Wally remained lying in the hedge, dazed and badly shaken. He had a vague idea that Dudley was fighting someone, but it was some moments before he recovered enough to scramble to his feet again. In those few moments it was all over.

Gradually working his way round the gipsy, Dudley so arranged matters that he presently found himself between the man and the caravan. Then he acted in a way which showed fear of physical pain was not one of his faults.

He struck a last heavy blow at the man, then wheeling round, sprang up on the shafts of the caravan. The next instant he was fumbling with the latch, endeavouring to open the door. With a shout of rage the gipsy saw his chance. The whip was still near him, and he picked it up in a flash. Then came a few seconds which Dudley was also long in forgetting.

Quite beside himself, the man lashed the junior as he stood on the small platform before the caravan door, and with his hands engaged in attempting to open the door, Dudley was incapable of defending himself.

Time after time the lash curled about his legs and body, causing him the most intense pain; but Dudley stuck to his task.

But the door seemed to have caught in some manner, and try as he would Dudley could not get it open. The whole thing could not have lasted more than a few seconds, for at the end of that time Dudley suddenly sprang forward, got his shoulder to the door, sending it inward, badly splintering it.

"Pongo!" he gasped. "Come on, boy!"

And the mongrel responded to the call in a flash, the little fellow and Dudley springing down to the road together.

Dudley knew the dog would be all right now, for Pongo was not given to being caught twice by the same man, and so he rushed round to the other side of the caravan. He saw that Wally was already on his feet, looking dazed and white, but otherwise unharmed.

"Hook it, Wally!" shouted the bigger lad. "Through the hedge—anywhere! Pongo is all right!"

Then, after waiting until Wally was safely through the hedge, Dudley and Pongo took to their heels at a pace which caused the gipsy to give up pursuit after about ten yards.

The two juniors met again at a gateway in the hedge, over which Wally climbed stiffly.

"Pretty warm, that," he grinned. "How did you get Pongo free?"

"Opened the door."

"Good man! What was the gypo. doing while you were at it, though?"

"Taking some exercise with his beastly whip," said Dudley. "However, Pongo is all right, and that's the main thing. I'm glad we got Pongo out of the brute's hands!"

"Glad you did, you mean. Jolly ripping of you, Dud., and I'm sorry I couldn't help. The beggar caught me one—I say, I shall have to hurry if I'm to get this letter off and back again in time for tea!"

"Oh, we shall do it!" said Dudley slowly. "Look here, I want to call somewhere. Suppose you go on down to the town and I'll wait here for you after I've made my call?"

"Why can't you come on down with me and make the giddy call on your way back? How long will the call last?"

"Not long, but—"

"Then mine is the wheeze," said Wally. "That is, if it doesn't make any difference to you?"

"No, it doesn't make any difference, only—well, that doesn't matter. I'll call as I come back, then!"

And Dudley was unusually silent during the rest of the way to the post-office, a fact which Wally failed to notice. He could always do talking enough for two.

CHAPTER 7.

A Question of Precedence.

"WALLY—Wally, you young wascal—"

And Arthur Augustus sprang to his feet. It was about fifteen seconds after Wally had left Study No. 6 on his way to the post-office, and the eagerness of the swell of the School House to call him back staggered the others.

"Sit down, Gus," observed Tom Merry; "sit down and cool!"

"Wally—call the young wascal back, Maunahs—Wally—"

"Oh, sit down!" said Jack Blake, yanking Arthur Augustus back into his seat. "That's all right; if you have forgotten to cross a 't,' it doesn't matter. The Wanderers' secretary won't be able to read your scrawl in any case."

"I wefuse to have my handwiting chawactewised as a scrawl, Blake! Figgins, deah boy, wun affah Wally and tell him—"

"You wish to dot an 'i'?" suggested the head of Figgins & Co. "Yes, certainly—I don't think!"

"Was there anything wrong with the letter—the address, or anything like that?" asked Jack Blake, springing up. "If—"

"There was nothin' w'ong with the lettah, deah boy; but I wish to wemonstrate with Wally. If you persist in wefusing to call him back, I shall weally have to wegard your action—"

"Oh, ring off—"

"I wefuse to wing off—"

"Then wring your own neck instead," suggested Lowther, the humorist. "We can't waste valuable time because you refuse to wing off. You are a silly ass, Gus; and there's no getting away from it."

Arthur Augustus screwed his monocle into his eye and looked at Lowther. The action was effective and chilling until Lowther solemnly winked, then Blake laughed.

"Anyway, I don't see what you have got to sit on Wally this time for," he said. "I know he's as cheeky as a wagon load of monkeys; but then, he always was, and always will be. Fancy a young beggar from the Third d'aring to pretend that he took the chair at a meeting of Fourth-Formers and Shell-fish!"



"By Jove!" muttered Kildare. "Where are the lads going?" The two juniors had turned off into the dirty-looking public-house—it could not be dignified by the name of inn.

"I did not wish to wemonstwate with Wally because of his cheek," said Arthur Augustus coldly: "I wished to wemonstwate with him on quite another mattah, deah boy."

"Oh! About Dudley?"

"Yaas, wathah, about the wastah of the Third, you know. I consider as an eldah bwyother that Wally—" "Well, why didn't you consider all that when he was here?" asked Tom Merry.

"Because the mattah slipped my mind—"

"Yes, it would!"

"Sure your mind didn't slip its cable instead?" asked Lowther. "It might have, Gus!"

"I consider you a silly ass, Lowther, and I considah Jack Blake and Tom Mewwy also silly asses. As I said, the mattah slipped my mind, and now you have pvenented me callin' the young wascal back. I have been looking for him all the aftahnoon, and when I discovah him—"

"The matter slips your mind—exactly!" laughed Tom Merry. "Let it slip the mind again so that we can get on with the washing, Gus; you'll be able to kick him when he comes back. Though, mind you, old chap, I'm with you when it comes to nipping this matter in the bud. Dudley is a waster, as everyone knows who has ever thought about him, and a waster is exactly what young Wally is not. Still, that will keep for half an hour."

"I considah—"

"Yes, and if you will consider in silence, you'll find you'll get on twice as well, and we a hundred times better. Now, look here, Blake, my proposal is that we at once form a

committee to run this Rugby game. There is an awful lot to do—"

"If you left the matter entirely to me, old man—"

"I should be an ass, shouldn't I? No, a committee is the idea, and as we fellows started the wheeze, I reckon we needn't have anyone else to help us in the selection. What do you say, Skimpole?"

"That, perhaps, under the circumstances, it would be advantageous if—"

"Exactly! You see, Skimmy is with me, which shows that he is only partially insane. Now, who is to be on the committee—the fewer the better!"

"Jack Blake!" shouted Digby and Herries.

"Yaas, wathah—"

"Figgins!" exclaimed Kerr.

"Yes, Figgins," said Wynn who was usually a trifle late in most things. "I vote for Figgins—"

"And Tom Merry," said Manners and Lowther.

There was a pause, which Tom Merry broke with a laugh. "Of course, it would be ripping if we could elect all the lot of us," he said; "but it would be too much of a crush. Still, three isn't many. Suppose we decide on five?"

"Well, that's all right."

"Yaas, wathah, deah boys!" said Arthur Augustus. "I pwopose that I be elected—"

"Eh?"

"What?"

"Which?"

"Yaas, wathah! Wuggah is a game—"

"You don't say so!" said Lowther scornfully. "A game, is it?"

"Well, as no one else is proposed," exclaimed Jack Blake, "I propose D'Arcy has it."

"Hear, hear!" said Tom Merry. "He's a harmless sort of ass."

"He's an ass, all right, but I don't know about being harmless. Still, he ought to be selected seeing he wrote the letter."

"Heah, heah!" said Arthur Augustus. "I disagree with a lot of Lowthah's wemarks, but— Heah, heah! I wegard your twying to cwy me down, Mannahs, as beasty bad form!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"And I considah—"

"D'Arcy has it," announced Jack Blake. "Now for the fifth man. What price Skimpole?"

"Twopence," said Tom Merry; "and jolly dear. Who says Skimpole?"

"Really, Merry," began the brainy man of the Shell—"really I must refuse to sit—"

"Stand, then. I'll use your chair for putting my feet on. Those in favour of Skimpole?"

"Merry, I must insist that my name be withdrawn, as I have no knowledge whatever of the game, and because—"

"Skimpole is elected nem. con. Oh, shut up, Skimmy! You and Gus are like cackling hens!"

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—"

"The first committee meeting takes place at once," said Figgins. "Clear out, you other asses!"

"Here—"

"I'll see you—"

"So long, and shut the door!" said Figgins coolly. "Turn the idiots out, Blake!"

"Of all the blessed cheek!" gasped Digby. "And after we've put them on the committee, too!"

"Out you go, my son! Good-bye, Herries! What's that? You want to punch my head? There's no time; punch Digby's instead."

"Yass, deah boy, you have my permish!" said Arthur Augustus loftily.

"I look upon your objecting to leave this room after the committee have respectfully requested you to withdraw," began Skimpole severely, "as a breach—"

"Don't waste words on them," interrupted Figgins. "Hoof 'em out if there's any oxing about. Like their cheek not going when we told them!"

The other six withdrew, stopping a few moments in the doorway to express their opinions on the matter. Then the door was slammed.

"Good!" grinned Tom Merry. "Nothing like a firm hand unless it's a thick head. Speech, Blake. Now, as I happen to be sitting at the top of the table, I propose that I be duly elected to the chair."

The others stared at him.

"Good! That being settled, I propose we get on with the washing. I suppose Gus is to go on with the secretarial work?"

"Yaas, wathah!" said D'Arcy.

"Good! All you have to do now, Gus, is to keep your mouth closed and take notes!"

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—"

"Yes, weally. Now, what about Skimmy playing the part of treasurer?"

"Yes!"

"Good idea!"

"But really," said Skimpole, "I cannot conceive why I was chosen to sit on this committee. As you know, I take life too seriously to trouble about games, and though I can understand my advice on committee is of great value, still—"

"Oh, it wasn't for your advice we selected you!" laughed Tom Merry. "It was because we couldn't have selected any of the others without raising Cain amongst those who were left out. Every one looks upon you as an ass, Skimmy, and so there was no jealousy. You don't mind my mentioning it?"

"Ha, ha, ha! I wegard that as wathah funnay!"

"And it was the same with Gus there. Now, the most important point of the whole thing is the election of the captain."

The chairman glanced round the room. There was a dead silence—a solid, determined sort of silence, and it did not look like being broken. Tom Merry coughed.

"Ahem! Although I say it—"

His words tailed off. Even the head of the Terrible Three had not the courage of his convictions in the face of that steady stare. The silence was continued.

"Perhaps a secret ballot is the correct thing?" suggested the chairman, after a bit. "Those in favour?"

They were all in favour. Arthur Augustus began tearing a sheet of foolscap into five pieces.

"Write distinctly, deah boys," he said, "because as secwetawy I shall have to wead the names. There must be no alterations, you know. Should a mistake be made, wequest that anothah votin' papah be given you, and—"

"Ring off, Gus! Have you all got papers?"

They had. They all turned to look at Skimpole, who was slowly tearing up his slip.

"Not knowing the respective merits of the other candidates, and feeling that I, myself, am not qualified for the post, having never played the game of Rugby, I must decline to vote," said the brainy man of the Shell. "No, Merry, it is useless your winking; and I do not understand your signs, Figgins."

Figgins and the chairman blushed, and Jack Blake looked indignant.

"You ought to vote, Herbert," he said almost affectionately. "You really ought to vote, if only to punish Figgins and Merry for attempting bribery and corruption—"

"My mind is made up, Blake."

"But, Bertie—"

"No, Blake; I must decline to vote."

"Then I can't think why we were asses enough to elect a wooden-headed idiot like you on committee!" said the leader of the School House juniors tersely. "Your proper place is in a padded-room. I say, Gus," he added, in a whisper, "It ought to be all right, though. There are two of us study-fellows in the room. For the honour of the study, you know!"

And he, too, winked.

"Yaas, wathah!" said Arthur Augustus. "For the honouah of the study!"

And he returned the wink, losing his monocle in the effort.

Then each of the members of the Rugby committee began scribbling on the voting-papers, and when finished, folded them up in neat, deliberate fashion.

"Drop them in that camera case," said Tom Merry. "Haven't you finished, Gus?"

"Yes, deah boy!"

"Throw it amongst the rest, then. Now shuffle 'em up so that the secrecy of the ballot is maintained—good word that!—and let us know the verdict."

"Wight-oh!" said Arthur Augustus. "I wathah fancy I know who is the winnah, though—"

"Dry up. Get on with the washing!"

Arthur Augustus bowed, and solemnly unfolded the first slip of paper which came to his hand.

"Blake!" he read aloud.

"Ah! Me—eh?" said the leader of Study 6 of the School House, starting a little. "Fire ahead, Gus, old man!"

"Yaas, wathah!" Figgins!"

"Figgins!" exclaimed Blake, looking surprised. "Sure it says Figgins?"

"Why shouldn't it say Figgins?" demanded that junior. "I'd like to know if there is a better fellow in the room to captain the team than myself, although I say it."

"Yes, you are about the only one who would say it, aren't you, Figgys? Let her rip, Gus!"

"The next paper is for Tom Mewwy, deah boys!"

"Tom Merry!"

"Yes; and a rattling sensible vote, too!" said the chairman heartily. "If you'd all have shown as much sense as that voter— What are you grinning at, Blake?"

"Nothing," said Jack Blake; but he grinned all the more.

There was only one voting-paper left in the camera case, and knowing what he knew, the leader of the School House juniors could have declared the winner before the vote was opened. It was all right now. Study No. 6 would supply the captain. Jack watched Arthur Augustus unroll the slip with a bored expression.

"Who has it?"

"Well, undah the cires., Tom Mewwy—"

"Who has it, ass? Never mind about the cires. Is it I?"

"Well, I wathah think—"

"Look here," exclaimed Figgins aggressively, "what we want to know is what name is on that paper!"

"I am afraid there has been collusion," said Skimpole. "It seems to me—"

"What name is on that paper, D'Arcy?"

"The name on the papah, deah boy, is Arthur Augustus D'Arcy," said the swell of the School House coolly; "and, weally, I must say I am wathah surprised that the name did not appear before—"

"D'Arcy!" gasped Tom Merry.

"That ass—"

"Weally, Blake—"

"That dummy—"

"Rot!" exclaimed Figgins. "What rot!"

"Weally, Figgins—"

"What D'Arcy has said is quite correct," put in Skimpole severely; "and I regret to say that it seems to me the handwriting—"

"Shut up, Skimmy!" said Figgins, Merry, and Blake in one voice; and with one grab they seized what they took to be their respective voting-papers.

However, it happened that each got someone else's paper, and in the next instant Tom Merry knew that Figgins had voted firmly for Figgins, while it dawned upon Jack Blake that Tom Merry had plumped for himself, and Figgins was just going to tax Jack Blake with also having voted for himself, when Tom Merry hastily gave a turn to the conversation.

"It seems that we all have one vote each, which is—er—curious."

"Yes, wathah!"

"Oh, you ring off! And so I, as chairman, have to decide the matter with my casting vote."

"Your casting—what?"

"Casting vote, Blake."

"I don't think! Gussy, you ought to have your head punched!"

"Blake, I wogard an expression like that as diswespectful, and must wquest—"

"Well, what is to be done?" said Figgins. "I refuse to agree to Merry having a casting vote, for one."

"I should just think so!"

