

THE TERRIBLE THREE and HARRY NOBLE, their AUSTRALIAN CHUM!

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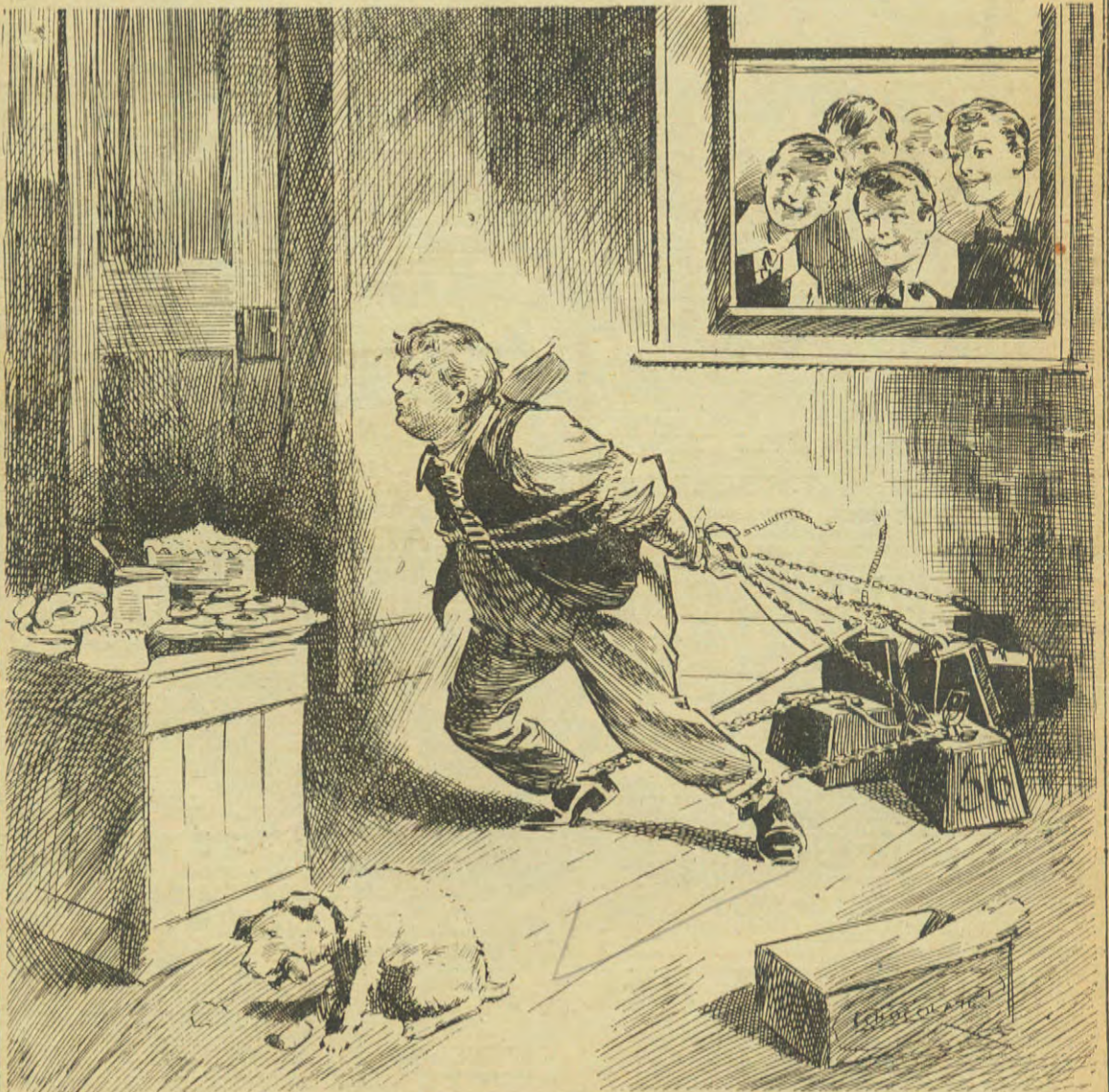
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TOM MERRY'S SUB-EDITOR.

Grand Long
Complete Tale by

MARTIN
CLIFFORD



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OF HALF AN INCH IN HALF AN HOUR.

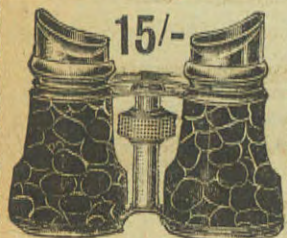
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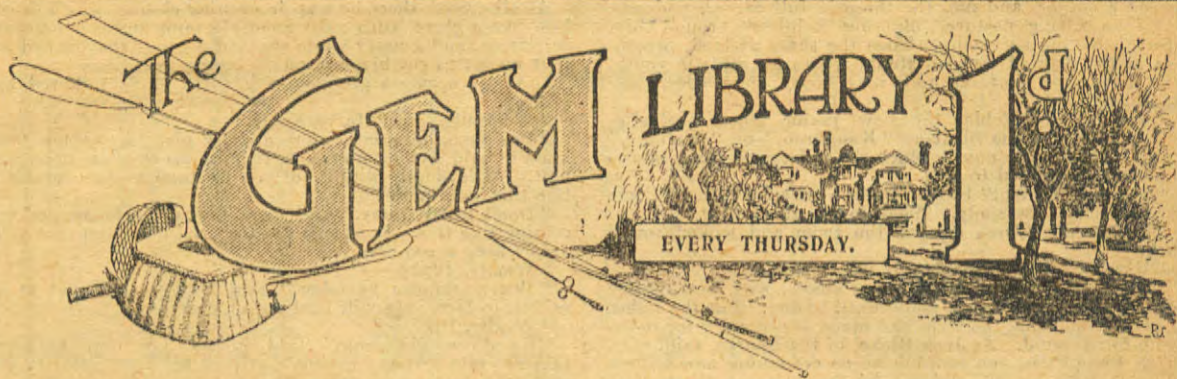
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TOM MERRY'S SUB-EDITOR



A Splendid Long Complete Tale of Tom Merry & Co. and their Australian Chum.
By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

CHAPTER 1.

Many Guests.

"COO-EY!"

"Coo-ey!"

It was a curious sound to be ringing along the passages in the School House at St. Jim's. It smacked of the Australian bush, and seemed oddly out of place in those ancient walls.

Mr. Railton, the House-master, started as he heard it, and looked round him in astonishment, and then he smiled. He remembered that an Australian junior had lately entered the School House—a Colonial youth of a very decided character, who had brought many of his native manners and customs along with him to St. Jim's. The "coo-ey" was evidently a signal from Harry Noble to some of his comrades in the Shell Form, and the House-master smiled indulgently, and went on his way.

And as he did so three juniors came bolting along the passage, and stopped just in time to save themselves from crashing into the House-master.

"Oh!" gasped Tom Merry. "Sorry, sir!"

"We didn't see you, sir," said Monty Lowther.

"Rather in a hurry, sir," stammered Manners.

"Coo-ey!" came again from the end of the Shell passage. "Dear me," said Mr. Railton, "the passages are not places to hold foot-races in, Merry. Really—"

"It isn't a foot-race, sir," said Tom Merry. "Kangaroo—I mean Harry Noble—has just signalled, and—"

"Well, well, you may go!"

"Thank you, sir!"

And the chums of the Shell hurried on.

"Nice pair of asses you are!" said Tom Merry severely. "If I hadn't stopped you, you'd have cannoned Railton, and there would have been a fall in House-masters."

"Why, it was you who started running!" exclaimed Manners indignantly.

"Oh, don't argue! Come on!"

"Coo-ey!"

"There he goes again! It means that it's all ready. If we stay here while Manners argues—"

"I wasn't arguing!"

"Then don't. Buck up!"

Manners stifled his wrath, and they bucked up! If it wasn't a foot-race, it looked very much like it, as the Terrible Three went along the Shell passage. Gore came out of his study as they passed his door, and they ran right over him, and left him gasping on the linoleum. Skimpole

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turned a corner, and met the three in full career, and was left in a sitting posture, blinking helplessly round him through his big spectacles. Then the three arrived, breathless at the door of the end study, where an athletic youth, with handsome features and very keen, alert eyes, was standing.

It was Harry Noble, the new junior from Australia, better known in the Shell as "Kangaroo," or "Wallaby," or by several other names which the unfettered fancy of the juniors had applied to him.

"You're the first!" he said, with a cheerful nod. "Come in and look at the study. What do you think of it?"

The Terrible Three entered the room and looked round them.

"Ripping!" said Tom Merry admiringly.

