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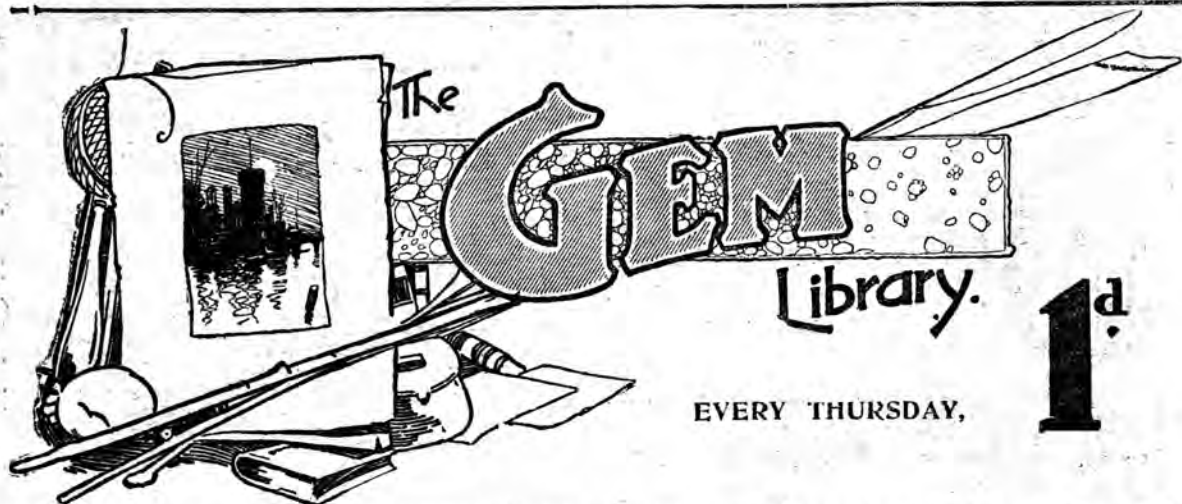
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CHAPTER 1. The Dog Patrol.

"ANY idea what the wheeze is, Dig?" asked Jack Blake.

Digby shook his head.

"All I know, kid, is that a message came into class from Tom Merry inviting the four of us into his study directly school was over. It may be in connection with a feed, because I know he had a hamper this morning—"

"My hat!" muttered Jack Blake, and he lengthened his stride down the corridor.

There had been a slight three-cornered argument in class that afternoon between Blake, Digby and Herr Schneider, the German master of St. Jim's, and just when things were showing signs of becoming interesting, Herr Schneider made unfair use of his powers as a pedagogue, and had settled the discussion once and for all. He had said loudly:

"Plake and Tigby will stay in mit tairselves after class, and so I haff you know!"

TOM MERRY, SCOUT-MASTER.

A Splendid, Long, Complete School
Tale of the Boys of St. Jim's.

— BY —

MARTIN CLIFFORD.

And stay in Blake and Digby had to. In consequence of this they were already half an hour late for Tom Merry's invitation, which had been marked urgent, and in consideration of Digby's last remark about a hamper, Jack Blake looked worried.

"If it is a feed, we—we shall be beastly late, Dig."

"If it is a feed, we shall be too late, you mean," answered Digby. "It's quite likely Merry will have asked Fatty Wynn in return for the spread they gave you when you came back from America, and if Fatty Wynn is a guest—"

"There won't be any grub—exactly!" agreed Blake. "Schneider ought to be boiled in oil. Hallo!"

The pair had reached the end of the corridor by now, in fact were on their way along the passage into which the Shell studios opened. But what caused Blake's exclamation was a weird chant which was ascending in a muffled way from somewhere.

"My hat! It isn't a feed, then?"

"Not much—if that row is coming from Tom Merry's study Listen!"

The weird chant broke out again:

"Een gonyama—gonyama!
Invooboo!
Yah bo! Yah bo!
Invooboo!"

A DOUBLE-LENGTH TALE OF TOM MERRY NEXT THURSDAY.

No. 62 (New Series.)

"He is a lion," translated Jack Blake, flinging open the study door. "Yes! He is better than that; he is a hippopotamus!"

"Not to say a silly ass," chuckled Digby. "Cheer ho, scouts!"

"Leave this woom, deah boy," exclaimed Arthur Augustus D'Arcy breathlessly. "Leave the woom, please. Een gonyama—"

"Dry up, Gus—"

"I refuse to dry up, Tom Mewwy, and I must wequest—"

"Corporal D'Arcy!" exclaimed Tom Merry, scout leader of the Dog Patrol of the School House. "You are disobeying orders, and the scout punishment for disobeying orders is a mug of cold water up the sleeve. Scout No. Four, a mug of cold water, please."

"Hewwies, if you dare to bwing a beastly mug of cold watah, I shall administrah a feahful thwashing. Wescue, Jack Blake, deah boy—wescue!"

"Steady with the one and only, Merry," grinned Jack Blake. "We mightn't get another if anything happened to it."

"Well, why doesn't the ass obey orders, then?"

"Tom Mewwy, I must refuse to take ordahs from you; I should considah it below my dig. to do so, deah boy, with all due respect to yourself—"

"Then you are kicked out of the Dog Patrol," said Tom Merry. "Wander off!"

"I refuse to wandah off, and I refuse to be kicked out of the Dog Patrol. Wescue! Wescue, Blake!"

"Oh, do dry up, over there!" exclaimed Manners from the other side of the room. "We can't hear ourselves talk. And don't shuffle your feet so, Herries!"

"My only hat!" gasped Jack Blake.

"M-mad!" muttered Digby. "They must be m-mad!"

"Off their giddy rockers—"

"We are not off our wockahs, deah boys. Invooboo," he added, in answer to Tom Merry's "Een gonyama—gonyama."

"Yah bo! Yah bo! Invooboo!"

Jack Blake and Digby glanced round the room in amazement. By the window, Manners and the humourist of the Shell, Lowther, were seated on the floor cock-fighting in the approved Japanese style. Near the fireplace Herries was rapidly making and unmaking buttons from bootlaces, according to the directions set down by Lieut.-Gen. Baden-Powell, C.B., while in the corner close to the door a truly weird performance was being indulged in by Arthur Augustus.

The swell of St. Jim's had removed his coat, and stood now in shirt sleeves, the cuffs of which were turned back over his wrists; and he had in his right hand a paper knife, held as desperadoes hold daggers on the stage. But for the newest thing in waistcoats, and a monocle which harmonised exactly with hair parted precisely in the centre, Arthur Augustus would have looked warlike as he swayed about, stabbing the air in the most villainous fashion. As it was, Jack Blake and Digby sat down on the table and shrieked with laughter.

"What's up with it?"

"My only hat! What's he doing now?"

"Wish! Got him that time, Gus! Ha, ha, ha!"

Arthur Augustus had ceased stabbing the air with his paper knife, and was now creeping across the room on his hands and knees, the knife between his teeth. Slowly he approached Jack Blake, then still more slowly passed him, stopping for an instant to listen at the table leg. A deathlike silence would have followed, but for Blake's yells of laughter; then suddenly Arthur Augustus sprang to his feet.

With a single bound he was across the room again, then, to the utter amazement of Digby, he violently plunged his paper-knife into a sofa cushion.

"There, deah boy!"

"Good!" choked Tom Merry. "Ripping, Gus!"

"Yaas, watah! You undahstood what I was doin', deah boy?"

"Rather! Fighting a Red Indian—Old Hawk, perhaps, whom we met out West."

Arthur Augustus turned a cold stare on the Patrol leader, and screwed his monocle deeper in his eye.

"I was not fightin' a Wed Indian, Mewwy," he said with dignity. "And if I had been, I watah think it would not have been Hawk. Hawk I wegard as a thorough gentleman. I wegwet to say I shall have to go through the performance again—"

"No! No, spare us, Gus, and don't do that! I know—you were attacking a Polar bear!"

"I was not attackin' a Polah beah—"

"A lion, I mean. No, don't go through it again. I ask you as a friend not to go through it again. You were lassoing a steer like we did on my uncle's ranch—"

"I was not lassoing a steeah, Tom Mewwy."

"A tiger, then—lassoing—I mean tracking a tiger down and slaying him in the last act—"

"Yaas, watah!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus. "Yaas, that was it, deah boy; I was twacking a tighah down, and I

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watah think I did the twacking in a life-like mannah. You see—"

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled Jack Blake, risking a visit from a prefect in the excitement of the moment. "You don't mean to say you were playing a scout game, Gussy—that you were going through an attack on a tiger in dumb show?"

"Yaas, watah!"

"My only Annt Jane!"

"I wegard that expression as watah absurd, Blake," said Arthur Augustus coldly. "And Digby's laughtah is widiculous, not to say—"

"But—but what were you crawling about the floor for, dummy?"

"I was twackin' a tighah—"

"Ho, ho, ho! And what was the tiger doing while you were tracking him? Oh, Gussy, you'll be the death of me!"

And Blake rolled about on the table again. Tom Merry was grinning himself, but he suddenly pulled himself together.

"I must say I agree with Corporal D'Arcy, Blake," he exclaimed. "There is nothing to laugh at just because he was practising the Scouts' war dance."

"Scouts' war dance! Is that what the ass was doing? Ha, ha, ha! He's just told me he was tracking a donkey—"

"A tighah, deah boy—twacking a tighah!"

"Yes, that's what I meant."

"Well, so he was," said Tom Merry. "I suppose you know enough about scouting, Blake, to know that the war dance means that all the scouts line up and sing the 'Ingonyama' chorus while the dancer pretends to go through with a giddy fight with some animal or other? If you don't, it's about time you learnt, or else handed in your badge and cleared out of the Dog Patrol."

"M-my hat! And what does Herries think he's doing?"

"Making buttons out of bootlaces, of course; haven't you heard about that yet?"

Jack Blake coughed. He felt that he was getting out of his depth a little.

It was some time now since Colonel Carr-Hilton came to the old school and introduced the Boy Scout idea to the juniors of St. Jim's, and much water had passed under the bridge since then. The idea had caught on wonderfully at the time, then the Christmas holidays had intervened, and afterwards, Tom Merry's trip to his uncle's ranch on the plains out West. And so the Dog Patrol had become little more than a name to the fellows. The revival was somewhat startling to Jack Blake, who was unprepared for it.

"Still, keenness in the young is a good thing, Merry," he said coolly. "Been at it long?"

"As hard as Trojans since half past four," answered the Patrol leader, bundling about a dozen trifling articles, such as penknives, pencils, pens and the like on a drawing-board, and spreading them out. "Now then, Gussy," he added, as he covered up the weird collection with Manners' focussing cloth. "I'm going to let you have exactly one minute's look at this little lot, and at the end you must scribble down here as many of the things as you can remember having seen. Ready?"

"Wight-ho, deah boy!"

"Good!"

Tom Merry whipped off the focussing cloth, and Jack Blake and Digby watched with interest. It was rather an interesting test as to the powers of observation, and in the end Blake and Digby also scribbled down the articles they could remember. Tom Merry glanced at the lists.

"Pretty good!" he said. "Blake is first with fifteen articles; Digby second with fourteen; and Gussy has remembered thirteen, which is jolly good indeed for him."

"Yaas, watah!"

"Well, that's a pretty good wheeze, anyway," said Jack Blake with reviving interest. "I don't know whether you will take the hint in the proper light, Merry, but I almost think it's time we gave this Boy Scouting another chance. I mean—"

The leader of Study No. 6 stopped rather abruptly, for there was something particularly withering in the glance Tom Merry gave him.

"Thanks!" said the Patrol leader distantly.

"I mean—"

"Yes, we all know what you mean, only you are a little behind the times for once, my son. As a matter of fact I have decided to work this scouting idea properly about three days ago."

"Yaas, watah! I wegwet to say, Blake, deah boy, that in the present instance you are watah a back numbah. Tom Mewwy and I have been discussin'—"

"Silence in the ranks!"

"I'm not in the wanks, deah boy; I'm a corporal!"

Jack Blake grinned.

"Oh, well, there's no need to get your back up, Merry," he said in his cool way. "I'm glad this scouting wheeze has taken on again, though I'm sorry you've got a swelled head over it—"

"Swelled head, eh?" said the Patrol leader tersely. "We



Jack Blake and Digby sat down on the table, and shrieked with laughter as Arthur Augustus D'Arcy crept across the study, stabbing the air with his huge paper-knife in the most villainous fashion.

shall have to look out that there aren't any swelled noses as well, sha'n't we, Blake? Try another salute, Gussey!"

"Wight-ho!" And Arthur Augustus put up his hand shoulder high, fingers outstretched and together, except in the case of the little finger, which he held down with his thumb—the scout salute.

"There, deah boy!"

"Yes—rotten!" said Tom Merry. "It's only the half salute, and as Patrol leader I am entitled to a full salute. Shove your hand up as high as your forehead."

"Yaa, wathah! Wipin'. I call this; and if we don't make those wotten Gwammah School wastahs appeah small, then I'll weturn my badge, deah boy."

"Grammar School kids?" exclaimed Blake quickly. "What have the Grammar School kids got to do with it?"

"Bai Jove!"

"Do you mean to say you haven't heard, Blake?"

"Heard what, ass?"

"Have you seen this week's number of the 'Wayland Chronicle' yet?"

"No."

"My hat!" muttered Tom Merry. "You are jolly well behind the times this journey, and no mistake. Where's the rag, Gus?"

"Heah, deah boy!"

And Jack Blake and Digby watched the Patrol leader open out the local paper expectantly.

CHAPTER 2

Tom Merry Resigns.

"WEAD it out, Tom Mewwy," said Arthur Augustus, with unusual keenness; "wead the wot out!"

"Right-ho! It's about the most long-winded, pronounced piffle I've come across. What do you think of this for a start, anyhow? It is doubtful whether throughout the breadth and length of this fair land there is a troop of Boy Scouts as well organised and as loyal to their King and their country as the Rylecombe Grammar School troop. The success of the undertaking is almost entirely due to Master Frank Monk, the captain of the school; and so well has this young patriot struggled to raise a corps which shall be an honour to his school and his country, that it is now unlikely that another troop could be found in Sussex who could compete with them in tracking or any of the other many games open to Boy Scouts. That's how the article starts, and it gets worse," went on Tom Merry. "It's about the most slobbery thing of its kind I've ever read."

"My hat! yes," muttered Blake, who was looking over the Shell fellow's shoulder. "If a paper rubbed it in for me like that, I'd take an afternoon off from footer and slay the editor. My only Aunt Jane, what does it say there?"

"You mean this—"

"Bless my old whiskers!" muttered Digby.

The passage in question came near the end of the article, and was to the point. It ran:

"It is indeed a feather in Master Monk's cap that he has beaten the college boys in this new enterprise, that he has

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"THE ST. JIM'S TERRIERS."

carried to a great success an undertaking which can only be of benefit to his country, while the students of St. James's College have obviously tired of the idea. All we can say in conclusion is, Wake up, St. Jim's! The Grammar School have shown you the way, and it is for you now to follow in their footsteps, and do your share in helping the younger generation to realise they are members of a great State and sons of an Empire upon whose domains the sun never sets. Gird up your loins, boys of St. Jim's, and take a leaf from the Rylcombe Grammar School book!"

"My—my only hat!"

"Bai Jove! I considah I have wead some wot in my time, deah boys, but I wathah think that is the beastly limit."

"Of all the bosh!" ejaculated Blake—"of all the measly piffle! Why, we started the Boy Scouting wheeze long before the Grammar kids thought of it!"

"Yes, that's so," admitted Tom Merry coolly; "only you see we've let 'em get ahead of us. It was our going to America and Liverpool that caused things to slide so. What we have to do now is to just massacre them."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"I should say so."

"But how?" asked Digby. "It's all very well to say we must massacre them, but how's it to be done? If half what this newspaper slop says is true, Frank Monk must have worked his troop up pretty well."

"What Frank Monk has done," said Jack Blake simply, "I can do a lot better."

"You?" said Tom Merry.

"Yes, my son, I! If you really have this thing at heart, and mean to make the Grammar kids sit up, you'd be wise to resign from the leadership of the Dog Patrol, and let one of us others take it over."

Tom Merry started violently.

"You think so, Blake?"

"I do," answered Blake, looking up quickly in surprise. "I am certain of it."

"Would you take over the leadership if—if I resigned, old man?"

"Of course I would, just to oblige."

"Then I resign!" said Tom Merry, with a very effective catch in his voice. "I hand over the—leadership to Blake, you chaps."

"Rot!" shouted Manners.

"Don't talk such piffle!"

"It isn't piffle, Lowther, old man," said Tom Merry slowly. "I feel that perhaps Blake is the better man, after all, and—

and my mind is made up."

"Nonsense!"

"Hear, hear! Good, Merry!"

"Yaas, wathah! It stands to reason that a Study Numbah Six fellow is bettah than——"

"What rot!"

"We won't accept your resignation, Merry."

"Shut up, Lowther!" called Herries. "Merry's a free agent, and can do as he likes."

"Is that you, Herries, asking for a thick ear?"

The cries were varied and loud. Tom Merry's special chums, Lowther and Manners, seemed to take the thing to heart, and appeared to be endeavouring to drown the other side with their shouts. Digby, D'Arcy, and Herries were trying to return the compliment, and drown their opposition. Through it all Jack Blake sat on the table, looking the picture of amazement.

"A-aren't you well, Merry?" he asked, after a bit, when it looked as if Herries and Lowther were about to remove their coats in order to get a step further with their argument. "Don't feel up to it, or something?"

"Blake, old man, I am fit enough; but I feel that there is a better man than myself amongst us, and so I resign!"

"Look here, if you are trying to be funny——"

"I am not—trying to be funny," returned Tom Merry, the catch in his voice appearing again. "I mean every word I say."

"Then what's up? Off your rocker or something?"

"Yaas, wathah! I weckon that must be it. Tom Mewwy is off his weckah, deah boys!"

"No, I am not. I resign, that is all. I stand down to allow a better man to take my place."

"Heah, heah!"

"I send in my papers, as it were."

"Accepted!" shouted Herries. "Accepted, old man!"

"Rot! You're not going to drop out now, Tom?"

"You go and pick flowers, Lowther!"

"Heah, heah!"

"Those in favour of Lowther going to pick flowers—I mean, of my resignation being accepted," said Tom Merry. Up went the combined hands of D'Arcy, Herries, and Digby instantly.

"Those against? Ah! Only two against, so the resignation is accepted. I retire in your favour, Blake, old man!" And he held out his badge.

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NEXT
THURSDAY:

"THE ST. JIM'S TERRIERS."

A Double-Length School Tale of
Tom Merry & Co.

Jack Blake looked at it as if he were just awaking from a weird dream. Never in his life before had he known Tom Merry so anxious to hide his light under a bushel. The hero of the Shell seemed even anxious to lose his laurels—so anxious that Jack Blake was conscious of a feeling of suspicion which, on the evidence, appeared unworthy. But it had all been sprung upon the Fourth-Former so quickly that he was only just grasping matters now.

"Look here, Merry, is there a wheeze or something on?"

"Wheeze?"

"I mean, kid, I'm not going to oust you out of the Patrol," went on Blake. "We all know you are a mufi at scouting, but that can't be helped now. Take the giddy badge back, ass!"

For an instant the faintest of grins flashed across Tom Merry's face, so faint that Blake failed to notice it. He went on pleasantly:

"Don't be an ass, Merry, in your old age. Stick to your giddy badge, take my advice on all occasions, and we shall pull through with these Grammar School kids all right. What I mean——"

"I have resigned," said Tom Merry quietly. "It is over as far as I am concerned, and the Dog Patrol has a new leader. Nothing more need be said, except, perhaps, a little advice. Stick to it, Blake; wire in for all you are worth at training the idiots, and, above all, get 'em good at tracking and scouting. If Lowther indulges in any of his rotten puns, punch his head; if Corporal D'Arcy plays the ass, kick him out of the Patrol; but the others you must treat with a firm hand. My only hope now is that you will, one and all, do your best to become the smartest patrol in the whole college. That is my last word to you, Scouts; keep at it, and never say die. The Scout motto is 'Be prepared'; and what I want to impress upon you is this: In future you must be prepared for anything. I have spoken!"

And before Jack Blake had recovered, the hero of the Shell had left the room. He left behind six juniors in the last stages of amazement.

"W-what's come over him?"

"Off his weckah, deah boys. I wathah think there can be no two questions about the mattah. He talked to us like the doctor, bai Jove!"

"Is it a rag, Lowther?" asked Blake.

"No, honest Injun, as far as I know. Do you think he can have been out—in the sun too much?"

"I wathah think there hasn't been any sun to-day, Lowthah, deah boy."

"He's got some plan on," said Digby suspiciously.

"But what?"

The fellows looked at one another without speaking. Before Jack Blake had entered the room, Tom Merry had been quite his usual self. There had not been the slightest sign present that he was about to stagger them all and declare that there was a better man in the college to lead the Dog Patrol than himself. It was a little beyond them all.

"My hat!" muttered Manners. "I believe Gussy is right."

"Yaas, wathah, deah boy. He was off his weckah; and, undah the cires, I wathah think the pwopah thing for us to do is to elect Blake as leadah in his place. A fellow who is off his weckah can't be leadah of the Dog Patwul."

"Hear, hear!" said Jack Blake, pulling himself together.

"It is quite likely Merry went suddenly mad, but there was a lot in what he said. Although I say it—ahem!"

Lowther and Manners were looking at him fixedly.

Jack Blake gave Arthur Augustus a violent dig in the ribs.

"Wight-ho, deah boy!" gasped the swell of St. Jim's.

"Those in favour of Jack Blake being elected instead of Tom Mewwy, wesigned, as leadah of the Dog Patwul? Cawwied!"

"Steady!"

"Not so quickly, Gussy!"

"Cawwied!" said Arthur Augustus. "It is no use Mannahs and Lowthah going against the mectin'."

"Blake voted for himself, you silly ass!"

"Mannahs, I must wequest you to address me with pwopah wepect."

"So he did; Blake voted for himself!"

"I am not disputin' the wevacity of your weemark, deah boy; I merely wequest that you fwame it in a more weepstful mannah. And I considah Blake has a perfect wight to vote for whom he likes."

"Yes; but——"

"And I wegwet, Lowthah, that your objections are too late," said Arthur Augustus firmly. "You are a back numbah, deah boy. Blake is leadah of the Dog Patwul."

And Manners and Lowther had to submit. There were six in the Dog Patrol now Tom Merry had left, and out of that six, four, including the candidate himself, had voted for Jack Blake. They growled, but there was no way out of it.

"Of course there isn't," grinned Jack Blake; "and you can consider yourselves lucky Tom Merry has behaved sensibly for once in his life. We'll have the giddy war dance over again."

"Yaas, wathah! and I'll twack down anothah wild beast. Lend me the papah-knife, deah boy!"