"Why?" asked Tom Merry innocently. "Surely you don't think—"

"No, we don't think—we're certain! Your giddy conscience wouldn't let you vote for anyone but yourself. What is it, Skimpole?"

"As a committeeman I wish to offer a suggestion," said Skimpole. "I take little interest in your games, and none whatever in Rugby, which I consider both rough and brutal—"

"Beastly wuff, deah boy!"

"Never mind what you consider; let's have the suggestion!"

"I propose that you four toss up for the captaincy."

"What do you say, Merry?"

"Well, as chairman, I really ought to have the casting vote; otherwise what is the use of a chairman?"

"None whatever," said Blake. "I'm agreeable if you others are."

Figgins said he was, and Tom Merry was over-ruled.

"Of course you haven't a casting vote," said Jack Blake indignantly. "You ought to think yourself lucky that you haven't been cast out of the study as it is. Odd man out, then!"

And four coins spun in the air.

CHAPTER 8.

Arthur Augustus Fails to Meet His Brother.

"TAILS, dear boy," said Arthur Augustus. "I wathah think—"

"Heads!" sang out the other three, and Jack Blake laughed.

"Serve you right, Gus, for being an ass! You are out of it!"

"So I am. Well, weally, it doesn't mattah a gweat deal, because I have suddenly remembered that I could not play undah any cires next Saturday."

"Can't play?"

"No, wathah not! I'm expectin' an invite to a party at Cleveland Lodge, and—"

"Then why on earth didn't you think of that before?" said Jack Blake. "If you had—oh, you ought to be boiled in oil! Heads, Merry!"

"So am I!"

"Tails!" growled Figgins, and he also retired from the contest.

"Shall I toss?" laughed Tom Merry, and the other nodded, calling tails.

"Then you have lost," laughed Tom Merry, "and the Rugger fifteen has the very best captain—ahem!"

Jack Blake grinned ruefully, but it never occurred to him to take the trouble to glance at the coin as it lay on the further end of the table, out of sight amongst the plates. The rivalry between the leaders of the Shell and the Fourth was as healthy as it was pronounced, and it would have occurred to Blake to suspect Tom Merry of under-hand dealings just about the time it would have occurred to Tom Merry to practise them, which time had certainly not yet come to pass.

"Anyway, good luck to the fifteen, Merry!" said Blake, pouring out another glass of lemonade. "Here's to a

ripping game and to a win for the first Rugger match at St. Jim's. You can rely on Study No. 6 if you want any of us."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Rather!" said Figgins. "Just let me know if you want any of the New House fellows to play, line, or do anything. They'll be ready!"

"Thanks!" said Tom Merry quietly. "We'll try and make a decent show somehow, though form will be something of a prize packet. I suppose you really have played, Blake?"

"A little," said Jack, grinning. "So has Figgins, haven't you?"

"I know the rules," admitted Figgins, with unusual modesty. "I'm not a Gabe or Gwyn Nicholls. But Fatty here can give 'em as good Rugger as they can give us, can't you, Fatty?"

"I'll do my best," said Fatty Wynn modestly.

"I must wotire and meet Wally," said Arthur Augustus, rising from the table. "I nevah thought of that, you know. It is weally the very thing, because if I meet him as he comes up from the village, he can't very well wun away or dodge me, bai Jove!"

"Oh, can't he?" laughed Tom Merry, as the swell of St. Jim's began putting on his overcoat. "He could roll you in the mud, though, couldn't he?"

"My youngah bwother will, I hope, show propah wespect to me," said Arthur Augustus, with dignity.

"Oh, you can cut! I don't see that we can do anything more than we have done about this Rugger game until we are certain the match is on. I'll let all you fellows know when the next meeting is, which will be when the answer to Gussy's letter arrives. So long!"

"There's Kildare! You'd better ask him for a permit in case you are late for tea. Sprint!"

"Yaas, wathah; good ideah, deah boy!"

And the swell of St. Jim's pelted off as hard as he could run.

Kildare, the college captain, heard him coming, and stopped, with a laugh.

"Hallo, youngster, where do you think you are off to this time?"

"I want to meet my bwother Wally."

"But you can't! He has gone into the town, and you would be late for tea!"

"That does not mattah in the least, deah boy, because I have had tea. I want to see Wally on important biz, and if you would give me permish, to cut tea I'd be awfully obliged."

Kildare looked at the junior curiously. The St. Jim's captain had made rather a study of Arthur Augustus, and saw a great deal in him which escaped less experienced eyes. He saw now that something was worrying Arthur Augustus.

"Well, as a matter of fact, D'Arcy, I am going into the town myself," he said pleasantly. "If you care to walk down with me until we meet your brother, it will be all right."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Good, then!"

They walked out of the college and from the grounds in silence—an unusual state of affairs with Arthur Augustus present—and once again the captain glanced at his companion.

"Nothing the matter with young Wally, is there?"

"Well, as a mattah of fact there is."

"Anything serious?"

"No—no, I don't think so, deah boy!"

And Kildare could see that that was all D'Arcy was going to say on the matter.

Arthur Augustus felt that it was a distinct point of honour not to explain, although he had been ready enough to talk about the friendship Wally had shown for the waster of the Third with his chums of Study No. 6, and with Tom Merry & Co. But they were juniors, and that made all the difference. In Gussy's mind seniors were without the pale, and had to be kept at a distance.

The two walked along the muddy road, chatting about football. Presently Arthur Augustus peered ahead in the gathering gloom, a puzzled expression on his face.

"It is wathah stwange that we haven't met young Wally, Kildare," he said. "He ought to be comin' back fwom the town by now, I considah."

"Perhaps the young rascal took to the fields?"

"Ya-as! Is there anyone ahead, deah boy?"

They had almost gained the village of Rylcombe by now—in fact, were almost upon the cross-roads. It was just where the main road was intersected by a lane that Arthur Augustus thought he had caught sight of some figures.

"Yes, there was someone there, all right," agreed the captain of St. Jim's. "Looked like a couple of juniors, to me; they turned down to the left."

"Then it can't be young Wally, because that woad doesn't lead to St. Jim's."

Kildare hurried forward. He gained the cross-road, and peered down the lane, then he laughed.

"It certainly looks like your brother, D'Arcy," he said, "though what on earth he is doing down there I can't say. Who's with him, by the way?"

"Dudley, of the Third."

"Dudley?" exclaimed the captain, raising his eyebrows. "Humph!"

The fading light was much stronger in the lane than it had been in the main road, for there were no trees there to add to the shadows, and Kildare and D'Arcy could both see the Third Form boys distinctly as they plodded through the mud. Arthur Augustus would have turned to go back to the college, for he wished to see Wally alone; but before he could make his excuse to the captain, Kildare caught him by the arm.

"By Jove!" he muttered. "Where are the lads going?"

"Weally, I cannot say—"

Arthur Augustus stopped dead. His brother and Dudley were turning from the centre of the lane. Then they stopped before a dirty, red-bricked house and peered both ways.

Kildare and his companion were well in the shade of the trees, and neither Wally nor Dudley saw them. They turned at right angles and deliberately walked through the open doorway of the dirty, red-bricked building.

The place was a public-house—it was not countryfied enough to be honoured with the name of an inn—and was, in addition, held in bad repute even by the rough farm labourers of the district. In fact, the place was on the condemned list, and would cease to exist as a public-house at all when the next licensing committee sat at Rylcombe.

"They went into the public-house, D'Arcy!"

"But weally, Wally wouldn't entah—"

Kildare did not answer, but strode down the lane towards the public-house, his lips set firmly. Arthur Augustus followed, but he did not speak again. There were times when it was not policy to argue with the captain of St. Jim's—times when it was as reckless as it was useless to attempt to turn him from the path he had decided to follow. Arthur Augustus followed the captain without uttering a word.

The light was rapidly fading, and by now it was as dark and gloomy in the lane as it had previously been on the main road; but it was still just possible for the pair to distinguish a couple of figures leaving the public-house. This was when Kildare was less than twenty yards from the evil-smelling place.

"D'Arcy!" cried the captain. "Dudley!"

Hardly had the words left his mouth than the two figures flashed across the lane, leapt the hedge together, and dashed off amongst the trees. The captain rushed forward, calling again.

"Come here, boys! Stop!"

But no sound answered him, and Kildare hesitated. There were several courses open to him. He could attempt to follow the lads, or he could make inquiries at the public-house; but somehow neither of these alternatives appealed to him.

"The ruffian has lost his licence already, and I shall only get lies from him," he thought; "and I stand about as much chance of catching the young rascals as I do of flying. D'Arcy, that was your brother?"

The last statement was half statement, half question.

"I don't know," said D'Arcy. "I didn't actually recognise Wally."

"Are you saying that to screen the young fool?"

Arthur Augustus turned and faced the captain of St. Jim's, his monocle screwed deep in his eye.

"I'm sorry, D'Arcy," said the captain quickly. "I didn't quite mean that."

"Don't mention it, deah boy. As a mattah of fact I didn't recognise either of the pair."

"But you think it was Wally and Dudley?"

Arthur Augustus thought in silence for a moment or two.

"Ya-as," he said at last; "ya-as, I wathah think I do!"

"Well, don't say a word about this, see; not until I give you permission."

Arthur Augustus hesitated. He felt about as uncomfortable as he had ever felt. He was not at his ease with Kildare, perhaps for the first time during his stay at St. Jim's.

Kildare saw that the junior wished to say something. He waited.

"Well, D'Arcy, what is it?"

"What are—are you goin' to do, deah boy, about the matter? I mean, if the doctah hears of it, young Wally stands a chance of gettin' sacked, and as he is my youngah bwothah—"

Arthur Augustus stopped lamely, but the captain went on for him.

"And as he is your younger brother you would rather that did not come to pass, eh?"

"Ya-as, wathah!"

"But you wouldn't have me hush the matter up in young Wally's case, if I should not do so for anyone else, I take it?"

Arthur Augustus thought for a moment or two.

"Under the circs. I don't see that I can pwevent you, Kildare, though—I suppose you ought to do what you considah the pwopah thing!"

"Yes," said Kildare quietly, placing his hand on the junior's shoulder. "You are a sportsman, D'Arcy, and to relieve your mind, I'm not going to report what we have just seen—at least, not till I have thrashed the matter out. A moment. Has your brother been with Dudley lately?"

"Ya-as, I am wathah afraid he has."

"Ah! Then I think I know who is the principal offender. I shall speak to both of the lads myself."

"Yaas, wathah! And you have my permish, Kildare, to give young Wally a feafhul thwashin'. I considah the uttah young ass deserves it!"

And Arthur Augustus began his walk back to the college, looking a good deal more thoughtful than usual.

CHAPTER 9.

Dudley Tears Up Some Lines.

"MY only Aunt Jane! I wonder if they saw us?" panted Wally.

"It looks as if they did, as they called out both our names. Who were they, do you think?"

"Kildare, for one. And I shouldn't be surprised if the other were my young ass of a brother, Gus. Pretty narrow squeak, wasn't it?"

"If they saw us," said Dudley quietly, "they might as well have caught us. I mean, it will be reported to the Head, and then the fat will be in the fire. I've brought you in for something this time, Wally!"

"Not you," said the scallawag of the Third Form cheerfully. "Besides, if I remember, you advised me not to go into the beastly public-house. I've landed myself, as a matter of fact, and you have landed yourself. The point now is, how are we to get out of it?"

"I shall explain as soon as the row comes on."

Wally whistled coolly to himself.

"No, you can't do that," he said, at last, turning to the other. "If you start explaining, Dud., there'll be the very dickens of a flare up. I expect you'd get sacked if you did. No, my son, the game is lie low, and say nothing!"

"How do you mean?"

"Well, we can tell the doctor we didn't go into the public-house for a drink or for tobacco, or for anything else he'd get his back up about, and then we can refuse to say anything else. As racks and thumb-screws are considered bad form nowadays, even the Head can't make a fellow speak if he's made up his mind not to."

"The Head won't believe us—about not going in for tobacco or anything of that sort."

"The Head will believe me," said Wally, looking up.

Dudley coloured. He knew well enough that very few of the masters with whom he had come into contact would believe him, and because the big Third-Former was no fool, he did not blame the masters. Dudley was ready to admit that it was a fellow's own fault if his word of honour were not taken after he had been found out in lies of various sorts.

The two juniors walked on in silence for a few minutes, then Dudley spoke again.

"I say, your brother knew you were out, Wally?"

"Of course. I came out to post a letter for him."

"Then, perhaps, he and Kildare guessed who we were, and never really saw us. Kildare saw me leave the college earlier this afternoon, I know."

"My hat, yes, that may have been it! The captain only called us by our names once, and because we did not stop, he may think he made a mistake. It was jolly dark, too."

"We couldn't recognise them, and so it's likely enough they didn't recognise us. Anyway, it's a chance."

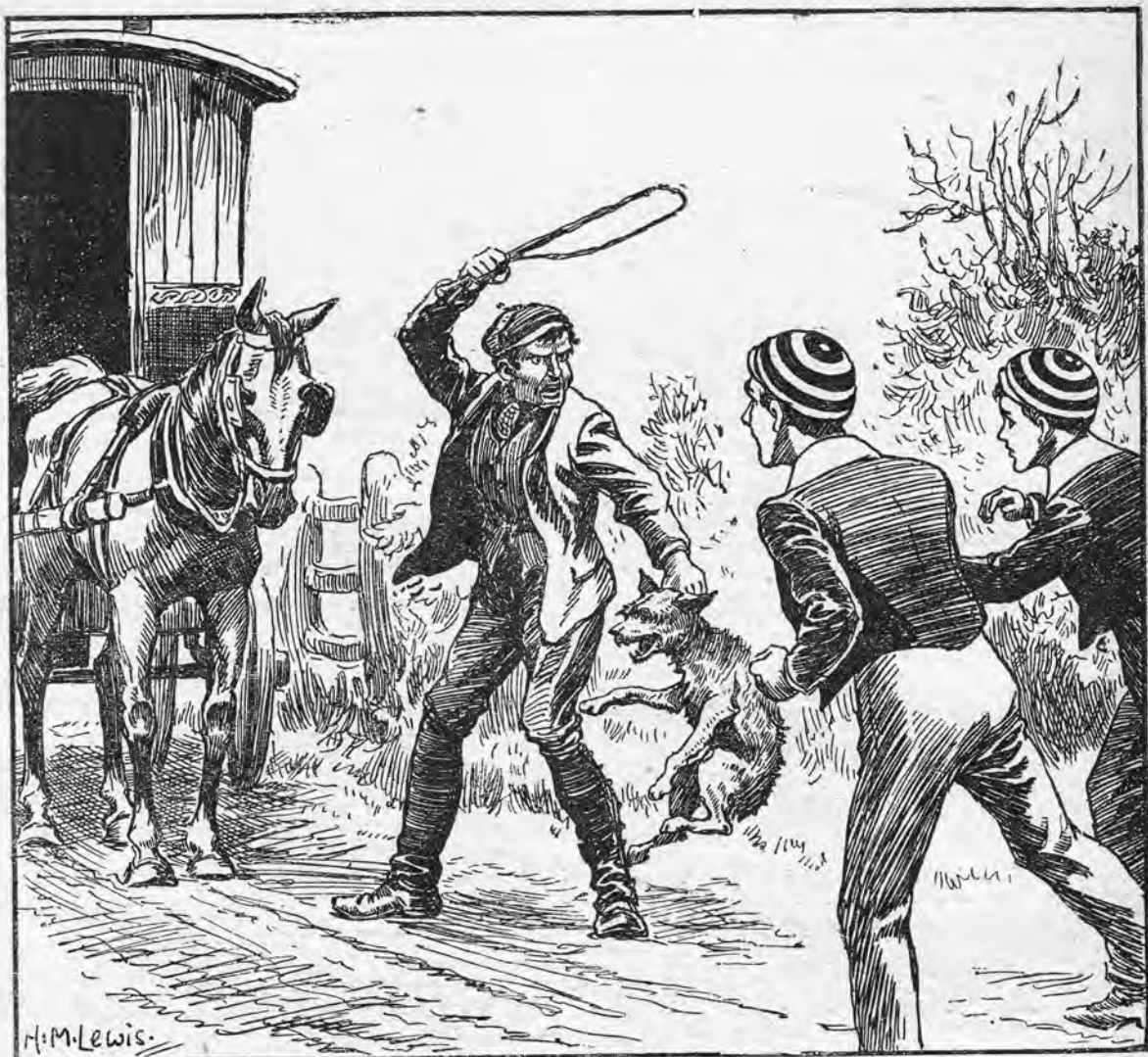
"Yes. Still, I don't see what good it will do us, Dud."