It was a large room for a junior study; and, as a matter of fact, it had not been a study until to-day. But the influx of new boys during the term had made it necessary for more room to be found. As Jack Blake, of the Fourth, said, with injured emphasis, you couldn't go on cramming new fellows for ever into the old studies. In the long run the county council would have been down on them, so Blake averred, for over-crowding.

Harry Noble had been in Blake's study for the last few days. Now, that study—No. 6 in the Fourth Form passage—was already occupied by Blake, Herries, Digby, and D'Arcy, and the Australian junior—though admittedly a very fine chap—was not desirable as an addition to an already crowded room. The chums of the Fourth, however, had treated him well, waiting patiently till new accommodation should be found.

The odd room at the end of the Shell passage had now been turned into a study.

The Shell passage was of recent construction, but this room was a remnant of the ancient building, and one of the walls was of old oaken panels. The other walls had been papered with a paper that harmonised with the oak, and the effect was very good. There was a cheery linoleum on the floor, this being put in at Noble's expense, who preferred it to carpet, as healthier. The furniture of the study was plain, but quite good, and there was enough of it.

The cupboard door was open, and it showed an array of new crockery that excited the wonder and envy of the fellows in the Shell. Crockery was always at a premium in the junior studies. The juniors provided it themselves, and the amount of breakages was amazing and distressing. Noble had started with a good supply; but how long it would last was another question.

"Ripping!" repeated Tom Merry. "This room's quite as good as ours, which was always considered the best in the Shell."

"Spiffing!" said Lowther, his glance turned towards the table.

It was a good-sized table, and there was a good-sized spread on it. Noble was giving a house-warming, to celebrate his entrance into his new study, and, to judge, by appearances, he certainly intended to do the thing in style.

The kettle was singing away on the brightly-polished grate, and four or five dishes and plates were ranged round the fire to keep warm, bearing appetising burdens of poached eggs, fried sausages, cakes, and pies.

There was a spotless cloth on the table, and cups and saucers and plates galore, and a tray, too—black, with a gilt ornament all the way round it. The chums of the Shell looked at it very admiringly. Knives and forks were laid for all the expected guests—and none of your makeshifts, either—knives without handles, and pocket-knives, and so on, as was but too common in a study feed. These were all new, spick-and-span cutlery, in the best condition—so bright and clean as to be almost oppressive.

"My word," said Manners, "you're going it!"

Noble beamed upon his guests with cheery hospitality. He was evidently rather pleased with the way he had got it all up.

"Hallo, here are the Fourth Form kids!" exclaimed Tom Merry.

More guests were arriving.

The "coo-ey"—the signal that the feast was ready—had been heard in Study No. 6 in the Fourth Form passage, and the dwellers in that famous apartment were prepared for the occasion.

In honour of the study-warming, Blake, Herries, and Digby had put on clean collars. But the fourth of the party—Arthur Augustus D'Arcy—had not been content with that.

D'Arcy perhaps considered that he had his reputation to keep up as the best-dressed fellow at St. Jim's, or perhaps he simply desired to do Noble honour, as a representative of a great British Colony.

Or perhaps—which may be nearer the truth—he was glad of a chance of sporting evening attire.

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At all events, there he was, in evening clothes, which fitted him like a glove, with a diamond gleaming in his expansive shirtfront, and a natty white tie, and a collar that looked as if it meant to cut his ears off.

D'Arcy's eyeglass glimmered into the study followed by D'Arcy.

"Welcome!" said Harry Noble.

"Bai Jove, deah boy, we're awfully pleased to come, you know!" said Arthur Augustus, turning his eyeglass upon his host. "It's simply wippin' of you to stand a—aw—function like this, you know!"

"Don't mind Gussy," said Jack Blake. "He insisted on coming like this. It was no good my warning him that you didn't keep a zoo here."

"Weally, Blake—"

"But he's quite harmless," said Digby. "Tame as a rabbit, in fact. He will feed out of your hand."

"Weally, Dig—"

"Sit down, old chap," said Monty Lowther, pushing D'Arcy into a chair, taking a grip of his high collar to do so. "Don't stand on ceremony."

"Oh! Ow!"

"What's the matter?"

"My collah, you ass! You've wumpled my collah!"

"So I have," said Lowther. "Sorry! Never mind!"

"But I do mind!" said Arthur Augustus, rising from the chair like a jack-in-the-box as soon as Lowther released him. "I mind vewy much, and I am perfectly aware that it was no accident, but that you were playin' a wotten twick. Gentlemen, I am extremly sowway to cause a wov in anothah fellow's quartah's, but, undah the circs, it will be necessary for me to give Lowthah a feahful thwashin'."

"Order, order!"

"I wefuse to ordah—I mean, I must insist upon givin' Lowthah a feahful thwashin'. I twust you will excuse me, Kangawoo, while I thwash Lowthah."

"Certainly!" grinned the Australian. "Don't mind me. Take him out into the passage, though, or you may smash the crockery."

"Yaas, wathah! Come out into the passage, Lowthah, so that I can thwash you without wisk to Noble's cwockewy."

"My dear ass—"

"I wefuse to be called an ass. Pway come on!" And Arthur Augustus seized Monty Lowther by the shoulders, to swing him into the passage.

"Hold on, you ass!"

"I wefuse to hold on! Unless you immediately apologise, I shall thwash you!"

Lowther was laughing too much to take proper care of himself. The effort of the Fourth Form swell sent him staggering to the door. Three juniors were just coming in, late arrivals to the feast—Figgins, Kerr, and Wynn, of the New House. Right into them went Lowther, dragging D'Arcy with him, and with startled yells Figgins & Co. fell over them. Five sprawling forms were mixed up on the linoleum, and which was which it was impossible for the moment to distinguish.

CHAPTER 2.

The Study-Warming.

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

All the juniors, with the exception of those on the floor, joined in the shout of laughter, Arthur Augustus, squirming out of the heap and staggering to his feet, presented a strange sight.

Alas for the nobby evening clothes! The handsome shirt-front was rumpled and grimed, the natty dinner-jacket split up the back, and the high collar looked a limp and dirty rag.

"Bai Jove!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I wegard this wibald laughtah as bein' in wotten bad form!" gasped D'Arcy. "Undah the circs, Noble, I beg you to excuse me for half an hour while I wun and change my clothes."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Pway don't wait for me, deah boys."

"What-ho, we won't!" grinned Blake.

"I'll wun like anythin'. I sha'n't be long."

And Arthur Augustus D'Arcy disappeared down the passage.

Figgins & Co. and Monty Lowther glared at one another. They were all looking dusty and rumpled, but they did not think of going to change their clothes. A jerk here, a pull there, and a little dusting, set them to rights.

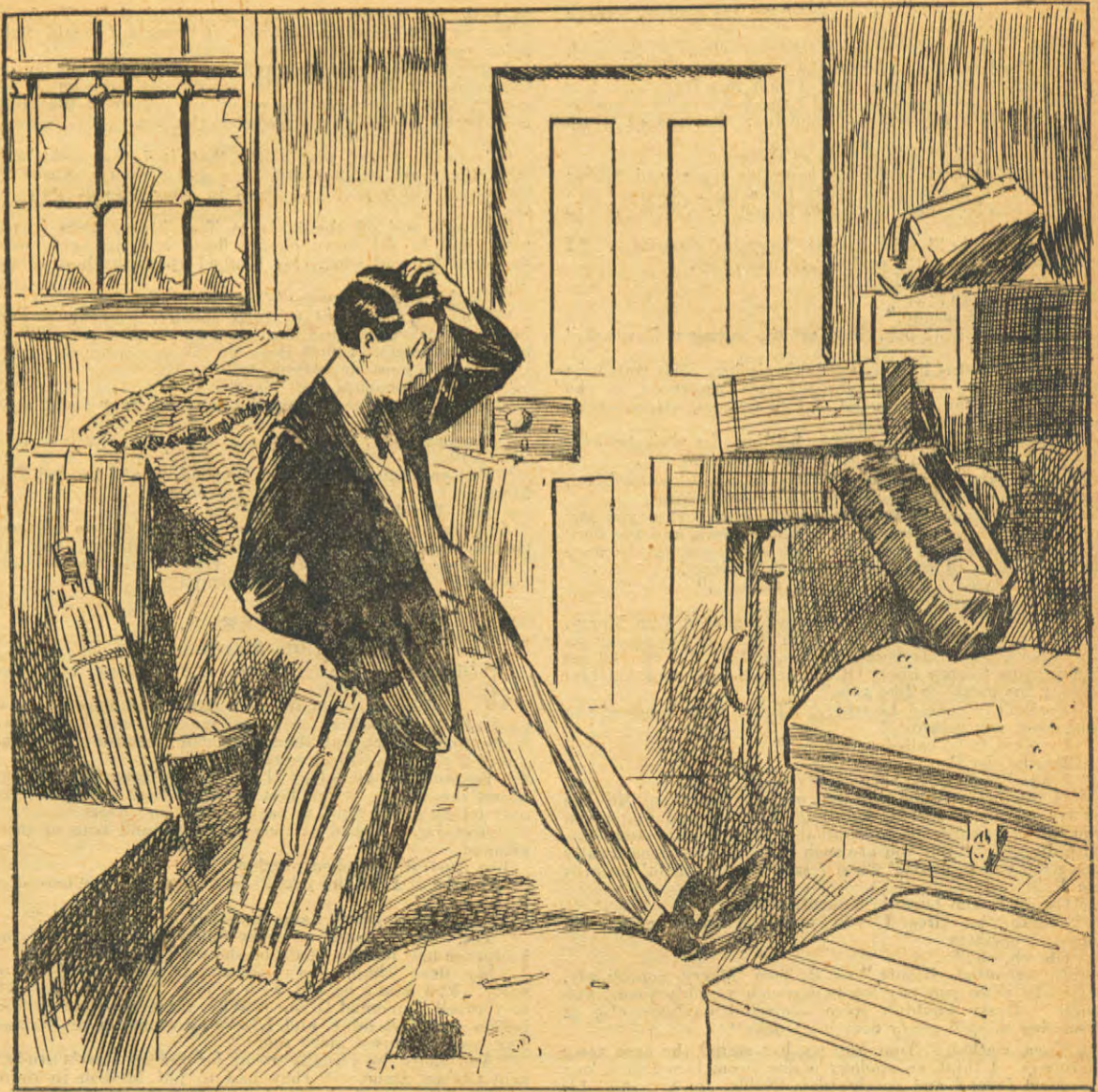
"I suppose this is a jape?" grunted Figgins wrathfully.