And once again Arthur Augustus began crawling round the table, though what he was supposed to be doing was beyond even the deductive powers of the Dog Patrol of the School House.

While Jack Blake watched he came to a sudden conclusion. It was the only conclusion to come to, seeing how well he knew Tom Merry of the Shell.

"Herries, my son," he whispered, "the kid had something up his sleeve!"

"I shouldn't wonder," murmured Lowther. "His arm, perhaps!"

And the humourist of the Shell felt hurt because they only glared at him.

CHAPTER 3.

The Cads of St. Jim's.

NCE outside in the passage Tom Merry closed his study door and grinned. Then he glanced at his watch. It still wanted about twenty minutes to tea.

"Good!" murmured the hero of the Shell, and he wandered off in the direction of the Third Form common-room. "Just time enough if we hustle—hallo!"

It was evident that the Third Form common-room contained no one but Third-Formers at that moment, for the noise which was coming through the closed door was deafening.

"Quick march, right wheel—right, you ass? Don't you know your right from your left, Gibson, you—you galoot?"

"But—"

"No talking in the ranks!" exclaimed the voice of authority loudly. "Now then—right wheel this time, and try to look less like a goat on stilts, Dudley—hallo, Merry; what do you want? We're busy now, so you'd better clear!"

Tom Merry had opened the door to see Wally D'Arcy industriously drilling the Third Form Patrol of Boy Scouts. Wally was Arthur Augustus's younger brother, and a contrast to the swell of St. Jim's at all times, but just now he seemed a greater contrast than ever.

His coat was off, his left shirt-sleeve badly torn, and his collar had broken loose at the front stud, but there was a keenness about him which no one could help admiring. This keenness had always been there, but it had not been, perhaps, quite so noticeable as of late, not until after the journey to the New World. Since that epoch-making holiday there was no holding D'Arcy minor; not only was the world his oyster, but he was rapidly opening it.

"You can clear, Merry!" he said briefly.

"Yes, kid, and I can stay. Drilling the Fag Patrol?"

"The Lion Patrol, you mean."

"The Lion Patrol!" grinned the Shell fellow. "Changed your name, then?"

"No," said Wally tersely. "It was only you idiots who called us the Fag Patrol. How could it be called that? There isn't an animal called a fag—"

"Isn't there, by jingo!" laughed Tom Merry. "What about that dirty, two-legged little beast one finds running loose in most big schools? That funny little beast who squeals when you pull his ear—Wally, my son, your inky crew will be the Fag Patrol of St. Jim's to the end of time."

"You can call us what you like," said Wally coolly, "but you'll be glad enough of our help when it comes to real work. What are you old fogeys going to do about this Frank Monk biz?"

"Do about it? Have you heard then—"

"Heard? Why, Monk is bragging all over the place about his rotten corps," exclaimed D'Arcy minor, "that's why I'm putting these fellows through it. Figgins and the others are doing the same in the New House."

"Yes, I passed the word to them this morning."

"And that is about as far as you'll get—passing the word. Once the word is passed, you all lie back in your chairs, cover your faces with pocket handkerchiefs, and snooze off to sleep again like other old fogeys."

"Ha, ha, ha!" chuckled Gibson.

"He, he, he!" chortled Jameson, and Tom Merry blushed.

D'Arcy minor moved away, for experience told him he was running a grave risk, but, somehow, Tom Merry did not act in accordance with past principles. He nodded instead, and seemed to be hesitating about something.

Just as he coughed as an introduction to a short speech he had prepared, the door was thrust violently open, and Gore, the cad of St. Jim's, came into the large room. D'Arcy minor turned on his heel sharply.

"What do you want here, Gore?"

"Come in, you fellows!" sang out Gore. "Tention! March!"

And to Wally's wild indignation, Mellish and one or two others followed Gore into the room and began marching round, Gore at their head. Wally took in the situation at a glance. Gore's troop—the Wolf Patrol—had come into the Third Form common-room for drilling purposes, possibly because

the gymnasium was full, and the cheek of the thing made the leader of the Fag Patrol grit his teeth.

"Tention!" he shouted. "Quick march!"

And as one man the Fag Patrol fell into line and marched straight across the large room.

"Right wheel!" said Gore, and this order caused the Fourth Form patrol to turn and march straight towards Wally's scouts. Tom Merry chuckled.

"Greek meeting Greek!" he chuckled. "Wonder what'll happen now?"

Curly Gibson glanced up at his leader, but Wally's keen face wore a mask of grim determination. His patrol was marching straight for Gore's, but Wally was not the scout to countermand an order just because someone got in the way. Gore looked savage.

"Get out of the way there, D'Arcy—get out of the way, you young idiot!"

The Fag Patrol came on with the determination of Cromwell's Ironsides. Gore bit his lip.

"Charge!" he suddenly shouted, and almost before the command was out of his mouth Wally also gave an order.

"Charge!" the Third-Former yelled. "Charge!"

And the patrols dashed at one another.

Gore's followers had the advantage in size and weight, but Wally's adherents were the more numerous, and at a glance Tom Merry judged the chances as being about equal. The next instant the two patrols met with a clash.

Straight into Gore's chest dashed Dudley, the big, red-headed Third-Former who, with all his faults, did not know the meaning of the word fear, and Gore went down, then Wally knocked Mellish on top of him.

"Right wheel!" cried Wally. "Right again and—walk over 'em!"

And walk over the two fallen, big fellows the fags did, to such effect that Gore yelled with pain. That was the beginning. The end followed soon afterwards, and from Tom Merry's point of view was both exciting and interesting.

Gore leapt to his feet and hit Dudley in the chest with all his strength. Curly Gibson and Jameson jumped in the small of Gore's back, so it is doubtful which side had the initial advantage. The rest of the stages were all disadvantages.

Forgetting that it is a scout's duty to help one another, the fellows hammered away for all they were worth, advice being given on all sides.

"Slay 'em!" shouted Wally. "Slay 'em, and never mind the expense! How do you like that, Gore?"

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"THE ST. JIM'S TERRIERS."

D'Arcy minor had got home with quite a useful upper cut on the point of Gore's jaw, and an expression flashed across the bigger lad's face which caused Tom Merry to button his coat. The Shell fellow was as keen on a fight as anyone, but he did not care for bullying, and Gore was all of two years older than Wally.

"If Gore wants a fight," thought Tom Merry, "I'm ready. Ha, ha, ha! Good, young 'un! Ho, ho, ho!"

With more anger than judgment Gore had dashed at D'Arcy minor, and, with all the judgment the other lacked, Wally had waited for him.

Quick as lightning the fag dodged the other's slow fist, then his own shot out, and hard, inky knuckles got Gore between the eyes. Gore at once sat down and tried to remember what had happened.

"Half-kill him, George!" gasped Mellish, who was fighting cautiously with the smallest of the Fag Patrol. "Half-kill him! I would!"

"Where am I?" muttered Gore. "What has happened? Oh, my nose!"

"Charge!" yelled Wally. "Walk over 'em! Charge!"

Curly Gibson glanced round the room. A scout must be prepared to make use of his opportunities, and Gibson thought he saw at least one in the shape of a large, stone bottle of blue-black ink. He went for it like a flash, and when he came back noticed another opportunity. Mellish had defeated his small foe, had knocked him down, and was sitting on his chest. Curly Gibson dashed up.

"Good-bye, Mellish—good-bye, old man!" he cried, then he emptied about half the contents of the bottle down the neck of the cad of the Fourth.

"Ow!" shrieked Mellish. "Ow!"

Curly Gibson raced round the combatants and approached Gore just as Gore was recovering.

"Got a black eye, have you, George?" shouted the fag.

"Try a blue-black face to match!"

And he dashed the remains of the ink into Gore's face.

What would have happened after that there is no telling, but nothing had the chance of happening, for the door was suddenly flung open and Kildare's finely-built form appeared in the room. There was a very stern expression on the face of the captain of St. Jim's.

"Gore, what are you doing here?"

"Let me get at him—lemme—"

"Gore!"

"Well, look what they've done to me!" howled Gore.

"All right, D'Arcy minor, all right, you cad—I'll half-kill you for this, you rotter!"

Kildare was a man of few words when actions answered better, and he waded in amongst the rival scouts without further remark. With one hand he caught Gore by his coat collar, and with his other yanked Mellish to his feet.

"Come on out of this!" he said sharply. "None of you Fourth or Shell boys have any right in here, and you will write a hundred lines apiece. Then every one of you—Third-Formers as well—have an extra fifty for kicking up this shindy. I've a good mind to gate the whole lot of you!"

"But look what they've done to me!" bleated Gore. "Just look at me!"

"Yes; dirty little beggar, aren't you? Go and have a good wash for once in your life—and your eye is going black, my lad! What are you doing here, Merry?"

"I came in to speak to D'Arcy minor," grinned Tom.

"You haven't been fighting?"

"Not to-day, my son—I mean, no!"

"Clear out, then!"

And Tom Merry went, following Gore and the others. He laughed to himself and wandered on down the corridor.

"Glad I didn't miss that little rumpus," he decided, "but I haven't done any good to the great cause. I wonder if young Wally would have voted. Humpf! I think the other plan is the better of the two. Yes, Skimmy is my man. Very thoughtful of Wally to damage Gore's eye, because the Gorey one will retire to the bath-room to wash; that means Skimmy will be alone, I should think. Distinctly good!"

He put on speed and burst into the study Herbert Skimpole shared with Gore, and greeted the brainy man of the Shell with a sounding thump on the back.

"Hallo! Busy, Skimmy?"

"Yes," said Skimpole, jumping violently. "Yes, I am very busy just now. I am trying to trace out the effect environment has on living organisations which are already degenerate—I mean—"

"Ah, yes! Nice light subject. The fact is, Skimpole, I wish to hold a meeting in this room."

"A meeting?"

"Exactly, and as I doubt whether there is a better man in the college to take the chair than yourself, I have decided that you are to preside."

"Really, Merry, I can hardly agree with you when you say—"

"Oh, yes, you are the best man. A chap who knows as

much about Socialism as you do ought to be able to take a chair."

Skimpole failed to see why.

"Fact!" commented Tom Merry. "Now, what I want you to do is to slip round to Blake and Gore; he's leader of some rotten patrol, isn't he?"

"The Wolf Patrol, of which I am a member—much against my will. My study companion, Gore, forced me into it; they are drilling!"

"Ha, ha, ha! Are they? Well, slip off at once and tell Blake, Gore, Figgins, and D'Arcy minor that you are holding an important meeting in this study at once—say you are holding the meeting, not I."

"But—"

"Never mind about buts. You are holding the meeting, seeing you are to preside, aren't you?"

"Well, I suppose in the circumstances—"

"Of course you are! Now, slip off and tell the fellows. Don't forget—Blake, Gore, Figgins, and D'Arcy minor. Er—don't press them to come, but just tell them that you are holding a meeting and give no more information."

Skimpole looked puzzled.

"It is very peculiar, Merry," he said thoughtfully, "and rather irregular, I should say. Perhaps I had better tell them that it is an extraordinary meeting you wish to hold?"

"You wish to hold, you mean."

"But I don't—"

"Yes you do," said Tom Merry persuasively. "Mind, you must be back within three minutes!"

And before Skimpole could object again, the hero of the Shell kindly but firmly ran him out of the study.

CHAPTER 4.

Skimpole Takes the Chair.

"WELL?" exclaimed Tom Merry, as Skimpole came back again within the stipulated time. "Are they coming?"

"I did my best, Merry, but—"

"Never mind about that—are they coming?"

"No, Merry; they are not," said the brainy man of the Shell severely. "And I must say that I am surprised at your sending me. Blake was most rude."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"And Figgins actually turned me out of his room—"

"Good!"

Skimpole blinked rapidly behind his enormous glasses. He could not for the life of him see why it was good that Figgins had turned him out of his study.

"Of course, it's good!" repeated Tom Merry gleefully. "Now we can get on with the washing. Take the chair, Skimmy."

"Really, Merry, I fail to see the use of my taking the chair now that we know the others are not going to attend. It is quite irregular to take a chair—"

"Order! Order in the chair, please. The business you have before you, Skimpole, is the election of Scout-master for the St. Jim's Troop."

"But really—"

"Yes, really," said Tom Merry. "Owing to the scanty attendance of patrol leaders there will be no need to second the proposals; I beg to rise and propose that Thomas Merry be duly and forthwith elected to the post of Scout-master."

Skimpole also rose to his feet.

"No, Merry. No, I really cannot take a motion in this extraordinary manner—"

"There is a proposal before the meeting," said Tom Merry severely. "Please attend to the business in hand. You must ask the meeting whether there are any other proposals."

"Really, Merry; this is absurd—"

"Not it, my son. It isn't our fault the others wouldn't turn up. You did your best, you say?"

"Yes, there—there certainly is that."

"Of course there is; get on with the washing. Gentlemen, the chairman wishes to know whether there are to be any more proposals before the meeting?"

Skimpole blinked vaguely at the hero of the Shell, and the hero of the Shell grinned pleasantly back.

"No more proposals you see, Skimmy," he said. "Now, put it to the meeting."

"Those—those in favour of Thomas Merry being elected Scout-master of St. Jim's?" asked the chairman faintly, and Tom Merry instantly put his hand up.

"T—those against?" And Tom Merry as quickly pulled his hand down again.

"Good!" he exclaimed. "The matter is settled, then; that's right, Skimmy; enter all the biz. on the minutes in proper order and—Hallo!"

The door was being pushed open at that moment, and the moment following Jack Blake and Arthur Augustus looked in. Jack Blake was grinning, but he stopped when he caught sight of Tom Merry.



"Good-bye, Mellish—good-bye, old man!" cried Curly Gibson, as he emptied the contents of the bottle down the neck of the cad of the Fourth.

"Hallo, what's up? What's the wheeze?"

"That you, Blake," said Tom Merry coolly. "You're too late, old man; the meeting is over."

"The meetin' is ovah? What meetin', deah boy?"

"What are you jawing about, Merry?"

"Read the minutes of the meeting, Skimpole," said Tom Merry cheerfully. "I wonder you didn't turn up, Blake. Fire ahead, Skimmy."

"Ahem!" coughed Skimpole. "Minutes of the extraordinary meeting held in this study five minutes ago—Herbert Skimpole in the chair; present, Thomas Merry. It was proposed that a Scout-master should be elected to take charge of the St. Jim's Troop of Boy Scouts, and the only name put up was that of Thomas Merry, and in consequence he was elected nem. con."

"What?"

"Bai Jove!"

"And the meeting closed with the usual vote of thanks to the chairman; at least, I believe it did."

"Of all the blessed cheek—my hat, Merry!"

"Bai Jove, Tom Mewwy—"

The Fourth-Formers were staggered. Tom Merry laughed pleasantly.

"Why didn't you turn up, kids? I understand Skimpole warned you a meeting was to be held."

"My hat! I thought Skimmy wanted to lure us in here to read us a chapter of his rotten book on Socialism!"

"Ah, well, of course, if you will think, Blake—"

"I pwotest," said Arthur Augustus loudly. "I pwotest that undah the cires, the meeting cannot stand, deah boys. I wequest that anothah meetin' be held at once, bai Jove!"

"No!" said Skimpole. "No, that cannot be done; I have decided that the meeting was quite in order."

"In ordah? How could it be in ordah, you uttah duffah, when there wasn't a beastly quorum?"

"Why wasn't there a quorum, D'Arcy? There are no rules to say how many shall form a quorum that I know of. No, D'Arcy, I do not think you have a case. It is my opinion that had no one turned up but myself, I should have been in perfect order if I held the meeting by myself—"

"Bai Jove!"

"Yes, I do indeed; I will even go as far as to say—"

Then Jack Blake burst into a roar of laughter and banged Tom Merry on the shoulder.

"Blest if you don't deserve to have the giddy mastership," he laughed. "I suppose this is why you resigned from the patrol leadership?"

"It certainly had something to do with the matter, kid."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Of course, you agree that a Scout-master is a necessity, that there must be some one to take complete charge of the patrols in time of war—I mean, when we meet Frank Monk and his crew!"

"Meet Frank Monk? What do you mean?"

"Yaas wathah, what do you mean, Tom Mewwy? Is there some wag on?"

"No, there isn't; there's going to be nothing raggyah about this affair," said Tom Merry, pulling a letter from his pocket.

"Frank Monk has been talking through his hat, so it is up to us to pull him off his perch. As Scout-master of St. Jim's, I propose that this letter be sent to Monk by to-night's post."

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He flung the letter on the table and Jack Blake whipped it up. Then he read aloud:

"Dear Sir,—It has come to my knowledge that you are Scout-master of a troop of Boy Scouts at your school, and I think it would be a good idea, should you be sufficiently organised, if we were to meet in some trial of sagacity. Anything you care to suggest in the nature of a scout game shall have my immediate attention, and you can rely upon an early answer. If, however, you do not feel that your troop is well advanced enough to be pitted against us, please say so and the matter can drop.

"(Signed) TOM MERRY,
(Scout-master of St. Jim's.)"

"Bai Jove!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus. "I considah that wathah a clevah lettah, deah boy."

"Think it'll bring Monkey up to the scratch, Blake?"

"My hat, yes; I couldn't have worded it better myself."

"No, you couldn't," said Tom Merry simply. "Hallo, what is the wind blowing up here?"

Figgins and Gore were entering the room; Gore because he wanted to hide himself because his eye had shut, and Figgins because he had heard the sound of well-known voices. Tom Merry nodded to Skimpole.

"Read the minutes of the meeting again, Skimmy."

"Yaas, wathah; wead 'em out, Skimmay, deah boy!"

And Skimpole obeyed. Of course, a fearful row followed, in which Gore said many things about Tom Merry's cheek, and flatly refused to recognise him as Scout-master. Figgins also remarked that he did not think modesty was the Shell hero's strong point.

"No, but brain is," returned Tom Merry simply. "If I had not been elected, who on earth in the college could have been?"

"Me!"

"You, Figgins? No, be serious for once, old man."

"Look here, Merry—"

Figgins looked warlike, then a thought suddenly struck him.

"I'll admit Gore is out of the question; better you, Merry, than Gore."

"Why?" demanded Gore.

"Because you are such a wottah, deah boy," explained Arthur Augustus. "I wathah think that is what Figgins means."

"I'll punch your head in a minute, D'Arcy—"

"Yes," went on Figgins, "Gore is quite out of the question, and so is young Wally of the Third. The only possible fellows, beside myself, are Blake and Merry, and as they both come from the rotten School House, I suppose they would have come to some agreement. Undah the cires, as Gussy would say, I don't see that it matters which of you is elected; either of you will make as big a mess of it as the other."

"I'm not going to agree, anyway!" exclaimed Gore. "I'll see you all hanged before I take orders from Merry."

Then Arthur Augustus rose to his feet, despite the fact that Jack Blake was trying to push him down on his chair again.

"I wish to wise to a point of ordah, deah boys—"

"Lie down!" growled Gore.

"I must wefuse to lie down, Goash, and I must wefuse to be addressed in that mannah," said the swell of the School House, with dignity. "Much as we all wegwet the unusual mannah in which our respected fwien, Tom Mewwy, has conducted this affiaih, I wathah think we shall have to abide by the result of the meetin'. Therefoah, undah the cires, I wish to pwopose, as Corporal of the Dog Patwol, that a vote of confidence be passed in the new Scout-master—those in favoah?"

And amidst much laughter every one put his hand up, except Gore. Gore scowled instead.

"Rotten bounce, I call it," he muttered, and he left the room.

Tom Merry's reply to the vote of confidence was brief, but to the point.

"Cheer-ho!" he exclaimed. "I'll admit there was a trace of bounce about the proceedings, but it was done for the good of the Boy Scouts of St. Jim's. It was up against all of us to see that the best man was elected, and I was a bit afraid an ass like Blake, or an old rotter such as Figgins, might scramble in somehow—(Silence, please!)—and so I settled the thing once and for all. The idea now is to tip Frank Monk, and all the patrols he can muster up into the cart."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"And so this letter goes by to-night's post, I take it?"

"Hear, hear!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Good!" exclaimed the new Scout-master. "We shall see what we shall see now, and it is possible Frank Monk may see a little more! Those in favour of going down to tea?"

And, as the tea bell was ringing loudly, that proposition was also carried nem. con.

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CHAPTER 5.

The Monk-Merry Plan.

"YOUNG Blake here!" exclaimed Tom Merry, bursting into Study No. 6 the following morning before breakfast. "Anyone seen young Blake?"

"Yes, young Merry, I have," said Blake for himself.

"Ha, ha, ha! I considah that wathah funny, bai Jove."

Tom Merry turned to find Arthur Augustus seated on the table. The hero of the Shell nodded to him.

"Morning, Gussy. I can't think why it is, Blake, but whenever I look at the one and only I always think of an old cackling hen my governess keeps at Huckleberry Heath!"

"Weally, Mewwy—"

"Yes, really, Gus—but I haven't come here to listen to that dummy's cackles. Blake, my son, Frank Monk has just rung me up on the telephone."

"Good egg!"

"Rather, and if you could only have heard him choking over that giddy letter of mine, you'd have—have cackled like that there in the waistcoat."

Arthur Augustus sprang to his feet. Tom Merry pushed him back on his chair again.

"No time to listen to you, Gus. Yes, Blake, Monk has fairly got the needle, and hinted that if he didn't wipe the floor with our patrols, he'd eat his hat or even one of Gussy's toppers."

"Then he's going to meet us in a scout game?"

"I should say so, kid," grinned Tom Merry. "We were gassing at the telephone for about ten minutes, and got into a fearful row with the girl at the exchange. To cut the cackle, it's all arranged."

"Good again; what's the idea?"

"Well, it is Monk's idea in a way, but of course I improved upon it—yes I did, Blake! The competition comes off this afternoon, because it happens that there's no footer on here or at the Grammar School, and the competition is quite up to the usual style."

"Get to the point, ass."

"I am; we have four principal patrols in this coll., haven't we?"

"Of course we have, counting Gore's rotten gang."

"And Monk is Scout-master of four patrols as well."

"Good!"

"Yes, isn't it? Well, what we have arranged is this: that Monk takes his rabbits to the Wayland side of the woods this afternoon, and exactly at three o'clock by the town clock starts to get through the woods to our side; at least, half of his band does that."

"Go on!"

"Yaas, fiah ahead, deah boy."

"The other half go into the wood, but they haven't to get through it; they have to capture as many of our attacking half as they can."

"What do you mean by the attacking half of our lot, ass?"

"The half which has to get through to Monk's side of the woods," explained Tom Merry. "You see, we are going to divide as well as them, one portion to get through the giddy woods and the other to stop their fellows coming here; sort of defence and attack."

"My hat!"

"You mean that theah defence must capture our attack, deah boy?" exclaimed Arthur Augustus excitedly, "and vice-versah on our side?"

"Yes, that's it."

"Bai Jove, I considah that wathah wipping!"