"Why, man, we needn't say anything about it!"

"No, of course we needn't—until Kildare romps in one of his straight questions and asks us outright if we were the fellows. When Kildare asks a straight question, you have to give a straight answer, and jolly quick. There's no beating about the bush and talking of the weather, or pretending to be deaf with the skipper!"

Again the elder lad looked queerly at Wally; then he shrugged his shoulders.

"No, you're right!" he growled. "There's no way out of it on that tack. My idea wouldn't work!"



Dudley flung himself at the infuriated gipsy. "Let the dog go!" muttered the big Third Former; "let him go!"

"Then it's a case of lying low and saying nothing," laughed Wally. "I shall enjoy it if Selby is the man Kildare reports to. I say, I believe that brute of a gipsy knocked you about. You are limping no end!"

"Oh, that's all right!"

The two juniors hurried on now, for they had not much time to spare if they wished to gain the college in time to escape an imposition, and they hardly spoke again until they were once more within the walls of St. Jim's.

"Another five minutes, and there would have been a row," grinned Wally. "Where're you off?"

"I've got something I want to do!"

"Right-ho, then! Remember, lying low and saying nothing is the game. See you later, old man!"

And as Wally walked coolly towards Study No. 6, Dudley turned and almost ran towards the Third Form class-room. The great room was almost in darkness. The gas had been turned low. But there was light enough for Dudley's purpose. He opened his desk, and began rummaging amongst the untidy papers and exercise-books it contained.

A few minutes later he hauled out some sheets of foolscap, closely written and signed at the bottom with Mr. Selby's signature. Dudley glanced at the sheets. They were intact, and numbered exactly five hundred lines.

Then the junior tore them slowly across the middle, and threw the halves into the waste-paper-basket, and sauntered from the class-room again.

"There'll be time to do Selby's lines after prep," he mused—"that is, if I buck up."

And he went in to tea, a little puzzled at his own action.

CHAPTER 10.

Tom Merry's Telegram.

"HALLO, Taggles!" sang out Tom Merry. "It is Taggles, I suppose, and not another nightmare?"

"Which it are not, Master Merry," said the porter, entering the dormitory where the fellows were dressing the following morning. "I 'ave a telegram for you!"

"For me, eh? Good egg! I say, Monty, perhaps it's another invitation to uncle's ranch at the other side of the Rockies! My hat!"

"What's up?"

"Good!" exclaimed Tom Merry, waving the telegraph-form in the air. "There's no answer, Taggles. Kids, the Rugger match is on!"

"Really?"

"Yes, really," grinned the chief of the Terrible Three. "The Wanderers' sec. says they will be delighted to play us, and will be on the ground in time to kick off at two-thirty, Saturday next. Rather ripping, I call it. Aren't those my braces, Manners?"

"So they are. What's the hurry, though?"

"I must get my fifteen as soon as possible. Why, we should be massacred if we went to the field in the raw state. What we want is practice."

"Yes; and it wouldn't be a bad idea if we got permission from the doctor to play the match, would it?" said Manners.

"I consider that ought to have been done first."

"Not much; but I'll set your young mind at rest now,

though. I'll tackle the doctor just as soon as he is down this morning."

It was some time since rising-bell had awakened the Shell, and so, in any case, they would have had to hurry their respective toilets along. However, on this occasion, there was a double incentive, and when Tom Merry found himself in the corridor, there were still twenty minutes to go before he would be required to attend call-over.

"Good!" thought the Rugger captain. "Now, I wonder if the doctor is down yet? Soon settle that question, anyway!"

He pelted along the passages until he came to Dr. Holmes' room; then, as a cheery invitation to come in answered his knock, he coughed and obeyed politely. Five minutes later he came out grinning, and absentminded for once in his way—so absentminded that he ran violently into Kildare's chest. Tom Merry rolled off the sturdy form of the captain of St. Jim's gasping.

"My hat, Kildare, you might look where you are going! I say, do you play Rugger?"

"Eh? Rugger! What on earth made you ask that?"

"Oh, only because St. Jim's are playing the Wanderers next Saturday," said the junior coolly. "I want to get the best fifteen I can against them, and someone told me you were a ripper at the game."

"The Wanderers! What in the name of goodness are you talking about, youngster?" exclaimed the captain, looking puzzled. "We aren't playing the Wanderers."

"Excuse me, Kildare, but you are a trifle behind the times—you are what Gussy would call a back numbah. We are playing the Wanderers, and it is our modest intention to put them through it, my boy!"

"But—"

"Oh, I can't stay here arguing all day, because I've the team to rake up. The fact remains that some weak-kneed seniors—no names mentioned—funkt meeting the Wanderers, just because St. Jim's happened to be a Soccer school. The fellows of the lower Forms thought differently on the matter, and so took the matter out of the aforementioned weak-kneed specimens' hands, and the Rugger match is very much on. But I must go now—"

"No, you don't!" said Kildare quickly. "What do you mean by the match being on? The doctor—"

"Has just been discussing details with me, old man," said Tom Merry coolly. "Everything is arranged, but as yet I cannot give you any details. If you play the game, and would care to have your name entered as a 'possible,' say so."

"I don't understand a word of what you are saying, but, of course, I shall be pleased to play if the doctor has decided—"

"The doctor," said Tom Merry severely—"the doctor has wisely decided to leave everything in my hands. Where do you play?"

"T-three-quarter; but—"

"T-three-quarter; Kildare t-three-quarter. I'll let you know whether you are selected or not, later on. So long!"

And the Shell junior ran off before Kildare had recovered from his surprise. The next fellow the Rugby captain met was Arthur Augustus, who looked as if he had not slept well.

"Hallo, Gussy! Still at large, then? I say, the Rugger match is on all right!"

"The Wuggah match! Ah, the Wandewahs have accepted our pproposal then, deah boy?"

"Of course they have! Do you, or do you not play the game, Gus?"

"Yaas, I should wathah think I do! I considah I am somethin' of a dab at Wuggah, Mewwy!"

"Hum! Is there any reliable information knocking about as to what unbiased people consider on the matter? Still, if you play, I may as well put your name down."

"Imposs. deah boy. I wegwet that I shall be unable to help you in the match, but I wathah expect to weceive an invite to a party at Cleveland Lodge for Saturday, and, undah the cires,—"

"Oh, never mind the cires. You'll play, kid, if you're good enough, but as it is about a thousand to one you aren't, don't worry about it."

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—"

"Yes, weally. Now, where is Blake?"

"In our woom. I do not wish there to be a bweach in our fwiendship, Mewwy, but I must wegard your wearnak about my not being good enough, as wank wot. Undah the cires,— Tom Mewwy!"

But Tom Merry was gone.

The news the telegram had brought to St. Jim's was received in Study No. 6 with loud applause and enthusiasm.

"Ripping!" exclaimed Blake. "Topping! I must say that my idea of accepting the challenge was—well, quite up to the mark—"

"Yes," said Tom Merry pointedly, "it would have been if

the idea had been yours. But to come to the point. How many of you kids play the game?"

The three Fourth-Formers looked at one another, and after a moment or two Jack Blake winked slightly. It took another moment or two for Herries and Digby to understand, then they winked back.

As a matter of fact, Jack Blake, after due consideration, and even before, had come to the conclusion that a great mistake had been made in the choice of captain, and the breasts of Herries and Digby still rankled at the instances of decided mental aberration which had been the cause of excluding them from the newly-formed Rugby committee. From that foundation it was by the simplest of reasoning that the chums of Study No. 6 came to the conclusion that Tom Merry was suffering from a swelled head.

After that it was wonderful that Blake's unspoken idea should communicate itself to the others through a no more expressive channel than one solitary wink.

"How many of you play?" repeated Tom Merry. "Don't all speak at once, please! I know you do, Blake."

"I'm not a nob at the game, old man; nothing like yourself, you know."

"Eh?"

"Yes. I can kick a Rugger ball, and I know the off-side rule and how to barge a three-q. into touch. I once scored a try when the other side were three short."

"Whom do you play for at home?" asked Tom Merry suspiciously.

"Only a potty little team. Put me down for three-quarter, Digby and Herries are both forwards."

"But not Cartwrights, either of us," said Herries. "In fact, compared with you, Merry—"

"What's that?"

"Compared with you, old man, I expect to be something of a rabbit!"

"Yes," said Digby. "I personally hardly like playing with you, Merry. To tell you the solemn truth, I—I hardly like even having my name put down on the same page of your notebook!"

Tom Merry glanced at him sharply, but Digby's face wore an expression which was the essence of innocence.

"Well, it's sporting of you to tell me what to expect. Dig," he said coolly. "I half suspected you of being a rabbit before. Anyway, I shall soon be able to drop on the right fellows after we've had a practice or two. I'm sending Binks down for a Rugger ball as soon as I can drop on him."

"Good, kid! Will there be a punt about this afternoon?"

"Yes, rather! I say, though, did it freeze last night?"

"Let me see. Yes, I should say it did."

"It did," said Herries. "The puddles were covered with ice when I went down to feed Towser just now."

"Then there won't be a punt about, after all," said Tom Merry disappointedly. "The doctor only gave his permission for the Rugby match on the understanding that we didn't play if the ground was frozen. Seems he knows a bit about the handling game, doesn't it? Still, there's plenty of time before Saturday."

"Yes, of course. Where are you off to now?"

"To hunt up Figgins & Co."

And he hurried off towards the gym., where he rightly guessed Figgins & Co., of New House fame, were to be found.

The long-limbed Figgins greeted the Shell leader cheerily. "Cheer-ho! We were just coming across to the School House to see you. Has an answer to Gussy's letter come?"

"Yes, and the game is on."

"That's the style! Getting the team?"

"Well, I'm jotting down the 'possibles,' old man, and I can tell you it is not easy work."

"Ah! If I had been elected— But fire ahead!"

"Yes; and a fat lot more you could have done than I have already done myself!" said Tom Merry indignantly.

"Here I have slaved away— Do you think I can help Blake and his rotten set being muffs at the game?"

"Muffs! Jack Blake a muf at Rugger?"

"Well, that's what he led me to believe—all three of them, in fact, kept on saying something silly about not being as good as I am. What are you grinning at, Figgins?"

"Grinning! Who was grinning?"

"You were!"

"Was I? Still, I can quite understand Blake saying he wasn't to be compared with you at the game, Merry."

"What on earth for? None of you have ever seen me play."

"N-no. No; it's a fact, we haven't. Still, we've heard you talk, old chap!"

"Heard me talk?"

"Of course, in your case, we know it wasn't swank; but—"

"Swank!" exclaimed Tom Merry, closing his notebook with a snap. "You've heard me talk! Why, I don't

believe I have said a word about actual play since I mooted the idea! If you are trying to be funny, Figgins— But no more rotting! Can you play?"

"I know the rules, but, as I said before, Merry, I'm not a Nicholls!"

"I know you are not!"

"And he isn't a Merry!" said Kerr thoughtfully.

"Hallo! You still about, Kerr? Do you play?"

"Yes; but McLeod didn't retire because he was afraid he might lose his cap to me, old man!"

"What about Wynn? But I needn't ask whether a Welshman plays Rugger."

"Oh, he plays, only he's a bit run down just now!" grinned Figgins. "He never seems to get enough to eat—do you, Fatty?"

"Well, I certainly consider another meal a day wouldn't hurt anyone, especially in this February weather. Still, don't put me in the fifteen if you can get anyone better, Merry."

"Don't you let that chance worry you. Forward, I suppose? You've got some weight, anyway."

"Well, I admit I weigh a bit."

"But not more than a ton—eh? I'm afraid there won't be a practice to-day on account of the frost, but to-morrow we'll all turn out, right enough."

"Yes, rather!" said Figgins. "Then you must take us in hand, Merry, and coach us. Did you play for your county last season?"

"Do you pretend to be a silly ass, or are you only one by nature?" asked Merry, after a moment's thought. "You're a success either way, Figgins!"

And he left the gymnasium, trying to call to mind some cause which would explain the manner in which his teammate had answered his invitation to play.

"It's not like 'em to be modest," he mused—"not a bit like them!"

Then he shrugged his shoulders, and went to look for Kildare again.

CHAPTER 11.

Kildare Makes Inquiries.

"HA, ha, ha!" chuckled Figgins, as Tom Merry disappeared. "Hear me smile, Kerr? Ha, ha, ha!"

"But what's the joke?" demanded the Scottish partner in the famous firm of Figgins & Co.

"Oh, it's some rag Blake and his set have got up," returned Figgins, "and it isn't up to New House fellows to spoil a rag! It certainly did get his wool off, didn't it?"

"It looked like it."

"Then I vote we pass it along to Lowther and Manners; they'll be game enough for anything after the way Merry turned them out of the committee-room. I'll slip off at once and find Manners, and we can get full particulars of the wheeze from Blake later on. I—Hallo, Kildare! Don't say it's me you want!"

"Is young D'Arcy in here?"

"Wally? No, he hasn't been here yet."

"Dudley, of the Third, then?"

Figgins looked up before replying. Why should Kildare want Wally, and if not Wally, Dudley of all fellows? Figgins remembered what Arthur Augustus had said about his young brother the previous night, and the chief of the New House juniors began to wonder. There seemed to be some link, then, between the scallawag and the waster of the Third, after all.

"Have you seen either of them, Figgins?"

"I'm sorry—No, Kildare, I haven't; they haven't been here!"

Kildare nodded, and walked off briskly. He went into the School House, looked in at Study No. 6, then went down to the Third Form class-room. Neither Wally nor Dudley was there, and with a frown Kildare turned into the corridor again. He almost ran into Arthur Augustus.

"Ah, D'Arcy! Where is your brother?"

"Bothaded if I know, deah boy; I am lookin' for him myself!"

"Did you see him last night?"

"Not to speak to, and—"

"I am glad of that; I want to drop on him suddenly."

"Hallo!" exclaimed a cheery voice from behind them. "Who is that you want to drop on suddenly, if I may ask? Not Mr. Selby, I hope!"

And Wally sauntered up, his hands in his pockets, and a rather more inky collar than usual round his neck. Arthur Augustus groaned at the sight of the collar and unconsciously turned away when he noticed that his brother had obviously overlooked doing his hair that morning; but Kildare did not notice this kind of thing.

"I want to speak to you, my lad," he said quietly.

"Come into my room, please!"

"Right-ho! Any help I can give you about the footer—"

You look pretty solemn, Gus!"

"I considah. Wally—"

"Oh, then that, of course, accounts for it! Hard luck, Gus!"