"It was that ass Gussy—"

"Where is he? I want to squash him."

"Gone," grinned Noble. "Sit down."

Fatty Wynn wiped the dust out of his eyes, and looked



Half an hour passed, and although the door was unlocked D'Arcy still imagined himself a prisoner. He sniffed and murmured vows of vengeance on Jack Blake.

at the spread—and all the ill-humour vanished from his face. A smile of beatific contentment overspread his plump features.

"I say, Kangaroo, this is ripping!" he said.

"Then let it rip!" smiled the Australian.

"Any more guests coming?"

"Yes; three more of the Shell—Skimpole, Dane, and Glyn."

"Good-sized party!" grinned Tom Merry. "Lucky it's a big room. Well, there's room so far."

There was room, but not without squeezing. Blake, Herries, and Digby crowded at one side of the table, Tom Merry, Lowther, and Manners facing them. Figgins, Kerr, and Wynn took the foot. It was a close fit. Kangaroo was at the head of the table, and there was a chair on either side of him for two more guests. Then there would still be two more. The Australian had pulled down the window to its fullest extent, and the fire was burning low; but the study was warm.

Little cared the juniors for that. They had healthy, boyish appetites, rendered keener by plenty of open-air exercise, and they had purposely missed their tea so as to do full justice to the Cornstalk's spread. The feed was just beginning when a dark-complexioned junior with keen, magnetic eyes entered the study. It was Clifton Dane, the Canadian

"Sorry late," he said cheerfully. "Linton insisted on seeing some lines. You know what these Form-masters are."

"Ha, ha! Yes; a regular bore!"

"Glyn's just coming. He called out to me that he was finishing an experiment—something in the electrical line," said Dane, as he sat down in one of the chairs next to Noble. "It's all right; I've got room."

"Close fit for the others when they come," chuckled Noble. "Now then, have I filled all the cups?"

"Yes, rather; and most of the saucers."

"Ha, ha, ha! That's want of space. Lucky you didn't get any over your bags!" said Noble.

"Pass the poached eggs, please," said Fatty Wynn. "They're on your way, Merry. You might pass the ham, Figgins. Sausages this way, Blake."

"Hungry?" asked Blake sympathetically.

"Yes, rather! Figgins made me miss my tea; though I told him it was a risky thing to do. You never know what effect a thing like that may have on your constitution. It might mean some permanent injury. And I always get so jolly hungry in June, too. It's something in the weather, I think."

"Hallo, here's Glyn!"

Bernard Glyn came in. There was a smudge of some chemical across the nose and cheek of the Liverpool lad,

but he did not seem to be aware of it. He grinned affably at the assembled company.

"Quite a pleasure to meet all you chaps!" he said. "Sorry I'm late, too. I heard the 'coo-ey!' but the experiment would have gone bust if I had left it then. I'm rigging up a new invention—and I think it will be a success—and then somebody will see some fun. Hallo, isn't Gussy coming?"

"Yaas, wathah!" said a voice at the door.

Glyn had sat down in the last available space, and Arthur Augustus looked round the study for a seat. There was a seat, but nowhere near the table to put it. Noble rose to his feet.

"It's all wight!" said Arthur Augustus cheerfully. "I will take my tea on the coal-locker, deah boy."

"Sure you'll be all right?"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Here's your teacup."

"Thank you, deah boy. Pass me the sausages, Lowthah."

"Certainly!"

Arthur Augustus had changed his clothes. His wardrobe was extensive, and his dress-clothes appeared to be unlimited. At all events, he was in evening attire again, and looked as nobby as ever.

Lowther passed the sausages, holding the dish towards the swell of St. Jim's for the latter to help himself.

D'Arcy gave a sudden exclamation, and jumped up, knocking the dish backwards over Lowther's knees.

Lowther yelled. A dozen or more greasy sausages and a flood of hot gravy soused over his trousers, and the fluid soaked through in a moment. The dish went to the floor with a crash, and smashed into twenty pieces.

"Ow!" roared Lowther. "Oh! Ooooch!"

"You uttah ass!"

"What did you do that for, Gussy?" gasped Tom Merry.

"The uttah duffah was just goin' to spill the gway on my tucks," said the swell of St. Jim's. "I jumped up just in time to stop him. Of course, I nevah expected him to play the giddy ox like this."

"I wasn't!" roared Lowther. "I was only handing you the sosses, you dummy!"

"I wefuse to be called a dummy."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I was handing the silly ass the—"

"If you declare that you had no intention of spillin' the gway on my twousahs, Lowthah, I am bound to believe you, as one gentleman to another," said Arthur Augustus, with dignity. "But you are such a wottah that I natuwallly suspected you of wottin' when I saw the dish tiltin' towards me."

"Ow, oh! I'm burnt! You utter idiot!"

"Undah the cires I will ovahlook those extremely offensive epithets—"

"Oh, oh, oh!"

"Never mind, Monty," said Tom Merry consolingly.

"It's the price you pay for being such a giddy joker, you know. Gussy wouldn't have suspected anybody else of intending to spill gravy over his tucks."

"Yaas, wathah! Tom Mewwy has stated the case vewy pwecisely. I think an apology is due fwom Lowthah to our esteemed fwend and entahtainah, Noble, for bweakin' his dish and wastin' his gway."

"Oh, you frabjous ass!" gasped Lowther.

"I decline to be addressed as a fwabjous ass—"

"Never mind, Monty; trousers are cheap," said Manners. "Sit down and finish your tea."

"Groo! I'm all grease!"

"I should wecommand Lowthah to go and change his twousahs—"

"I'll change your features for you one of these times!" grunted Lowther, as he sat down. "I'll change after tea. Fill my cup again, please."

"Pway pass me the eggs, deah boys."

The eggs were passed to Arthur Augustus without mishap, and the feast proceeded merrily. It was an enjoyable one, and everybody was in good spirits, and the smiles returned even to Monty Lowther's face.

"Hallo, you're late!" said Noble cheerily, as a pair of big spectacles glimmered at the open door. "Come in, Skimpy!"

Skimpole, of the Shell, the amateur Socialist and genius generally, came in, blinking about him like an owl in unaccustomed daylight.

"Yes, I fear I am somewhat late," he remarked. "It is owing to my having spent some time studying the latest theories of Determinism as expounded by Professor Piffar. I was just coming out of my study to come here, when someone ran into me—"

The Terrible Three chuckled.

"I sat down to recover myself from the shock, and began

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to read the wonderful book just published by Professor Piffar on that important subject. I thought I would make a few notes to read over to you at tea."

A general glare was bestowed upon Skimpole, but he was too shortsighted to see it. He sorted some notes out of his pocket, and absentmindedly sat on the corner of the table, and spread the tail of his jacket in the jam.

"You ass! Get off—"

"Professor Piffar points out that it being undeniable that things are as they are, they are evidently caused by the cause which produced them in their present state—Ow!"

Skimpole slid off the table as Tom Merry gave him a push, and he sat down on the floor, and his notes were scattered far and wide. He blinked up at the hero of the Shell.