"But how are we to know the defence from the attack?" asked Jack Blake. "I take it the two attacking parties have nothing to do with one another, just the same as the defences haven't?"

"Yes, that's it. Both defending parties are to wear pieces

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of red ribbon round their arms—right arms. The attacking party lead the way, and five minutes after they have gone, the defence slips into the woods, and I have passed my word that the attack won't warn the defence that the foes are about."

"Wipping!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus. "I considah the idea as wipping in the extreme; the wed wibbon on the wight arm will have a stwiking effect."

"Have you got the wheeze, Blake?"

"Yes, I think so; I suppose the defence has to capture all the members of the opposing attacking party and bring them in prisoners. How do we count the points, though?"

"Why, a capture counts as one point, and a fellow getting through the woods without being caught and within the hour means another point to his side. We hit upon the time limit to prevent skulkers getting up a tree and waiting until the defence had passed or well out of the way."

Jack Blake nodded his approval.

"For you and Monk, Merry," he said, "it isn't so bad."

"You mean, as a matter of fact, that it is jolly good; yes, I understand," laughed Tom Merry. "The only point is that they run to one more scout than we do. You see, our Dog Patrol only runs to six now I'm out of it."

"That can soon be put right. Buck Finn is anxious to join us."

"Good! Put him through the paces this morning, make him take the oath, and we'll examine him before dinner; a chap who has lived his life out West ought to be able to scout. I shall have to slip off now and see Figgins and young Wally. So long!"

He pelted off, and Jack Blake rubbed his hands together and chuckled.

"For a fellow suffering from a swelled head, Merry hasn't done so badly, Gus; what do you say?"

"Yaas, wathah; as a mattah of fact, I considah the whole ideah as wipping."

"Hear, hear!"

"And when an opportunity pwesents itself," went on the swell of the School House, "I intend to offah my congwats. to Tom Mewwy. I wathah think we owe him our congwats., Blake, deah boy?"

"Yes, we do, and a thick ear for his cheek; but, as I said, the idea isn't at all bad. Hallo, there goes the breakfast bell."

"Yaas, wathah, bai Jove," said Arthur Augustus, "and I can't say I wewget to heah the sound. I wathah think I am feelin' a twifle hungwy."

And the pair made their way down to the breakfast room to find that the scouting section of the St. Jim's juniors was in an advanced state of excitement.

CHAPTER 6.

The Start.

"NOTHING wrong with the weather, I guess," said Buck Finn, the chum from Arizona, as he swept the clear April sky with his experienced eyes. "Light'll last, I reckon, an' there's no wind to spoil the tracking; plenty of sun to show the way in the woods, too."

"Yaas, wathah; I wewget it as a wippin' aftahnoon, in fact. Where's Tom Mewwy?"

"Here, Gussy," answered the Shell fellow for himself. "Take that blessed window out of your eye, my son."

"Weally, Mewwy; if you are referring to my monacle—"

"Yes, I am, kid; take it out!"

Arthur Augustus drew himself up in a dignified manner and looked his Scout-master full in the face.

"I must wewget that as wude, deah boy, and I must wewuse to obey. In personal mattahs like a monacle I wathah think you exceed your authority, Mewwy, in asking—"

"Ha, ha, ha! Well, you've no idea what a silly ass you look in scouting togs and a monacle—fearful freak!"

"Weally, Mewwy—"

"Fact, kid; where is Blake and his rabbits?"

"The Dog Patrol is here, Merry," said Blake, pointedly.

"Yes, that's what I meant. I have decided that the Rat Patrol—Figgins' lot—and your patrol, Gore, are to form the attacking party; the Dog and Fag Patrols are to be the defence."

"Weally, Mewwy—"

"Oh, you go and take your eye from that monacle, Gussy!"

"I wewuse to take my eye—your remark is absurd, Mewwy, and I shall not answah it. What I wish to point out, deah boy, is—"

"Oh, don't you begin, Gus," exclaimed Wally. "Let me get a word in edgewise; I'd rather the Fag Patrol were amongst the attackers, Merry."

"Bai Jove, how remarkable; that is what I wished to observe in respect to the Dog Patrol!"

"Lie down, Monacle!"

"Weally, Wally—"

"Oh, do shut up; can't the arrangements be altered, Merry?"

"No!" said Arthur Augustus; "the awwancements cannot be altered except in the case of the Dog Patrol!"

"No arrangements are going to be altered in the least, kids," said Tom Merry, shading his eyes with his large scout hat as he looked back at the college clock. "Everything is cut and dried, Silence in the ranks!"

"But I must pwotest, deah boy—"

"Silence—in—the-ranks!"

"But I am not in the wanks; I'm a co'powal and in that capacity I must wewest that the Dog Patrol be allowed to attack instead of defend—"

"Yes, and as Scout-master I shall claim the privilege of punching your head if you don't dry up."

"I wewuse to dwy up!"

"Then swallow that rotten monacle and go home; my hat, doesn't he look a freak, Blake?"

"Not much worse than usually," grinned the Fourth-Former.

"And we all know Gussy; he's quite harmless!"

"Weally, Blake, fwom a fwied I must weward that obsahvation as wude in the extreme—"

"How would you regard it if I were to bump you, Gussy?" asked Tom Merry. "Kindly?"

"I should wewuse to weward it at all; I should wewuse to allow myself to be beastly well bumped, Tom Mewwy, and I should have no alternative but to administrah a feahful thwashing to the fellah who twied to bump me. In fact, deah boy—"

"Well, go and bury that monacle, then. Hallo, is that the hour?"

A distant church clock was chiming the hour of three, and Tom Merry drew himself up. They were all ready and waiting on the outskirts of the woods; waiting for the hour to start, and it was pretty certain Frank Monk of Grammar School fame was waiting with equal eagerness at the opposite side. Tom Merry listened intently. That church clock was always a minute or two in front of the town clock, and it was by the town clock he had arranged with Monk to start. The wind was blowing towards the town that afternoon, though, so there was a chance of their missing the sound of the chime.

"Shut up, Wally," exclaimed Tom Merry. "Blest if I can hear anything; was that it?"

"No, deah boy; no, I wathah think that was a twain whistle—"

"Dry up, then!"

"But about that othah mattah—"

"Dry up!" shouted Tom Merry. "How on earth do you think I can hear a bell if you cackle like an old hen all the time?"

"Weally, Mewwy—"

"Dry up, I tell you!"

Arthur Augustus turned a withering glance upon his Scout-master and screwed his monacle deeper into his eye.

"Mewwy," he said, "Mewwy, I weally must say that you are extremely wude this afternoon, not to say beastly wude. What I wish to say is that the Dog Patrol as the oldest patrol in the coll., ought to attack and—"

"Will you lie down?"

"No! No, I wewuse to lie down. I have made up my mind to attack."

"So shall I in a minute," said Tom Merry wrathfully. "How can a fellow hear a clock chime? Was that it?"

"No, deah boy. I considah I have a wight to attack, and I must wewuse to have my wight overshadowed—"

"Will—you—lie down?"

"And, in conclusion," said Arthur Augustus with dignity, "I must inform you that, unless I have your permish, to attack, I shall wewuse— Oh! Wow! You wottah! You howwid wottah!"

Arthur Augustus had been too engrossed upon his oration to take note of something happening behind him. It wasn't a great deal which was happening, certainly; but it had far-reaching results. Lowther, the humorist of the Shell, had quietly gone down on his hands and knees just behind Arthur Augustus, so close to him that he was almost touching the Fourth-Former's calves. Then Lowther, the humorist, had winked.

Tom Merry wasn't a blind donkey, but the wink was quite as good as a nod. He winked back, then pushed Arthur Augustus in the chest.

The top portion of the swell of St. Jim's had gone downwards, the lower portion up, then he gracefully disappeared into a convenient ditch.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Ho, ho, ho!"

"My hat!"

"You wotten boundahs!" came a muffled voice from the ditch. "You howwid wottahs!"

"Ha, ha, ha! Look at the freak!"

"Hewwies, I wewuse to be chawactewised as a fwack. You have wained my clothes. I have no alternative but to administrah a feahful thwashing. Wow!"

He scrambled out of the ditch considerably the worse for

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wear, the only portion of his face which was not covered with black mud being a circle round his eye where his monocle had once lodged.

"There is nothin' for it, Tom Mewwy!" he shouted. "I am about to give you a fearful thrashing!"

"There goes three o'clock! Rat and Wolf Patrols, advance and do your best for the sake of St. Jim's!"

"And I call upon you, Blake or Hewwies, to second me——"

"I take charge of the attacking party," went on Tom Merry, taking not the slightest notice of Arthur Augustus. "You other patrol leaders command your own patrols——"

"And I must request that a wing be formed at once, that there be wounds of two minutes with one minute's rests——"

"Ready, Gore?"

"Tom Mewwy! Tom Mewwy, come heah! The white feathah——"

"Yes, I'm ready," growled Gore, whose eye was of many colours.

"Right away, then!"

"Mewwy! Mewwy, you wotten coward! Mewwy——"

But Tom Merry and the two patrols had vanished into the thick undergrowth of the fine old woods. Jack Blake sat down and yelled with laughter. Arthur Augustus glared witheringly at him.

"I do not see any cause for this wibald mirth, Blake," he exclaimed. "I considah it wathah wotten of you, as a mattah of fact, seeing you considah yourself a friend of mine."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I even considah it extremely wude, not to say bad foun, deah boy——"

"My only hat, Gussy; but you look such a funny aas——"

"Weally, Blake——"

"Yes, really. If you could only see yourself."

"I do not wish to see myself, and I wegard Tom Mewwy's conduct in wunning away as degwading to a fellow of St. Jim's. I wegard his action as cowardly in the extweme. Bai Jove, though, what am I to do in the mattah?"

"Do! Sit down and wait for the five minutes to run out, of course," laughed Blake, watch in hand.

"But my clothes! They are in a fearful stato."

"I should say so."

"Then I must go and change them, deah boy. You will have to wait here for my return."

"We shall have to——what? Here, you keep out of the sun, Gus."

"I wefuse to keep out of the sun. There is no altewnative. You will all have to wait while I wun to the coll. and change my things."

"How long will you be, then, Gussy?" asked Digby, with a wink.

"Not more than half an hour, deah boy, if I wun——"

"Half an hour, eh? We shall be through these woods by then and have captured all the Grammar School rabbits about. How's time going, Blake?"

"Like steam—two more minutes. Get ready, you chaps!"

"Weally, Blake, I must insist that you wait while I wun and change my things."

"One minute!"

"Line up!" said Wally D'Arcy to the members of his patrol. "Remember, we are the salt of the defence."

"Get ready!" said Blake slowly. "Get ready! Go!"

"Stop, stop! You wottahs! Blake! Hewwies——"

But no one answered, and so Arthur Augustus was left standing alone in the field. For a moment he hesitated, then he too disappeared amongst the trees. The honour of St. Jim's came before everything with a St. Jim's fellow, even before personal appearance with the swell of the School House.

CHAPTER 7.

Gore's Misfortunes.

"NOW we've once started," said Tom Merry, pushing his way without caution through the brushwood, which was already green with the leaves of spring. "ordinary patrol work can be dropped. We're all individual scouts, and must depend upon ourselves—off our own bats, I mean."

"Well, don't make such a beastly row, Merry," growled Gore.

"Oh, there's no need to go quietly yet! Monk and his rabbits have only just started the same as we have."

"Perhaps."

"What do you mean, Gore?"

Gore shrugged his shoulders.

"You're a pretty fine Scout-master, you are!" he sneered. "Can you give me any reason why the Grammar fellows shouldn't have started twenty minutes before we did so as to get a good start, and then pretend they'd started properly at three?"

And he laughed again.

Tom Merry looked at him curiously.

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"Yes, Gore," he said quietly; "I could give you a couple of good reasons. Frank Monk wouldn't let his chaps play the cad's game for one of 'em; the other is, the chaps themselves would half slay him if he had suggested it. This is where I fade out of the picture."

He hurried off by himself, and before long the other fellows also began to separate, single scouts having a better chance of escaping the opposing defence than groups. Despite this accepted truth, however, Mellish of the Fourth kept with Gore and the two forged ahead.

"Pretty rotten sort of wheeze this is, and no mistake!" grumbled Gore after a bit. "Just like one of Merry's blessed ideas. Do you know where we are?"

"In Rylcombe Wood."

"I know that, you fool! Whereabouts in the wood? Are we heading straight, do you think?"

Mellish looked up at his companion. Of the two, perhaps, Mellish was the most contemptible nature, for he had the meener spirit, but there were times when even he was nettled.

"Well, there's no need to get ratty, Gore," he exclaimed. "It isn't my fault it's hot and prickly here. They aren't my woods."

"Funny merchant you are, aren't you?" inquired Gore savagely.

"And it isn't my fault," snapped Mellish. "It isn't my fault D'Arcy minor blacked your eye, as he has, is it?"

Gore growled something, and for a moment Mellish thought he had gone a step too far. He made an attempt to smooth the ruffled waters by offering the other some milk chocolate. Gore took the offering with a growl.

"D'Arcy minor can wait," he muttered. "I'm not the sort of fellow to let a brat of the Third use his hands on me. He'll find that out before long. What's that down there?"

Something metallic was shining amongst the dank, long grass. It was half concealed whatever it was, and Gore stopped.

"Oh, let's chuck this!" he growled snappishly. "Hanged if I'm going to dance through the woods to Merry's piping; the cad's conceited enough as it is."

"But Monk or some of the Grammarians will catch us if we stop here."

"Let 'em. I hope they do. I say, it would be up against Merry if we did let 'em catch us on purpose, wouldn't it? I mean, it would be two points to the other side. I'm going to sit down."

Mellish hesitated.

"It's not quite the game, is it, old man? I mean——"

He tailed off weakly. Gore was looking at him with a fixed, disconcerting stare.

"Not quite the game?" he asked, endeavouring to look puzzled. "And what do you consider is the game, Mellish, better known as the cad of the Fourth?"

"Well, I mean the honour of the school. Oh, I don't mind! If you like to stop and wait to be caught I'll stop too," he added, blushing. "It'll be rather a rag, anyway."

Gore muttered something to himself. He was in a very bad temper that afternoon, for he had been in trouble in class, and his eye hurt where D'Arcy minor's fist had come in contact with it.

"I'm going to have a cigarette," he said after a bit, "and I'm going to sit down. And if only you'll shut your silly mouth we'll have a decent time—— Ow! Oh! O-oh!"

Gore had sat down—sat down comfortably, as he thought, on the driest tuft of grass to be seen, but he was now up again—up and howling at the top of his voice.

"What's the matter, George?" gasped Mellish. "What's up?"

"Oh! O-oh!"

"George, are you stung or—or bitten by a beastly snake? What's the matter?"

Gore was dancing on one foot, clapping his left calf with both hands. The noise he was making was enough to have drawn the deafest scout in the world to the spot. Then suddenly a changed expression flashed across his face.

"Look!" he bellowed. "It's a beastly trap! I put my leg in it!"

Mellish looked as directed, and saw that the shining something Gore had noticed before was now entirely exposed. It most certainly was a trap. That was enough for Gore and the state of his temper just then.

With another bellow, he seized a large stone, then dropping to his knees, he began demolishing that trap for all he was worth. Time after time he banged away with the stone until the steel trap resembled anything in the world but what it had originally been, then just as his anger began to wear itself out, another shout rang out.

"Hallo! Bless my ole 'at! Well, of all the nerve——"

They were disjointed remarks, made at the top of a naturally powerful voice, and they came from a burly gamekeeper, one of Sir Neville Boyle's men, Mellish could see at a glance.

"Then we must be on Sir Neville's ground," thought that junior with a gasp, and he shuddered.



As Tom Merry pushed, the top portion of the swell of St. Jim's had gone downwards, the lower portion up, then he gracefully disappeared into a convenient ditch.

The next moment Gore also shuddered. The burly gamekeeper had laid a heavy hand on his shoulder.

"This'll just be about the limit, my boy," he said gravely. "No, I ain't goin' to touch you; it's too serious for that."

"W-what do you mean?"

"What do I mean? Why, what I mean is this, my young spark. I mean that this'll have to be reported to Sir Neville, an' I make as bold as to suggest that you'll know what that'll mean. Sir Neville's had some trouble with poachers in his time, an' I doubt whether he'll take kindly to havin' his traps smashed. I ain't goin' to lay a hand on you, but I'm just going to jot down your name, my boy."

"L-look here," began Gore, going pale. "I'm beastly sorry. Lend us a bob, Mellish."

"You needn't try that on," said the gamekeeper gruffly. "Bribin' won't come off this journey."

"But, look here; we hadn't any idea we were on Sir Neville's ground. In fact, we lost our way, I suppose, and it was only by chance—"

"Don't worry to tell lies. I want your name for bursting up that there trap, that's all. No particulars as to date of birth, etcetera. And it don't matter about the other boy, so long as you clear out o' the woods at once. Come on, my lad!" Mellish looked hugely relieved.

"Yes, better give your name," he whispered to Gore. "Go on, old man! You'll get me landed as well."

"Hope I do. Suppose I make it two bob?" he added to the gamekeeper.

"If you made it two pun I'd refuse. Your name, sharp, or I haul you both off to Sir Neville, an' that'll mean trouble on the score of trespassing as well."

"There!" exclaimed Mellish anxiously. "I knew you'd draw me into it. His name is—"

"Shut your mouth!" snapped Gore furiously. "I—I—"

"Are you goin' to give your name—this is the last time I'm going to ask?"

"Y-yes; D'Arcy—Walter D'Arcy!" said Gore quickly.

"I—"

"St. James's College, of course?"

"Y-yes."

"Right-ho!" grinned the gamekeeper. "You'll hear of this again. Now clear out o' the woods sharp, an' don't try on explain you didn't know they were closed to the public to account of the festival. I've got all I want, thanks."

And Gore and Mellish went—Gore hastily at a run, and Mellish in a flush of amazement.

CHAPTER 8.

The First Capture.

"THERE—there'll be an awful row about this, George!" faltered Mellish at last. "I—"

"Shut your mouth!" snapped Gore, and he sat down on the trunk of a fallen tree and examined his leg.

The pair were still in what they took to be Rylcombe Wood, but neither knew in which part. Mellish's only hope was that they were not still on Sir Neville's ground, and that Gore's lie would not bring trouble on his, Mellish's, head. He voiced this hope after a bit as the pair sat panting on the tree-trunk after their run.

"I—I say, George, you oughtn't have done it."

"What was that?"

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Mellish started violently. He could hear nothing, but then, he did not wish to hear anything, and he got up ready to make a run for it.

"Only some rotten old rabbit or something rustling about in the grass!" grumbled Gore, whose temper was not improved by the fear he was trying to hide. "What oughtn't I have done, milkso?"

"Given D'Arcy minor's name—I mean——"

"Rot! Isn't it everyone for himself? And besides——"

"Steady there, Lane—round to the other side, Carboy. Got 'em!"

Gore's views on individualism were interrupted by loudly whispered instructions. Before he could realise the turn events had taken, Frank Monk, Carboy, and Lane of the Grammar School had burst from the thicket.

"Hands up, my sons, hands up!"

"What do you want, Monk?"

"You, kid—you and the great Mellish!"

"Well," said Gore aggressively, "mind you don't get a thick ear instead."

Frank Monk grinned.

"Any of those you can give I'm ready to take. Do you surrender?"

"Oh, you mean the scouting rot!" grinned Gore unpleasantly.

"Yes; you can count us as captures."

"Come along, then."

"Come along—what do you mean? We're going back to St. Jim's."

"Ha, ha, ha—I don't think!" laughed Monk. "You are coming to the old bridge, my son, where we've got to meet Tom Merry in the end. Come along!"

He got a grip on Gore's arm, and Gore tried to wrench himself away. He did not succeed, so he altered his plan. He hit Monk forcibly on the end of his nose.

In ordinary circumstances Frank Monk was an excellent tempered fellow, but there were limits. Gore had passed the limit, and Monk asserted himself. He thumped Gore in the chest and sat him down.

"Take that!" muttered the Grammarian, holding his nose. "Scrapping didn't come into the arrangements, but if you feel like a round or two, I'm your man!"

"Come on, Mellish!" bellowed Gore. "Come on, you rotten coward! There—take that!"

Monk refused to "take that," and neatly ducked just in time; then he closed with the college lad, and they began rolling about on the ground excitedly. There happened to be a great many dried twigs and stones about, and clothed as they were in scout costume, they found it painful work.

"Separate 'em!" gasped Mellish. "Better separate 'em!"

"Right-ho!" grinned Lane. "For Gore's sake. Here's the rope, Carboy!"

Carboy nodded, and the next time Gore came uppermost in the fight, coolly fastened his legs together with a slip-knot, ran another length of rope round his waist, and so fastened his arms to his side.

"All right now, Monkey," he said cheerfully. "I've got him trussed Al. Did he hurt you?"

"Hurt me?" growled Monk. "I only hope I've hurt him half as much!"

"Unfasten this rope—undo it, Lane, or I'll half kill you!"

"Yes, I don't think."

"Undo it, I tell you!"

"Dry up, ass!" said Monk curiously. "A jolly fine scout you are and no mistake. A deaf moke could have tracked you down, even if he happened to be blind as well. I'll take the rope off if you'll promise to come to the bridge quietly."

Gore started to rave, but he calmed down rather abruptly. Perhaps, in the circumstances, it would be as well if he did go quietly.

"Call less attention to us," thought Gore, and he glanced at Mellish.

Mellish still looked a little scared.

"Are you coming quietly, ass?" repeated Monk. "We can't stay all day talking to a parcel of college anobs like you; we've got work to do."

"Yes; I'll come."

"That's more like a sane remark. There you are."

He slipped off the cords, then led the way through the woods, his arm linked for safety in Gore's.

"No offence, you know," he said cheerfully. "Just a little natural caution in case you might be tempted to hoof it, Gore. My hat, you fellows didn't half make a row—I suppose it was you?"

"W-what was me?"

"The row, ass! And what was that about Wally D'Arcy? What did you mean when you told Mellish about having given Wally's name?"

Gore started, but he pulled himself together before even Frank Monk's keen eyes noticed anything.

"You rotten sneak, Monk!" he exclaimed. "You must have been spying and listening to our conversation!"

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"Exactly. That is what we were out to do, ass. Aren't we scouting?" "Has Wally got into a row or something?"

"Y-yes."

"Wally?" chipped in Carboy. "D'Arcy minor isn't within half a mile of this spot. I caught sight of him just before I met you, Monk; but, of course, didn't touch him as he is a defender. Wally is right back there."

Monk glanced at Gore curiously. He did not know a great deal about the St. Jim's fellow, but the little he did know was not pleasant knowledge. He had always understood in a vague sort of way that Gore was a cad, and that Mellish was decidedly a bird of the same feather.