And the cheekiest fag of St. Jim's followed the captain into his study.

"Shut the door!" said Kildare briefly. "Sit down! Now, my lad, I want to know what it all means?"

"Thanks, Kildare! No, this chair will do A1. What does all what mean, though?"

"Don't you know?"

Wally coughed.

"Ahem! I don't see that a fellow is bound to commit himself. In fact—"

"You can drop that, D'Arcy, and at once! This is a serious matter—a very serious matter—as you will very likely discover before long. I want to know everything connected with a visit you and Dudley paid to a filthy, evil-smelling public-house yesterday afternoon. Out with it!"

"Well, but—"

"I may as well tell you at the beginning," said Kildare quietly, but with the kind of quietness which is more awe-inspiring than any outward anger—"I may as well tell you that unless you give me a voluntary account of your action, and one that is entirely satisfactory, I wash my hands of the whole affair, and the matter is reported to Dr. Holmes. I think you know what to expect then."

"A sporting chance of the sack, I suppose?" said Wally, some of the jauntiness vanishing from his face. Still, he stuck to his guns. "You'd better report it right away," he added, "because I can't properly explain, Kildare."

"Why can't you?"

Wally thought for a moment or two.

"I can't even tell you that. I didn't go in the rotten place for tobacco or—anything like that, anyway."

"What did you go in for, then—not to play cards or games? But you weren't there long enough for anything like that."

"It wasn't to play games. Look here, Kildare, I can't say why I went in, but it wasn't for any of those things we've mentioned. In fact, I'll give you my word it wasn't for anything you or even Selby would get his back up about. There! That's about all I can say!"

"Nonsense, D'Arcy!" exclaimed the captain. "You know very well what the masters would think. Did you or Dudley suggest your going into the place?"

Wally did not answer, and Kildare rose to his feet.

"Your silence answers my question," he said. "If you had been the leading spirit, I think I know you enough to be certain that you would own up. Dudley took you into the place."

"I haven't said he did, and I don't think it's quite fair of you trying to catch me tripping!"

"You don't think it quite fair of me! You silly young donkey, D'Arcy minor, what on earth do you think I am taking all this trouble for, if it isn't for your own good? Wouldn't it be a hundred times simpler for me to report the matter, or easier still to let it drop? I thought you were a sharper youngster than that."

Wally coloured.

"I am not going to visit the place again," said Wally. "I'll promise you that. I—I think I can even promise you that Dudley won't, either."

At that moment the door of the study was pushed open, and Kildare turned round.

"Who is it? Hallo, Lefevre! I'm busy now, old man. I'll come to your study later, if you like."

"Oh, it's nothing!" answered the Fifth Form fellow, in tones which thrilled with indignation. "But what do you think of young Merry's cheek? Isn't it too—too rich for words?"

"About the Rugger? I don't know about cheek."

"You don't know? Here, a Shell kid dares to—Great Scott, Kildare, what is the school coming to? But if you are busy—"

"Yes, I really am, old man. I say, do you mind stepping into the Third Form-room and sending Dudley along here?"

"Certainly! Dudley, a young slacker, that's what I say. A little cad!"

The door was shut again, and the captain turned to Wally.

"You see what the seniors think of your friend Dudley?" he said quietly. "A slacker and a cad!"

Wally bit his lip, and was silent.

"You said you could almost promise me that Dudley would not visit the public-house again. Then you admit that it was he who took you there?"

"No, I don't."

"But it was," persisted Kildare. "You, a fellow who leads to some extent the lads of your Form, is, in turn, led by a cad, a slacker who does not play games, and led by the nose, too!"

"I wasn't!" cried Wally, colouring furiously. "It's all rot!"

"But facts speak for themselves, my lad. You admit the public-house was a rotten place, and yet you were weak-minded enough to be led into it by one of your own fellows. Come in! Yes, I want to see you, Dudley. Lefevre sent you?"

"Yes."

"Do you know what I wish to see you about?"

Dudley glanced at Wally, but before he had had time to answer, Kildare answered his own question.

"I'll tell you what I am going to do, Dudley," the captain said coolly. "I am going to thrash you for taking D'Arcy into a public-house. Take off your coat!"

And as he spoke, he took down a section of an old fishing-rod, which looked as if it would prove useful in the captain's hands.

Wally was on his feet again, his face flushed. It really did appear as if Kildare were going out of his way to make him feel small!

CHAPTER 12.

The Captain Surprises Wally.

TAKE off your coat, Dudley!" said Kildare again. "I'm not in the habit of giving juniors from the Third Form orders twice over!"

"He sha'n't!" almost shouted Wally. "At least, if you make him, you'll have to thrash me as well. He didn't take me into the rotten place."

"Dry up, Wally!"

"I'm not going to dry up! We went in together, Kildare; in fact, Dudley didn't want me to go in at all."

"Yes I did, only I didn't say so. You're right in thinking it was all my fault, Kildare; it had nothing to do with D'Arcy!"

"Ah! I'm glad to hear you say that."

"Anyway, it's true enough."

And the waster of the Third pulled off his coat. Wally was about to rush forward, for what purpose he did not know, when he suddenly stopped. Kildare had stopped, too, putting the section of the old fishing-rod down on the table. In slipping off his coat, Dudley's unlinked cuff had fallen back, laying bare his sturdy arm.

"What is the matter with your skin?"

It seemed to the captain that the flesh was one mass of wheals and scars. Dudley pulled his shirtsleeve down.

"That's all right," he muttered. "You needn't take any notice of that!"

"Who did it? Good heavens!"

The senior had caught the lad by the wrist, and, with a quick movement, exposed the whole length of his arm. It certainly was in a very ugly state.

"The gipsy!" cried Wally. "The gipsy did it, Dud!"

Dudley nodded.

"But you needn't take any notice of it, Kildare," he said coolly. "I can stand anything you're likely to give after this."

"The gipsy? What gipsy? What does he mean, D'Arcy?"

"Why, a beastly, half-drunken gipsy, who looked like killing my dog Pongo for barking at his horse!" exclaimed the scallawag of the Third. "If it hadn't been for Dudley I believe he would have killed him. You're a brick and a ripper, Dud, a jolly fine beggar, and I don't care what the whole school says."

"Put your coat on!" said Kildare shortly. "I suppose this ruffianly gipsy horsewhipped you?"

"Yes; and I believe he could have saved himself if he had left Pongo in the caravan," said Wally, whose eyes were sparkling in a way they seldom sparkled. "The gipsy had thrown the dog into the caravan, you see, Kildare, and then he landed me one which almost stunned me, but I can understand what happened. You yourself said the door wouldn't open, Dud, so I suppose you stood there while the cad was laming into you with the whip. My hat, his body must be as bad all over as his arm, I should say!"

"Is it?"

"He did catch me a bit, but it wasn't enough to blub about. I dare say I could have stuck all that rotter could have managed. Don't be a fool, Wally!"

"I don't care what I am. I reckon you must have been a rattling brick to have stood all that and said nothing. If anyone is a fool, it's Lefevre for saying what—that he did."

"What did he say, then?"

"Never mind what Lefevre said," put in Kildare, "and never mind what D'Arcy says now. Of course, I cannot thrash you in your present state, Dudley, but your having got into trouble with a gipsy who ought to be in prison cannot influence me in the serious matter of the visit to the public-house. Dudley, I am going to put a question to you which I do not think I should have troubled to have put but for those scars, though. I am going to ask you to explain why it was you led D'Arcy into the public-house, and so save this younger lad from the very serious consequences which are bound to follow if you refuse. I am putting you on your honour, mind!"

"I'll explain."

"No you won't!" interrupted Wally. "He sha'n't explain, Kildare, and you haven't any right to make him in—in that way. I don't care if I'm sacked for it, he isn't going to explain!"

"Shut up, Wally! I—"

"No, you sha'n't! I'd rather be sent to the doctor a hundred times after what he's done for Pongo!"

Then Kildare, the captain of the old school of St. Jim's, acted in a curious manner.

"You can both go now!" he said. "Think the matter over and—shut the door!"

And they went, speechless with amazement. Kildare waited for the door to close, then carefully put the fishing-rod section back in its place.

"Confound it!" he muttered. "Those scars are just about the worst things that could have happened, quite the worst, I should say!"

The senior was thinking of the strange influences which spring up in school life, of the striking instances of hero worship which thrive amongst fellows who have yet to gain senior ranks, and it struck him that the most important detail connected with schoolboy hero worship is the choice of hero.

Dudley was one of the least successful pupils in the Third Form—a "waster" even to the fellows themselves, let alone the masters and prefects—and just when he, Kildare, had been endeavouring to nip this friendship in the bud, this had happened to strengthen it.

"Accidentally, though," thought the captain suddenly. "Dudley hadn't told D'Arcy about them!"

That was one point, at least, which might be remembered in making up the credit side of Dudley's shady account, and then there were the scars themselves.

It must be a curious sort of fellow who could be thoroughly contemptible, and yet go through what he had evidently cheerfully gone through for a chum's dog! That struck Kildare, too, and Kildare was given to acting upon his ideas at once. He left his study, and paid a visit to Mr. Selby's room. He had a little discussion with that gentleman about Dudley, and when he had learnt all there was to learn, he tackled the House-master and all the other available masters with whom Dudley had come in contact.

After that he went into breakfast, but he continued his investigations afterwards, for he looked up all the Third Form registers for the last term or so, examined most of the undestroyed detention books, and at the end of it all, had to come to an unpleasant conclusion.

There could be no two questions about the matter. Dudley's record was a disgrace to any St. Jim's fellow.

"Still, he was ready to own up for D'Arcy's sake," mused the captain, more than a trifle puzzled, "and at some cost to himself, I should say. That was cricket whatever anyone says. Humph! I wonder what would happen if I took no further steps in the matter?"

The unspoken question interested Kildare. Perhaps the juniors would think he had decided to overlook the affair. But they could hardly think that because he had expressly said that he should not do so. Perhaps Dudley would come in and own up when Wally was out of the way!

Kildare liked the alternative. It was giving the junior with the black record a chance of proving himself better than they all thought him to be, and great things might come of a chance like that.

"Yes"—thought the captain suddenly—"yes, that is what I'll do!"

And he went into his morning's work, uncertain as to whether he was pleased or otherwise with the turn events had taken.

CHAPTER 13.

Dudley Pays Kildare a Second Visit.

I SUPPOSE you two fellows play Rugger?" said Tom Merry, bursting into the Shell Study as soon as first school was over. "I know you do, Lowther."

"Y-yes, I play, old man; nothing very great, you know," Tom Merry looked up.

"I didn't expect you were anything very great. You

aren't the sort of chap who looks as if he were very great at anything, except playing the giddy goat; but if you don't think yourself good enough to play, say so, and I'll find someone else."

"Oh, I'm good enough to play, thanks," said Lowther hastily. "I was merely comparing myself with you. Beside you, of course, I shall look a bit of a rabbit, and so will Manners."

"That's a fact," agreed Manners. "Some one said you had played for your county, Tom."

"Then someone's a— Someone doesn't speak the truth," said the chief of the Shell, with rising anger. "How do you know I play at all, duffer?"

"Why, you've told us so! My hat, old man, if you can't play after what you've said! But it's only bluff and modesty on your part."

"No, it isn't bluff and it isn't modesty, you shrieker, and I haven't said a word about being able to play. Look here, has Blake or Figgins been into this room?"

"Has Blake or Figgins been into this room—have they, Lowther?"

"Blake or— Yes; I believe Figgins did just look in, now you come to mention it."

"I thought so. Nice cheerful sort of a last word you are, aren't you? But it's my candid belief you are all a set of rabbits and can't play Rugger for nuts!"

"We can't, compared with you, old man," admitted Lowther. "Come in, Skimpole!"

"Ah, thanks!" said Skimpole, who had just left Jack Blake, and, unknown to himself, was well primed in a certain direction. "How do you do, Merry? I suppose I ought to offer you my congratulations, although—"

"Congratulations? What for?"

"About—about the cap you won," explained Skimpole, blinking vaguely as if he were not quite certain whether it was a cap or a bowler hat which was supposed to have rewarded Tom Merry's prowess. "A Rugby cap, I believe it is called."

"A—what?"

"Rugby cap," repeated Skimpole. "Yes, I am certain it was a Rugby cap someone told me you had won, although at the time I'll admit I was not struck with the value of the prize."

"Someone told you I had a Rugby cap?" almost shouted Tom Merry. "Who was it, Skimpole? Tell me who it was, and I'll see that he is slain at once."

"I shall certainly give you no information, Merry, if it is likely to cause ill-feeling between you."

"Ill feeling—eh? Look here, what is it, now, Reilly?"

"Sure, and nothing to get touchy about, me bhoy!" grinned the Irish junior of the Fourth. "It's about the Rugby."

"What about it, then?"

"Faith, and now you mention it, I don't think there's anything about the foine old game. Someone told me you'd toured with a fifteen in Oirland, and I'd like to know if you played at all down Munster way."

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Lowther and Manners together.

"Ho, ho, ho!"

And the expression of wrath on Tom Merry's face was so startling, that Reilly decided to leave, and did so as hard as he could run.

"I thought it was a rag as soon as Blake spoke," he chuckled. "But you don't catch an Irishman spoiling a rag. Faith, though, I'll give Tom Merry a woid berth after this."

Tom Merry had also left the Shell study, the laughter of his comrades being unsuitable to his present frame of mind, and it happened he met Kildare before the end of the corridor. The captain stopped him.

"Of course, you aren't thinking of having a practice this afternoon, Merry; the ground is much too hard."

"So I'm afraid. We might try a little scrum practice in the gym, don't you think?"

"Yes, that's a good idea. It'll get the pack into some sort of shape. Three o'clock! I'm afraid some of us will show up rather poorly by you, you know," added the captain, laughing. "You've played a lot, I understand?"

"Well, I haven't; I've hardly played at all, and it's that howling ass Blake who's setting the wheeze round that I'm a dab at Rugger. I was just going to his study to break his neck—I mean—"

"Ha, ha, ha!" laughed Kildare. "Yes, Blake certainly led me to believe you were a great gun at the game, and that none of the others were any good. First time I've ever known you to be really troubled with modesty, Merry, or any of you juniors, in fact."

And the captain went on, still laughing. Tom Merry shook his fist after him, then also continued his way, rowing vengeance upon Jack Blake of the Fourth. However, he had only gone a few steps, when he found himself face to face with Dudley.

Somewhat to Tom Merry's surprise, the big Third-Former

stopped, for the two had scarcely spoken more than a dozen words to each other all the time they had been at St. Jim's.

"Have you seen Kildare pass this way, Merry?"

Tom looked at the other narrowly.

"Yes," he said; "he's just gone into his study. Is anything up?"

"No. I want to speak to him, that's all."

And Dudley pushed by, entering the captain's study without hesitating. Tom Merry whistled.

"Phew! I must say I agree with Gus. Wally has a rum taste in chums. I—I wonder if I should have helped things along at all if I had spoken to the waster about it?"

But he answered his own question with a shake of his head. Better leave things alone for a time; no doubt Wally would soon get tired of a fellow of Dudley's stamp.

And by the time Tom Merry had gained Study No. 6, he had forgotten all about his resentment towards the leading spirit of that select den, and at once plunged into a thoughtful discussion with the Fourth-Formers about young Wally. They were still engrossed in their subject, and just as far away from any useful solution, when the bell rang announcing the second half of the morning's work.

"Bother!" muttered Digby. "I don't believe Taggles can tell the time. How's the glass?"