"Really, Tom Merry—"

"This is a feed, not a crank lecture," explained Tom Merry. "We can stand Socialism in small doses, but we bar Determinism. Chuck it—"

"But it is most important—"

"Sosses or poached eggs?"

"The whole future of the human race may hang upon the—"

"Poached eggs?"

"Eh?"

"Will you have sausages or poached eggs?" bawled Tom Merry.

"Oh! Poached eggs, please."

And Skimpole found a seat on the edges of two adjacent chairs, and began to eat; and he showed, too, that his excursions into the mysterious regions of "isms" and "ologies" had not impaired his appetite.

CHAPTER 3.

A Little Sing-Song.

"JOLLY good quarters!" said Clifton Dane, as he rose from the table.

The festive board was showing a bareness now, natural after the great onslaughts made upon it by a crowd of hungry juniors, but there was still something left—and Fatty Wynn was still at work upon it.

"Yes, not so bad—eh?" Harry Noble remarked, looking round the study. "The best of it is, that I shall be the only fellow in the Shell to have a study to myself."

Clifton Dane looked at Bernard Glyn, and both of them grinned.

The Australian looked puzzled.

"Blessed if I see the joke!" he remarked. "Where does it come in?"

"So you're going to have this study to yourself—eh?"

"Yes, rather—unless any new fellows come in the Form. I suppose new fellows would be shoved in here with me?"

"My dear chap, you're counting your chickens too early. You won't be left with a jolly big study like this to yourself," grinned Glyn. "Why, there are three fellows beside myself in mine, and I have no room for my fixings. I've been promised more room."

"And there isn't really room for me in Gore's study," said Clifton Dane. "They had to put Mellish in there, too. I rather think this study is meant for me."

Noble looked rather grim.

"It's my study," he said firmly. "Always glad to see any of you chaps as guests; but any chap coming to dig here will get treated as I was treated in Tom Merry's study, when Mr. Railton shoved me in there."

"Ha, ha, ha! We chucked you out, didn't we?" grinned Tom Merry.

"Well, you tried to," said Noble, laughing. "It wasn't much of a success, so far as I remember. Blake was inclined to cut up rough, too, when I was put into No. 6; but Gussy stood up for me like a little man."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"I'm keeping this study to myself. I want it. I've got all sorts of things to stow away, and I'm going to keep pets. That chap Dane keeps snakes, and they'd eat up my pets, very likely. Then Glyn's electrical apparatus would be in the way. I expect I should tread on his dynamos and sit on his batteries."

"You'd get a jolly big thick ear if you did," said the Liverpool lad warmly.

"There, you see, war declared already, and you're not here yet," grinned Noble. "You keep off the grass, and we shall be ripping good friends. Not going?"

"Yes; I've got to get back to my experiment."

And Glyn nodded and left the study. Skimpole, remembering that he had not finished Professor Piffar's wonderful book on Determinism, followed him. The other juniors were on their feet, with the exception of Fatty Wynn.

"Suppose we have a sing-song to finish up with?" sug-

gested the Cornstalk. "We haven't got to get to prep, yet."

"Bai Jove, that's a wippin' ideah! I don't mind givin' you a tenor solo."

"Oh!" shrieked Lowther.

"Bai Jove, Lowthah, old chap, what's the mattah? Are you hurt?"

"No."

"Then what were you shwiekin' for?"

"I was shrieking in anticipation."

"You uttah ass—"

"Let's have the tenor solo, and we'll all join in the chorus," said Figgins. "If it's too bad, we'll sing the chorus while Gussy's singing the verse, and then it will be all right."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I should uttably wefuse to sing a solo undah those cirs."

"Well, it won't be a solo if we all join in," said Tom Merry. "Begin!"

"Pway wait till I get my note."

D'Arcy produced a tuning-fork from his pocket, and struck it on the mantelpiece. Then he "ah-ed" up and down the scale till he was satisfied that he had his note, and then he started the tenor solo.

It was the hero's song from the first act of "Lohengrin," and as Fsharp was the highest note, it was not so much out of D'Arcy's range as most of his tenor solos. For D'Arcy was persuaded that he had a top B-flat, and nothing would convince him to the contrary, not even the unearthly shriek he gave when he was trying to produce the top B-flat.

"Nun sei bedankt, mein lieber Schwan," began D'Arcy, "Zieh' durch die weite Fluth zuruuck—dahin—"

"I didn't know he was going to sing in Esperanto," grumbled Lowther.

D'Arcy left off in the middle of his tenor solo to jam his eyeglass into his eye, and fix a glance of withering contempt upon Lowther.

"You uttah ass! I'm not singin' in Espewanto."

"What is it, then—Sanskrit?"

"It's German, you feahful duffah."

"Did you make it up yourself?"

"You—you unspeakable ass! It's a song fwom Wagnah—fwom 'Lohengwin'."

"I mean the German; or perhaps you invented the pronunciation," said Lowther thoughtfully. "Go on, though; I can stand it."

Words failed to express D'Arcy's feelings at that moment, so he did not try to express them, but went on with his singing.

"I will begin again, deah boys. 'Nun sei bedankt, mein lieber Schwan—'"

"Here, fair play, you know; go straight on," said several voices.

"I will begin again—"

"That you won't!"

"Play up!"

"On the bawl!"

"Wats! 'Nun sei bedankt, mein lieber Schwan—'"

"Oh, come, enough of the lieber swan," said Tom Merry. "Get on with the washing."

"I wegard that wemark as widiculous, Tom Mewwy."

"D'Arcy having declined to finish his song, I call upon Figgins—"

"I am goin' on, deah boy."

"Too late! Figgins will now oblige us with 'What's the Matter with Gussy?'—I mean, 'What's the Matter with England?'"

"Certainly!" said Figgins, and he started: "'There's a rumour of war in the air, there's talk of a foreign attack; in the midst of alarms there's a call to arms—'"

"Nun sei bedankt, mein lieber Schwan—"

"To fight for the Union Jack," went on Figgins cheerily. "If they come, they'll find us ready, heart on fire and gun in hand—"

"Zieh, durch die weite Fluth zuruuck—"

"To meet the foe, with blow for blow, the Territorials stand!" rang on Figgins.

"Weally, Figgins—" said the tenor, breaking off.

"What's the matter with England?" trilled Figgins,

"Who cares for the foreign drum—"

"You uttah ass—"

"From counter and farm, at the first alarm, the Territorials come!"

"I wefuse to sing until Figgins shuts up."

"There's nothing wrong with the country," went on Figgins. "Her sons know how to—" Ow-wow-wow!"

There was something wrong with Figgins. It was D'Arcy's fist, which smote him on the end of the nose, and forced him to sit down suddenly on the linoleum, with his patriotic song unfinished.

"I am extremely sowwy to have to stwike Figgins," said D'Arcy, looking round, "but undah the cirs. I had no alternative. I will now wesume my solo."

Figgins jumped up, seeing red, but the others held him back. Arthur Augustus burst into melody again, and the German song tumbled out thick and fast. But tenor solos were not popular, and it was generally considered that D'Arcy had had his innings. Tom Merry burst into a coon song, and the others took up the chorus, and the end study rang with sound. In the midst of that formidable roar, both D'Arcy's operatic air and Figgins's Territorial song were drowned and inaudible.

"Come and kiss me, Honey, come and kiss me, do!" roared the juniors; and those who did not know any more of the song, roared that line over and over again to the same tune, with surprising effects.

As few were singing the same words, and most of them had different tunes, the chorus was a little mixed, and not wholly harmonious. D'Arcy grew as red as a turkey-cock in his endeavours to bring his solo out above the roar, and Figgins, giving up the Territorial song in despair, commenced to tattoo on the floor with his heels, to add to the din.

The noise was far too great for them to hear footsteps in the passage. They had no hint of danger until the door was suddenly thrown open, and three or four infuriated prefects burst into the room.

Kildare, the captain of St. Jim's, and Darrel and Rush-

SEVEN New Readers. See What Happens Next Week!



den, and Knox, came rushing in, with canes in their hands, and no quarrel in their looks.

"Turn them out!" roared Kildare.

"Bai Jove—"

"Here, I say—"

"Hold on!"

"Ow! Wow! Hooroo!"

"Yow! Groo!"

"Oh, oh! Ow! Hold on!"

There was a wild scattering of the juniors. They stood not upon the order of their going, but went at once. In the wild scramble for the door to escape the lashing canes, the juniors jammed and struggled, and rolled over. Herries found himself with his head and shoulders in the cupboard, amid smashed crockery. Tom Merry and Blake rolled amid the wreckage of the overturned table. Manners and Dane were sprawling in the grate on overturned dishes. And still the canes did not spare. The noise the juniors had been making had rung through the whole School House, and the House-master had given Kildare a hint that he expected the juniors to be kept more orderly. And Kildare was not inclined to run any risk just then of spoiling the child by sparing the rod.