Gore looked at Mellish, but nothing in the way of inspiration appeared like coming from the Fourth-Former, and so he turned to Monk again.

"It was a rag!" he muttered.

"A rag, eh? Good man. Anything up to snuff? You got into trouble with one of Sir Neville's keepers, didn't you? We heard his voice."

Gore began to flounder. He had the heart to lie, but he was lacking in the essential of a sound imagination. However, he managed to rise to the occasion.

"No, there wasn't a row," he added hastily. "Any—any shouts you may have heard I uttered because I—I cut my leg a bit. The keeper told me I was trespassing, and for the fun of the thing I—I gave the name of Wally D'Arcy. It'll be beastly funny when Wally proves he wasn't within half a mile of the spot."

"Ha, ha, ha!" laughed Carboy. "That's pretty good. Wally was walking away from this part when I saw him. It'll make the keeper look small."

Monk chuckled as well.

"But someone else'll look small if the keeper comes into class, as one of them did at our place once, and has a look at you all," he said. "What'll you do then, Gore my son?"

"Own up!" said Gore indignantly.

"Of course," added Mellish, with equal dignity. "You'd own up at once, wouldn't you, George?"

"Of course I would," agreed the Shell fellow, looking relieved. "The idea to give old D'Arcy's name only occurred to me on the spur of the moment, and—and I nearly gave the show away with laughing. I say, Mellish, won't it just get our own back for the asses he made us look on the first of April, eh?"

"What did he do?"

"Do!" exclaimed Gore. "Do! Why, he—why he—"

What was that?"

A loud and angry voice suddenly rang out through the otherwise silent wood.

"Who is there? What are you doing there?"

"My—my hat!" gasped Monk. "That's Sir Neville's voice!"

"How dare you—boys, how dare you trespass! Catch them, Drake!"

Drake was evidently one of the many gamekeepers employed by Sir Neville, and it was also evident that he was a man who could act promptly upon an order. The five juniors could hear him plunging through the undergrowth towards them.

"Cut!" gasped Monk. "Hook it like hares!"

And each of the five pelted off at a pace as near even time as he could make it.

CHAPTER 9.

Rival Scouts.

IN another portion of the famous old woods another scene was taking place. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was the sole actor as yet.

The swell of the School House was on his hands and knees, crawling slowly towards a neighbouring bush, his monocle deep in his eye, and the light of fixed determination on his face.

"Weally," he was soliloquising, "weally, I wathah believe that I am about to make a capture!"

And he paused to listen. There certainly was a foreign sound coming from the other side of that bush, the sort of sound someone might make if he were moving cautiously about.

"If it is one of the Gwammah wottahs, I wathah think his numbah is up," thought Arthur Augustus. "I will thwow myself upon him, bai Jove!"

And suddenly springing to his feet, he rounded the bush in a flash and leapt on the back of another junior who was also on his hands and knees.

"Hands up, deah boy!" shouted Arthur Augustus. "Hands up, or I fiah, bai Jove!"

"Good gracious!"

"Hands up, deah boy—put your beastly hands up!"

And, as some sort of inducement, Arthur Augustus rolled his captive over on some prickles. The captive uttered a yell, and Arthur Augustus let him go with a gasp.

"Bai Jove, it's Skimmay!"

"Yes, it is I!" exclaimed Skimpole, the genius of St. Jim's,

scrambling to his feet. "You really ought to be more careful, D'Arcy; you startled me extremely."

"Bai Jove!"

"Yes, you did, indeed," went on Herbert Skimpole, blinking rapidly through his enormous glasses; "and a shock is very dangerous to a man when hard at work. I was just examining this fern, which seems different from the ferns of its class which have hitherto come under my observation. If you will notice carefully, D'Arcy, you will see that the leaves lie in exactly—"

"Yaas, wathah, deah boy; but why aren't you scoutin'?"

"Dear me, I really forgot all about our game. But it does not matter. Just notice, too, how very peculiar the root of this plant has grown!"

"You uttah duffah!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus. "You might have been captured by Fwank Monk or one of his wottahs, and you count as a beastly point, deah boy. I wathah think you had bettah get a move on."

"Certainly, if you think it advisable, and for the good of our side," said Skimpole obligingly. "Where do you advise my going?"

"Anywhere, you dummy—— Bai Jove!"

A regular stampede appeared to be approaching the pair, and the monocle dropped from Arthur Augustus's eye.

"Bai Jove, Skimmay, I pwopose we wun!"

"Dear me!"

At that moment a green shirt and a scout hat burst through the foliage, and the excited face of Tom Merry loomed up before them.

"Travel, you chaps," he panted. "Bobbies, keepers, and all sorts of people are after us—fairly hook it!"

"Weally——"

"Fact! Come on!"

"But the scoutin', deah boy!"

"Oh, hang the scouting; there's been a bungle, for which Frank Monk ought to have his silly head punched. These woods are closed by order of Sir Neville for a week. There are giddy trespass boards all over the place."

"Bai Jove!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus. "Wun, Skimmay; wun like anythin'!"

And he started off as hard as he could go. The other juniors followed, and a few moments later they came upon Figgins, running for dear life, and quite indifferent as to where he was going. Lowther was with him, and he seemed quite upset.

"Of all the utter duffers, Merry, you take the bun!" he gasped. "For an empty-headed dummy you aren't to be beaten. Why didn't you remember that the Rylcombe Festival started to-day, ass?"

"It's Monk's fault. But there's no time to talk now," exclaimed the Shell fellow hastily. "There'll be an awful row if any of us are caught. Bless if I can think why some of you didn't remember about the rotten festival. Kerr has just told me he saw Sir Neville, and that he is raging like a mad bull."

"That's what Wynn said."

"Where is Wynn?"

"In a hole," said Figgins with a grin. "He said he felt too hungry and hot to run, so he has hidden himself in a deep hole, and Lowther and I covered him over with leaves and branches and things. He's going to sneak out of the wood when the coast is clear. The next time I come scouting with you, Tom Merry, we'll ask your governess to be one of the party; you need someone to look after you."

"Bai Jove, yaas, wathah; or Cousin Ethel!"

Both Tom Merry and Figgins blushed at that, but the cause was very different. Somehow Figgins always managed to colour a little when Cousin Ethel's name was brought into the conversation.

While the juniors were talking, Arthur Augustus was leading the way at the best pace he could manage. He did not know where he was going, but that did not matter, so long as the keepers were shown a clean pair of heels.

The portion of the Rylcombe Wood they were in belonged to Sir Neville Boyle, and it was always closed to the public at the time of the festival. This Sir Neville had found absolutely necessary, for the three festival days were days upon which the countryside let itself go, and a bonfire had once been the cause of a wood fire which had done a great amount of damage. In addition to this, Sir Neville was a gentleman who only issued orders he meant to be observed, and an "I didn't know" or "I forgot" was no sort of excuse in his eyes. Tom Merry knew there was trouble ahead if anyone had been caught.

"It's Patty Wynn I'm afraid of, Figgins," he panted, as they sped along. "The young ass ought to have made a dash for it."

"He said it was too hot, and that he felt hungry——"

"Humph! Jolly fine scouts some of you New House slackers are, and no mistake—too hot and hungry to run, by jingo!"

"Yes!" said Figgins coolly. "But then we can't all be the polished scout Tom Merry is!"

"Silence in the ranks," muttered the Scout-master sharply. "Good! Here we are!"

They had gained the outskirts of the wood once again, and

they were all over the hedge and in the field again like a flash. Then they sat down and panted. Arthur Augustus was the first to speak. He found his monocle, screwed it into his eye, and viewed Tom Merry thoughtfully.

"Of all the wotten Scout-mastahs, deah boy——"

"Dry up, Gussy, or there'll be a thick ear for you to attend to."

"I wefuse to dwy up," said Arthur Augustus with dignity, "and I should regard any thick eahs you could administah as miwicals, Tom Mewwy. Of all the wotten Scout-mastahs——"

"Look here, D'Arcy——"

"As I was sayin', of all the wotten Scout-mastahs—— Here comes Fwank Monk and some of his wastahs. Hallo, Fwank Monk!"

Monk of the Grammar School did not answer at once. He hurried up and fixed a withering glance upon Tom Merry.

"Pretty bright specimen you are, aren't you?" he exclaimed.

"Yaas, wathah, that was what I was sayin'. Of all the wotten Scout-mastahs——"

Tom Merry got up.

"What was that you said, Monk?"

"I remarked that you were a pretty bright specimen of a scout," returned Monk with warmth, "and I add now—I don't think. Scoutin' isn't your game, Merry; draughts is more like it."

"Oh, I like that——"

Carboy and Lane came scrambling over the hedge at that moment, full of wrath.

"Where's Merry?"

"Any one seen Tom Merry?"

"Yes," said Merry aggressively, "I have. Do you want him?"

"Yes, I want to punch his silly head."

"Right-ho, Carboy; get a start on you. I'm ready!"

"Anyway," said Lane excitedly, "we won—the Grammar School won."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"So they did, Merry!"

"I don't think!"

"I tell you we did," shouted Monk. "We captured two of your rotters, Gore and Mellish—yes, we did!"

"Well, I've captured you now," said Tom Merry, catching hold of Frank Monk's arm. "You've no right to be this side of the wood—you are my capture, if that's the line you are going on."

"Oh!" said Monk. "Am I?"

And he thumped Tom Merry in the chest to such effect that Tom Merry sat down.

He panted, and Arthur Augustus leapt to his feet.

"Bai Jove, Fwank Monk," he shouted, "I vegard that as a declaration of war, deah boy, and I have no alternative but to administah a feahful thwashing. I must wequest you to take that, deah boy!"

He hit out vigorously, but Frank Monk happened to be looking at the time. He promptly ducked. From his point of view his manœuvre was entirely successful, but Lane, who happened to be standing at his side, seemed to entertain different ideas on the subject. The aristocratic knuckles of the scion of the house of D'Arcy had gone home on his nose.

"Ow!" howled Lane. "Ow, you mad ass!"

And he hit Arthur Augustus in what is termed the wind.

Arthur Augustus followed the lead set by his Scout-master and also sat down. That was the beginning of the end.

For no apparent reason except that he was in a state of excitement, Carboy banged Lowther on the left ear and then Lowther jumped on Carboy, and they finished the remainder of their dispute rolling about the ground. Everyone took sides now, and every moment the fighting forces were increased. Digby came panting over the hedge after a stern chase in which he had been the fugitive and a keeper the pursuer, glanced at the contending sides, and went for Carboy. The next moment a Grammarian came upon the scene, uttered a wild cheer and went for Digby, and so matters raged until D'Arcy minor's voice rang out above the uproar.

"Drop it, you scugs," Wally shouted. "Sir Neville and a whole host of 'em are coming this way. Dudley and I nearly got nabbed; drop it, Merry, you ass!"

It took a moment or two to cause the combatants to see reason, but Wally managed it at last, and then they all rose to their feet.

"Call yourself a scout, Merry?" yelled Monk. "Reckon you are fit to serve your king and country?"

"I do! And I reckon I'm fit to serve you with as many thick ears as you can take."

"Which is none from a St. Jim's rotter."

"Grammar cads!"

"College scugs!"

"Yah!" shouted Mellish, who with Gore had been watching and not taking part in the fight. "Yah, Monk, you rotter!"

"Go and eat coke!"

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A Double-Length School Tale of
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NEXT
THURSDAY:

"THE ST. JIM'S TERRIERS."

"I wegard the victowry as ours, deah boys," said Arthur Augustus; "and I wegard Lane as a wuff beast—"

"Pax, you asses," exclaimed Wally anxiously; "I tell you Sir Neville is coming this way!"

"Let him come," shouted Monk. "I don't care for a dozen Sir Nevilles. Are you going to finish it out, Merry?"

"Yes; when and where you like!"

"Come on, then!"

"We won!" shouted Carboy. "You can gain until Doomsday, Lowther, I tell you we won!"

"When?" asked Lowther. "When did you win?"

"I captured Gore and Mellish."

"Don't tell lies," said Mellish.

"Yes, don't tell lies, you wicked little ass," said Lowther in his cool, aggravating way. "People who tell lies can't sleep at night—can they, Carboy?"

"Let me get at him!" said Carboy. "Please let me get at him."

Then Lowther asked Carboy if he were tired of life, and Carboy answered irrelevantly.

"We won!" he shouted, placing his face to within about an inch of Lowther's, an annoying method of addressing even the best tempered of fellows. "We won!"

"Of course we won; they know that themselves," shouted Monk.

"Hallo, missing link," said Lowther. "I thought Merry had slain you!"

"Do make it pax, you chaps," cried Wally. "I tell you Sir Neville himself must be almost here by now!"

"Yah!" shouted Mellish, who felt very valiant now that the actual fighting was over. "Want anything in the nature of a thick ear, Monkey?"

"There he is!" groaned Wally. "Sir Neville is here. Listen!"

"Bai Jove," gasped Arthur Augustus; "my youngah bwothah is wight!"

"Of course I'm right, idiot; and if we're spotted it means being gated for weeks. You old fogeys want putting in strong rooms."

"My hat!" muttered Merry. "I propose we bunk."

"Heah, heah! Undah the circe—heah, heah!"

"We won!" shouted Monk, moving off. "We won, college rotters!"

"Ha, ha, ha! Don't you wish you had, Grammar cads?"

"Of course we won."

"Missing link," yelled Lowther. "Get a chain for the missing link, Lane, and a book on how to fight."

"College rotters!" came back the howl but not so loudly, the noise being lost in the widening space between the rival scouts. "College wasters!"

"Grammar cads!"

"Ha, ha, ha! And they call themselves scouts."

"We won."

"We won."

And all further remarks were lost in the distance.

CHAPTER 10.

Lane Gives Some Information.

"CALL yourself a Scout-master, Monk?" asked Lane, as the Grammarians vended a weary way homewards. "Do you consider you know a scout's staff from a Baden-Powell hat?"

"Hallo, Lane; what's the matter with you?"

"Why don't you learn how to scout, Monk?" said Carboy thoughtfully; "I would if I were you!"

Frank Monk glanced at his chums, then walked on without speaking. He felt that remarks would be out of place, and, besides, he felt sore in mind and body about the whole thing. He wanted to get home and hide his light under a bushel for a short time.

"Any ass would have chosen another day," said Lane after a bit; "that is any ass but Monk."

"Monk's proper place is a home," muttered Carboy. "Don't you agree with me now, Monk?"

Still Frank Monk maintained a diplomatic silence, and Carboy and Lane were just about to improve on their previous remarks when a shout went up from behind the hedge.

"Here they come!"

"Here are the Grammar cads. Turf 'em, Pilcher! Ha, ha, ha!"

Frank Monk and company started as one man. They all knew those voices and the laughter. They came from Pilcher, Craggs, and Grimes, village youths who were no less at war with the Grammar School chaps than they were with St. Jim's fellows, but there was not much time to think in.

Almost as Craggs's instructions rang out, a whole volley of pieces of turf and balls of mud sailed over the hedge, and scarcely one of the Grammar School Troop of Boy Scouts escaped.

This, on top of what they had just gone through, proved The Gem Library.—No. 62.

almost too much for Carboy and Lane, and they turned to flee; but in face of the enemy Monk was himself again.

"Fire!" he shouted. "Fire!"

"What with, ass?"

"Pelt 'em!" shouted Monk, picking up a piece of turf which had almost floored Lane the moment before, and hurling it wildly back at the grinning Pilcher. "Go for 'em!"

His scouts answered the call nobly, and as the thick hedge and an unjumpable ditch prevented anything in the nature of close quarter work, they all began tearing pieces of turf from the roadside, and sending volley in return for volley. In less than a minute another terrific fight was in progress, but that minute was just long enough for a fresh development to help complicate matters.

A trap came round the bend in the road smartly, the cob with its knees well up, and being driven by an old gentleman who was smoking a cigar, and looked pleased with the world in general and himself in particular. That was just before he was round the bend. The moment following his views on life underwent a drastic change, for a moist morsel of ditch-mud caught him in the left ear.

He dropped the reins and his cigar, and bellowed something at the top of his voice.

"My hat!" gasped Monk. "Steady there, Grimey, my son! Ha, ha, ha!"

The advice had come a fraction of a moment too late, for Grimes had fired again. At first Monk thought the villager's effort had knocked the elderly gentleman out of his trap.

"Dry up, you chaps! Drop it, Pilcher, you ass!"

"Steady on!" gasped Craggs. "There's someone there! Lie low!"

And Frank Monk could just catch sight of the village fellows crouching down on the opposite side of the hedge before a heavy hand fell on his shoulder.

"How dare you, boy," thundered the owner of the hand—"how dare you!"

"How dare I—what?" asked Monk, twisting out of the other's grasp. "Oh, it's you, is it! Well, I am sorry, sir, but it wasn't—"

"Look at me!" shouted the elderly gentleman, who had climbed down from his trap, and was a deep beetroot colour about the eyes. "I will have you sent to a Reformatory for this, my lad, as sure as my name's Parker!"

"But I haven't done anything!" growled Frank Monk, who had some mud in his eyes and felt upset. "It was I who stopped the others as a matter of fact."

"Don't you dare to lie to me, boy!"

"Lie to you—who wants to lie to you, I should like to know? If you don't like turf in the ear, why didn't you duck?"

Frank Monk was a polite enough fellow at most times, but it had been a trying afternoon, and, besides, he always objected openly when anyone hinted that he was speaking falsely. Mr. Parker did not know this, and if he had his was far too uncertain a temper to have allowed him to care about it.

"What is your name?" he cried to Monk, taking no notice of the others. "Give me your name instantly, or I shall call the police and give you in charge!"

"Call the police, eh?" grinned Lane. "Got a strong voice I suppose."

"Your name, boy—you there!"

"My name?" said Frank Monk, looking up innocently.

"My name—bless my hat, I believe it has slipped my memory! May I ask what I have done, sir?"

"Done—done! Look at me?"

Frank Monk did so. He could not see even then why he was being raved at.

"As a matter of fact," he said coolly, "you've got hold of the wrong end of the stick if you mean about that bang on the ear. It wasn't I who threw the turf."

"You lying young rascal!"

"Good afternoon," said Monk, and he began to move off.

Mr. Parker followed him up, and Lane followed Mr. Parker, a gleam in his eyes.

"Do you want his name, sir?" he said gravely, and in a very loud whisper. "I'll give it to you if he won't."

Both Monk and Mr. Parker turned sharply at that, but there wasn't a great deal to be learnt from Lane's grave face.

"His name," the junior said pleasantly, "is D'Arcy—Walter D'Arcy, of St. James's College; a bit of a blood at his best."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Ho, ho, ho!"

Distinct chuckles came from Craggs, Pilcher, and Grimes through the hedge, but they said nothing. They couldn't see Lane's object in giving Wally's name, but they could see that the manoeuvre was likely to cause complications. Monk looked astounded.

"Yes," went on Lane; "don't forget—D'Arcy, Walter D'Arcy, and when you call at St. Jim's, if you are going to, explain that it was I who owned up."

"Yes, certainly, my lad. You are the only boy amongst



The two boy scouts let out a frightened scream as the burly gamekeeper laid a heavy hand on each of their shoulders.

you who has the slightest ideas of good manners. What is your name?"

"Ah!" said Lane sadly. "That is the question, isn't it?" And he sauntered away.

Mr. Parker looked rather uprisped at first, but as he had all the information he cared about, he climbed up into his trap again.

"And, mark you, D'Arcy," he cried, shaking his whip at Frank—"mark you, I shall call on your schoolmaster the first thing in the morning, and I shall use all persuasion possible in order to induce him to publicly thrash you!"

Then he whipped up the cob and drove on, indignation stirring in his breast. Frank Monk turned to Lane in amazement.

"My hat, kid, what made you do that?"

"Well, the old idiot shouldn't have called you a lion-tamer. Serve him right!"

"But young Wally—hang it all, what about Wally? I say, we must slip back and explain to the old beast."

"Why?" grinned Lane. "Bless me, young Wally will enjoy it, and clear himself as easily as winking. I did it to give Parker, or whatever his rotten name is, a good walk up to St. Jim's. It was all your fault, Grimes, my boy!"

"Yes, I did just catch him one, didn't I?" grinned Grimes. "A good old sonker. Fancy you giving D'Arcy's name, though!"

"Oh, it's a rag they have on at St. Jim's," explained Lane.

"You remember, Monk, what Gore said?"

"My hat, yes! I'd forgotten. Good wheeze, my son; and they'll get some fun out of it. Ha, ha, ha!"

The idea of Mr. Parker bursting in on Dr. Holmes, and demanding to see Wally, then receiving a fearful shock when he did see him, struck them all as funny, especially Grimes.

"An' you say it's a jape?" the village fellow asked, winking at the others. "Sort of All Fool's Day idea?"

"Yes, that's it, I suppose. All we know is that they are ragging Wally at St. Jim's somehow," laughed Monk. "I say, we'd better be slipping along. Good-night, Grimes, you rotter!"

"Good-night, Grammar cad," said Grimes pleasantly, in his Sussex drawl. "Sha'n't see you again until next time, I suppose."

Then he turned to his companions and began chuckling hugely. Pilcher and Craggs chuckled back.

"Gave Wally's name, did they? Ha, ha, ha!"

"Ho, ho, ho!"

"An' his own schoolmates be ragging him, too," said Grimes. "An' don't you forget it. The orders be—pass the word to the other village fellows, an' pass it quick!"

And Pilcher and Craggs nodded energetically.

CHAPTER 11.

Dr. Holmes Receives a Visitor.

"I WOULDN'T like Tom Merry to hear," said D'Arcy minor, in a whisper; "but the thing can be left safely to him. Merry's head's screwed on all right, although it is a bit swelled."

"Silence!" cried Mr. Selby, the Third Form master. "Silence!"

"Of course," went on Wally, "a mistake was made in ever choosing him as Scout-master, but—"

"Silence!"

"The deed having been done we shall have to back him up, Curly. Yesterday's affair was a beastly farce, but, you'll see, Merry will turn the tables all right on Monk and Co. If

he doesn't, then the Fag Patrol will turn the tables on Tom Merry, and turn him out of the troop. I have spoken!"

"Silence!" roared Mr. Selby for the third time, the flush of anger mounting to his brow.

He could not see who it was who was talking, and he could not hear what was being said; but there was a distinct buzz of conversation in the class-room.

It was the morning after the scouting in the Wayland Woods, and so there was plenty to talk about, in addition to D'Arcy minor being in a talkative mood, and it looked as if there was going to be trouble in the Third Form room that morning, when suddenly the door was pushed open.

"Dr. Holmes wishes to see D'Arcy minor in his study, sir."

"Wishes to see D'Arcy, Kildare!" exclaimed Mr. Selby, glancing from the captain to his most unruly pupil. "D'Arcy minor, do you know why Dr. Holmes wishes to see you?"