Herries tapped the old barometer and shook his head.

"No change, you chaps. I—I believe this froet is going to last the week out; I do, really."

"Not it, kids!" said Tom Merry cheerfully. "Don't you worry, the Rugger match will come off all right. All we've got to do is train hard. Three o'clock in the gym for scrum practice, mind."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Hallo! That ass Gussy has turned up again, then?"

"Tom Mewwy, I must be wogard—"

"Yes, do, old man!" said the hero of the Shell pleasantly.

"I would if I were you. See something of you before dinner." And he, too, made his way into class.

CHAPTER 14.

Arthur Augustus Speaks His Mind.

"I wally is wathah swange that Kildare hasn't said anythin' about young Wally and that public-house," thought Arthur Augustus; "very strange indeed. I wondah if it would mattah if I were to tackle Wally about it?"

But even as D'Arcy put the question to himself, he knew that there was only one answer. Kildare had expressly told him not to speak to his young brother until he—Kildare—gave him leave; and as yet the captain had not said a word on the subject.

"And it's two days, bai Jove, since he had young Wally in his study!" mused the ewell of the School House. "If it were not entirely a mattah of personal honah with my young bwathah, I wathah think I should take Jack Blake into my confidence. It's vewy wemakable."

"Hallo, Gus! Cheer ho, my boy!"

"Stop, stop, you uttah ass! Tom Mewwy, I wish you wouldn't hit me on the shouldah; it wumples my beastly clothes."

"Ha, ha, ha! By the way, you haven't seen the study since the paint dried, and all that, have you?"

"No, deah boy; I haven't been in your woom since the affahnoon we—"

"No, that you haven't," grinned Tom Merry. "Never mind, there'll be some invitations knocking around soon; but mum's the word. Coming into committee?"

"Undah the cires, deah boy, I am afwaid I cannot. You see—"

"I see that you are one of the Rugby committee men, and as such have to sit," said Tom Merry. "Come along, Gus!"

"I must wefuse—"

"It's down this corridor, up the next, and through a doorway."

"Let go my arm, Mewwy," said Arthur Augustus coldly.

"I must wquest you to let go my arm."

"Right-ho, Gus; coat collar'll do quite as well. I say, Figgins, here's one of our committee men trying to shirk his duties."

"Rotter!"

"I wefuse to be termed a wottah, and I considah Figgins beastly wade. Let go my collah, Tom Mewwy; let go, or I shall have to give you a feashful thwashin'!"

Figgins caught hold of Arthur Augustus's arm; then, with the ewell of the School House between them, they started at a trot towards Study No. 6, chatting about the one absorbing question of the hour at St. Jim's just then, the forthcoming Rugby match.

The frost had lasted in the most exasperating manner—not a severe frost, but just enough to cause the football

pitches to exhibit signs of a decided "bone." The doctor's verdict had been announced only that morning—Friday—that if the frost still held by breakfast the following morning, a wire would have to be sent to the Wanderers' secretary scratching the match.

"And now it's freezing harder than ever," said Figgins. "There are three degrees, Taggles says."

"Wescue! Wescue! Let go my beastly collab, Tom Mewwy!"

"But it may be the last lap, as it were, Figgy," said Tom Merry hopefully. "I shouldn't be at all surprised myself if it thawed to-night; I shouldn't, really."

"That comes of being optimistic, kid."

"Wescue, Blake! Blake, deah boy!"

"Hallo!" came Blake's cheerful voice. "What's the matter? What are you doing with Gus, Merry?"

"Yanking the slacker into committee, old man."

"I wescue to be chawactewised as a slackah, you wuff, wotah."

"Yes," added Figgins; "he said he wouldn't come at first, so we're press-ganging him."

"Wescue! Flocah the wotten boundahs, deah boy!"

"Good egg!" said Jack Blake. "Can't have slackers connected with the Rugby set of St. Jim's. Shall I push him from behind?"

And to D'Arcy's utter disgust, Blake put his head down and "scrummed" the swell of the School House all the way down the passage. In this fashion they arrived at Study No. 6, where Skimpole was already seated in lonely state.

"Good!" said Tom Merry. "I'll take the chair, as usual. What's the matter, Gus?"

"I intend to give you a feahful thwashing."

"Good man! Now, I propose from the chair that we settle all the unimportant biz. first, then I'll tell you my team for to-morrow."

"Yes, if there's a match."

"Oh, there'll be a match, Figgy, old kid! I believe it's thawing already. It's as warm as toast."

"Yes, in front of a fire."

"Don't croak. Now, Skimpole, how goes the financial part of the concern?"

"Well, Merry," said Skimpole, opening his notebook. "the financial state is somewhat precarious; in fact, I will go as far as you say—"

"Oh, cut the cackle, and let's have the details. How much have we in hand?"

"In hand? As a matter of fact—"

"Oh, dry up!" groaned Blake. "How much have we in hand?"

"Yes, how much have we in hand?"

"Let us have it in round figures, Skimmy."

"In round figures," said Skimpole, looking up over the tops of his spectacles—"in round figures we have in hand the sum of minus five shillings."

"Minus! My hat!"

"No, Mewwy, deah boy, minus five shillings. Ha, ha, ha!" chortled Arthur Augustus; but the effort passed in silence.

"Five bob out—eh?" said Blake. "That means a sub. round. Is everything paid up, Skimmy?"

"Yes. I myself paid the carman for carting the goalposts the Rylcombe people kindly lent us, and I decided to award Taggles the sum of sixpence as honorarium for helping to put the aforesaid goalposts up. Then there was—"

"That'll do for the present," said Merry pleasantly. "We've got some important business on hand, so we'd be obliged if you ring off, Skimmy. We'll have a whip round afterwards for the five shillings. Two-thirty the match starts, Gus?"

"Yaas, wathah; and if it weren't for the invitation I am expectin' from Cleveland Lodge for the party, I should be vewwy pleased to be a membah of the team."

"Ah!" grinned the chairman. "Somehow, Gus, I can't quite see you playing Rugger."

"No, deah boy," said Arthur Augustus languidly; "it is a wottenly wuff game."

"I don't think! Now, look here, you fellows, I've got my fifteen bar two. I'll read them from the forwards—Kerr, Manners, Lowther, Fatty Wynn, Digby, Lefevre, whom I believe is pretty warm, Herries, and young Reilly."

"That sounds useful from a Soccer point of view, anyway," said Jack Blake thoughtfully. "I mean, they'll be able to do some dribbling when wanted."

"Yes, that's what I thought. For halves, I can't think of anyone but Monteith. He has played, I know, and he has promised to turn out for me, which is rather decent of him. For the other half I haven't the faintest idea where to go; there doesn't seem to be a second Rugger half in the college."

"Let's leave that open, then. What about the three-qs?"

"Kildare, Figgins, you, Blake, and myself. Kildare may

carry us through on his back; he has a knack of doing that."

"Kildare?" said Figgins, in pronounced surprise. "We are all looking to you to do that for the team, Merry. After the way you have talked—"

"Oh, dry up; that gag is as ancient as the Rockies."

"Sit down, Merry," said Skimpole severely—"sit down at once! If there is any sign of a disturbance, I shall have to withdraw. I am surprised at you, Merry!"

"Oh, go and pick flowers! I can't think of a full-back at all, unless we ask Selby or Taggles."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Arthur Augustus turned round, and screwed his monocle in his eye with a deliberate sort of twist.

"I weward your laughter as a sign of vewwy low intelligence, Figgins," he said. "There is nothin' humowous in Tom Mewwy's suggestion, although, undah the circs., I shall be unable to play, because I am accepting an invitation to a party."

"Hang Gussy's invite; let's get on with the washing," said Figgins. "Surely there must be someone in the coll. who can play full-back."

"It's wathah a wespensible posish, deah boy," said Arthur Augustus. "In fact, I should weward it as a vewwy wespensible one."

"Of course it's responsible. It's no good going to any of the lower Forms for a full-back, you know, Blake. A Third-Former might manage as a half because he could make up for his lack of weight with nippiness, but you must have beef at back. I'm blest if I know what to do; and there you have it!"

"My only Aunt Jane, yes! Fancy there being only thirteen fellows in the coll. who play Rugger!"

"Well, it's a Soccer school, you see. What do you say if we leave it until to-morrow morning?"

"Right-ho!"

"Then let's get on with the last biz," said Tom Merry. "Gentlemen, I propose we have a run to-night to get fit."

"Get stiff, more likely."

"Not much! I don't mean a Marathon; just a knee-loosening trot out towards the quarry, only of course not so far."

"Yes, that isn't so dusty."

"What about permish, deah boy?"

"I've got permission, Gussy, and Kildare and Lefevre have promised to come with us. Start at seven."

"Good!"

"You had better come as well, Gus."

"No feah, Tom Mewwy," said Arthur Augustus, with a shudder. "The woads will be beastly hard, and there's a wotten wind. Besides, I must wait for the post to see whether my invite to the party at Cleveland Lodge awwives."

"Hard cheese! Well, there's nothing more except the whip-round for the five bob."

"That's so," agreed Blake, looking at Skimpole severely; "but before I consent to such a course of action, I should like to move that a vote of censure be passed upon the treasurer for the simply rotten way in which he has squandered the money of the club—"

"Really, Blake—"

"For the ruinous manner in which he has granted awards without our consent—"

"Really, I must protest!" said Skimpole, getting up. "I made no awards whatever except in the case of Taggles, and even in that instance I offered him twopence before I consented to sixpence."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I did, but Taggles would not accept. Then I offered fourpence, and he still refused to do the work, so what was I to do but to give him the sixpence he demanded?"

"Did you offer him fivepence?" asked Blake severely.

"N-no."

"There! You see, gentlemen, how the money has been squandered!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Well, really, a penny isn't—"

"From the chair," said Tom Merry solemnly—"from the chair I propose herewith that Herbert Skimpole be decapitated, and his remains be hidden in any selected chimney in the school."

"Yes, Skimmy," said Blake; "and the only thing that has saved you is the fact that you do not exist. You told me you didn't, yourself. Hallo! What do you want, young Wally?"

"Nothing," grinned D'Arcy minor—"nothing, young Blake; only I heard Merry wants a stand-off half for to-morrow."

"Yes, I do."

"Then take an old man's advice," said Wally, "and

plump for Dudley of the Third. Straight tip; honour bright!"

And he vanished before the words had sunk home. But almost as soon as the door was shut again there was commotion in the room. Arthur Augustus sprang to his feet quite angrily.

"I pwotest!" he said indignantly. "If Dudley is picked I wufuse to have my name connected with the game!"

"Ring off, Gus, old man, for a minute."

"I wufuse to wing off. Dudley is a wotten cad. Only three nights ago he took my youngah bwother into a beastly—he got my youngah bwother into sewious trouble. Dudley is a wank wottah, and—and I wufuse to have anything to do with a team which includes him as a membah!"

And Arthur Augustus sat down again.

All the others in that room had seen D'Arcy upset many times before that occasion, but never quite so earnestly.

Most of them knew, by now, that there was some link connecting Wally with Dudley, the waster of the Third, and it was obvious to all that Arthur Augustus was worried over the matter. Tom Merry rose to his feet.

"Don't get into a stew, Gus," he said. "I sha'n't worry Dudley to fill the place at half. I'll play anyone before him."

And nodding round the room, he sauntered out into the passage.

CHAPTER 15.

The Waster of the Third.

"SAY, you chaps, Kildare isn't coming, after all!" sang out Tom Merry. "He's going to work, or something."

"Hard luck!"

"Lefevre's just coming down."

The clock high up in the St. Jim's steeple was striking the hour of seven, and nearly a dozen of Tom Merry's fifteen were assembled before the gymnasium doorway, clothed in running shorts and light sweaters.

The moon was shining faintly through the frosty atmosphere, and the roads were hard and dry, an ideal night for a run. But the same hardness of the roads was not greeted with enthusiasm.

"Blessed if I can see what makes you think it'll thaw just to oblige," grumbled Jack Blake. "It looks to me as if the frost were going to last to about Easter."

"Not it, kid. You'll see, we shall play the Wanderers all right. Feel fit, Wynn?"

"A little faint; but, then, I've had nothing to eat since tea, not counting a little snack of a few sandwiches just now and some apples with Figgins. Are we going to stop anywhere for refreshment?"

"My only hat, no!"

"Ah!" murmured Fatty Wynn. And he reflectively tapped his sweater, which was bulging suspiciously at one side.

At that moment Lefevre hurried up, and then the word was given, and the run commenced. The last of the bunch was hardly out of the grounds when two figures crept from the gymnasium. They were also in running things, and beside them trotted Pongo, the mongrel.

"Give 'em time to get well away," whispered Wally's voice. "We mustn't be seen, Dud."

"Blessed if I can see any sense in the wheeze at all."

"Of course there's sense in it. You are going to play half with Monteith to-morrow, aren't you?"

"Not if Merry doesn't want me."

"But he does want you, kid. Tom Merry isn't a bad sort for an old fogey, and he wants the best men in the college for his giddy fifteen. He may think he doesn't, but he does; and you're admitted you are a Rugger man."

Dudley nodded.

"Anyway," he said quietly, "I'm not going to ask for a place in the fifteen. You can make up your mind to that, Wally."

"Of course you are not going to ask. I'm going to tackle Gussy after this run and give him a jolly good wiggin'. He'll see who ought to play half all right. I should think we might start now."

Dudley growled a little, but he followed the younger lad's lead, and started off down the road at a good, swinging trot. Wally knew the direction taken by the others, but was content to follow without overtaking them.

"Pr'aps we'll finish up with a sprint with them," he thought. "I'll think that over."

Two or three miles were covered almost in silence, then presently Wally turned off from the main road.

"They're bound to have taken the short cut, Dud," he said, "and we may as well do the same. I don't want to make you stiff."

"Where are you going?"

"Past the old farm—cut across the grounds, you know. Look out for the ditch!"

Wally neatly jumped the wall, and made off towards the deserted, half-ruined old farmhouse. Dudley followed. He was still a long way from seeing the use of the run, for he had made up his mind not to offer his services to Tom Merry.

"And I reckon Merry has made up his mind not to ask me for 'em," he thought, with a short laugh. "I don't know that I blame him, all things being considered."

They were almost across the field by now, Wally some dozen yards or so ahead, when suddenly Dudley was startled by a yell.

"Look out! Oh!"

And it seemed to the big Third-Former that his chum had vanished into the earth. Dudley sprang forward, his face white. The sight of the black outline of the drum of a windlass on trestles standing out black against the moonlit sky, sent a thrill of horror through him. The old well! Wally had fallen into the well!

Scarcely realising that such could be the case, Dudley flung himself down on his knees at the brink of the crumbling well mouth, and shouted down into the evil-smelling depths:

"Wally! Wally!"

There was no answer except that Dudley's own call came vibrating back to him by echo.

Dudley's face went deathly. He knew that the farmhouse they had just passed had been untenanted for years, and that, in consequence, the well was never used now. Perhaps it had run dry, and in that case Wally would have been killed. That seemed the likely conclusion, seeing that not a single sound came from the dismal depths.

Thoughts of this nature only took a moment or two to flash through the junior's mind. Then he noticed the windlass above the well again. From the drum of this hung a rope, run out to its utmost limit. It looked old and rotten, but Dudley did not think twice of that. It was the one chance of rescuing Wally, provided there was still water in the well, for it had occurred to him that his chum might have injured his head against the side in falling, and was now drowning in a five-foot circle of water!