The desperate juniors swarmed out of the study at last. D'Arcy was the last to escape, very flushed and outraged in his dignity. He turned in the doorway to address some remarks to the panting prefects.

"Kildare, I regard this conduct as outrageous. I consider—"

Kildare rushed towards him, and he never knew what it was that D'Arcy considered, for the swell of St. Jim's went down the passage as if he were on the cinder-path.

The study was cleared, but it was a wreck.

Kildare looked round him rather ruefully, and then he burst into a laugh.

"I hear that this was a study-warming," he remarked. "The youngsters have got warmed too, as it turns out. I hope they will be quiet for a little while now."

"I think they will," laughed Darrel.

And they certainly were.

CHAPTER 4.

D'Arcy Requires Satisfaction.

"WHEW!"

"My hat!"

"Ow!"

"Bai Jove!"

These four exclamations were all made together, as the chums of Study No. 6 burst into that apartment, breathless, after their flight from the prefects. Jack Blake slammed the door and locked it, and Herries heaved the armchair against it. Digby clutched up a cricket-bat from a corner, and stood prepared for eventualities. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy smoothed out his rumpled attire, with wrath gathering upon his aristocratic countenance.

"Great Scott," went on Blake breathlessly, "that was a warm time! I wonder where the others have got to?"

"I saw Tom Merry and Manners and Lowther bolting into their study. Dane went in with them," gasped Herries. "They're all right."

"And Figgins & Co.—"

"We can see from the window."

Blake ran to the window and opened it. It was dusk in the quadrangle, but three figures could be seen running at top speed across towards the New House. It was easy, in spite of the dusk, to recognise the long limbs of Figgins, and the short, plump person of Fatty Wynn; and the third, of course, was the Scottish partner in the Co.

Figgins & Co. had got clear!

"They're all right!" announced Blake. "My hat, it was a warm time and a hot run! Anybody coming along the passage?"

"I can't hear anybody," said Dig, who was listening at the door. "I don't think they're after us."

"Perhaps Kildare thinks we've had enough," grunted Herries. "Blow! I can feel that cane round my calves now!"

"I suppose we were making a bit of a row in the end study," Blake remarked thoughtfully. Digby chuckled.

"Yes, I suppose we were, Jacky."

"Well, it's all right. We're well out of it."

"I refuse to regard it as all right, Blake."

"Eh? What's the matter with you, Gussy?"

"There is a great deal the matter," said D'Arcy, with much dignity. "This is the second suit of evenin' clothes I've had ruined."

"Hard cheese, old chap. If you're asked to a party now, you'll have to go in a dressing-gown or a blanket, I suppose," said Blake sympathetically.

"Pway don't wot, deah boy! I have been treated outrageously. Kildare has stwuck me!"

Arthur Augustus made this announcement quite dramatically, and the three Fourth-Formers started and looked at him. D'Arcy was very much in earnest, and there was evidently something on his mind.

"Struck you?" said Blake. "Rats! You mean he hit you."

"There is no great difference between hit and stwuck, you know."

"Well, they're both past participles, I believe," said Blake, with a judicial air. "But there is a difference in the number of letters. Hit has three letters, and struck has six, and—"

"Pway be sewious, deah boy. Kildare has stwuck me, and I wequire satisfaction!"

"Eh?"

"I wequire satisfaction!"

"My hat! Aren't you satisfied yet? If you wanted some more, what did you run for?"

"I did not want any more brutal outwages. I admit that I did run like anythin'. But on reflection, I considah it is impos. for a D'Arcy to submit to such insultin' conduct even from a pwefect. I have a pwopah respect for constituted authority, but I must wefuse to be stwuck. I owe it to my ancestors."

"You owe it to your aunt's sisters?" asked Blake, pretending to misunderstand. "Have the old ladies been lending you money?"

"Ha, ha, ha!" cackled Herries and Dig. D'Arcy turned his eyeglass upon them with a withering expression.

"You misundahstand, Blake. I owe it to the name and fame of my ancestors to wefuse to be stwuck."

"Oh, blow your ancestors, old chap! They're dead, anyway."

"I can quite undahstand your pwejudice on that point, Blake," said D'Arcy loftily. "You are of Saxon descent—"

"Yes, rather!" said Blake. "One of the oldest pure-bred English families in Yorkshire. None of your rotten Norman blood in me!"

"Yaas, wathah! Now, my ancestahs came over with William the Conquerwah, and they gave your ancestahs a feahful thwashin' at the battle of Hastings—"

"What!" roared Blake.

"I am sowwy my ancestahs licked your ancestahs at the battle of Hastings, if it weighs on your mind, deah boy, but I have to considah my dig, as a D'Arcy. Kildare has stwuck me—"

"There's somebody in this study who will follow suit, if he gets much more of your piffle!" growled Blake.

"Pway don't be watty, deah boy, because my ancestahs—"

"Oh, ring off your ancestors!"

"Certainly. As I was sayin', a D'Arcy cannot be stwuck without demandin' satisfaction. I shall have no wescource but to send a fwient to wait on Kildare to demand an explanation."

Blake stared at Arthur Augustus for a moment. Then he looked at Digby and Herries. Then he burst into a roar that rang through the study.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Blake.

"Ha, ha, ha!" shrieked Digby.

"Ho, ho, ho!" howled Herries.

D'Arcy surveyed them angrily.

"Am I to undahstand from this wibald laughtah that you wefuse to take my message to Kildare?" he demanded.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"If I cannot find a fwient in this study, I shall pwceed to look for a fwient outside this study," said Arthur Augustus impressively.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The swell of St. Jim's, with an extremely annoyed expression, dragged the armchair away from the door, and unlocked it. He opened the door, and stood with it in his hand to address a last remark to his convulsed chums.

"For the last time, deah boys, will one of you take my message to the person who has insulted me—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Blake was rolling on the carpet, almost sobbing. Herries and Dig were leaning on one another's shoulders, on the verge of weeping. They had laughed themselves almost into hysteria, and were still laughing.

"For the last time—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Arthur Augustus went out of the study and slammed the door. It was seldom that the swell of St. Jim's—the pink of politeness—let himself go like that. But on this occasion he did. The slam rang through the Fourth Form passage in the School House. D'Arcy strode away, and within Study No. 6 three juniors wept with merriment.

CHAPTER 5.

Arthur Augustus Finds a Friend!

TOM MERRY sat in the armchair in his study, laughing breathlessly. The chums of the Shell had had just as hot a run for it as the Fourth-Formers, and Manners had taken the precaution of jamming the table against the door after entering. The Terrible Three and Clifton Dane were in the room, all a little breathless, and all a little hurt, but quite good-humoured about it. They knew very well that the noise they had been making must have disturbed the whole house, and that they deserved a great deal more punishment than they had received.

"Kildare had his rag out that time, and no mistake!" said Tom Merry, panting. "What a businesslike stroke he has when he's in earnest!"

"Yes, rather!" said Manners, feeling his leg tenderly. "He's given me some marks. Darrel laid it on pretty well, too."

"And Knox is a spiteful beast," said Lowther. "He caught me behind the head, a thing Kildare or Darrel would never do."

It was generally agreed that Knox was a beast. Against the other prefects the juniors never thought of bearing the slightest ill-will. As a matter of fact, it had been some excitement and fun, though painful at the time.

"Well, they're not after us, that's one comfort," said Tom Merry. "The Fourth Form kids got away all right, too. I don't know where Kangaroo is."

"I saw him streaking for the upper stairs."

"Good! He can run, too! They're not likely to follow as here, and—Hullo!"

Tap.

"Who's there?" called out Manners cautiously, determined to be unable to move the table from the door if it should prove to be a prefect.

"It's all right. It's I, dear boys!"

"Gussy, by Jove!"

Manners pulled away the table, and the Fourth-Former entered. He was looking considerably dusty and disordered, as was natural after what he had been through. The front of his evening shirt was crumpled, and sticking out of his waistcoat in jags, but D'Arcy was too excited to notice it.

"Hullo!" said Tom Merry. "Take a seat, old man. Did you catch it?"

"I dare say you noticed, dear boys," said D'Arcy, looking round the study, "that Kildare stumped me."

The Shell fellows stared at him.

"I think he was striking out pretty freely all round," remarked Clifton Dane.

"Yaas wathah! He stumped me! It is impos. for a D'Arcy to be stumped without demandin' satisfaction, and I am goin' to send Kildare a message."

D'Arcy made this announcement with due solemnity; but it was not received solemnly. It affected Tom Merry & Co. in precisely the manner as it had affected the juniors in Study No. 6. They stared at him, and then they went off into a shout of laughter.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

D'Arcy turned his monocle from one to another.