Wally did not quite know how to answer. There were many things which, if they had come to light, the doctor might be anxious to talk over with him.

"No, sir; I don't think I know."

"Then you had better go and find out," said Mr. Selby sharply; and Wally went.

Kildare walked on ahead, and turned into the Sixth Form class-room before Wally could attempt to pump him; and so the Third-Former had to make his way to the doctor's study with what ease his conscience would allow him.

"It can't be that broken stable window," he thought, "cos Gibson and I mended it ourselves; and I don't see how it can be breaking boards last night, because I'm certain no one saw me. Oh, hang it, perhaps the old man wants my advice on something!"

And he grinned cheerfully and knocked at the doctor's door.

"Come in!"

The tones were by no means reassuring, nor was the expression on Dr. Holmes's face, and Wally cudgelled his brains again in the matter of misdeeds.

There was someone else in the room, too—a stout, middle-aged gentleman, who looked very stern and angry; but before Wally had time to notice him, Dr. Holmes's voice rang out again:

"D'Arcy, what is the meaning of this?"

Wally looked uncomfortable.

"I—I don't know, sir," he said cautiously. "Has anything happened?"

"Anything happened! D'Arcy, this gentleman—Mr. Parker—informs me that—that you and some more of my boys attacked him, that you—you threw pieces of turf and mould at him!"

Wally brightened up, and grinned.

"There's been a mistake, sir," he said. "Mr. Parker has made a mistake."

"You mean, the missiles were not intended for him?"

"I mean, there weren't any missiles as far as I'm concerned, sir," said Wally. "I don't know anything about the affair."

The doctor looked relieved, but the really interesting expression was on Mr. Parker's face.

"This boy's name is not D'Arcy!"

"Excuse me, but it most certainly is—Walter D'Arcy."

"But this is not the boy whose name was given me as D'Arcy!"

"Still, this is Walter D'Arcy nevertheless," said Dr. Holmes, in relief. "Do you not think, Mr.—er—Parker, that you may have been mistaken in thinking the lads who caused you annoyance were St. James's boys at all?"

"How am I to know what boys they were!" growled Mr. Parker. "I haven't been in the place a couple of days—here for the fishing. All I know is, that the lad who was most insulting to me was named D'Arcy. Not only was he insulting, but he actually hit me on the—the ear with a clod of dirt! Yes, sir, he did; then—then cheeked me. Are there any more D'Arcy's in this college?"

"There's my brother," said Wally, grinning, and even a flicker of a smile appeared on Dr. Holmes's face at the information.

The idea of Arthur Augustus hitting a dignified old gentleman like Mr. Parker on the ear with a clod of dirt had its humorous side.

"Your brother, eh—older than you?"

"In years—yes," said Wally. "But his name isn't Walter."

"Will you send for him, sir?" exclaimed Mr. Parker, turning to the doctor. "Possibly I made a mistake in the Christian name. Without doubt the lad I want is the older D'Arcy."

"I don't think," murmured Wally to himself, as the doctor rang the bell.

Taggles, the porter, came shuffling in, then retired again with an order to the House-master that Arthur Augustus was to come to the study immediately.

In due time Arthur Augustus came, hair carefully brushed and parted, and monocle in eye.

"You requested my presence, sir?"

"Who is this young idiot?" muttered Parker.

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NEXT
THURSDAY:

"THE ST. JIM'S TERRIERS."

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"Weally, sir," said Arthur Augustus, turning with dignity. "weally, as a total stwagah, I must wegard your wemark as a twifle familah, not to say wude—"

"Silence, D'Arcy!"

"Yaas, certainly, doctah; but I must wequest—"

"How could you, Gus," murmured Wally, "how could you hit the old bird in the ear with a clod of dirt? I am surprised at a brother of mine doing such a giddy thing."

"Weally, Wally—"

Arthur Augustus looked from one to the other, but before he had time to speak Mr. Parker turned to the doctor.

"No, this is not the lad who insulted me, either."

"Insulted you, sir? I wathah think I have nevah seen you in my life before!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus quickly.

"When did I insult you?"

"I said you did not. You are not the boy."

"Yaas, but I have a weputation to pweserve, sir, and I must wegard an insinuation such as you have just made as wequiring an exclamation, bai Jove! As a matter of fact, sir—"

"You are certain that neither of these are the lads you complain about?" asked Dr. Holmes, who knew his pupil Arthur Augustus.

"Of course I am, and I am certain that the name given to me was Walter D'Arcy, the younger lad's name. It is not likely that I should have made a mistake in the Christian name, after all, seeing that Walter is this boy's name. I was misled by one of your other villainous young rascals—"

"Weally, sir—"

"Silence, D'Arcy! Do you think you would be able to recognise the boy who gave you the name?"

"Recognise him? Of course I couldn't! Aren't boys as alike as peas from one pod? And aren't they all worse than one another? It is my candid opinion, my dear sir, that they ought to be kept under lock and key, and you have my sincerest sympathy in having such a lot of little fiends under your charge."

The doctor sighed.

Sometimes that sentiment expressed in other words occurred to him, but the expressive grin on Wally's face brought the doctor back from abstract meditations.

"You boys can go back to your respective class-rooms."

"Yaas, wathah, doctah! But I would like to wemark that I considah Mr. Parkah wathah beside the mark in sayin'—"

"Please go, D'Arcy!"

"Certainly, sir; but Mr. Parkah weally owes an apology—"

"Leave the room, D'Arcy!"

"Yaas, come along, Gus," whispered Wally, slipping his hand through his brother's arm. "You'll raise Cain if you start."

"I don't care if I waise a couple of Cains. Welease my arm, Wally! Welease—"

"When we're safe outside, ass," Wally murmured cheerfully, dragging his brother from the room, and closing the door. "Don't be a silly duffer. Something might crop up if we stay in the Old Man's room any longer."

"There is nothin' that could cwop up—"

"Oh, isn't there, my son. A fat lot you know about it, don't you?"

Arthur Augustus turned sharply on his brother, and glared at him through his monocle.

"Wally, I twust I am not to undahstand that your wemark wefers to the vewwy wude mannah in which Mr. Parkah was hit on the eah with a clod of wotten mould? If so—"

"That's all right, Gus, it wasn't I. I don't say I wouldn't have done it if I'd been there, but I wasn't. It's a mistake on the old bird's part. But there are other things. So long!"

And Wally wandered off as slowly as his conscience would allow him.

Arthur Augustus went downstairs.

"It is weally wathah weemarkable," he soliloquised. "Some watah must have given Wally's name for a wag. I think I will go back to class by cutting through the grounds, that bein' the longah way round. Bai Jove! What a whipping day!"

Arthur Augustus walked very slowly, so slowly at times that he almost stopped, and in this way he came to the gates. He stopped altogether now, because the sound of raised voices reached his ears.

"Which you can't see the doctor nohow, seein' he's already engaged—"

"I tell you I'll see someone, my man."

"Which you can't," answered Taggles. "You can wait here if you like. Otherwise you can go an' drown."

Arthur Augustus sauntered up.

"Anythin' the mattah, Taggles?"

Taggles did not answer, but someone else did, a burly, rather

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pleasant-looking young farm-hand, straw in mouth and hands in pockets.

"Yes, something, is the matter!" he exclaimed indignantly. "an' though it hasn't anything to do wi' me in a way, I'm going to see fair play. A joke's a joke right enough, but when it comes to smashing a widow's property I'm the man to see the thing through. I want to have a few minutes quiet conversation with a young blackguard named D'Arcy, my lad!"

Arthur Augustus started violently, and his monocle dropped from his eye.

CHAPTER 12.

Arthur Augustus Receives a Shock.

TAGGLES stepped from his lodge at that moment, and sniffed.

"Then you've got what you want," he said. "That's D'Arcy there, that is!"

And he waited expectantly to see what would happen. He had not long to wait.

"Your name is D'Arcy, is it?" cried the young farm-hand, grasping Arthur Augustus' shoulder with a grip that made the swell of the School House vinee. "It's lucky we've met, my lad, 'cos you can have your choice. Shall I go to the doctor, or shall I give you one of the worst hidings you ever had in your life?"

Arthur Augustus answered irrelevantly.

"Welease me," he said sternly. "Welease me instantly! You are crumpling my coat-sleeve."

"Which is it to be?"

"Welease me! Welease me at once, or I shall be compelled to administrah a feahful thwashing. I shall count three, and if you haven't weleased me by the word three—one—two—"

The farm-hand looked at Arthur Augustus in surprise. At a rough guess the young man was about fourteen stone in weight, and getting on for six feet in height, and Arthur Augustus was nothing like either. But it was evident that the swell of St. Jim's was not lacking in pluck, and the farm-hand liked him for that.

"But you ought to be ashamed of yourself!" he said indignantly. "A young fellow like you to go about at night smashing property."

Arthur Augustus looked up in some relief.

"I wathah think there has been a mistake, deah boy. I wegwet to say that the regulations of the coll do not pe'mit my goin' about at night. I wathah think it must be a case of mistaken identity."

"Your name is D'Arcy?"

"Yaas, wathah—"

"Then it was you who helped to smash Widow Kemp's gate!" exclaimed the farm-hand. "You ought to be ashamed of yourself, a poor widow who has hard enough work to keep body an' soul together, to go an' break down her gate an' fence. You ought to be kicked out of the skule, that you ought!"

"Bai Jove! Weally, deah boy, you are labourahin' undah a misapprehension. I did not bwreak down Widow Kemp's gate."

"Yes you did, you young liar! You helped, anyway."

"Weally, sir, your language is wepwehensible in the extveme. I give you my word of bonah—"

"I should think the word of honour of a lad who'd smash a gate like you did wasn't worth much, hang me if I should."

"But I didn't bwreak down the gate. I nevah bwroke down a beastly gate in my life, deah boy."

"I tell you you did, an' I'll tell you how I know. It was about ten o'clock, and I heard you pass along by our place, an' I came out to see what you were up to. You'd gone. Then I heard woodwork being torn down. I ran across the field, an' I heard Widow Kemp callin' to know who was there, an' I heard one of you say, 'Chuck it, Wally D'Arcy! That's a bit too thick, that is!' Exact words, mark you. Then you all laughed and ran off—"

"Wally D'Arcy?" said Arthur Augustus faintly. "Did you say Wally D'Arcy?"

"Yes, I did. And now I want to know whether I'm to go to the headmaster of this college, or whether you're going to agree to pay for the damage and take a thunderin' good hidin'! You can make your choice."

"Yaas, wathah! Yaas, undah the cires, I considah it weally genewous of you to offah me the choice."

"Well, which is it to be?"

"Yaas, wathah; but I'm not Wally D'Arcy."

"You said just now that you were."

"I wathah think I remarked that my name was D'Arcy, not Wally D'Arcy. Wally is my younghah bwothah."

"Is that another lie?" asked the farm-hand suspiciously. "If it is you won't do much good, 'cos I mean to see this through."

"I am not in the habit of tellin' lies," said Arthur Augustus quietly, "and I wathah think I should face the music if I had bwoken down the gate. I will wemonetwate with my younghah bwothah."

"Remonstrah be hanged! That won't do for me. If it was your young brother who did it, he'll have to pay for the damage and take a thrashing, or I go to Dr. Holmes. You fetch your young brother along here now."

"But I can't, deah boy. He is in class, and I wathah think there is a mistake somewhere. I will wemonetwate with him, and if it were he the damage shall be paid for, and I will administrah a thwashin' myself. The matter will have to wait until class is ova, though."

From almost any other fellow in the college this would not have suited the farm-hand at all, but there was something about the dignified loftiness of Arthur Augustus which carried weight even against private conviction. The farm-hand half thought he was being bluffed, but he felt compelled to submit.

"But, mark you," he growled, "if I find out you've been lying, I go straight to your schoolmaster, an' the fat'll be in fire, an' no mistake."

Arthur Augustus screwed his monocle in his eye, and viewed the other with a long, steady stare.

"Excuse me," he said coolly, "but I wegard that as a vewwy wotten obsewvation. Good-mornin', deah boy!"

And he turned on his heel, leaving the farm-hand scratching his head, trying to puzzle matters out. But for all his coolness, the swell of St. Jim's was a good deal exercised over what he had just heard. He knew that Wally would not wantonly damage the property of a widow woman, who had a hard struggle of it to make both ends meet, but he was not so sure the wild youngster of the Third might not have been one of a party which had behaved recklessly if nothing else.

"There's that wascal Dudley, for instance," thought Arthur Augustus, as he made his way into the college. "He behaved wippingly once, I know, but I wathah think what is bved in the bone will come out in the beastly flesh. If a fellow has been a wottah once, there's always the chance he may bwreak out and become a wottah again. I wegard the whole mattah as a mystewy."

And with that Arthur Augustus had to be content until class was over, but somehow he managed to give Jack Blake the gist of the story during Latin translation, and Jack Blake was equally indignant.

"Don't you believe it, Gussy," the leader of the School House juniors said as they dismissed. "Don't you believe it for a moment. Wally hadn't anything to do with smashing gates. I'll go bail for that. The best thing we can do is to tackle him at once."

"Bai Jove, yaas, wathah! I nevah thought he did it, you know, but he might have been with some wottahs who did. Seen young Wally, Tom Mewwy?"

"No, my son. Anything up?"

"Yaas, wathah!"

And Arthur Augustus told the Shell fellow the news.

Tom Merry whistled thoughtfully.

"Pretty rotten hearing, that. I don't believe it."

"Thanks, Tom Mewwy. No, I wathah think a D'Arcy wouldn't bwreak down gates myself. Seen young Lowthah, Wally, deah boy? I mean, seen Wally, young Lowthah?"

"Yes, young ass, I have!" said the humorist of the Shell. "He was between my finger and my thumb just now, as you might say—at least, his ear was. He's down by the gym, and a degree cheekier than usual."

Arthur Augustus hurried off, followed by Tom Merry and Jack Blake, and they came upon D'Arcy minor suddenly, employed in attempting to climb the gymnasium drainpipe.

"Wally, come down, you young wascal! Come down at once!"

"Right-ho, Gus! Look out there!"

And Wally came down, almost on his brother's head.

Arthur Augustus took no notice, but turned a stern glare upon him.

"Wally, where were you last night?"

"Lots of places—prep, supper-room, bed—"

"Did you, or did you not, bwreak bounds?"

"I did, my son. Turning prefect in your old age, Gus?"

"No, you young wascal, I am not turnin' pwefect," said Arthur Augustus anxiously. "Where did you go when you had bwoken bounds?"

"Oh, the same old place—tuckshop, of course! Did you think I ran up to town or something like that?"

"Did you go anywhere else bah the tuckshop?"

"No fear! It was a beastly dark night, and jolly cold."

"Then you didn't bwreak down Widow Kemp's gate?"

"Bless my hat, what should I want to do that for, ass?" exclaimed Wally. "Some of you old fugeys must be getting out of your dotage and into raving lunacy. I never went near Widow Kemp's place!"

"I am extvremely pleased to heah that, Walthah," said Arthur Augustus. "And undah the cires, I shall let you off the feahful thwashing I intended administrahin'."

"My hat, I really believe you have gone off your rocker at last, Gus! I do, upon my word!"

"No, deah boy—no, I am not off my wockah."

"Then what's all this rot about?"

Arthur Augustus told him in a few words, and as he listened Wally's keen young face became set.

"Of all the rotten goes, this takes the bath bun!" he exclaimed. "My hat, someone must have called out my name when I wasn't near the place! It's the giddy Parker affair over again."

"The Parkah affaiah—bai Jove!"

Arthur Augustus gasped in amazement. He had forgotten in the new sensation the strange interview he and his brother had had in Dr. Holmes' room, but it all came back now, and the strangeness increased a hundredfold. That there should be two cases of mistaken identity in one morning was beyond Arthur Augustus.

Tom Merry admitted that it was beyond him too.

"Of course, it may be a coincidence," he observed, "but it's jolly funny. I propose we slip down to Widow Kemp's cottage and get full particulars now—there'll just be time before dinner."

"Yaas, wathah! I was going to pwopose that myself."

"May as well," agreed Blake. "I wonder if any of the other fellows were out last night, except you, Wally?"

"None from the Third."

"And none from our dormnay, Blake."

"No, that's a fact. Gore and Mellish were both in, I know for a cert., because I complimented them on their scouting and Gore on his black eye. Pretty strange, eh, young Merry?"

"What you might almost call an eye-opener, don't you think, young Blake?" agreed the hero of the Shell. "But don't waste time. Let's cut along as hard as we can."

And they started off at the double.

CHAPTER 13.

Wally Has Another Interview with the "Old Man."

"DO you know anything about this Mrs. Kemp?" asked Tom Merry, as they turned down one of the Sussex lanes. "I don't seem to even know her name."

"Oh, I've heard the village people speak of her," returned Blake. "She hasn't been here long. Very hard up, I think Taggles said once. I suppose this must be her place."

The chums had stopped before one of the smallest cottages in the locality, a miniature place with a neatly-kept garden surrounding it, and a large fowl-run. Jack Blake pointed to this.

"That's how she gets her living, I think," he said—"selling the eggs and the fowls. My hat!"

Now that they were quite close to the cottage there could be no doubt that it was the one they sought, for the garden gate was smashed to pieces, and not only that, but the wooden fencing adjoining. The intrinsic value of the damage was not great, possibly, viewed from, say, a D'Arcy standpoint, but they could all guess what it must mean to a widow who had a living to make out of eggs and fowls. There were rather grim expressions on the chums' faces as they turned into the garden.

"Undah the cires," said Arthur Augustus, "I wathah think I had bettah be spokesman."

"Right-ho; only remember that we haven't got all day to jaw in," said Tom Merry. "Cut the cackle etcetera."

"I'll wemembah, deah boy. I suppose that is Mrs. Kemp ovah there."

Arthur Augustus hurried across the grass, and raised his hat to a very old woman, whose face was wrinkled by years, but whose eyes were soft and kind. As Arthur Augustus looked at the plaintive, bent old figure he felt more glad than ever that this was none of Wally's doing.

"Fire ahead," whispered Blake. "Get on with the biz."

"Yaas, wathah! Mrs. Kemp, I believe, ma'am?"

"Yes, sir."

"Well, we have come heah about the broken gate, you know. We all think it wathah wotten, and—and—"

"Here, you lie down, Gus!" said Wally. "The fact is, Mrs. Kemp, a fellow of the name of D'Arcy is supposed to have done the rotten trick. Well, he didn't, because we two are the only D'Arcys in Sussex."

"In the South of England, Walthah."

"Oh, you lie down! We are awfully sorry, but we give you our words that none of us had anything to do with it; and we don't think it was any other St. Jim's fellow either."

The old woman looked at Wally and smiled.

"No, I don't think it was you," she said. "And it doesn't matter who it was now. I don't want any boy to get into trouble about it, and it was against my wish that Bob Gale called at the school."

"Bob Gale! I suppose that was the wottah who doubted my word of bonah!" muttered Arthur Augustus.

"Did you hear the name of D'Arcy called out, Mrs. Kemp?" asked Tom Merry curiously.

"I thought I did, sir; but if this young gentleman is Master THE GEN LIBRARY.—No. 62.

D'Arcy I must have been mistaken." And she looked at Wally again with a smile which made Wally colour.

But the Third-Former was pleased at her words; there was something of more worth than flattery in them.

"Well, it's very strange," went on Tom Merry, "and we can't make it out at all. Neither of the D'Arcys were near here last night."

"Then, it must have been someone else; and it does not matter. The cottage is my own—it was left to me. And that is why I came here; so it does not matter at all. Bob Gale is coming in to-night after he has finished work, and is going to mend the gate for me."

"Bai Jove, is he, though?" exclaimed Arthur Augustus. "That is wathah wipping of him, you know!"

"We come from the same village near the coast, sir," answered the old woman, as if that fact explained everything.

And it does explain a lot, too, for Sussex village people are as clannish and loyal to one another as the people of the West country.

Tom Merry turned to the others.

"I don't see that we can say any more. We didn't have a hand in the rotten trick, and we're jolly glad we hadn't. If we find out who did it, we'll make him sit up, I can tell you. We'd better be going, you chaps."

"Wait a minute, deah boys! I wathah think we ought to do somethin' more than we have in this mattah. Mrs. Kemp," added Arthur Augustus, bowing to the old country woman again, "I shall take it as a greet favoah if you will have the broken gate and fence pwopahly mended, and instwuct the—er—mendah to send the bill to me at St. Jim's Coll." And the swell of the school put his monocle in his eye.

"Good old Gussy!"

"That's the sty'e, Gus!"

"Good old sport!"

"Yaas, wathah—I mean, don't mention it, deah boys. I considah the mattah as one concerning my personal dig, as my name has been brought into the stwange affaiah. You will agree with my pwoposal, I twust, Mrs. Kemp?"

"It is very kind of you, sir."

"Bai Jove, not at all; merely a mattah of dig. with me, I shall also considah it a greet honah if Gale will shake hands with me when we meet. I considah Bob Gale is a bwick in offahin' to mend the wotten gate. Good-mornin', Mrs. Kemp!"

Arthur Augustus raised his hat again, just as he would have raised it at parting from Cousin Ethel; and the other juniors tugged at their caps also.

Tom Merry seemed quite pleased with their visit.

"Fine old lady!" he exclaimed. "Ripping! And it was really decent of you to offer to pay, Gus. I wanted to do it myself, but I am nearly spent out. We'll sub round when the ship comes home."

"I wathah think we will do nothin' of the sort, deah boy! The mattah is one of personal dig."

"Rot! You didn't smash the gate—either of you."

"Bai Jove, no; but our name was intwoduced into the affair! No, Mewwy, I must refuse to considah your pwoposal. Go and eat coke, deah boy!"

"Oh, very well, then; have it which way you like," laughed Merry. "We haven't got any nearer to the meat of the thing, though, have we? We don't know who called out your name, Wally."

"No—and we never shall. Some seug or other, and seugs aren't worth troubling about."

"Still, it's funny."

"Oh, a coincidence, I expect!" said Jack Blake. "Perhaps the fellows who played the dirty trick were talking about Wally at the time. My hat, we'd better make a sprint for it, or there'll be lines!"

"Bai Jove, yaas, wathah! Wun, deah boys—wun like anythin'!"

And run they did, about as hard as they could, and all just succeeded in getting to the dining-room in time to escape imputs. But at least one of their number was not allowed to enjoy a well earned repast in peace, for scarcely had Wally taken his place at the table, when a stern voice rang out.

"D'Arcy minor, stand up!"

Wally stood up, and sighed. Something really had come out now. Mr. Selby never spoke in that voice unless trouble loomed prominently in the near future.

"D'Arcy minor, you are to go to the doctor's study immediately!"

"Y-yes, sir."

"You know what for?"

"N-no, sir."

"Then you will very soon find out!" snapped Mr. Selby.

And once again Wally had to make the dreaded pilgrimage to the "Old Man's" room.