Grasping the rope with his strong hands, Dudley began to lower himself with desperate speed. Hand under hand he descended, calling Wally's name loudly. Suddenly Dudley was forced to stop. In lowering his left hand over his right he had discovered that there was no more rope, that he was at the end, with his feet still dangling in mid-air.

How far he was from the water, if there were water, Dudley did not know. He tried to calculate by means of the time it had taken him to descend, but that was useless. He had no idea how deep the well was even.

"Wally!" he called again, the perspiration starting to his forehead. "Wally, old chap!"

His own words rebounded from the well sides monotonously, echoing again and again until they were lost in the open air above. Dudley set his teeth hard, and let go the rope.

He knew that there would be little chance of his gaining it again, however close the bottom of the well might be, and he had even thought of the remoteness of the chance of a passer-by hearing shouts for help; nor was he certain that his voluntary fall would not land him on the bottom of a dry well with a broken limb or two. But Dudley had risen to the occasion in a way not one fellow at St. Jim's would have believed it possible for him to do.

Down he fell like a stone, but it could have only been for a few feet, for he felt himself plunge into icy water almost immediately, and the pale moon above the mouth of the well vanished from his sight.

"Phew!" choked the junior, coming to the surface again. "Phew!"

He was almost frozen by his sudden immersion, but his mind was clear enough. One single overarm stroke carried him to the opposite wall, another half-stroke and he was off again at a different angle, then he felt his arm brush against some half-floating object.

"Wally! Is that you, old man?"

It was Wally; but the younger lad did not answer. With a muttered exclamation of relief, Dudley held his chum's head high above the surface of the water.

His eyes were getting more used to the gloom in the well by now, and as the misty moon happened to be directly above them, he could distinguish Wally's features. At first he thought he was dead, so white was his face. Then he saw that a stream of blood was trickling from the side of his head. Dudley put his hand over the other's heart, and with a thrill of joy he could distinguish the rapid beating.

"But I couldn't have been much too soon," he thought. "A few seconds more and I dare say it would have been all over with him. My hat, I am glad, though!"

His relief was so intense that it was some moments before he began to think about their position, and even then it was a melancholy howl which attracted his attention.

"Pongo! Hallo, Pongo! It's all right, boy! Humph! Is it, though?"

Dudley looked up, still supporting Wally's head above the surface, and treading water. He could see Pongo looking down at them, and he could see the rope, dangling not more than six feet above his head. But how to reach that rope? It seemed a simple proposition in a way, and yet Dudley could not puzzle out how it was to be done. By raising himself in the water and stretching out his arm he could reduce the six feet of space to something not much over three; but how to reduce that three?

He swam to the side, feeling with his running-shoes for any projection which might serve as a foothold, but the well side was overgrown with moss, and as slippery as rocks at low tide. Dudley began to get desperate. Presently it dawned upon him that they would never get out of the well without outside help, that he would be able to keep himself and Wally above water until he became numbed with the cold, and then they would sink, and perhaps not be found for months afterwards.

The minutes slipped by slowly and terribly. Wally came round, and when Dudley had given him a brief account of what had happened, desperately cudgelled his brains for some means of escape.

"But there must be some way out, Dad," he said, gritting his teeth. "Look, the rope is only just above us!"

"Yes; and if you can reach it, you're smarter than I, that's all. I've tried all I know."

"Try to hoist me up a bit. No; that's no good. My hat, Dad, this is awful!"

The other nodded, and for some moments there was silence. Dudley broke it.

"Anyway, I'm glad Pongo didn't topple in with you," he said. "Do you know, I thought at first that the little beggar was going to jump down to us—"

"Like you jumped down to me. I reckon that was a silly trick, old man. What was the good of both of us getting into the mess?"

"What ought I have done, then?"

"Stayed up above. What was the good—"

Dudley laughed, and there was silence again. They watched the light clouds—signs of the longed-for thaw. Wally thought—soud past the moon; then the cold affected them to such an extent that their thoughts came slowly, and in confused condition.

How long they remained in that semi-conscious state, mechanically keeping themselves above the water, they never knew; but it seemed to Wally that the end of it all wasn't far off, when a series of echoing, excited barks startled him into wakefulness.

"Pongo! Dudley, old Pongo has come back!"

"What good can he do—"

But Dudley stopped speaking. The little mongrel both fellows were so attached to was jumping about at the well-mouth, in the last stage of excitement, occasionally running away, only to come back again in a moment's time. Then the two juniors in the well heard the pleasantest sound they had ever heard in their lives—Tom Merry's cheery voice.

"But, hang it all, Fatty, something is the matter!"

"A rat in the well, perhaps!"

Instantly Wally yelled one of his deafening yells:

"Merry, quick! We're down the well! Hooray! Cheer up, Dad! Hurray!"

And Dudley caught him by the arm again because he thought he was going to faint.

The rest was easy, with Tom Merry directing affairs from above, for the hero of the Shell did not waste much time.

"Unfasten that rope from the windlass, Figgins; they can't reach it. Rip off your belts and sweaters, and tie 'em together. That's the style. Can you stick it another minute, Wally?"

"Another half-hour now you fellows have come," came back a somewhat exhausted voice. "How did you know we were here?"

"Pongo brought us. We met him a mile or more along the road, and he's bitten Wynn, Figgins, and Digby for trying to capture him and take him back to the coll. We thought he had escaped, and got lost, you know. Yes, tie the belts on to the rope, old man! Is it strong enough?"

"Yes, but will it reach?" asked Figgins. "Can you touch the rope now, Wally?"

"Another inch! My hat, yes! Hooray! Up you go, Dad!"

"Yes; after you," said Dudley quietly. "You've been in the water longer than I have. Don't be an ass!"

And up Wally went. A few moments afterwards Dudley was also hauled up from the well.

Tom Merry and the others listened to Wally's explanation

as they walked hurriedly back towards the college, but they did not say much. They glanced at Dudley in turn once or twice; but the waster of the Third took no notice of them. He was playing with the dog Pongo most of the way back.

"And he actually let himself fall into the well when he knew there was no chance of getting out, Wally?" said Tom Merry, in a low voice. "You mean to tell me Dudley did that?"

"He did, Merry; and he saved my life, if ever one fellow saved another's in this world!"

Tom Merry did not reply. He was puzzling over many things, and one of the many things was that it has to be a very bad fellow indeed who hasn't some good in him. By the time they gained the college grounds the hero of the Shell had turned the idea round a little.

"It has to be a jolly good fellow who hasn't a little bad in him, more likely," he mused. "I should have thought a bit before dropping in the well like that myself."

And Figgins, Blake, and the others were thinking much the same.

CHAPTER 16.

Tom Merry's XV.

"W EALLY," soliloquised Arthur Augustus, about five minutes before Tom Merry and the others gained the college gates with Wally and Dudley—"weally, I must say I considah it wathah wrotten that I should be left in suspense about young Wally! If Kildare has reported him to the Head, I wathah think I ought to have been told."

Arthur Augustus rose to his feet, and began pacing Study No. 6. As a matter of fact, he had not joined Blake and his chums on their run because he was worried about his brother.

"Yaas, wathah! I considah Kildare ought to have told me what he has done—I do, weally, bai Jove!"

An idea had struck Arthur Augustus, a very simple idea, which somehow had not struck him before.

"Yes, bai Jove!" he exclaimed aloud. "If the beastly mountain won't come to Mohammed—Why shouldn't I request Kildare to explain?"

There seemed no logical reason why he should not, and when once Arthur Augustus made up his mind, there was no unmaking it again.

"I'll wun and intahview him at once, bai Jove!"

And run he did. A cheery invitation to come in answered his knock at the captain's door, and Arthur Augustus entered, to find Kildare at work at the table.

"Ah, D'Arcy!" he said pleasantly. "As a matter of fact, I was coming to see you this evening, only I understood you had joined in this run. Yes, of course, I know why you are here."

"About my young bwothah. I considah—"

"Yes," said Kildare musingly. "Well, I am not going to take any further notice of the affair, D'Arcy."

"Bai Jove!"

"The reason I have is this. You know I had your brother into this room the morning after the visit? I sent for Dudley, too. Dudley came; but before that Wally had refused to give me any details whatever of the wretched affair. But with the arrival of Dudley on the scene a change took place. Dudley wished to explain, but your brother wouldn't let him."

"Weally?" exclaimed Arthur Augustus, in blank amazement.

"Yes, really! And Dudley said it was all his fault."

"Bai Jove!"

"And then something that I hoped for, and half expected, happened. It was a second visit from Dudley. Dudley came voluntarily to this room two hours after the first interview, and explained that it was he who took your brother into the public-house."

"I knew that, deah boy."

"Yes, so did I. But I didn't know that the reason for the visit was connected with an attempt to turn over a new leaf. It seems that Dudley had been in the habit of making bets with a certain unknown rascal who frequented that public-house, and that this same rascal used to send him tips. Dudley went into the public-house to leave a message for the man telling him he was done with betting, and that no more tips or letters were to be sent to him, or they would be handed over to me. That was the reason of his visit, D'Arcy."

Arthur Augustus screwed his monocle into his eye, and tried to grasp matters.

"And you are not goin' to report the mattah?"

"No! I'm going to give Dudley the chance he has proved he is willing to try to take."

"Bai Jove, yaas! I considah, for a wastah, that Dudley has behaved wathah decently. In fact—"

But at that moment the study door was flung violently open, Tom Merry and about a dozen other juniors bursting into the room.

Of course, everyone tried to speak at once, all pushing the grinning Wally and the somewhat embarrassed Dudley into the centre of the room, and so it was some time before Kildare understood what had happened at the well. When at last he had induced Tom Merry to explain, without Blake and Figgins chipping in, he turned to Dudley carelessly.

"That's the life!" he said. And he never spoke to the Third-Former again on the matter.

But Arthur Augustus did not quite follow his lead. He rose to the occasion in quite another direction.

"Dudley," he exclaimed, "I should considah it a honouah if you would let me shake youah hand, deah boy! I must admit that I have always considahed you a wotten wastah, but I now look upon you as a wattlin' bwick. I considah —"

"Yes," said Kildare, "only do you mind all taking D'Arcy outside while he considers? Thanks!"

Dudley was, of course, lauded to the skies, the utmost heights being gained when Tom Merry suddenly turned to him.

"Look here, old man, will you play for me to-morrow at half?"

"I'd like to play, if you want me."

"Good! That only leaves the full-back position open. Gussy, you'll have to turn out, after all, I'm afraid."

"Well, under the cires, and seein' that the invite to the party hasn't awwived, I wathah think I will."

"Good again! I'll shove you somewhere in the pack, where you can't do much harm, and put one of the eight back."

"Tom Mewwy," said Arthur Augustus witheringly, "if I play, I play at back. I always considah that is my place, deah boy."

"Oh, very well, then—for the first half, anyway. I'd rather have a team of rabbits than one of Internationals who weren't sportsmen, any day of the week."

"Yaas, wathah!" agreed Arthur Augustus. "You can count on me, deah boy!"

"Right-ho, then! All we want now is a gentle thaw, and I believe it's coming."

And come the thaw did, for when the fellows awoke the following morning the sun was shining quite brilliantly, and the wind had veered round to the west. The excitement was intense, reaching a tremendous height when at last Tom Merry took his men on the field.

The Wanderers were already out, punting about, and looking what they were, a neatly-built "fifteen" of sportsmen. The Wanderers' secretary held the whistle, and he brought the players into their respective places punctually on time.

"Well kicked, sir!"

The ball had been sent well down the ground, within a few yards of touch, and Fatty Wynn and his fellow-forwards were following up in the approved style. However, the Wanderers' left-wing three-quarter got in his kick all right, and he made a great effort to find touch. Right over Tom Merry's head the ball sailed, and he spun round to find that Arthur Augustus had fielded like a Winfield.

"Kick—kick, old man!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

And Arthur Augustus found touch almost at the other end of the ground. A beautiful kick.

"My hat!" muttered Tom Merry, following his forwards up for the line-out.

One of the Wanderers had taken the ball from the throw-in neatly, and was coming up the wing like the wind. His partner was following up not five yards away. But Blake knew the game. He went for the man with the ball, collaring him low, and bringing him down with a thud.

Almost as he fell the Wanderer parted with the ball, and parted well. But there was something wrong from his point of view, for Tom Merry had flashed past, intercepting the pass just at the right moment.

Down the field he went, feinting and dodging smartly. Then, when he had drawn his men, he threw the ball to Figgins. The long legs of the New House junior carried St. Jim's still further into their opponents' territory before he was collared. The resulting scrum was exciting, the spectators shouting themselves hoarse from the touch-line.

"Have it out, Saints, at the left—have it out!"

And with a tremendous shove, Fatty Wynn added the last straw in gaining just those few inches of ground which enabled Lefevre to heel into Monteith's hands.

The opposing half was round the scrum in a flash. But Monteith was too quick for him. Straight for Dudley he threw the ball, and, with a beautiful waist-high pass, the Third-Former set Jack Blake going.

Running "straight," Blake made a beeline for the goal-

posts, dashing full into a three-quarter's arms before he passed the ball to Tom Merry, and the next thing the spectators saw was the hero of the Shell lying on the ground over the line, and the score was 3 points to nil.

Kildare took the kick, but it was a difficult one with a greasy ball, and it just failed to add the major points. But that did not matter in the least. St. Jim's had drawn first blood. That was the main thing.

After the punt out the next thing of note to happen was a clean breakaway on the part of the Wanderers left wing. Clean through the three-quarters they dashed, passing beautifully, and, with only Arthur Augustus to beat, it seemed a thousand to one the scores would be equal. But, as Blake had said, there was no telling with the swell of the School House.

Straight for his man he went, veered off at the exact moment his opponent passed, and coolly rolled himself and the recipient of the pass into touch.

"Sowwy, deah boy," he said. "But undah the cires, there was nothin' else to do."

"Ripping, Gus!" panted Tom Merry. "My hat, if you had let me stand you out of this, I'd have jumped on your neck!"

"Weally, deah boy——"

"Look out!"

But Arthur Augustus was looking out all right. He defended his lines during the next few minutes—perhaps the warmest few minutes of the game from his point of view—like a Trojan.

The game wore on—a splendid, clean, British Rugger game. Just after half-time the Wanderers got over, and so levelled the scoring—their kick also having failed. The pace became even faster.

But the defence was always too good for the attack with the greasy ball, some of the tackling being really of a high-class order. Dudley, the waster of the Third, perhaps, sparing himself less than any of them. But try as Tom Merry's fifteen would, they could not add to their total, and as time went on it looked as if the first Rugby game at St. Jim's would prove a draw.

"Buck up, deah boys!" kept repeating Arthur Augustus. "On the ball! Well cleahed, sir!"

And he himself was kicking and tackling in brilliant style. But tackling would not win the game for St. Jim's, and Arthur Augustus knew that.

"I wathah think a dwop at goal would be bettah," he mused. "Nothing like a dwop at goal if it's stwaight."

And the next time the ball came his way he did not kick, but rounded his man, and made for his opponents' territory like a three-quarter.

"Kick—kick, sir!"

"Pass!" yelled Tom Merry. "Here you are!"

"I wathah think I'm going to dwop," murmured Arthur Augustus. And suddenly wheeling round, he dropped the ball, and kicked.

Straight from the ground and his toe rose the ball, at an angle which reduced the chance of a "charge down" to a minimum. Then there was a moment of breathless suspense. Would the ball sail between the posts? At first Tom Merry thought it would not. Then a terrific cheer went up, and the score was one try and a drop goal to one try, and the game won and lost.