"Weally, dear boys—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"If my remarks are weceived in this studay with nothin' but wibald mewwiment, I shall have no wesource but to wetire."

And he retired, and a yell of inextinguishable laughter followed him down the passage. With a very red and indignant face, D'Arcy paused in the passage to reflect. Whom should he visit next—who was likely to regard the matter with fitting seriousness?

His younger brother, Wally—D'Arcy minor of the Third—or Figgins & Co. in the New House—or yes, there was Glyn. D'Arcy had visited Glyn of the Shell at his house, near St. Jim's, and was very friendly with the young inventor. He walked along to Bernard Glyn's study, tapped, and entered.

"Glyn, dear boy—" he began.

Glyn was seated at the table, busy with a paper covered with mysterious-looking figures. He looked up rather irritably. On the table before him lay a large, nickel-mounted walking-stick.

"Eh? Excuse me; I'm busy. Buzz off!"

"My dear fellow, it's important. I've been insulted—"

"Yes. All right. I don't mind."

"You are not listenin' to me," said D'Arcy indignantly. "Pway give me your attention."

"Br-r-r-r!" said Glyn, with his eyes bent upon his problem.

D'Arcy's eye glimmered behind his eyeglass. He picked up the walking-stick on the table, intending to give Glyn a slight poke with it to draw his attention.

The next moment a wild yell rang through the study.

"Oh!"

D'Arcy, with the walking-stick in his hand, danced on the floor of the study like a dancing dervish, letting out a series of ear-splitting yells.

He did not seem to be able to let go the walking-stick, for he kept it in his hand while he jumped spasmodically and yelled.

"Oh! Ow! Oooh! Oh! Leggo! Lemme off!"

Glyn chuckled quietly. From the end of the walking-stick a thin wire ran under the table, to a powerful battery there. As a matter of fact, the walking-stick was the Liverpool lad's latest "wheeze." It was simply a conductor for a powerful current of electricity, and Arthur Augustus was getting the benefit of it. The wire ran through the centre of the stick to the metal head, which D'Arcy was grasping with fingers that could not let go.

"My hat!" said Gore, looking in at the door. "What's the row? Hallo! Here's D'Arcy doing a walking-stick dance turn. Come and look."

"Faith, and it's ripping!" cried Reilly, looking in.

"Kape it up, Gussy! Bravo!"

"Take it away!" shrieked D'Arcy.

"Take what away?"

"The stick!"

"Faith, and I'll soon do that!"

The boy from Belfast grasped the stick—and gave a yell. Then he commenced to dance as D'Arcy was doing, and a crowd of juniors gathered at the door and watched them with cheers.

D'Arcy had hold of the head of the stick, and Reilly of the metal band at the other end, and each was unable to let go.

"Begorra, and it's kilt I am!" roared Reilly. "Faith, it's electricity intirely. Shut it off, ye gossoon!"

"Bai Jove! Ow! Oh!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" cackled Gore. "Go it!"

"Shut off the current, ye spalpeen!" yelled Reilly.

Glyn grinned, and shut it off. The walking-stick dropped from the shaking hands, and hung by the wire. Reilly and D'Arcy hugged their tingling hands, and grunted.

"Faith, and it's a good mind to punch ye're head I have," growled Reilly.

Glyn laughed.

"I didn't ask you to take hold of the stick," he replied.

"You're interrupting my work. Buzz off."

"Weally, Glyn—"

"Oh, get outside, kid! I'll talk to you presently."

"Undah the cires, I shall wetire, but pway undahstand that I wegard you as a beast."

"Right-ho! I don't mind."

D'Arcy bestowed a withering glare upon the St. Jim's inventor; but it only took effect upon the top of his head, for Glyn was leaning over his paper again. The swell of St. Jim's retired from the study with his nose well in the air. In the passage he almost ran into Harry Noble.

"Bai Jove, I'm glad to see you, dear boy!" exclaimed D'Arcy. "I'm lookin' for a friend."

"Good!" said the Cornstalk. "I'm the very man!"

"Pway come into the quadwangle, where we can talk without intewwuption," said D'Arcy, with a glance at the crowd of juniors in the passage.

"Certainly!" said Noble, looking a little puzzled, but very obliging. "Is it anything very important?"

"Yaas, wathah—awfully important!"

And Noble followed Arthur Augustus into the dusky quadrangle, where—mysteriously under the dark shadow of an elm—D'Arcy poured out his wrongs, and the satisfaction he required. And to his relief—and somewhat to his surprise—the Cornstalk chum did not laugh. He listened to the recital with a face as solemn as D'Arcy could possibly have desired.

"I suppose I can twust the mattah into your hands, dear boy?" said Arthur Augustus, very flattered and pleased by the deep interest the Cornstalk evidently took in the matter. Noble slapped him on the shoulder.

"You can. Say no more about it."

"Yaas, wathah, but—"

"Leave it to me."

And the Cornstalk placed his hand solemnly on his lips, and hurried away. D'Arcy, not knowing exactly whether to be pleased or not, went slowly into the School House.

CHAPTER 6.

Smythers Declines to Stay.

"NOBLE!"

Mr. Railton called the name as the Cornstalk chum entered the School House, and Noble turned towards the House-master, who was standing at the door of his study.

"Yes, sir?"

"The new Shell study is now prepared for occupation," said Mr. Railton. The Cornstalk grinned slightly, as he remembered the study-warming.

"Yes, sir; I've seen it."

"You will take up your quarters there, Noble, and—let me see—you will have three study-mates," Noble's face fell, but he did not speak. It was useless to begin an argument with a House-master. Mr. Railton would have cut it short in such a drastic way. "Let me see. Dane and Glyn were placed in their present quarters really only temporarily, and there is room for them in the end study. Yes, you will have Dane and Glyn with you, Noble, and—yes—Smythers."

"Ye-es, sir. I was thinking perhaps I should have a study to myself for a bit."

"Impossible!"

"But if the other fellows don't care to come, sir," said the Cornstalk meekly.

"I should say there is very little doubt upon that point."

"But if they don't."

"As far as that goes, they are at liberty to remain in their present quarters if they wish to do so," said Mr. Railton, looking a little puzzled. "I have no desire to disturb them against their wish. But I warn you that there is very little chance of that."

"Very well, sir."

Noble walked on to his new study with a thoughtful expression upon his face, and a glimmer of fun in his eyes. He wanted that study to himself. And when he wanted a thing, and set his mind upon having it, the young Australian, as a rule, succeeded in getting it.

"Hallo, this looks ripping!" he muttered, as he entered the study. It was in a state of "admirable disorder," just as the prefects had left it, and everything was at sixes and sevens. The young Colonial set to work getting it to rights. Tom Merry looked in while he was busily engaged, and offered to lend a hand, but Noble declined with a shake of the head.

"It's all right," he said, "I can manage."

And Tom Merry nodded and passed on. Noble had the study tidy at last, and the broken crockery stacked in a box, to be taken away by the maids next morning. The work finished, the Colonial's next proceedings were somewhat curious.

He took an acetylene lamp from the cupboard, and turned on the water, so that the gas began to generate in the carbide container. But he did not light it. He stood the lamp out of sight under the armchair, and left it there.

The lamp was well loaded with common carbide of calcium—not the "scintless" variety. Needless to say, in a few minutes a most horrid smell began to permeate the study. Noble closed the window, and the smell became strong, penetrating, and painful. It was like unto drains in the worst possible state of repair, only more so. And Noble sniffed, and sniffed—and grinned.

In spite of the poisonous smell, he sat down quietly at the table and commenced his preparation. He had been at work about a quarter of an hour, when a junior came in with a bundle of books under one arm, and a fishing-rod and a cricket-bat under the other.

It was Smythers, of the Shell. Smythers was a rather wealthy youth—indeed, there were fellows in the Form who declared that it was since the family's accession to wealth that the third letter of the family name had become a "y" instead of an "i." Smythers had plenty of pocket-money, and would have been a desirable study-mate to many fellows. But the Cornstalk was not one of them. He preferred to be king of the castle, so to speak.

"Hallo!" said Smythers, setting down his books on the table with a bump. The Cornstalk looked up and nodded.

"Hallo!" he said. "What do you want?"

"I'm going to share this study."

"Good!" said Noble carelessly. "Bring along your props. I've furnished the study myself, but there's room for more props. I suppose you will be standing a bookcase, or something?"

Smythers nodded.

"Taggles is going to bring along my things to-morrow," he said. "But, I say"—he looked round the study and sniffed expressively—"is there anything wrong with the drains in this part of the house?"

"Drains! I don't know. I'm not a sanitary inspector."