"Hard luck, Wally!" grinned Curly Gibson, as his chum passed. "If it's a whacking you're expecting, slip into my room for a shin pad; if it's only a caning, bring your hand up

quickly just as the cane is coming down. Saves a lot, that does."

"Go and watch the flowers grow, Gibson," muttered Wally, and he walked thoughtfully from the room.

CHAPTER 14.

Another Monk-Merry Plan.

"THIS is the limit!" exclaimed Wally excitedly. "I don't care what anyone says, it's the limit!" He banged his fist down on the reading-table in the Third Form common-room, and glared at his listeners.

"What's up now, Wally?"

"Did the doctor whack you?"

"Hard luck!"

"No, the doctor didn't whack me, Curly Gibson," cried Wally; "he's a man of sense, the doctor is. Look here, you fellows! Early this morning I was called into the doctor's room and charged with pelting an old bird with turf. I didn't do it, and I escaped a row by the skin of my teeth. Just before dinner Gus and Tom Merry coolly accuse me of smashing down Widow Kemp's gate—"

"Jingo!" exclaimed Dudley.

"Yes, Dud, they did; and we went down to interview the old lady. She's a ripping sort, and I convinced her it wasn't I who played the scuggish game with her property. Then," went on D'Arcy minor, with rising wrath—"then I come back for dinner, and what do I get?"

"Dinner?" said Jameson.

"Yes, I know I do; but I get a summons to the doctor's room first, and there I have to go through it again. This time I am accused of breaking a trap in Sir Neville Boyle's woods!"

"My hat!"

"Did you do it, Wally?"

"Of course I didn't, Curly; I never saw a beastly trap all the afternoon. It was when we were playing that rotten scouting game with Monk's rabbits, you know. Sir Neville was in the doctor's room, and so was Drake, a new gamekeeper. Drake had the name Walter D'Arcy written down, and he swore it had been given to him by the fellow who had smashed the trap. That's why I say it's the limit, and if it isn't I'd like to know what is."

A burst of indignation greeted the news, Jameson, Gibson, and Dudley being especially wroth.

"But you cleared yourself, Wally?"

"If you didn't do it you can prove an alibi, or whatever it's called."

"Oh, can I? We were scouting, I tell you, and so how can I prove that it wasn't I? But that doesn't matter. Drake himself says he doesn't think I was the fellow, the rotter being older, and as for the doctor, well, he of course is a sport and takes a fellow's word until he finds him out in a lie."

"Then you're out of it all right?"

"Yes, I'm out of it all right as far as a row goes, Curly; but what about my beastly reputation? Oh, you can laugh, but when I do get into my next real scrape these things will crop up. Besides, I'm hanged if I'm going to have people giving my name as their own to save their bacon. It isn't good enough, I can tell you."

"My hat, no!"

"What does Gussy say?"

"He's inclined to rave a bit, Dud, my son," grinned Wally.

"Talks of remonstrating with the doctor and sending for Ferrers Locke, the detective; but I am not having any of that. This is up against me, and it's going to be up against me to solve the giddy mystery."

"Hear, hear!"

"We're with you to a man!"

"Thanks. Hallo, Gus!"

"We this strange mattah of your reputation," said Arthur Augustus gravely. "What do you intend doin' about it, Wally?"

"A jolly lot, I can tell you."

"What, deah boy?"

"I don't know what yet," said Wally darkly; "but we're going to do something. You can leave it to me, Gus."

"I weally think I ought to wemonstware with the doctah, Walthah."

"Remonstrate with the old man? What on earth for, ass? The doctor isn't going about giving my name as his own, is he?"

"Weally, Wally!"

"Well, talk sensibly, Gus. But you had better go, old man; we've business to attend to, and an old fogey like you—no offence meant, Gus."

"Well," said Arthur Augustus, "if no offence is meant I suppose I must not take exception to your remark, which you must allow me to observe is both wude and iwwelevant. As a mattah of fact, Walthah, I do not know which of three courses to adopt."

"What courses?"

"I don't know whether to wemonstware with the doctah, wiah to Fewwes Locke, or w'ite to the patah!"

"Ha, ha, ha! Go and sleep on it then, Gus, and when you wake up again, decide to do none of 'em."

"Yes, that's it," said Curly Gibson indignantly. "If the Fag Patrol can't look after its leader, call me an ass of a Fourth-Former."

"Weally, Gibson! Oh, well, if you want to talk mattahs ovah, I have no objection to withdwain'; but I must insist that I be informed as to your plans for the future."

"Oh, you shall be informed as to the plans, ass, when they are formed. Shut the door."

Arthur Augustus closed the door as desired, and rejoined his chums in Study No. 6. Tom Merry was there by invitation, and inclined to lay down the law from Jack Blake's point of view.

"You know what a mess you made of it last time, Merry," said the Fourth-Former severely. "We don't want another fiasco like that, I can tell you. One more, and Boy Scouting at St. Jim's is dead."

"That last mess up was Monk's affair."

"Yes, Monk's and yours."

"Principally Monk's," said Tom Merry pleasantly. "But it will be all right this time, because I have a ripping idea, and the festival will be over by to-morrow afternoon."

"About time, too, I should say," grinned Herries. "They have been having a rare old time down in the village. Blest if I can see why all the villagers want to go out on the spree just because Rylcombe sent fifty men to help Harold defend England against William the Conqueror in the giddy year 1066. It's like putting the flag out on the day Noah came out of the ark, to my mind."

"Yes, there has been a time down in the town," laughed Blake. "Most of the shops have their shutters up on account of their windows; but bother all that. The point is, is Tom Merry to be depended upon?"

"Of course he is to be depended upon," said Tom Merry indignantly. "I'd like to meet a more dependable fellow than—"

"You have," said Blake simply. "You are in his study now. Well, if you'll give us your word you won't boss this affair like you did the other, I don't mind you having another try. I mean it's up against you to try and prove you aren't the ass we all know you to be. What do you say, Gussy?"

"Yaas, wathah," said Arthur Augustus, who wasn't listening. "I considah the proposal does you gweat cwedit, deah boy."

"And you, Digby and Herries?"

"Oh, let the ass have another go. He can't botch it worse than he did the scouting in Wayland Woods."

"There'll be no mistaking this time if Monk will agree," declared Tom Merry. "I tell you, I have a ripping idea. I say, I have been making some inquiries from Taggles about Widow Kemp, too."

"Good, kid!"

"She's awfully hard up and all that," went on the Shell fellow quietly. "Taggles reckons she only just manages it. I—I—"

"Go on, old chap."

"Well, look here; would you chaps join me in an idea to— to make things a bit brighter for the old lady? I'm pretty certain young Wally and the rest of the Fag Patrol will."

"Yaas, wathah. I can speak for my youngah bwothah. He will considah anything you ask him to for Mrs. Kemp as an honah, deah boy."

"Yes, I reckoned on that. Then there's Figgins. We've only to ask him, I know."

"That's a fact," agreed Jack Blake heartily. "And you've asked us already, kid."

"You agree?"

"Of course."

"Good!" said Tom Merry. "I'll slip along and try to get on to Frank Monk on the telephone and put my proposal to him. If he agrees I'll slip back here and explain. So long."

The others watched him go, then Arthur Augustus turned hastily to Blake.

"I didn't want to intewupt the convalesation, deah boy," he exclaimed; "but I am considahbly wowwied."

"About Wally?"

"Yaas, wathah. About my youngah bwothah. It weally is vewwy wemarkable, Blake."

"Yes, it jolly well is, my son. What does he say about the charge of smashing that trap or whatever it was?"

"Of course he nevah did it. I should have thwashed him considahbly if he had. I weckon it bad form of the fellow who gave his name, bai Jove! Beastly bad form."

"Bad form, eh? I reckon it downright dirty, and I'm hanged, if I can see daylight. It wasn't a rag on the part of our fellows, because there isn't a St. Jim's fellow who wouldn't own up when it became a case for the beak—at least, there are only about one or two."

"Goah and Mellish, bai Jove. Yaas, but I wathah think

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 62.

A Double-Length School Tale of
Tom Merry & Co.

NEXT
THURSDAY:

"THE ST. JIM'S TERRIERS."

We proved that it was neithah of them who broke down Mrs. Kemp's gate, deah boy."

"Well, they proved that themselves by not having been out on the night in question," said Jack Blake thoughtfully. "I don't see what we can do. Better let it slide and see if anything else turns up. Hallo, back again then!"

"No, but I expect to be in an hour or so," said Tom Merry, coming into the study. "It's all right; Frank Monk agrees."

"Agrees to what?"

"That we run an original sort of Marathon Race—his scouts against mine. You know the quarry?"

"Of course I do."

"Well, you remember that huge rock just near where I once did the climbing act up a piece of rope? Good! I've arranged with Monk that he is to start from the Grammar School gates at three to-morrow and run with the rest of his troop just as hard as he can for this rock, round it, and back again to the old bridge, where we were to have—er—met on the previous occasion."

"Don't see a great deal in that so far."

"No, ass, but we also start from here at the same time and have to get to the rock and back to the old bridge before them. I've worked it out. The distances are exactly the same, and of course there are a huge number of short cuts if one likes to run the risk of crossing the farmers' fields, etcetera. That'll be rather exciting, I should say."

"I see!" exclaimed Blake. "The troop to get to the bridge first wins?"

"Yes; the troop which gets the most home in the first six."

"Humph! Not so dusty."

"No; and there won't be any hitch this time, because it was more my idea than Monk's," said Tom Merry. "But there's something else. Every scout who enters has to pay an entrance fee of two shillings."

"My hat! What for?"

"For the winner—"

"The winnah!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus in horror. "Do you mean to say that the winnah is to become a pprofessional winner, Tom Mowry?"

"Bless my hat no!" laughed the Shell boy. "The winner takes the money, certainly; but he has to hand it all over to Mrs. Kemp as a sort of offering from the Boy Scouts of St. Jim's and Rylecombe Grammar School."

"Good!"

"Wippin'; weally wippin'! I considah—"

"That's something like a wheeze, Merry!" exclaimed Blake. "I'm with you to the last gasp in that."

The enthusiasm was quite pronounced, and Tom Merry grinned with pleasure. Arthur Augustus slapped him gently on the shoulder.

"Wippin', deah boy!" he exclaimed. "I wegard the idea as wippin'. The pwize is that the winnah has the honah of pwesenting Mrs. Kemp with the wotten money. I wathah think, though, that the entrance fee ought to be waised. If we waise the entrance fee there will be more money to hand ovah."

"Great thought, Gussy."

"Yaas, wathah. I pwopose, gentlemen, that the sum be waised fwom two shillings to a fivah!"

"To a—what?"

"To a fivah, deah boy. Well, undah the cirs., say to a sov."

"Here, steady on!" laughed Digby. "Bless my old whiskers, I shall have all my work cut out to raise the two shillings at this stage of the term. You lie down and dream again, Gussy."

"But, weally—"

"No, leave it at two bob," laughed Blake. "That mounts up to a decent sum when you consider the number who will subscribe."

"Yaas, wathah!" admitted Arthur Augustus. "Undah the cirs., deah boy, I withdwaw my pwoposal."

They all laughed, but it was good-natured sort of laughter. Arthur Augustus always had plenty of money, but it was not "swank" which had induced him to make his proposal. They all knew the swell of the School House too well to think that for a moment. Kindness of heart had been D'Arcy's one and only motive.

"Then it's settled," said Tom Merry, getting up. "Start at three o'clock sharp to-morrow, and may the better troop win."

"We shall," said Blake, and that was the opinion of all present.

CHAPTER 15.

More Trouble.

"PERHAPS you have a double, Wally?"

"Perhaps I haven't. No, Curly; it's someone doing me down, that's what it is, and I can tell you, I'm fed up with the wheeze."

D'Arcy minor spoke decidedly, his face set. He did not mind suffering for his own sins, and they were not few; but when THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 62.

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it came to bearing the brunt of the misdoings of others, well, as he put it, the limit was reached.

The chums of the Third were out in the grounds, waiting for the bell to announce afternoon school, and they were walking up and down near the avenue. Wally broke the pause.

"If I only had some clue to go upon," he said, "it would be something. But I haven't a ghost of an idea who is playing the scuggish game."

"You'll have to grin and bear it," said Curly. "Perhaps you've heard the last—"

"S-st! Here comes Selby."

"My hat, yes. Who is he with?"

"Farmer Hodges," exclaimed Wally. "I—I wonder what's up now."

D'Arcy minor had a premonition that there was trouble ahead for him, though why he should have, he did not know. Still, there was a very stern, angry expression on Mr. Selby's face, and as for Farmer Hodges, he looked on the point of raving.

"C-come on," said Wally. "Let's be walking—"

"D'Arcy—D'Arcy minor!"

The name was called in a terrible voice. Wally jumped and stopped.

"Yes, sir."

"What is the meaning of this? How dare you, boy—how dare you? This will very likely mean expulsion for you."

Wally met his Form-master's angry glare steadily. There was something tangible here, and he could face it all right. He had done nothing worthy of expulsion even in Mr. Selby's eyes, so the master's warning came as a relief than otherwise.

"Anything happened, sir?" the junior asked coolly.

"Anything happened?" thundered Farmer Hodges. "Wot do you mean by it, eh? I can take a joke as well as any man, but when it comes to painting an animal bright blue—"

"Painting a—what?" gasped Wally.

"Painting Nicodemus, the donkey, a bright blue. You thought it rare funny when you did it, didn't you, my lad, but you won't think it so funny now. Me an' this gentleman are just going straight to the doctor—"

"My hat, I never painted Nicodemus a bright blue or any other colour. I haven't seen Nicodemus for an age."

"Oh, you haven't, haven't you!" shouted the farmer. "Wot about this?"

And he held up a card before Wally's astounded gaze with hands which shook with anger. On the card was painted in bright blue letters the words: "Done by Wally D'Arcy, R.A." Wally was dumbfounded for a moment or two.

"Surely, D'Arcy," exclaimed Mr. Selby, "surely you were not so mad as to do this?"

"Do it—of course I didn't, sir."

"Don't you start tellin' lies, my boy; they won't help you. You did it—that card is proof—"

"Do you call that proof," said Curly Gibson. "You don't think the fellow who painted your donkey a bright blue would be such an ass as to leave his name behind, do you?"

Farmer Hodges was in far too great an anger to notice this remark, but Mr. Selby saw the point at once.

"It is very remarkable," he said, fixing Wally with a keen glance. "Do you affirm that you know nothing of the affair, D'Arcy?"

"Of course, I do, sir. I haven't seen Nicodemus for days."

Mr. Selby turned to the farmer.

"I really think there must be some mistake, Hodges," he exclaimed. "D'Arcy minor is one of the most unruly pupils I have in my Form, but I scarcely think he would dare to do this. Of course, we will go to Dr. Holmes at once—you will come as well, D'Arcy—and, no doubt, the matter will be thoroughly sifted. When do you say this outrage was performed?"

"Between ten and eleven this mornin' to a minute," cried the farmer. "At ten I had a look at Nicodemus myself; at eleven he came past the house a bright blue, an' I have been washin' him in paraffin ever since. I want compensation for this, I can tell you; apologies won't suit me this time—"

"Between ten and eleven!" exclaimed the master. "Are you positive of the time?"

"Of course I am."

"Then it could not have been D'Arcy, because he was in my class-room between those hours!"

It was Farmer Hodges who received the shock this time, and for a moment Wally thought he was going to inform Mr. Selby that he was not speaking the truth. But he evidently thought better of it in time.

"Are you certain, sir?"

"I am quite certain, Hodges. Let me see, D'Arcy, did I not give you an imposition for repeatedly looking at your watch at about half-past ten?"

"Yes, sir; fifty lines."

"But here's his name, sir," exclaimed the farmer. "There's no getting over that—"

"That, I consider," said Mr. Selby, "practically proves that D'Arcy is not the culprit. No lad in his sane senses, as

the lad just remarked, would be so foolish as to leave a confession such as this is. I am afraid, very much afraid, that this is a joke on both you and D'Arcy."

"Then it must have been one of your other lads, sir."

"No, it could not have been a St. James's boy. No one was out at the time you mention."

"Well, I'm goin' to Dr. Holmes and chance it——"

"As to that, you can, of course, please yourself," said Mr. Selby. "I think it rather absurd of you to trouble the doctor over a matter which cannot concern him in the least. Really, Hodges, I think if you look for the culprit amongst the village boys or young men you will come nearer to obtaining satisfaction. Many ridiculous tricks have been played during this festival, I understand."

The farmer thought for a moment or two, then half turned.

"It may be as you say," he growled, "but if I find out that it isn't—if I find out this young rascal did it, I'll take the law into my own hands an' thrash him to within an inch of his life."

Then he walked away just as Mr. Selby did so, leaving the chums of the Third looking at one another in blank amazement. Wally broke the pause excitedly.

"There you are," he exclaimed, "you know me now. I'm a blood, and no mistake. I've smashed a trap belonging to Sir Neville Boyle, I've broken down Widow Kemp's gate, I pelted an old bird with mould, and now I've painted Nicodemus a bright blue. Pity I wasn't put away when I was young."

Jameson and Gibson were almost gasping.

"What are you going to do about it, Wally?"

"Do?" exclaimed D'Arcy minor, "do—why slay someone."

"Yes, but whom?"

Wally looked at Gibson, then put his hands in his pockets. That was the question. Who could be the practical humorist who preferred the name of D'Arcy to his own? Wally did not know, and he had to admit to himself that he could not see how he was to find out.

"But if I ever do," he said darkly, "if I ever do——"

And the others said they would help him to think out a just and thorough punishment.

CHAPTER 16.

Three Cheers for St. Jim's.

THE memory of the recent fiasco in Wayland Woods acted as a spur to the scouts of St. Jim's and the Rylcombe Grammar School, and by three o'clock the following afternoon every fellow was in an advanced stage of excitement. Even Gore had caught the spirit of the moment, and as he rather fancied his running powers just then, had borrowed a two-shilling piece from Mellish, and had paid his entrance-fee almost without a grumble. It was Mellish who grumbled.

Punctually at three o'clock the St. Jim's fellows lined up before the old school, and waited for the word to start, and once again Tom Merry was listening for the chime of the town clock.

"There's one thing," said Wally, fastening his stocking, "and that is you'd better keep close to me, Gibson. If you don't I shall probably be charged with burning a house down or slaying a policeman, or something like that, and have no proof that I didn't do it."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Ha, ha, ha—there's no ha, ha, ha about it. Blest if you'd think it funny if you were in my place, my son. I feel like a dog with a bad name, and am only waiting to be hung——"

"Get ready—go!" cried Tom Merry, and away they went. Merry, Blake, and Figgins at the head.

It was a glorious afternoon, chilly for the time of the year, but dry and pleasant, and the prospect of a run to the quarry was enticing.

"Go as you please," said Tom Merry, as a last word of command. "No restrictions—only get there and back to the bridge before Monk's rabbits."

And go as they pleased they did, Figgins's long legs carrying him over the ground in rare style.

Up hill and down dale the way led, the hill by the wood weeding out the less speedy in a rapid manner.

"My hat!" panted Fatty Wynn. "M-y h-at!"

But he pounded along, conscious that he stood a good chance of coming in last, but determined to do his best. And that was the spirit of all with perhaps the exception of Gore and Mellish, the latter dropping out before even the quarry was gained. Gore, however, kept on, but he was pretty blown as they flashed past the woods. Cigarettes have their effect in the long run.

There was a little trouble on one or two occasions when fields were crossed, but for the most part the farmers rose to the occasion at the sight of the scout's badge, and cheered the runners heartily, giving them advice.

At the large rock by the quarry Tom Merry, Blake and Figgins were a good half-mile ahead of the next, and here they met Frank Monk, Carboy and Lane. Not a word was spoken. Breath was too precious to waste in talking, for the run to the bridge was going to be the run of a lifetime now.

Away the six pelted, almost together, Frank Monk straining

every muscle to draw away from his rivals. He thought he had succeeded after a time because he could not hear many footsteps behind him, and he turned. He certainly was leading, but Tom Merry was not twenty yards behind him, with Lane a good third. If he could keep that order it would do.

But Tom Merry had his teeth set, and the fourth man, Jack Blake, wore a firm expression on his handsome, strong, young face.

Let the best man win. That was the thought of all, and as long as an English sportsman thinks that, he'll do, whether he is beaten or not!

Presently the landmarks began to grow more familiar. There was the old wall, with its gaudy advertisement about using somebody's food for cattle, for instance, and then the distant spire of the church. That told all one thing. Another half-mile and the race would be over!

On Frank Monk ran, his breath coming in gasps, and behind him Tom Merry footed it, the same set expression about his mouth.

The distance between the pair was lessening, an inch at a time, not more, but it was lessening, and that was enough for the St. Jim's fellow. He put forth every ounce of strength he had left.

Monk heard him approaching, and almost shut his eyes in an effort to spurt, but there would not be much of a spurt for any of them now. It was the man who could stick it who would win.

"And that's going to be me," thought Tom Merry; "either that or I drop."

The space separating the two was not half what it had been, six yards and not a foot more, and there were still three hundred to go. Suddenly Frank Monk became conscious that he was running abreast with his rival, and after that neither junior knew much about the race. They simply plugged along for all they were worth, knowing that whichever won they were both doing their best.

Suddenly the old bridge loomed up before them with Kildare standing in the middle watch in hand. The winner was the man who got on the bridge first.

For the next few yards there was nothing in it, then it seemed to Frank Monk that Tom Merry must have suddenly become a masculine Atalanta, for he seemed to sweep ahead when almost on the bridge, and the instant following a cheer went up from Kildare and the other seniors who had come out to see the finish.

"Merry!"

"Well run, youngster!"

"Splendid!"

For Tom Merry had won, but not by miles, as Monk had at first thought. By two yards and not a foot more.

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Together the two old rivals dropped to the grass, but they did not lie there long, for another shout went up from Kildare.

"Here come the others. Oh, well run, Blake. Who is with him?"

"Lane!"

"All you know, Blake!"

It was the first pair over again, only with the St. Jim's fellow leading and Lane struggling to overtake him. He lessened the distance between himself and his opponent just as Tom Merry had done, but he had left it too late, or else Jack Blake was just that trifle too good for him which counts for so much in the end. It does not matter a great deal what the explanation of it was—a sportsman does not make excuses for being beaten, and Lane was every inch a sportsman. What did matter was that Jack Blake gained the bridge first, and so St. Jim's had both first and second home.

There was a bit of an interval before the third came along, and when he did it proved to be Carboy. Figgins was not far behind him, and he was limping a little, for he had cut his foot on a stone, but he never mentioned that. He was the last of the first half-dozen, and he wasn't going to spoil a splendid performance by complaining of a cut foot.

"Hooray!" shouted Tom Merry. "We've won—St. Jim's have won."

"Yes," said Monk quietly. "Beaten us fair and square. Three cheers for St. Jim's!"