There is not much more to add except that, perhaps, the excitement which followed that game was more intense than anything of its kind experienced at St. Jim's before. But that was only to be expected.

"Splendid!" gasped Tom Merry, as he led his men from the field of play. "Jolly fine!"

"Yaas, wathah! What I call a wippin' game!"

"I should just think it was ripping!" chipped in Blake, as they all hurried for the bath-rooms. "Ripping is only a weak word for it!"

"Yes," agreed Fatty Wynn. "And you wouldn't believe how hungry it has made me. There is nothing like Rugby to give one an appetite. But that is all right, because Tom Merry very wisely gave me a free hand in arranging a feed for to-night, and I rather think you fellows will be a bit surprised when you see the spread."

And surprised they were; though it was a pleasant surprise, and one of the most enjoyable spreads ever given in the Shell study passed off without a hitch. This happy state of affairs, Wally D'Arcy accounted for by the fact that, though uninvited, he kindly consented to attend, and politely insisted on taking the chair. And the first Rugby match at St. Jim's was "replayed" over and over again.

THE END.

(Another splendid, long, complete tale of the boys of St. Jim's next Thursday, entitled "The Son of a Sailor." Please order your GEM in advance. Price One Penny.)

Please tell your Friends about this Story.—Ed.

BRITAIN INVADED!



A Powerful and Stirring War Story.

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 tells 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.

The British army, entire, retreats on Harlow in order to fight a decisive battle—as the German forces have commenced their march on London.

The opposing artillery open fire at night; and Sam and Steve set out together to capture a German gun—holding a position on the border of Epping Forest.

Putting fire to the dry bracken and gorse, the two boy scouts drive the German gunners temporarily away. Limbering up, the deserted gun they drive off at a mad pace. Away they go—right through a Prussian infantry regiment, the officers of which take it for one of their guns.

(Now go on with the Story.)

Lost—A German Gun.

"I never thought we'd get through 'em!" cried Stephen exultingly. "I s'pose it'd never enter their heads that any Britishers could be up here—with a German gun, too. Where for now, Sam?"

"We've got to lie up till we know where we're goin'," replied Sam. "We'll be safe in the old Hazel Bottom for a spell."

He turned down a dark, deserted road where there was no sign of any soldiery, and taking the gun along at a walk, he presently wheeled along a mossy ride, and pulled up in a small dell fringed round with thick trees.

"We'll be out of the line of 'em here," he said, descending from the limber and tending the horses. "You see, once clear of the forest, we shall be in the thick of the Germans, an' it won't do to go blunderin' ahead right into 'em. We've shaken off the others, an' it ain't likely any of 'em guessed we were anything but the gun's proper crew. If they did, I'd back 'em not to find us now."

"Lost, in Epping Forest, one twenty-pounder gun," said Stephen, grinning. "'marked with the Kaiser's crest, an' answerin' to the name of Billy. Anyone bringin' same back to Commander Von Krantz will be rewarded.' He'd better shove that in 'The Daily Mail' to-morrow."

"He may get her back without that," said Sam, wiping down the horses' legs. "We've got through the forest in the dark all right; but that's child's play to haulin' her across the open to the British lines. Won't do to back ourselves too soon. Any oatmeal in those boxes on the gun? The horses could do with a whack mixed with water."

"Course not," said Stephen; "they don't keep it. By gum, here's plenty of shells, though!" he added. "All packed an' wadded an' all."

"No good to us," growled Sam; "only dead weight. We can't use 'em. Better chuck 'em out."

"They look comfortable where they are," returned Stephen, shutting the box. "I don't see any reason to monkey with 'em."

NEXT
THURSDAY:

"THE SON OF A SAILOR."

By
MARTIN CLIFFORD.

"Stay here, then, while I go an' reconnoitre," said Sam. And he disappeared down the entrance to the dell.

Stephen sat on the limber of the gun, and made himself come with the horses. It was lonely enough in the dell, but he decidedly preferred his own company to that of any Germans. It seemed to him that Sam was away an interminable time, and he was beginning to wonder anxiously anything had happened to him, when his brother returned silently as he had gone.

"It's a pretty tough job, but there's one direction we shall have a chance of gettin' through," he said. "Up with 'em!"

"What a dickens of a time you've been!" said Stephen. "I had to find a route. You can't trundle a captured twenty-pounder an' four horses about, as if you were takin' a drive in a pony an' trap," said Sam, picking up the reins. "Well, it's pretty near daylight, I reckon."

"It can't be!" said Sam, startled. "That's what I make it," grunted Stephen, as he mounted the rear leader. "We've done a lot since we left, an' you've gone two hours an' more."

"We've got to push on sharp, then," muttered Sam, loading the gun out of the dell; "it'll be up against us if we don't clear the lines before full daylight."

He soon found that Stephen's warning was only too correct, for as soon as the road was reached it was plain that the stars overhead were growing pale, and the east was already grey. It was lighter outside the forest than in it, naturally; and Sam, after a cunning use of the byways and rides which he knew would lead him clear without passing near any German pickets, at last drew clear of the wood, and found the cold twilight of dawn was showing up the countryside.

He had covered a good distance under shelter of the forest, and the British lines were now well away on his right front. Those of the German troops that he could see were mostly behind him, save for one or two outlying battalions, and some companies of German sappers, that lay almost directly in his path. These he meant to make a detour round, hoping reports or messengers would be sent to question the drivers of the solitary gun.

"Now for it!" he said. "We've got to do the job at a good hand-gallop, Steve; it's no use goin' slow. If no pickets or ambushed troops are in the way, we may do it."

"Right, provided some interferin', goggle-eyed German staff-officer don't spot us with his glasses, an' send a squad of Chlans in pursuit," said Stephen drily, starting the horses at a canter. "That seems to me the likeliest game."

The canter grew to a gallop, and away went the gun along a straight, narrow lane between high hedges. Though it was somewhat out of his way, Sam kept in it as long as he could, and, as there was barely room for the gun to travel in it, it was a case of forward or nothing. The boys' spirits rose high as they reached the end of it without mishap.

With the first streak of dawn a heavy fire had opened from the German front, and their batteries, all along the two-mile length, poured a rapid shell-fire across at Lord Gethin's position. The British guns answered smartly, though they were outclassed in both weight and numbers, and soon a powerful fire of musketry and machine-guns added itself to the din. As the brothers swept out of the lane with their captured gun, the boom and crash of the firing became terrific.

"The busier they are the better for us!" shouted Sam, driving his horses along up a rise of ground. "Sit forward, Steve, an' ease that beast of yours. We shall want every inch of stayin'-power they've got in 'em."

They reached the crest of the hill, and there they met an outlook that fairly made Sam pause and hesitate. The hills were screaming overhead, there was a corps of Prussian Engineers away on the left, and a battalion of infantry, with two machine-guns, a quarter of a mile on the right, and directly ahead of them, not four hundred yards away, was a company of Saxon riflemen, taking cover and firing at the British regiments.

Right away beyond these, far ahead, and answering the German fire, were the boys' old friends, the Fusiliers, whom they recognised even at that distance by the uniforms of the officers standing up behind the men who lay in the firing-line. At that short range they were exposed to a very heavy fire from the German guns and riflemen.

"By gum, the Fusiliers are gettin' it hot!" cried Stephen. "Which way, Sam? Those Saxons in front are right in our route."

"There's only one way—slap through 'em!" shouted Sam.

"Sit tight, an' ride like blazes! They'll get us, but it's better than bein' captured an' shot!"

A thrill ran through every nerve in Stephen's body as he realised the desperate venture his brother was about to dare. He saw no possible chance of getting through alive if they ran into the very thick of the Saxons. But he saw, too, that they had no choice.

To right and to left the armed sappers and the Prussian infantry barred their way in still greater numbers. A little troop of Dragoons were cantering out on their flank. Sam's only course was to follow his nose and drive the guns till horses and drivers were shot, and he did not hesitate for a moment.

Once over the crest of the hill the gun thundered down the slope in great bounds, and the horses galloped with their bellies to the ground. There was little driving needed now, and Sam held the reins in his left hand and drew his revolver with his right. He determined grimly that it should cost the enemy a life or two before he lost his own.

Guiding the team, as well as he could, to pass just on the rear of the Saxon riflemen, Sam crouched low on the limber, and his brother bent forward in the saddle. A long shout arose from the distant sappers, and Sam guessed they saw what was wrong. The gun swooped down towards the Saxons, who suddenly raised a hoarse, guttural cheer.

"Great guns!" thought Sam. "The fools think we're a German gun, comin' to support them!"

It was less foolish than Sam supposed, for the driver and rider were hardly visible in the dust; nor did any German dream that a gun coming up from their own side could be in British hands. But as the piece dashed up they saw khaki jackets, and a cry of warning arose. The front rank sprang up from their places at the word of command, and the rifles were levelled.

At the same moment Sam swung his team sharply across, and instead of passing clear of the company, as his former course would have taken him, he dashed straight at them.

Stephen felt himself nearly hurled from his horse's back as it struck the first man of the rank, and like an avalanche the gun and team crashed into the company. So sudden was the swerve that the gun was into them before a rifle could be fired with any effect; and amid a spatter of blind shots, and an uproar of oaths and shrieks from the Saxons, the twenty-pounder hurled itself through them like a locomotive charging through a flock of sheep. One wild, thundering rush and it had crashed through their sheltered ranks, stopped over the rise of a grassy knoll just beyond, and was gone.

"Crouch low!" shouted Sam. "We shall get a volley in a moment!"

"By gum, we've done 'em!" yelled Stephen. "Ah!" he shouted, as four horsemen came shooting out across their path. "Look out! The cavalry!"

The swiftest of the troop of Dragoons, seeing what was wrong, had spurred ahead, and were bearing down on the boys as fast as they could force their horses. One cut across too close in front, and was hurled down and driven over by the gun; another overtaxed his horse and fell back; but the third—a huge man on a magnificent dappled grey—galloped alongside and drew abreast the limber. On him depended the saving or loss of the guns.

Sam heard the drumming of the hoofs and the horse's laboured breath. He saw the big Prussian shoot up abreast him, and the man whipped his long sabre well back over his left shoulder for the blow.

Sam's revolver cracked in the nick of time, and the Dragoon pitched headlong out of his saddle. At the same moment came disaster, for a stray bullet drilled the off-lead gun-horse through the body, and down he went, head-over-heels, like a shot rabbit.

"The leader's down!" yelled Stephen, digging his knees in and hanging on with all his might.

There was no need of the warning, for Sam was all but jerked off the limber. The dead horse rolled ahead and sideways, and in a moment was right abreast the off-wheel. Then came a fearful lurch, and a tug that seemed to wrench the gun apart.

"Now we're done!" was the thought that shot through Sam's brain as he saw the horse go down.

But nothing gave way except the coupling, and with one mighty jerk the gun and its team broke away from the dead off-leader, yanking it into the air for a moment, and then dashed off, with only three horses, at a speed that seemed more breakneck than ever.

"Are they after us still?" shouted Sam, jamming his boots still more firmly against the bar.

He dared not any longer take his eyes from the team even for one glance back.

"Five of the Dragoons are!" called Stephen, catching a glimpse of them over his shoulder as he rode. "I don't think they can catch us, though; they ride too heavy."

"It's the bullets we have to fear," said Sam grimly.

ANSWERS

NEXT
THURSDAY:

"THE SON OF A SAILOR."

By
MARTIN CLIFFORD.

"We'll be in full view of the Saxons before we clear the slope."

Another little hill lay in front, and as the gun charged up this, just before it reached the top, it was in full view of the Saxon company through which the boys had passed.

Only for a few brief seconds were they exposed to the rifle-fire, but the rattle of musketry behind, and the storm of bullets around and overhead, was terrific. Sam's jacket collar was ripped clean off on one side by a bullet that did not even touch his flesh; another shot raked his forearm, making it bleed freely, and paralysing the limb for the time, so that he had to change his driving-hand. The bullets that tore up the ground and smacked on the iron of the gun were countless, but the big piece of artillery itself was something of a shield for the boys, who crouched as low as they could. Sam's chief fear was that another horse would go down, and if it did he knew no power could save them and the gun.

Some wisacre or another, in times of peace, has calculated that nearly a ton of lead is fired in war for every man that is killed. However that may be, the two brothers came through the ten seconds of exposure to the Saxons' fire nearly unscathed. One moment they were in the midst of the whistling hail of lead, and the next they were over the crest of the hill and thundering down the slope on the other side, screened from the baffled Saxons by the rise of ground.

"Great Caesar! They've bolted!" gasped Stephen, the wind screaming past his ears as his horse flew onwards.

"The gun's running on 'em; they can't hold her!" cried Sam, giving the team a loose rein.

The three horses had no power to hold the gun back, and as it thundered down the long, steep slope they could only just keep ahead of it by galloping as they had never galloped before.

One slip, one stumble, meant broken necks for the team and both riders.

"As well one death as another!" muttered Sam grimly. "I'd sooner my gun killed me than be shot against a wall by Germans. Gun, but this is glorious!"

The wild speed and the mad excitement of that rush down the hillside roused the blood of both the brothers to fever-heat.

The pace of it left the pursuing Dragoons behind; but once more the bullets began to fly, as distant troops saw the gun in its mad career, for it was plain that the whole German force on that side knew now that a gun had been captured from their very midst, and was escaping towards the British lines.

Half a dozen staff-officers in various parts were swearing violently and shouting orders, as they watched the far-off piece of artillery through their glasses, and a couple of field-guns began rapidly pumping light shells after the fugitives, bursting high and wide before and behind.

"Bang away, you beauties!" shouted Sam. "You'll deserve the Kaiser's medal if you hit us, goin' at this pace. Glory! There's the Fusiliers not six hundred yards ahead! If only these horses can keep it up—"

"Look out!" cried Stephen, as a mounted corps on their left came tearing after them. "Uhlans!"

There was no mistaking the light horsemen, with their

swift mounts and long lances. They were gaining slowly but surely, and the gun-horses were failing at every stride.

"Will they cut us off, after all?" muttered Sam, tightening his reins and calling on his horses for a last effort. "If something don't save us, they'll be up before we get there. Well, we've come off best with Uhlans before, an' now we want some help. By gum, we've got it, too!"

Out of the corner of his eye he saw two of the German Lancers go down headlong, and their horses galloped riderless away, with stirrup-irons clashing and flying.

"The Fusiliers are dustin' 'em!" shouted Stephen. "I'll bet old Devine's spotted us through his glasses!"

A sharp, rattling fire broke from the trenches away ahead, where the Fusiliers and two other British regiments lay.

They had evidently seen the runaway gun was in the hands of their own side, and the oncoming Uhlans were met with a brisk fire.

Spurred by the need of recapturing the gun, the German Lancers came on much closer to the British lines than they would otherwise have dared.

They were not yet in a line with the gun, so that the British fire was directed at them without risk of hitting the boys.

It became a breathlessly close race, for if the Uhlans overtook the tired gun-horses in time, their Lancers would make short work of the boys.

On they came, now barely fifty yards from their quarry, and Sam set his teeth, for the rifle-fire could hardly stop all the troop in time.

The end seemed to be at hand, when suddenly a British quick-firer, a long way off to the right, opened upon the Uhlans with a vicious stammer.

Rat-tat-tat-tat—boom!

The deadly little one-pounder shells burst full among the pursuing Lancers. It was an easy, end-on shot for the machine-gun, and the Germans were devastated by the sudden hail of shells.

A dozen men and horses were mown down in less than thirty seconds, and the eight or ten remaining scattered wide, as they ought to have done at first.