"Don't you notice a curious smell in the study?"

Noble sniffed.

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"Well, now you speak of it, there's a bit of a whiff," he remarked. "I don't suppose it's due to the drains."

"Then where does it come from?"

Noble looked round the study.

"Blessed if I can see what causes it," he said. Which was strictly true, for the carbide lamp was hidden under the armchair.

Smythers threw the window down.

"I suppose you don't mind the window open?" he said.

"I'm a fresh-air fellow, you know, and this whiff is simply poisonous."

"My dear fellow, have the door and window both open if you like," said Noble generously. "I like fresh air. I was raised in the bush. When I was staying with my uncle at Croajingalong, I used to sleep in the open air."

"I'd rather sleep in the open air than in a scent like this," growled Smythers. He took out a scented handkerchief, and waved it in the air before him. Smythers was a little of a dandy, and rather a rival of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy in that respect, but in the opinion of the swell of St. Jim's, Smythers overdid it. D'Arcy never used scent, while Smythers, as a rule, simply reeked of it.

Noble sniffed again.

"Phew! Are you trying to drive out one whiff with another?" he asked.

"I can't stand this," exclaimed Smythers angrily. "How a chap can sit here and work in such a niff, I can't imagine. There must be something wrong with the drains."

"Oh, don't worry; it may clear off."

"It doesn't look like it."

Noble shrugged his shoulders, and went on with his work. Smythers extracted a small phial from his waistcoat pocket, and poured a generous allowance of scent upon his handkerchief, and fluttered it in the air. The Cornstalk grunted, but did not look up. Smythers fanned himself with the handkerchief, and growled.

"It's rotten! I can't stand it! I'm not going to stick in a rotten study that smells worse than a rotten Augean stable."

"Oh, dry up, old chap, I'm trying to work!"

"How can you work in such a reek?"

"It wasn't so bad before you added that scent to it."

"What! This is a most expensive scent."

"Good old violet de Parme!" chuckled Noble. "Shilling a gallon!"

Smythers measured him with his eye. Had a Fourth-Former said that to the dandy of the Shell, Smythers would have been all over him in a second. But there was something about the resolute face and square chin and broad shoulders of the Australian that made Smythers pause.

"I look on you as a cad," he said, after a minute's silence.

"No extra charge," said Noble cheerily.

"You are a rank outsider."

"Not quite so rank as a chap who uses that scent."

"You—you—" Smythers paused. "I'm not going to stay in this study to be poisoned. Mr. Railton said I could stop in my old quarters if I liked."

"Please yourself, Smith."

"My name's Smythers!" roared the dandy of the Shell.

"Sorry! Not half so good a name as Smith, you know."

"Look here, you rotter—"

"Better language, please," said Noble, getting up. "I'm not used to these fancy names. Are you looking for trouble?"

"I don't want a row with you," said Smythers, backing away. "I don't know what you're made of to stand this smell. I'd rather pig it, in a Form-room, with the Third, than stay in this study."

"I'd rather you did, too, as a matter of fact, though it would be a bit rough on the Third," said the Cornstalk genially.

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Smythers took up his books. The smell in the study was really horrible by this time, and as Smythers never suspected the real cause, it was not surprising that he could not stand it.

"Well, I'm going!" he snapped.

"Good-bye!"

Smythers only grunted in reply, and left the study. He tramped along the passage with a very injured expression, deposited his belongings in his old quarters, and then sought Mr. Railton.

"If you please, sir, I'd rather stay in my old study," he said. "The end study isn't—h'm—isn't comfortable, sir."

"As you like, Smythers," said the House-master.

And that was settled. Meanwhile, the Cornstalk had shut the door very carefully after the departing Shell fellow, and then—safe from observation—he executed a cake-walk of triumph round the table. He was thus engaged when the door opened suddenly, and Bernard Glyn came in.

CHAPTER 7.

The New Firm.

NOBLE stopped the cake-walk all of a sudden, and turned rather red. Glyn looked at him in astonishment.

"Hallo! Off your rocker?"

"N-n-no."

"Private gymnastics, I suppose?"

"Ye-es, that's it."

"Good! I hope you've finished. I shouldn't be able to do my prep. while that sort of thing's going on. I'm to share this study, after all, you know."

"Yes; so I've heard. But you can remain in your own if you like."

The Liverpool lad chuckled.

"Not likely, my son. But—" He sniffed, as Smythers had done. "What's that unearthly, ghastly, awful whiff?"

"Eh?" said Noble, sitting down. "Do you notice any smell? Smythers has just been here, and he said there was something."

Glyn sniffed, and sniffed, and sniffed.

"How can you stand it?" he exclaimed.

"Oh, I dare say you'll get used to it!"

"Blessed if I shall! If this is going to be a permanency, my stay won't be. What is it? It isn't drains; it's—it's—You artful dodger!"

Noble's face fell a little. Glyn's expression showed that the Liverpool lad had guessed the truth.

"Eh?" he said. "What are you talking about?"

"You know jolly well!" grinned Glyn. "I've used acetylene gas in my experiments, and I know the old familiar niff. You want to keep this study for yourself, but you'll have to get up very early in the morning to pull the wool over the eyes of a Liverpool chap, I warn you!"

"Well, of all the rotten soles!" exclaimed the Australian, in disgust. "I wish I'd taken a little more trouble about it now. I could have got some things from the chemist in Rylcombe if there'd been time."

"Ha, ha, ha! I don't think you'd have taken me in. I'm jolly glad you've got rid of Smythers, though. I couldn't stand him about the place."

"I suppose I shall have to stand you!" grunted the Cornstalk.

"Yes, you will; and I hear Dane's coming. I suppose those are his fairy footsteps in the passage," added Glyn.

"Look here!" exclaimed Noble hurriedly. "Don't let on to Dane. Two's better than three in a study this size."

The Liverpool lad grinned.

"Right you are! Mum's the word!"

There was a tap at the door, and the handsome, dark-complexioned Canadian lad came in. He gave the two juniors a cheerful nod.

"Hope I don't disturb you," he remarked. "I'm digging in this study, you know. Room for one more—eh?"

"Oh, heaps!" said Noble. "If you like the quarters, dig here, and welcome. You don't mind if I go on with my prep?"

"I'm just going to do the same myself. But—hem!—hum!—ahem!—do you notice anything curious in this study?"

"Yes; there's a couple of rather curious-looking objects!" said Noble, looking alternately at Dane and Glyn.

"Oh, don't be funny! I mean, a curious smell."

Noble and Glyn sniffed solemnly.

"Yes, a sort of whiff," said Glyn. "I do notice it. Can you account for it, Noble?"

"Oh, don't ask me!" said the Australian.

Dane looked from one to the other. He sniffed several times, and then smiled.

The Canadian, who was half an Indian, had a sense of smell as keen as a bloodhound's. He walked straight to the armchair and slung it aside, and the acetylene-lamp was

revealed. The smell that was proceeding from it was simply terrific now.

"Very good," said Dane; "but not quite good enough. Ha, ha, ha!"

Noble's face was a study.

Dane picked up the lamp, turned off the water, and carried it to the window, placing it on the sill outside. Then he turned back, smiling.

"Hardly good enough!" he said. "I've just seen Smythers, and I find he's not coming into the study. I'm not sorry; he's rather an ass! There will be three of us."

"Well, I was going to keep this study to myself," said Noble ruefully. "I'm rather inclined, as it is, to take you two chaps by the scruff of the neck, and tote you out into the passage."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Do you think I couldn't do it?" demanded the Kangaroo warmly. "Look here, Mr. Railton says you two chaps can stay in your old quarters if you like. Go and stay there!"

"No fear!"

"You are asking to be chucked out!"

Glyn winked at Clifton Dane.

"Yes, rather!" he said. "Begin! We're yearning for it!"

The Cornstalk was not one to refuse a challenge. He gripped Glyn by the shoulder and Dane round the neck. Either of them the sturdy Australian could doubtless have put out of the study without much difficulty, but the two together were too big an order. They returned grip for grip, and Noble was lying on the floor the next moment, with Glyn sitting on his chest, and Dane standing on his legs.

"Oh!" he gasped.

"Think you can stand us in the study?" asked Glyn cheerfully.

"N—yes!"

"You'd like us to come?"

"No!" roared Noble.

"Hand me the inkpot, Dane!"

"Here you are!"

"Oh!" yelled the Cornstalk. "Don't! On second thoughts, I should like you to come very much!"

Glyn, with his quiet chuckle, replaced the inkpot on the table, and the Cornstalk was allowed to rise. He dusted himself rather ruefully.

"As he's so pressing, we're really bound to stay, Dane!" said the Liverpool lad.

"Exactly!" assented Clifton Dane.

"It's all right, Noble! Don't be uneasy; we'll stay!"