And Carboy and Lane answered loyally.

"Three cheers for the Grammar School," shouted Tom Merry.

"Hip, hip, hip—"

"Hooray!" yelled the college juniors, and Kildare and his friends joined in.

Of course, they all waited to see the others home, but they had not long to wait, for hardly ten minutes separated Tom Merry from the last man, Paddy Wynn, who had run the race of his life and had never felt so hungry in his life before. The majority of the fellows came in a bunch, the Flag Patrol almost together.

"Anyway," panted Wally with a grin, "they can't say I've done any desperate deeds this time. I've enough witnesses to prove anything."

"Ha, ha, ha!" laughed Frank Monk. "What, haven't they let that hairy old wheeze drop yet?"

"Wheeze, what wheeze?" exclaimed Wally quickly. "What do you know about it, Monkey?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Look here," said Tom Merry, drawing the Grammar School fellow aside so as to be out of the senior's hearing. "What are you talking about, Monk?"

"The wheeze."

"Yes, but what wheeze?"

"Why, the idea of giving the name of Wally for fun. Here, I don't know a great deal about it, although I helped to set it going by telling Grimes, Pilcher and Craggs. Gore told me."

"Gore! Do you mean to say Gore—" Tom Merry stepped forward and caught Gore by the arm. "We want you," he said quietly. "What is this wheeze about D'Arcy minor, my son?"

"I don't know of any wheeze, Merry, and just you leave go of my arm."

"I'll leave go of your arm when I hear what I want to learn, my son. Monk, Gore says there isn't any wheeze."

"Isn't any wheeze?" exclaimed the Grammar School fellow, looking at Gore curiously. "Why, you were the fellow who told me about it, Gore—don't you remember in Wayland Woods?"

"No—Yes, well I was ragging—"

"That's what I say, the wheeze was to give Wally's name. Lane and I gave it to an old fiery chap named Parker—"

"Bai Jove!" gasped Arthur Augustus.

"Yes, we did, because Gore had told us it was up against Wally here. You'd given the kid's name to a gamekeeper for fun, you said."

It was all out then, and it was not a difficult matter to put two and two together. Pilcher had taken Monk's lead, just as Monk had taken Gore's, but in the wild things which were done during the festival holidays, the joke had got out of hand a little. That was the only possible explanation, but the affair did not finish there. The joke was just within the bounds of "cricket," but the motive in starting it was another story.

"You smashed Sir Neville's trap," said Tom Merry quietly, turning to Gore, "and you gave Wally's name. That was it. You lied to save your own rotten skin, and didn't care what happened to young Wally."

"I tell you I didn't—"

"Monk," went on the Shell fellow, "what would you fellows at the Grammar school do in a case like this?"

"Do? Why I'd see that that rotter was given the frog's march from here to the school," said Monk indignantly. "I'm jolly sorry I had anything to do with the plot; I hadn't the faintest idea—"

"That's all right, Monk; we know you, old man. Gore, you can get down on your hands."

"What do you mean, Merry?"

"That you are going to play the leading part in the frog's march from here to St. Jim's."

"Oh, he's a scug," said D'Arcy minor, in disgust. "It isn't worth troubling about scugs."

"Silence in the ranks," said Tom Merry. "Frog's march him, you chaps, and lend us a hand, Monk, because you've got to come to St. Jim's in any case for the money. You can shout as much as you like; Kildare and the other seniors aren't within half a mile."

Gore made a fearful fuss, but it made no difference, and though they did not overdo the punishment beyond making the cad of St. Jim's feel pretty small, he had had quite enough by the time the old college walls were gained.

There is just one other scene worth describing, and that took place immediately Gore's punishment was over.

Tom Merry and Frank Monk were seen whispering, then they separated and gave the same order to their respective troops.

"Tention—form fours—quick march!"

The orders were obeyed with a smartness which would have been a credit to any troop of Boy Scouts in the country.

Together the rival corps marched along, their scout hats now on their heads, and their staffs in their hands, and the way Frank Monk and Tom Merry led them was the way which led to Widow Kemp's cottage.

They had to march in single file down the lane, but there was a bare space at the end in front of the cottage, and in this they formed up again in a solid body.

The old lady was in her garden again, as it happened, and she looked up as Tom Merry stepped forward. The winner of the Scout Marathon looked a trifle embarrassed, and he was a little red, but that was nothing. In a few by no means badly chosen words he handed the old lady a little leather purse with a couple of new sovereigns in it, and took off his scout's hat.

"From the scouts of St. Jim's and Rylcombe Grammar School," he said quietly. "We hope you will accept it."

It was a moment or two before he could make the old lady understand, then, when he succeeded at last, a tear or two rolled down the wrinkled face, wrinkled with age, but no less by the hardships she had borne in her long life. She took the purse and she shook Tom Merry's hand, but she did not say anything.

"Tention!" said the rival Scout-masters again together, and one and all saluted the old lady, then the order was given to right about, and they marched up the lane again conscious that it was not a bad afternoon's work they had done.

THE END.

(Another long tale of Tom Merry & Co. in "THE GEM" LIBRARY next Thursday. Please order your Copy in advance. One Penny.

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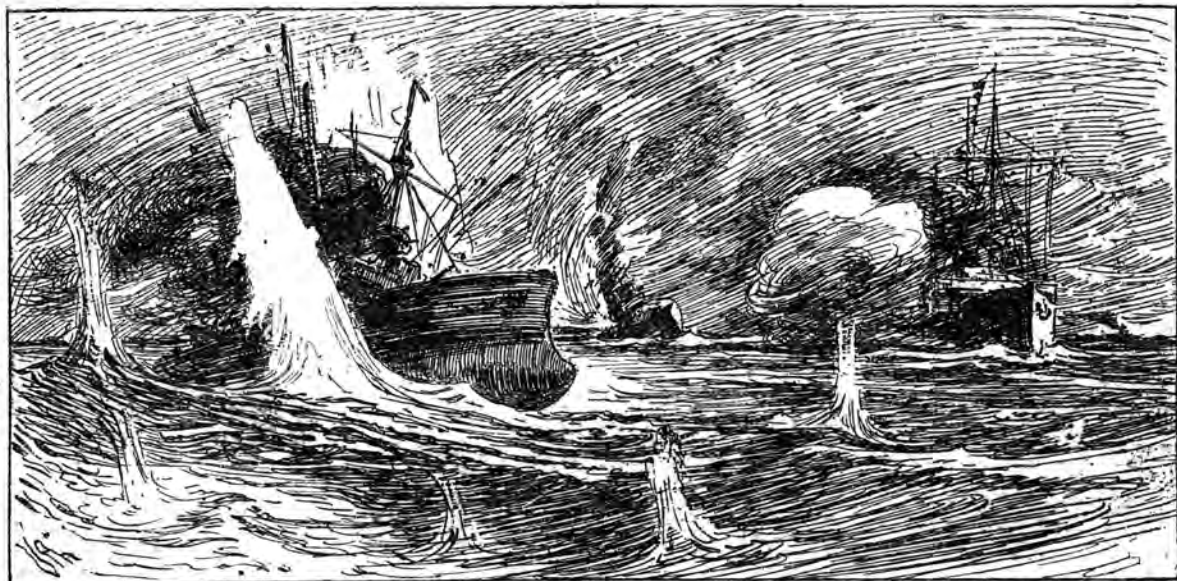
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This week's story in "The Magnet" Library is grand. Hope to hear something more of the Cliff House School before very long; also of Mark Linley.

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THE FIRST CHAPTERS.

Sam and Stephen Villiers, two cadets of Greyfriars School, by a combination of luck and pluck render valuable service to the British Army during the great German invasion. They are appointed special scouts to the Army, which is forced back on London by Von Krantz, the German commander.

At the time when this account opens, London had been bombarded and carried. Von Krantz had entered the City with his troops, the Lord Mayor was a prisoner at the Mansion House, and from the flagstaff on that famous building the German flag floated, where none but British colours had been seen since London was built. London Bridge was blown up, and across the great river the remainder of the British troops and the half-starved millions of London waited in grim silence for the next move.

Sam and Stephen are chafing at their enforced inactivity, when Ned of Northey, a young Essex marshman, and an old friend of theirs, sails up the Thames in his smack, the Maid of Essex, with a despatch he has captured from a German. This contains useful information of the landing of another German Army Corps, and Sam, having shown it to Lord Ripley, is given permission to go down river.

The boys have many exciting adventures, and are on board a British torpedo-boat, No. 667, when it has to be beached after a battle. Its commander, Lieutenant Cavendish, with Sam and Stephen, are taken off by Ned of Northey in his smack.

Later, Sam and Cavendish are captured by a German battleship, and are on the point of being shot, when the German is attacked and sunk by four British torpedo-boats. After the fight, in which two of the torpedo-boats are sunk, Sam and Cavendish are picked up by the Puff-Adder, whose commander, Lieutenant Forbes, is a friend of Cavendish.

"Saved any others, Freddy?" is Cavendish's first question.

(Now go on with the Story.)

"Haven't found anything alive," said Forbes, in answer to Cavendish's query; "but I fancy the Rattler got one or two while I was picking you up. Sandford took her there first. Here he comes!" he added, hailing the other destroyer as she steamed past. "Got any?"

"Five only!" came back the answer from the Rattler's bridge.

"Five out of six hundred!" muttered Sam. "My word, it's pretty awful!"

"Never thought there'd be any at all. Must have jumped early. Have they got the skipper?" said Cavendish, with interest. "A tall chap, with a pointed beard."

Forbes hailed the Rattler, and put the question.

"No; only one officer, and he's a lieutenant," came the answer. "Who's your pal in the sleepin'-suit?"

"Bobby Cavendish," replied Forbes.

"Great Scott!"

"Put her about, and get back to the Minotaur!" said Forbes, who was evidently commander of the flotilla.

The two destroyers leaped ahead, side by side, and steamed off rapidly in a south-westerly direction. Forbes gave the bridge in charge of his sub, and turned to Cavendish.

"Now let's have it, Bobby. How under the sun did you come to be on that German?"

"I shall have to go back a day or two to tell you that," said Cavendish. And he gave Forbes a short account of all that had happened since he first picked up Sam and Stephen off Herne Bay. He said as little as possible about himself, but gave most of the credit to Sam—who had to interrupt him and protest once or twice—and explained matters down to the sinking of the Kronprinz.

"My only aunt!" said Forbes. "Shake hands again, Villiers, if you don't mind. I've heard of you, of course. By gum, what a ghastly mistake that you're not in our Service!"

"It's a rum thing, but all you Fleet fellows chuck that at me," said Sam, laughing. "But Cavendish did as much as I did, and more."

"What a gorgeous three days you've had! I'd have given five fingers to have been with you that night at Sheerness. Phew! If a tuppenny little tin pot like No. 667 could mop up two of 'em, what would a—"

"Don't call 667 any names, Freddy, or it'll be my painful

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duty to put a boathook through you!" said Cavendish. "Remember, your wallowing old fish-kettle draws too much water to have got through the Swale at all."

"That's true. You did uncommon well. They'll never forget in the Service how you were piloted by a lobster," said Forbes slyly.

"Having hauled me out of the chilly deep, Freddy, you are welcome to pull my leg to any extent," said Cavendish amiably. "Your beastly torpedo gave me a headache; but that's neither here nor there. The Kronprinz is on the bottom."

"With six hundred men!" said Sam, with a slight shiver. "I've been through a fortnight's campaign ashore, an' seen some rummy things; but they seem to happen on a much bigger scale, an' much quicker, at sea. The way those poor brutes were mopped up by the screw! Ugh!"

"No worse than for the bluejackets on the Resolute," said Cavendish. "She was smashed up an' sunk without gettin' a whack back in return—of any weight. Poor Charlie! I'm sorry he was thrown away on a scrapheap like that."

"Good man," said Forbes pensively; "adequate chap—very. So was Finch, of the Stiletto; an' Danvers, of the Asp—our other two. The Kronprinz got 'em both. It's the luck of the sea. I thought she'd bag at least three of us. In fact, four wouldn't have been enough but for gettin' to clove range in the fog. With a long run-in to make, the German might have wiped us all up."

"Where did you spring from? And what are you doin' out here?" said Cavendish. "We're a long way nor'-east of the Straits an' Frankie—we never expected to see any of the Fleet. You haven't joined him, have you?"

"No. We were hurrying up the North Sea to join Howard's squadron in the north, along with the Minotaur. She was sent on ahead, an' we were catchin' her up."

"Minotaur! Ledbury's ship?"

"Yes. Well, she's got embroiled with a big German armoured cruiser this mornin' on the way. The German had the heels of her, an' bein' heavily gunned, reckoned he'd got the Minotaur cooked, although she's a battleship of sorts. Anyway, they had a rare turn-up, an' Ledbury sank the cruiser, who probably wished she'd let him alone."

"Good egg!" said Cavendish.

"Yes, because the cruiser was well above Ledbury's fightin'-weight, an' ought to have mopped him up. Down she went; but the Minotaur got the dickens of a mauling; and when our flotilla got there, we found her at a standstill, with crippled engines."

"Phew!"

"It had been a case with her, of course, if any German ship turned up while she was all adrift. They were workin' like niggers in the engine-room to get her under steam again; an' Ledbury signalled me to scout westward with my flotilla, an' if a German ship appeared, to tackle her at any risk. It wasn't any too soon, either, for we sighted the Kronprinz in half an hour, an' she'd have bagged the Minotaur as you say she did the Resolute. I backed as soon as I saw her, sent two of my ships round, an' we rushed her in the haze, as you know. I expect that blessed execution of yours helped us a bit. They must have been all wrapped up in it when we hove in sight."

"They were," said Sam feelingly; "an' the blessed Marines were just goin' to loose off!"

"Those Dutchies like a show of that sort. They're a theatrical lot. Don't wonder at their bein' annoyed with you, though. Well, you've had a good run for your money."

"Talkin' of which," said Cavendish, "we've got to get back to Frankie."

"When?"

"At once, if not sooner. You'll be within hail of him in an hour or two."

"Not we. We're bound the other way, up north. I'm sorry."

"Oh, blazes!" said Cavendish. "You won't see any fightin' with Howard, either. Blow it all," he added fretfully, "we must report to Frankie. He doesn't know the state of the Sheerness squadron, even. What am I to do?"

"I can't take you to him. You'd better see if the Minotaur can't let him know by wireless. There she lies! We'll be alongside in five minutes."

Stationary on the sea some way ahead, through the clearing mist, a squat, powerful-looking ironclad was rolling in the long swell. She was a second-class, ram-bow battleship of rather an old type, small compared to the modern monsters, and less strongly armoured, but not such an ancient "crock" as the hapless Resolute. There was plenty of fight left in her for any but the very large battleships and cruisers, only for the moment she was helpless.

As the destroyer raced up to her, Sam saw she was badly scarred with the recent fight. It needed no trained eye to see she had had a terrific knocking about.

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"She'll have to go back," said Forbes. "She can't possibly go on up the North Sea in that state, with half her guns done for an' her engines cracked. She'd only hamper the fleet. I expect Ledbury's managed to get a message to Lord Howard by wireless. There's her semaphore going. My signaller's already told 'em the news. We're ordered alongside."

The Minotaur's Last Fight.

The Puff-Adder raced up to the battered ship, and stopped close abreast her. Her captain, a short, bluff, clean-shaven man, spoke the destroyer from his quarter-deck.

"Found and torpedoed the battleship Kronprinz Karl, sir," hailed the Puff-Adder's commander. "Asp and Stiletto unfortunately sunk while rushing her. The German went down with all hands but five, picked up by Rattler."

"Very well done indeed, Mr. Forbes," replied the captain, as if he were approving of a good bit at cricket. "I congratulate you and Mr. Varden. I have no time to receive you—proceed at once northward and join Lord Howard, following your previous instructions. Report details to him. You will also inform him that I am returning to Dover for repairs, in accordance with his orders now received by marconigram, in reply to my message sent to him an hour ago. Our transmitters are out of order, and he may not have received my last reply. Make all speed, Mr. Forbes."

"Yes, sir. I have Sub-Lieutenant Cavendish here, and a cadet picked up from the Kronprinz Karl, with important report for Sir Francis Frobisher."

"Sheer in and put them aboard, Mr. Forbes; I will take them back. I give you thirty seconds!" came the reply abruptly.

"Oh, good egg!" said Cavendish, dancing with delight.

"You'll have to go up the side, you two," said Forbes, sheering his vessel right in towards the battleship; "no time to launch a boat. Hi, there! Swing the boom out, please! I suppose you can tackle the rope?"

"Sticks an' strings are in my line," said Sam, as a steel boom was swung out from the battleship's towering deck with a rope at its end, within reach of the destroyer's stern. He swung himself off and began to swarm up the rope—not such an easy job in the thick lummies, and he was feeling anything but fresh, but he recognised the need for hurry. "Sorry our cruise with you was so short."

"So am I; you're the right sort," said Forbes. "So long, Bobby. Wish you luck with your next command."

"Give 'em my love up North," said Cavendish, as he followed Sam, and before the two of them had passed along the boom to the deck, both the destroyers were dashing over the seas towards the north-east. At the same moment the battleship's screws—her engines being at last available once more—began to revolve, and she slowly moved ahead.

"Nip aboard, you two," said a second lieutenant with a blood-stained bandage round his head. "Swing that boom in, bo'sun! Mr. Hayle, take these gentlemen aft!"

"Well, you're a rum-looking pair of beach-combers," said the chubby midshipman who answered to the name of Hayle, as he conducted the new-comers past the casemates on the port side, glancing curiously at the thick "lummy" suits. "Where did Freddy say you blew in from, an' what d'you call yourselves?"

"I am Sub-Lieutenant Cavendish, late of No. 667, and I always kick snotties when they are impertinent," said Cavendish.

The middy winked at Sam, but saluted.

"I beg pardon, sir! Didn't recognise you in your pyjamas. However, you're a guest here. Did Freddy feed you?"

"Yes, we've fed. Doesn't your owner want us to report to him?"

"Doubt it. Not till he sends for you, anyway. It won't affect him, you see, an' the old man's great at minding his own business. I say, we had a rare dust-up with that cruiser."

"Sunk her, didn't you?"

"Rather! Lost a lot of good chaps, though. I'd like to have been in that rush for the Kronprinz—must have been fine. Did Freddy say you were prisoners on her? How did it happen?"

Neither of the comrades were keen to talk about it any more; however, the cheerful middy pumped them till he got some of the facts, and his respect grew enormously, though it could not quite cover his cheek. Nothing could have done that!

"What a spiffing time, you've had!" he said enviously. "It ain't often we get much sport on a cathedral like this, an' when we do it's all hammer an' tongs an' smash an' row enough to burst your head, without much to see or do for us gun-room chaps. All right for the gunners an' the Number One. One thing," he said, grinning, "if we do fall in with another Dutchie on the way home, she'll get her

own back! You should just see our starboard guns—late guns, I ought to say. An' as for the engines, they're paralytic!"

"She seems to be goin' ahead strong now," observed Sam, as they were taken to the upper deck to be out of the way.

"Goin' ahead—yes, that's about all they'll do—the engines. I heard the engineer-lieutenant say the old man may as well kiss his foot as ask us to do any manoeuvring. He said it would shake 'em off their bed-plates if the bell were rung too loud. But we've got to keep up what speed we can. We'll be apt to be spotted by some German if we muck about too long."

"How is it there are so many of 'em around?" said Cavendish.

"Their ships are dribbling up this way from the Thames, an' over from the Elbe by two an' threes. We saw three this mornin', but the big cruiser was the only one to tackle us. We didn't chase any of 'em, bein' under orders for Howard. However, I don't suppose we'll see any more. We're all right."

The midshipman was absolved from his regular duties—which did not amount to much—by the order to look after the two passengers, and the bulk of the crew and artificers were busy repairing damages. For an hour the three sat—well out of the way of anyone who might interfere with them—on the upper deck, while the Minotaur bore steadily southwards. Presently, however, Cavendish rose to his feet, and stared to windward.

"All right, are we?" he said. "You're not much of a prophet, youngster. What d'you call that? No King's ship comin' from that direction, I'll swear!"

He pointed to a distant speck and to a smudge of smoke on the horizon. At the same moment the look-out in the fighting-top gave the news to the captain through the speaking-tube, and it was soon through the ship.

" Battleship with two turrets. German! Making for us at top speed!"

"Crews to the guns!" came the order sharply, as the whistles piped shrilly. "Clear the decks!"

"This," said the midshipman, with a sigh, "looks like our knock-out. Wish I had a better job, if it was only to handle a Maxim."

"She's not a new ship, but she's heavily gunned, by the look of her," said Cavendish, looking keenly at the stranger. "One of their Baltic class. Well, it's just a pinch for her. In a duel with guns she can't help sinkin' us."

"What rotten luck!" murmured Sam—"after the holes we've got out of, too. No chance of help?"

"Great Scott!—no! We're two hours from the Straits yet. She's smelt us! She sees we've been knocked end-ways already, an' only want a little hammerin' to send us to the bottom. There go her guns!"

The first fierce outburst of the German's forward batteries rent the air, and the long scream of the shells, which Sam was now well accustomed to, was heard on all sides. The sighting-shots were not good. The stranger began by over-shooting the mark, then he shot short, but finally the stunning crash of the shells as they burst overhead shook the Minotaur heavily.

On she went, silent as any merchant-man, swinging round in a long curve, and getting nearer and nearer the German, but not a shot did she fire. The stranger's guns redoubled their efforts as the broadside batteries came into play, and the Minotaur became the centre of a hail of bursting shells.

A shot from a four-inch gun struck the other side of the casemate next which the three comrades stood, nearly stunning them with the noise and shock.

The midshipman, coughing in the fumes that the shell left behind it, began to grow restless as the fever of the battle seized him.

"What did they set me to look after you two for? I might have got a job somewhere!" he growled.

"Well, run along, kid!" said Cavendish, quite understanding. "We don't want you!"

"I can't leave you without orders," sighed the midshipman; "an' nobody'll bother about me now. Phew! There goes the port forward gun!" he added, as a great nine-inch shell wrecked the big gun on the fore-deck and laid its crew dead in the smashed casemate. "The only heavy piece we had left!"

Sam said nothing. He could only stand tight, bewildered by the appalling crash and flare of the fight. He had been in more than one great battle ashore, and had seen the heaviest horse artillery in action; but this was far more terrible. He wished with all his heart that he had something to do, and envied every man at the guns, and every officer with responsibility to keep him occupied. It is the hardest of all tasks to stand still and be shot at.

The Minotaur forged along relentlessly as Fate itself through a perfect inferno of smoke and crashing shells, her upper-works shot away, her smoke-stacks honeycombed, and

her crew dwindling like snow before the sun as the human wreckage was carried down to the surgeons below. The destruction was awful. And only four or five of the guns were answering stubbornly to the German fire.