They made one last effort to reach the gun, but the pace took them within a withering fire, and the last remaining four wheeled and galloped off with all their might.

A rousing British cheer rang all along the line of the trenches as the captured gun thundered up to them, the two black-clad youngsters, hatless and panting, steering it in.

Sam saluted the officer of the first company, dashed round the end trench, and wheeled his exhausted team round to a standstill, with the gun swung muzzle-on towards the enemy.

Stephen slid from the back of the near leader, and Sam dropped off the limber, feeling dazed and giddy.

It was not for some moments that he realised the whole line was suffering a heavy cross-fire from the German position, and Devine, the adjutant, unusually excited, dashed up to him.

"Well done, young Greyfriars! By the holy poker, that beats anything I've seen in the whole campaign!" he cried. "Where the dickens did you steal that pistol-on-wheels from? Here, nip into the trenches, or you'll be shot down!"

"Hi! Gunners forward, here!" shouted Colonel Gray. "Where are those three gunners? Let them see if they can do anything with that piece!"

Three men in the uniform of the R.F.A., who had been thrown out from a dismounted battery, came running out of the trenches.

"Is she disabled? Any shells with her?" they cried to the boys.

"Plenty in the side-boxes, all neatly packed," said Stephen dizzily. "I saw 'em."

"Bring those boys to me!" called Colonel Gray.

And the two brothers quickly found themselves in the shelter of the trenches, before the Fusiliers' colonel, who questioned them rapidly.

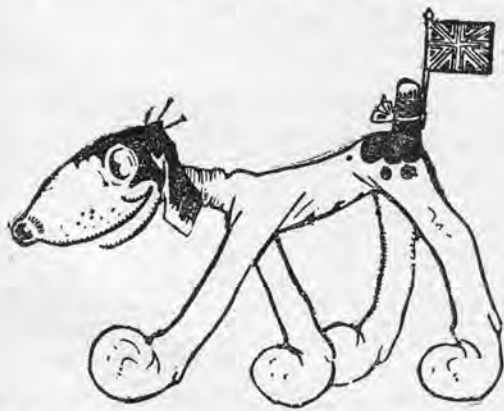
Leaving out the details of the chase, Sam told him how they had saved the gun from the forest fire and brought it away.

"Splendidly done! A first-class piece of work!" exclaimed Colonel Gray. "If the gunners can use her it may save us yet!" he added, under his breath. "You boys never fail to bring us luck. Go with Devine, and get what rest you can under the trenches. You're nearly dropping, my lads," he continued aloud. "Don't fear I'll forget the service you've done us!"

Sam and Stephen took their places at the end of the firing-line, and Devine, who was watching his men's shooting, saw how exhausted the boys were, and gave them some of his emergency rations, and made them swallow a little brandy, which set them up again.

"I wonder they don't put a price on the heads of your youngsters," said the adjutant, "for the worry you give 'em."

"I am Homeless Hector."



See this week's CHIPS.

A gun brought right through their own lines, by Jove! You'll be sneaking a troop of Uhlands next!"

"What a dickens of a fire they're pourin' into us!" said Stephen, listening to the continuous scream of the bullets and the drumming of the lead round the trenches. "How's the big fight goin', Devine? How are we gettin' it?"

"Hades—absolute blue Hades!" said Devine grimly. "I fancy it's worse along the other end, where Gethin is; but it's pretty bad here, and this is the fag-end of it. The Germans have combined their forces, an' their numbers are simply swamin' us."

"Is it as bad as that?" said Stephen uneasily.

"Bad enough. We're just the out-liers here, an' those Prussian regiments an' batteries in front had got us fairly smoked; but it's just possible that gun of yours may save our little lot. Never saw the old man look so relieved as he did when you brought it up. Look, they're making an emplacement for it!"

Through the deadly cross-fire that the Germans were pouring in, a detachment of the Fusiliers were slaying with skilful haste to protect the captured gun.

Bags of earth were piled in front, and a proper emplacement made, and though the men were dropping like flies under the withering fire, they worked as swiftly and coolly as if they were at the Agricultural Hall. It is at such times as these that the British soldier shows the stuff he is made of.

Then, as the three Artillerymen took charge, the gun was swiftly loaded and laid. A thrill of pride passed through Sam and Stephen as they saw their captured weapon make its first shot at the enemy.

It was a fine piece of artillery, a very mammoth to the

Both of them had now played too long at the deadly game of war to believe that it was impossible for the British colours to be lowered by foreigners. They knew well enough that their little force on the right flank had no chance of beating off such a horde. They saw that they were swamped by odds and, unless help came, they could do no more than die hard at their posts.

"They've got us, but they'll pay dearly for it before we're wiped out!" said Stephen, between his teeth. "Give me a rifle—I'll account for one or two before they reach us!"

There was no lack of weapons, for only too many were scattered around, without living hands to hold them. Stephen quickly took a Lee-Enfield and a bag of cartridges from a fallen Fusilier, and settled himself at the edge of the trench. As quickly as he could load and fire, he dropped man after man of the oncoming Germans at long range, his teeth set hard, and his eye glinting along the black barrel, but his hand and nerve were as steady as if practising at the Greyfriars' butts.

Sam looked to his revolver, and watched grimly. Musketry was not in his line. He saw the fronts of the advancing legions crumple and thin out as they met the British fire, but they filled and came on as steadily and swiftly. It was like a huge, iron-disciplined machine moving, and they were too numerous to be driven back by the rifles of the small British force.

How the main battle was going round the shoulder of the hill he could not guess. The din made by the Fusiliers' rifles as the men poured in their heaviest fire, shut out all more distant sounds, except the booming of the heavy guns on the heights.

"If Gethin's drivin' the Germans back—which ain't very

STARTING SHORTLY,

"BRITAIN AT BAY!"

ANOTHER WAR STORY.

little company-guns that were all the Fusiliers had, and its first shell whirled across the valley with deadly accuracy, and burst full amongst the trenches from which the German rifle-fire came.

The gun was loaded, and fired again and again, and with its glasses the Artillery subaltern in charge of the gun saw the havoc he was making.

"By Jove, those two kids ought to be made dukes for bringin' us this!" he said. "We're knockin' spots off 'em! Their fire's slackenin'!"

"Your looted pop-gun is makin' the enemy very sick," said Devine to the boys. "The cross-fire's stopped. We're gettin' it from the left now, an' we're punishin' that

I believe we can hold 'em off, for they don't know we're here. If they knew—"

"What then?" said Stephen.

"Why, they'd come down in full force, an' simply wipe us out! If every man of us could fire six rifles at once, we'd have no chance against 'em. It'd mean fightin' till the last man dropped, an' they'd turn Gethin's flank. He can't help. But they're not likely to—"

"What are all those battalions movin' out towards us, then?" said Stephen, pointing straight ahead to a moving mass that suddenly appeared on the hillside. "They're comin' out of the trenches. An' there's a squadron of cavalry beyond 'em."

Devine put the glasses to his eyes, and whistled. A grim smile hardened round his mouth.

"They're goin' to do it, after all!" he muttered. "Well, we'll show 'em how a British regiment can die. It's all left to us!"

The Hour of Shame.

As they watched those grim, swiftly-moving battalions sweeping down upon them, Sam and Stephen realised, with sinking hearts, that the adjutant's words were only too true.

likely—he may be able to send us help," said Sam. "He must see what a hole we're in!"

"He's most probably got his own hands full!" said Devine grimly. "Those beggars will be into us in a minute, an' then there'll be Hades. We're punishin' 'em on the way—that's one thing! By Jove, how your young brother shoots! He's got that tall chap that's runnin' with the Prussian corps—their major, most likely."

Behind them the captured gun was being served with wonderful rapidity by the two remaining artillerymen, for one of them had been shot. During the first part of the enemy's advance, it sent shell after shell into them with deadly effect, one shot cutting down a full half-company of Saxons, and laying them low, while two others made terrible havoc among the Grenadiers.

The loss the Germans were sustaining was tremendous, but such loss is always expected in a frontal attack. They had men enough to annihilate the British before them, and they meant to do it. They spread out into more open order as the gun punished them, after which the shells had less effect, and they came on remorselessly. In another minute the mass of men would have rolled down upon the Fusiliers' position, when Devine uttered a cry of delight.

"The galloping Maxims!" he exclaimed. "By Jove, they're just in time!"

Round the shoulder of the hill, flying along over the broken ground as lightly as bicycles, came eight objects that, at first glance, looked like small butchers' carts. They were the galloping machine-guns—light Maxims, with a single horse and rider apiece, and a cheer broke from the men as they came into view.

The distant German guns turned a rapid fire on to them, and one was bowled over and done for in full career, but the pace was so hot that the rest dashed up in the twinkling of an eye, swung round, and the horses were scarcely unhitched before the little guns opened their fierce, stammering fire upon the charging Germans. The front of three Prussian corps crumpled like paper under the hail of lead,

"By glory, it's the other way round now!" cried Sam.
 "Not it! Too late to stop 'em!" said Devine. "But it gives us our chance. They'll be so thinned that the odds'll be less when they reach us—an' look! The Saxons are wiped up!"

"They can't go back now, any of 'em!" cried Stephen, cramming fresh cartridges into the magazine of his rifle. "They've got to keep on. Hurrah for the little spitfires behind us! Come on, you swabs—we're ready for you!"

The difference the Maxims made was enormous. Four of them concentrated their fire on the two flanking regiments, and so terrible was the punishment that both were nearly shot into rags as they crossed the open ground in front of the trenches, while a corps of Saxons fairly broke and scattered in all directions.

Had the German commander expected the arrival of the Maxim battery, he would never have ordered the charge. Now he had no choice. He must go forward and storm the position or be annihilated. But, even yet, great as their losses had been, the Germans outnumbered the British when the hand-to-hand struggle came.

"Fix bayonets!"

The order rang all down the line. There was one last devastating hail of bullets from the Maxims, and then the fire ceased. With guttural cries and loud shouts of "Hoch!" the Prussians hurled themselves upon the trenches.

The two forces came together in a blind, stabbing, thrusting melee. Bayonets and butt and sword were clashing together, and the thick coughs of those who went down with the steel through their vitals mingled with the harsh cries of the Germans. The Fusiliers met them in grim silence.

At the end where the boys were the tumult was terrific. Devine's revolver cracked rapidly, and the men smote and slow as the heavy Prussians rushed at them. A Fusilier sergeant went down just in front of Stephen, his head nearly severed from his body by the sword of a huge Prussian officer, who then aimed a deadly downward blow at the boy.

Stephen, who had no bayonet, swiftly raised his rifle with both hands to guard his head, and so powerful was the big Prussian's stroke that the sword shore through wood and barrel between the boy's hands, and Stephen staggered and fell as the blade came home upon his shoulder.

Stephen felt the sting of the sharp steel in his flesh, a loud explosion close to his ear deafened him as he fell, and the big Prussian sprawled helplessly on top of the boy with a bullet through his forehead. Dazed and giddy, Stephen lay for some seconds crushed under the weight of the heavy body, while the fight raged and stormed around him.

Making a frantic effort, he freed himself from the dead bulk pressing him down, and tried to raise himself to his knees. He saw the wave of dark-coated Prussians breaking and rolling back from the trenches, like an ocean roller that has dashed itself against a beach. He heard the hoarse, wild British cheer, and as the scattered ranks of the foe fell back and fled across the open ground he realised that the Fusiliers had held their own. The charge was broken, and the Prussians defeated.

From among the heaps of dead that lay about the breastwork the enemy turned and fled for their lives, and a bare fourth of those who had rushed to the attack now saved themselves.

Shaken by the Maxim fire before they reached the trenches, the reception they had met with on the Fusiliers' bayonets had turned the scale. The British line received them like a wall of steel, and desperate men always fight hard. Barely a minute did the deadly struggle last before the tide turned, and the Prussians, broken and defeated, left a full three-quarters of their force dead or dying on the field as they fled.

Stephen tried to cheer, but his voice failed him, and he sank back against

the wall of the trench. The next thing he saw was his brother's anxious face bending over him.

"Steve! Where are you hurt, old boy? Good heavens, he's done for! Here, Devine, quick!"

A little silver flask was put to the cadet's lips, and, as the spirit revived him, he scrambled painfully to his feet and leaned against the trench wall, despite his brother's orders to keep still.

"I'm all right—nothing to make a fuss about!" he panted.

And as he glanced down at himself he did not wonder at Sam's alarm, for his khaki jacket looked as if it had been dragged through a shambles, and the cloth was sliced through at the shoulder.

"It ain't my blood, Sam. The big Prussian there fell on top of me," he said. "He was such a weight, he crushed the wind out of me. That's why I couldn't sit up. Somebody shot him just after he cut at me!"

"I got him with my revolver," said Devine. "But you're wounded, youngster. Look here!"

"Only a bit of a cut, not a finger's depth," said Stephen, opening his jacket. "The force of the blow was spent on my rifle, an' the sword only fell on me. Gum, I'd like to have the fellow's strength! He shored right through the barrel an' fore-end as if he were cuttin' a turnip. You saved my life, Devine; he'd have got me next whack. How the beggars run!"

"There go the Maxims!" exclaimed Sam.

And Stephen forgot the mauling he had had in the exhilaration of seeing the enemy in full flight.

Two more battalions had been sent down by the Germans to support the charge; but, seeing the utter rout of their comrades, they were forced to fall back also, and now the whole German force on that side was dashing back for cover as fast as it could, while the Maxims and the captured gun hammered them with tremendous effect. The losses of the Fusiliers had been heavy, but they were nothing to those of the flying foe, and the battle-ground was heaped with dead.

"By James, we're turning their whole flank!" cried Devine, watching, with his glasses to his eyes, the columns on the hill beyond. "They staked everything on that charge, an' now they're weakened that gun of yours is footin' 'em right out of it!"

Cheer upon cheer rose from the battle-stained little force in the trenches as the enemy were seen hurriedly leaving their position and drawing in towards the main force, while the Maxims raked the nearer lines, and the captured gun, with its last remaining shells, hurled its fire into the retreating companies beyond. Devine was right. The flank had been turned, and the outlying German battalions on that side were fairly beaten off and driven back.

"Then we've won the day!" cried Stephen, wild with excitement. "We've licked 'em! The victory's to us!"

"To us, yes, on this side," said Devine, smiling; "but we're only a little hole-an'-corner in the big fight. We've done our little best, an', thanks to the Maxims, we've come out on top. But—"

"Look there!" exclaimed Stephen, catching his arm and pointing to the left.

Over the shoulder of the hill, a quarter of a mile away, came troop after troop of scattered regiments, and the boys were met by a sight that made them catch their breath and gulp.

Three British batteries—or, rather, what was left of them—a broken and half-horsed gun apiece—were struggling wearily towards the rear. The others beyond, still fighting to the last while a single gun could be used, were answering the German fire. But over that fatal hill Lord Gethin's force was retreating, fighting stubbornly as it went.

(Another long instalment next Thursday. Order your copy of "THE GEM" LIBRARY in advance. Price 1d.)

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WHOM TO WRITE TO: The Editor, "THE GEM" LIBRARY, 23-9, Bouverie Street, Fleet Street, London, who will be pleased to hear from you.

"The Son of a Sailor."

A new chum arrives at St. Jim's, and his stay, although not a very prolonged one, is decidedly lively while it lasts.

The new arrival has his own ideas about things, and those ideas do not altogether tally with the accepted conditions at the old college. Hence, there's trouble.

The EDITOR.

P.S.—I shall be able to announce the result of our £50 Competition very shortly.

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