"What's the owner up to?" gasped the midshipman. "We're done, of course; but why's he closing in like this? We're gettin' right on to the enemy, an' the nearer we are the worse we get it! He'll shoot us through an' through!"

Cavendish watched keenly whenever the wind thinned away the smoke, but he said nothing.

"I s'pose our skipper'd rather go down at close quarters than run," said Sam, whose head was ringing with the deadly concussion.

"It ain't that," said Cavendish quietly, as the thunder of the guns lulled for a moment. "He's goin' to ram! An' the German don't tumble to it. They think we daren't try it. They'll see!"

"My aunt, but you're right!" exclaimed the midshipman—"at least, there's a chance of it!"

"What'll happen?" said Sam wonderingly.

"Blue blazes for both of us," replied Cavendish cheerfully; "but especially for the German, unless he can dodge us. One try is all our engines are good for, I reckon."

"An' if he does dodge us?"

"Then he'll sink us in another minute an' a half! Get ready to go down on your tummy!"

The order rang out from the upper deck almost as he spoke, while the Minotaur turned swiftly.

"All hands lie down! Prepare to ram!"

Down went the three comrades on their faces, flat upon the deck. Seamen, gunners, and all did the same instantly, and the guns ceased.

Right ahead, as the smoke lifted, Sam saw the German battleship. He had not realised she was so close. He could even hear the shouts from her deck, as she made a desperate effort to draw ahead in time.

But she was too late. Better armoured and more heavily gunned than the Minotaur, she was not nearly so handy nor so well handled. The British ship, summoning up every ounce of power, hurled herself upon her heavy enemy like a tiger charging a bull.

It was the last, most deadly resource of all—the final hope of the stricken ship. It would end in her own ruin, doubtless, as well as her enemy's, even if she were successful. If she failed, the German would have her at his mercy.

The last few seconds seemed like years. Sam saw the spruce, powerful ship ahead of him, scarcely scared by the Minotaur's few remaining guns. He saw the uniforms and the faces of her crew, as they, too, lay down, as they saw there was no escape from the collision, for the Minotaur followed her enemy as she swerved.

Then came one fearful, devastating crash as the Minotaur's huge ram struck the German just abaft her citadel, and a shock that flung both crews across the decks, prone though they were. The British ship's bows came full upon the tall steel side of her enemy, and cut deep into her, heeling her over helplessly.

The German had received his death-blow.

Bruised and half-stunned as he was—for the three comrades had been flung in a heap against the steel bulwarks—a wild cheer rose to Sam's lips.

"Hurrah! She's done for! Down with her!" he cried, trying to rise.

Cavendish threw an arm across him, and kept him down.

"Stay where you are!" he exclaimed, shouting to make himself heard above the din. "She'll sweep our decks before she goes under."

The crash of the collision was still ringing through the two ships, and loud rendings and crackings were heard as great iron girders and crosspieces burst one after another under the strain.

Wild cries arose from the German's decks, almost drowned in the loud hiss of escaping steam. It seemed as if the Minotaur would hoist her foe bodily out of the sea as she pressed onward, still with her huge steel ram pressing into the German ship's vitals, and both vessels groaned as if in pain.

Suddenly Cavendish's warning came true enough, and four or five of the German's machine-guns opened with a rattling fire, that beat upon the Minotaur like hail, and dealt red slaughter among her crew. Instantly, however, the fire was returned with double the power from the Minotaur. She had any number of small quick-firers available—it was only her bigger guns that were out of action—and her position was better for making use of them.

The German fire was silenced within forty seconds, while the British ship was freeing herself. There was a sickening lurch as she swung round sideways, her ram tearing through the German's lower plates, and one of her engines had still power enough to back her away. She came clear with a

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sudden heave, leaving her foe too helplessly stricken to work a gun or man a casemate.

From every sound throat on the Minotaur a rousing cheer was raised as the two steel monsters parted, the German in her death-throes and the British ship staggering blindly along, victorious, but crippled, with one screw working slowly and her bows crumpled like paper. Sam, Cavendish, and the middy sprang to their feet again and watched breathlessly. It was an awesome sight to see.

"Plugged her!" said the middy, with great satisfaction. "Whew! Wasn't it great! I give her twenty minutes to go down in!"

"About that," said Cavendish, with a nod.

"She looks as if she wouldn't last three minutes," said Sam. "What about her crew?"

"Fraid they'll go with her, poor beggars! We can't even round to to help 'em. Look at that! The Minotaur's taken charge!" said the middy.

Now that the fatal ram was withdrawn, the German battleship was settling fast. No watertight doors could save her then. She was ripped up like the carcass of a sheep, and her great hull heeled farther and farther. Even a landsman could have seen she was on her way to the sea-bottom.

As for the Minotaur, she could do nothing. As the middy said, she had "taken charge," which meant that one engine was going ahead and could not be stopped, so disorganised were the engine-rooms, and her steering-gear also refused to act. Had she been able, she would have gone to the rescue of the German ship, whose flag now fluttered down in token of surrender. But the Minotaur was as much out of hand as a bolting horse, and for the time nothing could be done with her.

Meanwhile, the German was raising her bows in the air and settling stern first. Battered and broken, she sullenly gave herself up to the mercy of the sea. Neither of the vessels had any boats left, and there was little hope of saving a man.

Sam turned away with something as like a shiver as his cool nerves would allow. He had seen more than one iron-clad sink already, and after the heat of the fight it was a sight that he had little relish for.

It was true that, if the German were not sinking now, the Minotaur would by this time have been in the same case, taking her crew with her to the bottom. But those swarming, helpless men, going to their death in the vessel they had manned and handled, was a grim spectacle. Down she went at last, and the pitiless grey waves of the North Sea closed over her.

Meanwhile, the Minotaur, crawling along with blood-stained decks and wrecked upperworks, managed finally to regain command of herself. Her captain was a splendid seaman, and as soon as the engine was throttled down her steering-gear was put sufficiently in order to make her obey her helm. She made her way straight back to the scene of the collision, which she had left some distance behind.

"I always said the owner wasn't a bad chap in an emergency," said the middy wisely.

"Better not tell him you think so," returned Cavendish; "he might get swelled head."

"Our bows are precious low in the water," said Sam. "Are we done for, too? You said it'd probably finish us."

"By good luck, we shall keep afloat, after all," said the middy. "She ain't smashed herself up as badly as she might. She's built for ramming, you see."

"Hope so," returned Cavendish. "There are still some of those unlucky beggars afloat. We may pick up a few."

Into the swirling eddies where the battleship had gone down, the Minotaur steamed slowly. There were a surprising number of German sailors swimming for their lives, for many had jumped before their ship went down, and had saved themselves, for the time, from the fate of the other two hundred who had been drawn under with her.

"A job at last!" exclaimed the middy.

And as a sub-lieutenant called to them, the three companions set to work with a will and helped rescue the drowning. Coils of rope were brought out in all directions, and lines were thrown to all those within reach. With three men at each rope, the drowning Germans were hauled bodily up on to the lower-deck flats as the Minotaur steamed at a snail's pace among them.

Still, it was slow work, and the more disheartening because it was plain that more than half must be drowned before the crippled Minotaur could reach them, when Cavendish, looking up from his work, gave an exclamation.

"British cruiser!" he said, pointing to the westward, where a light, jaunty-looking warship was racing towards them at high speed. "It's the Orion! She must have got herself attached to Frankie's lot."

"Too late for the fight," said Sam.

"Lucky for her! She ain't even armoured, an' the beggar THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 62.

we rammed could have sunk her like a cockboat. But she'll be able to help save the rest of these poor swabs."

The Orion raced up like a liner, saluting the Minotaur, and, swinging to a standstill, she had her boats in the water in no time. While the rest of the sunken ship's crew were thus being picked up, her signallers quickly exchanged the news with the battleship, and finally the two vessels came within hailing distance, and the Orion's captain, as junior officer, came aboard the Minotaur to confer with her commander. They were together for some time.

"Well, young 'un," said a sub-lieutenant, coming on to the lower-deck, and addressing the middy, "we've earned our rest, I fancy. The Orion's captain's butterin' our owner in the charthouse. The old man's very pleased, on the whole."

"He jolly well ought to be!" replied the middy. "Though, if I'd been him, I'd ha' rammed the Dutchman a bit further forward. Still, he did very well. Are we goin' to float, or do we turn over to the Orion?"

"We float all right, and our port engine, though crocked, 'll carry us as far as Dover," said the sub-lieutenant. "The old ship'll never go to sea again," he added, with a sigh. "She's only fit for the scrap-heap."

"They'll turn us on to something more up-to-date," said the middy hopefully.

"You young sweeps haven't any decent feelings!" growled the sub.

"Well, I ain't going to shed any tears over the Minotaur. Her dyin' kick was a good one, though, wasn't it? You see—"

"Forward there!" said a sharp voice. "The two passengers from the Puff-Adder are sent for by the captain!"

"Passengers! Infernal cheek!" murmured Cavendish. "Come on, Villiers! Mustn't keep the owner waiting."

They repaired at once to the charthouse, where the two captains were in conference.

"Good-morning, gentlemen!" said the Minotaur's captain abruptly. "I have not been able to receive you before. You wish to reach Admiral Frobisher with urgent news, I believe?"

"Yes, sir," said Cavendish.

"You will return to him with Captain Fane, on the Orion, then. He will reach the squadron long before I can."

The interview came to a quick end, and Captain Fane, after assuring the Minotaur's commander that he would cause an escort of torpedo-craft to be sent back at once to guard the damaged battleship on her journey south, went over the side and took Sam and Cavendish with him. They found time to greet the middy.

"Good-bye, kid!" said Cavendish. "Hope we meet again before the fun's over."

The cruiser's cutter took them back at once, and they were soon on board the Orion, which immediately leaped away south-westward at full speed, her Marconi installation (wireless telegraphy) getting at once into communication with Sir Francis's flagship. The wonderful invention showed its usefulness when, in less than half an hour, six torpedo-boats were met, racing out in obedience to the message. They were to escort the Minotaur, which, now far behind and out of sight, was crawling along as best she could on her way to Dover.

"There's the Foreland!" exclaimed Sam, as the welcome sight of the far-distant white cliffs loomed on the horizon.

"And there's Frankie's squadron," added Cavendish, pointing to the distant warships steaming in on their long patrol from the French coast to the Downs. "Wonder what the old bird'll say?"

They said nothing of their adventures to anybody on board the Orion, though one or two of the junior officers were very keen to hear what their mission was. One or two of them knew Cavendish, and his peculiar rig-out made them uncommonly inquisitive. However, he kept them at bay with more chaff than they were able to answer, and gave them to understand that he was a recaptured deserter on his way to be tried and shot.

"We don't want to be pitching the tale to everybody," he said to Sam, when they were alone. "We've got to tell it to Frankie, an' that's quite enough. There's the Terrific, as large as life. Is that a sailin'-vessel just beyond her? You can see its mast over the flagship's foredeck."

"Looks like one."

"The Terrific's had a scrap since we left. Look at those marks on her side—that's shell-fire. I say, I'm not an excitable bird, as a rule, but I'm blessed keen to know what Frankie'll do for us in the way of a job. It ought to be a nailin' good one after this. Aren't you?"

"I s'pose so," muttered Sam.

"You look down in the mouth, old chap! What's up?"

"I am, an' that's a fact!" said Sam, with a sigh. "You see, my young brother Steve's been with me right through this campaign. Except the dad, he's about all I've got to care for. We've pulled through the tightest sort of places

together. But now—well, it's a moral certainty he's either at the bottom or else in the hands of the Germans. An' if so, they'll have shot him before now."

"It was a poor look-out for that smack when she was left in the Swin, sure enough," said Cavendish gravely. "He was a smart little chap, your brother. An' that marshman, too, was as handy a man as ever put to sea. But cheer up, old chap! You don't know that they're done for yet. They were a slippery pair."

"What chance was there for either of 'em, when the fog lifted at daybreak, an' all the German fleet on the watch for them?" said Sam, whose heart felt heavy enough. "It's ten hours since we left them, an'—"

He broke off, and stared as if he could not believe his eyes. Cavendish uttered an exclamation.

Round the stern of Sir Francis Frobisher's flagship, taut and trim as when first she left the Blackwater, glided the Maid of Essex herself!

The hull of the huge warship had hidden her from view, for both had lain hove-to. Ned of Northey was at the helm, and as he luffed to the wind a boat pushed off from the flagship, pulled across the few yards of water that lay between, and Stephen himself stepped out of her and sprang on to the smack's deck. Cavendish burst into a roar of laughter.

"My only aunt, look at that! Villiers, my boy, they're before us, after all!"

A heartfelt shout broke from Sam's lips.

"Steve, you young beggar! Steve, ahoy!"

The Admiral Gives Sam His Orders.

Stephen stared up at the cruiser with blank amazement. Then he gave a whoop of delight, and danced wildly on the Maid's deck.

gents!" said Ned, pulling back rapidly to the Maid of Essex, where Stephen was at the helm.

There was a rapid but heartfelt handshake, and the smack swung round and darted rapidly over towards the flagship.

"How the dickens did you manage to get here?" cried Cavendish.

"It was all plain sailing," said Stephen. "There was a bit of a breeze through the fog about dawn, an' we cleared the Swin. We saw the German battleship was gone, an' were in a fearful stew about you. Ned paddled about half the night, lookin' for you, but it was no good, an' we reckoned she'd got you."

"Mighty dismal we felt, too," said Ned. "Then we thought we ought to try an' reach the admiral with those despatches Master Aubrey left in his coat, as they was important. We'd no trouble in gettin' here, for the wind an' tide was fair to us, an' we didn't see no German craft."

"Has Frankie got the despatches, then?" called Cavendish, who, with Sam, had dived into the cabin, and was hastily scrambling out of the blanket-suits and donning his own clothes.

"You bet! An' mighty pleased he was," said Stephen. "I b'lieve he sent some torpedo-craft off at once to nab the German transport."

"What did he say?"

"I haven't seen him. He was holdin' a council of his captains, an' I don't think the Marine Johnny who took the despatches in gave him my message right," said Stephen simply. "He didn't know I was one of us three, an' I suppose they didn't want to disturb the giddy council. Then your cruiser turned up, an' began signalling, so Ned an' I cleared out."

"Oh blow!" said Cavendish. "I'd hoped you'd saved us

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"It's Sam! By glory, it's Sam, an' there's the naval Johnny with him! Luff in towards her, Ned. I'm a Dutchman if they're not saved, after all!"

"You young rip!" hailed Sam, who was more moved than he cared to show. "What d'you mean by stealing a march on us?"

"We thought you were drowned," cried his brother, as the smack ran under the Orion's lee, as the cruiser slowed down, "or else shot. Gum, but this is the best thing that's happened! I didn't want any more fightin' if you were gone. Tell me all about it!"

"I can't shout it out from up here, old boy!" said his brother. "We'll be with you as soon as they can put us aboard."

The cruiser's second lieutenant stepped up to Sam and Cavendish, while the signalling between the two ships was progressing rapidly.

"You two fellows are wanted by the admiral at once," he said. "The owner's told him you're here. Quartermaster, get a boat lowered away there!"

"If it isn't contrary to discipline," said Sam, laughing, "we would get across quicker in the small dinghy there, for she's all ready, provided you don't mind us goin' over the side on a rope."

"Right!" said the lieutenant. "Our boats are chocked away, an' it'll save time. Stop the boat there, quartermaster! You fellows had better look sharp!"

"Bring her alongside, Ned!" cried Sam to the marshman, who had put off in the Maid's dinghy, and was pulling up to the cruiser.

A rope was quickly knotted to the rail, and Cavendish and Sam slid quickly down into the dinghy, saluting their farewells of the Orion as soon as they reached her.

"Gosh, but it's a sight for sore eyes to see you back again,

all the jawing business. Now we'll have to report in full. You should have—"

"Smack ahoy!" hailed an officer on the Terrific. "Are Lieutenants Cavendish and Villiers aboard you? The admiral's waiting."

"Into the dinghy—sharp!" said Ned, pulling it alongside.

"This is quicker than crossin' in the quarter-boat, anyhow."

"It's a treat to get into real clothes again," said Cavendish, as they both tumbled into the dinghy. He was looking as spruce as ever, and Sam was in his scout's uniform once more. "Hard luck, leavin' you behind, young 'un!"

"It suits me," said Stephen. "I don't care for too much admiral."

"We'll be aboard again soon if he stays hove-to," said Sam. "So-long, Steve! With any luck, we'll get a job out of him."

They were quickly put aboard the flagship, and Ned pulled back to the Maid of Essex.

Sam and Cavendish were at once taken aft to the admiral's cabin by a subaltern of Marines. Sir Francis, looking as keen and hawk-faced as ever, received them without a moment's delay. The two youngsters saluted.

"Where is your ship, Mr. Cavendish?" said the admiral sharply.

"I left her aground in the Swale, sir, sunk by German shell-fire," said Cavendish, with the same cheerful air he always wore; "but I did what you sent me to do."

"Give me your report in full."

And Cavendish gave it him. The midnight passage through the Swale, the torpedoing of the two German ships, and the loss of No. 667, he put into a few words.

He told of the affair under King's Ferry Bridge, the escape in the Maid of Essex, the chase by the Kaiser's yacht, and their venture in blowing up the cables of the Kronprinz Karl, followed by their capture.

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The admiral listened without a word. His keen features showed his amazement from time to time, but he kept his eyes all the time on the sub-lieutenant's face.

He heard finally of the torpedoing of the Kronprinz and the Minotaur's last fight, both of which were already known to him, however.

"Gentlemen," he said, bringing down his fist upon the table, "I have been fifty years in the Navy, and I would give the whole of it for such a forty-eight hours as you have just spent. It's the youngsters who see the fun!" he added, with a sigh.

"Mr. Cavendish, you will at once get your step as full lieutenant. Mr. Villiers, when I gave you leave to pilot No. 667 through the Swale, I certainly never expected such a haul as this. You have both done most admirably. As for the cutting adrift of the Kronprinz Karl, it was a stroke of genius."

"That was Cavendish's doing, sir," said Sam quickly.

"We had great luck, sir," said Cavendish. "Things fell out very handsily for us. I'm sorry I couldn't bring my ship back."

The admiral laughed.

"She cost, perhaps, £8,000. Since you left me you appear to have sent £2,500,000 to the bottom in German battleships. Don't let the loss of No. 667 worry you, Mr. Cavendish. You may rest assured that your services will be rewarded as they should be, and it seems to me it is as well for the British Fleet that you have come back early. I can't afford to waste you. There is a first-class destroyer coaling at Dover, and I wish you to take command of her."

Cavendish's eyes glistened with delight as he saluted.

"And you," said Sir Francis, turning to Sam—"but for your pluck and knowledge of the channels the thing could not have been done at all. I don't wonder at the reputation you have ashore. As you belong to the Army, there is nothing I can offer you in this Service, but I will see your exploits are recognised as they ought to be at headquarters; nor will your young brother and that smart young smacksman be forgotten."

"I'm not looking for rewards, sir," said Sam, whose face had flushed with pleasure, for he felt Admiral Frobisher's praise was better worth having than that of most men.

"No, my lad; it's early to talk of rewards, while the enemy still holds the upper hand and our work is still before us."

"Is there any work that I can bear a hand at, sir, however small?" said Sam eagerly. "I know I'm not in your Service, but if you'd give me something to do—"

"I'll see if there's any need of you. You have certainly proved yourself fit for anything," said Sir Francis; "but I have urgent affairs to see to now, and you must leave me."

The comrades saluted, but before they reached the door the admiral called Sam back.

"There is a matter which has just occurred to me," he said, "that wants attention, and it must be done at once, if at all. After your late record, I need not ask if you are ready for a risky job."

"Ready, an' willing, sir!" said Sam, with new hope.

"You must know, then, that the Londoners are in a very bad way for lack of food. The Germans are holding the whole town south of the Thames in a state of siege. That is no news to you. The town is open to the southward, but everything is so disorganised that it is difficult and slow work getting provisions up to London from the South Coast."

"It was bad enough when I left, sir," said Sam.

"It is worse now. In spite of our having cleared the way, very few ship-owners dare send their vessels up Channel; and London is in desperate straits. To the north, of course, she is cut off altogether."

Sam nodded. He knew it too well.

"There is only one way to relieve the starving people quickly, and that is to run a big supply of provisions through the German blockade, right up the Thames to London itself. If successful, it would take but a few hours instead of days for the ship with all her cargo to reach the very spot where she is needed so badly."

"She'd be more likely to be sunk, sir," said Sam; "but there's just a small chance it might be done."

"Very well. A big steamer is now lying at Dunkirk, opposite us on the French coast. She is laden with a huge quantity of supplies, which would greatly lessen the misery in London, at any rate, for some days. British subjects on the Continent have provisioned her, and hope to get her sent across. But at present there is a hitch. They cannot get a capable person willing to risk what is practically a certainty of being caught and shot. Some have offered, but the agent will not trust them with the vessel."

"I see, sir."

"Are you willing to try?"

"Like a shot, sir! I mean, yes, certainly!" exclaimed Sam joyfully. "What water does she draw?"

NOW YOU'VE FINISHED LEAVE ME IN A SHOP!

"Eighteen feet. Can you do it?"

"I can pilot her up, sir. And if she's full-powered, an' there's any way of dodging the Germans, I'll find it!"

"By what you have already done, I am certain that if anybody is fit for the task, it is you. Your piloting No. 667 through the Swale justifies me in offering it to you. The steamship's owners have appealed to me to help them, but I am quite unable to spare any of my own officers for such a purpose. Will you go?"

"I will start at once, sir."

"I can give you no help. Mr. Cavendish cannot go with you. And any armed escort, of course, would be worse than useless to you—strategy alone can help you. You will have to depend entirely on yourself."

"Yes, sir. I suppose my brother Stephen can go?"

"Of course, if he wishes it. I will give you a letter to the agent at Dunkirk. They will not refuse you."

Sir Francis wrote a few lines on a sheet of the ship's notepaper, which he sealed in an envelope and gave to Sam.

"There is a Belgian collier lying next the Rutland, a mile astern of us. She is bound to Ostend, and can drop you at Dunkirk. I will signal orders to the Rutland to that effect. It will be your quickest way."

"Thank you, sir."

Sir Francis gave Sam a hearty handshake. The boy was a free volunteer, and the admiral showed him that he recognised it.

"Good-bye, my lad, and may good luck go with you! If you succeed, you will save thousands of your countrymen from great misery. If you are caught—well, you've the pluck to bear your fate with a stiff lip."

With a kindly nod, the stern old sea-dog dismissed Sam, who went up on deck as if he were treading on air.

"You look beastly pleased," said Cavendish, who met him at the ladder. "Has Frankie given you a job?"

"A beauty!" said Sam. And he told the sub-lieutenant briefly what his orders were.

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