"I suppose you will!" growled Noble. Then his good-natured face cleared. "It's all right! I'd rather have had the study to myself, but if I'm bound to have anybody, you're the two fellows I would have chosen—honest Injun! It's no good our ragging one another; we shall have to chum."

"Well, that would make things go smoother," assented Glyn, "and I haven't the least objection in the world."

"Same here," said Clifton Dane heartily. "I couldn't chum up with Gore or Mellish in my last quarters, and Skimpy was too absent-minded a beggar to be chummy. I'm quite willing to start on a friendly footing here."

"Good!" said the Cornstalk. "After all, we shall make a jolly good team, we three. Tom Merry & Co. and Blake & Co. seem to be the heads of affairs in this House, and they seem to fight over it a good deal. We'll start a new firm, and knock 'em both into a cocked-hat!"

"Agreed!" said Dane.

"Hear, hear!"

"Then it's settled!" said the Kangaroo, with a grin. He opened the cupboard, and took out three bottles of ginger-beer and three glasses. "Fill up, and drink to the long life and success of the new firm—Cornstalk & Co.!"

"Good!"

And the health of the new firm was drunk with enthusiasm.

CHAPTER 8.

The Head's Offer.

IT was noticeable the next morning, at lessons in the Fourth Form-room, that Arthur Augustus D'Arcy wore a thoughtful shade upon his aristocratic brow. Jack Blake observed it, and wondered what it portended. It certainly did not mean that D'Arcy was giving extra thought to his lessons, for Mr. Lathom, the little master of the Fourth, patient as he was, had his patience severely taxed by the swell of St. Jim's that morning.

When the Form-master wanted to know one of the chief productions of France, and was told "duels," he naturally stared a little. Jack Blake stared, too, for the reply showed what Arthur Augustus' mind was running on. He was evidently still in want of satisfaction.

D'Arcy was so absent-minded that morning that Mr. Lathom gave him up in despair. He contented himself with inflicting lines with a liberal hand, and D'Arcy was the richer by three hundred in all by the time the Fourth Form filed out.

In the passage Blake gave him a sounding slap on the shoulder.

"What the dooce——"

"Look here, you young ass——"

"I decline to be called an ass!" Arthur Augustus removed Blake's hand from his shoulder, and stepped back away from him, with an air of great dignity. "Pway do not be such a wuff beast, Blake! At pvesent, too, I have mattahs to think of, and shall be obliged if you will not bothah me!"

"You—you ass!"

"As you have declined to stand my fwiend upon a most important conjuncture, I have been compelled to look for a fwiend elsewhere. I am in doubt wethah I can keep up your acquaintance at all, undah the cires."

And Arthur Augustus walked away, with a dignified stride, leaving Blake overwhelmed with astonishment.

"My hat!" said Jack, with a long whistle. "Found a friend elsewhere, has he? What boulder is pulling his aristocratic leg, I wonder? Hallo, Tom Merry! Are you Gussy's friend?"

The Terrible Three were coming along arm-in-arm from the Shell Form-room. They stopped at Blake's question. Tom Merry remembered D'Arcy's modest request of the previous evening, and roared.

"No," he said. "Gussy came to our study to find a friend, I think, but he found him not. He went away on his dig."

"Some ass is pulling his leg," said Blake, frowning. "I suppose I shall have to look into it."

Tom Merry laughed.

"Gussy's on the warpath, and no mistake," he said. "Kildare ought to be warned to make his will. By the way, those chaps in the end study have chummed up, instead of knocking one another out, as I expected; and I hear they are going to become top study in the School House."

Jack Blake looked warlike at once.

"Then there will be trouble!" he said. "No. 6 is top study in the School House. We've had enough rot of that sort from you Shell-fish. If Kangaroo starts it, he will get—get boomeranged!"

"There's more news, too," said Manners. "I heard Kildare talking it over with Darrel. Of course, we're out of it."

"What's the news?"

"Haven't you heard—about the cricket?"

"No," said Blake, interested at once.

"When Railton was playing the other day he knocked a ball clear from the cricket-ground through the window of the Head's study. It was a mighty swipe, and no mistake. But you were there; you saw him?"

"Yes, rather! It was a drive that Hayward or Jessop might have been proud of!" said Blake enthusiastically. "If I were the Head, I wouldn't have that window mended; I'd have left it as it was, with an inscription on it in gold letters."

"H'm! A little draughty in winter, I should think," grinned Manners. "Anyway, the Head was struck——"

"Not by the cricket ball?"

"No, fathead; by the batting! Of course, if Railton had been trying to do it he probably couldn't have done it; it was an accident. But there seems to have been a lot of talk on the subject, and some of the chaps in the Sixth thought they could do the trick if they tried."

"That's just like the Sixth; they always think they can do anything another fellow can do!" commented Blake.

"Exactly. But the end of it is, the Head has offered a prize of a new cricket bat—a jolly good one, too, I hear—to any chap who can send a ball through his window. From the cricket ground, of course."

Blake's eyes sparkled.

"By George! I'm going to have a try!"

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

"What are you cackling at, image?"

"Ha, ha, ha! If it's cheek in the Sixth to try to equal Railton's stroke, what is it in the Fourth?"

"Oh, rats! I'm going to have a try. I suppose the whole school will be batting at the Head's window for the next few days, instead of trying to take runs," said Blake. "I've got a drive that I rather fancy, you know."

"Yes, you fancy it's a good one, don't you? Queer, the fancies people have sometimes," Monty Lowther remarked.

Blake bestowed a glare on the facetious Lowther, and went to his study for his cricket bat. The Terrible Three followed his example. It was a splendid dry summer's day, and there was time for cricket practice before dinner.

THE GEM LIBRARY.—70.

Tom Merry, Manners, and Lowther sallied out with their bats under their arms, and found a general concourse of fellows heading for the ground.

The Head's offer had been received with enthusiasm.

There was not the slightest chance of most of the fellows getting a ball anywhere near the Head's window, which was at a tremendous distance from the ground for a drive; still, it had been done by the House-master, and all the young cricketers meant to have a shot at it, at all events.

There was a chance for fellows like Kildare and Darrel and Monteith. But it was rather comical to see Wally & Co. of the Third Form going down to the ground with a businesslike air.

It might have been expected that Arthur Augustus D'Arcy would be "on" that offer of the Head's immediately he heard of it. But other and weightier matters occupied Gussy's mighty brain. He "wathah fancied" himself as a cricketer—at batting, bowling, and fielding—but just now the tempting prize of a new cricket bat passed him unheeded.

He sought out Noble, as the Australian came down to the ground with his new chums—Glyn and Clifton Dane. Kangaroo had the bat under his arm that he had brought with him from Melbourne. He had forgotten D'Arcy for the moment, but he grinned as he caught sight of the Fourth-Former's anxious face.

"I want to speak to you, Noble," said D'Arcy, with a glance towards Dane and Bernard Glyn. The two juniors grinned and walked on, leaving the Cornstalk alone with D'Arcy.

"Go ahead!" said Kangaroo tersely.

"Have you seen Kildare yet?"

"Yes, certainly."

This was true enough. Noble had seen him half a dozen times since his talk with D'Arcy in the shadow of the elm.

"Then it's all right?"

"Certainly." The Cornstalk lowered his voice to a mysterious whisper. "Leave it to me. Come to my study at eight o'clock this evening, and all will be well."

"But——"

"Nuff said! I'm your second, and the affair's in my hands. You can trust me to look after your honour all right."

"If Kildare cares to apologise, as one gentleman to another——"

Noble shook his head decidedly.

"Can't be did!"

"Yaas, it's accordin' to the wules, you know—wepawation is as good as satisfaction. I've been thinkin' it ovah, and——"

"Yes, in any case except where a blow is struck," said Kangaroo solemnly. "In this case an apology will be insufficient. There must be blood!"

He hissed out the last word in a tragic whisper, and D'Arcy started and recoiled.

"Bai Jove!"

"Yes—and plenty of it, too!" said Noble, nodding seriously. "You have been struck. If Kildare had hit you, or whacked you, or smitten you, an apology would have set the matter right. But as he has struck you, there must be blood—real blood!"

"Weally, Noble——"

"It's all serene. You've left your honour in my hands, and I will see that there is plenty of blood."

"But I don't want——"

"You don't want to make it up. Quite right. Excuse me now, old chap, I'm going to have a shot for the Head-master's window."

And Noble rushed off before D'Arcy could detain him. Arthur Augustus looked after him through his eyeglass, and shivered a little.

"Bai Jove! That fellow's a fewocious beast!" he muttered. "I'm weally beginnin' to wish I had let the mattah alone. He talks about blood just like a howwid wotiah in a cheap American dweadful!"

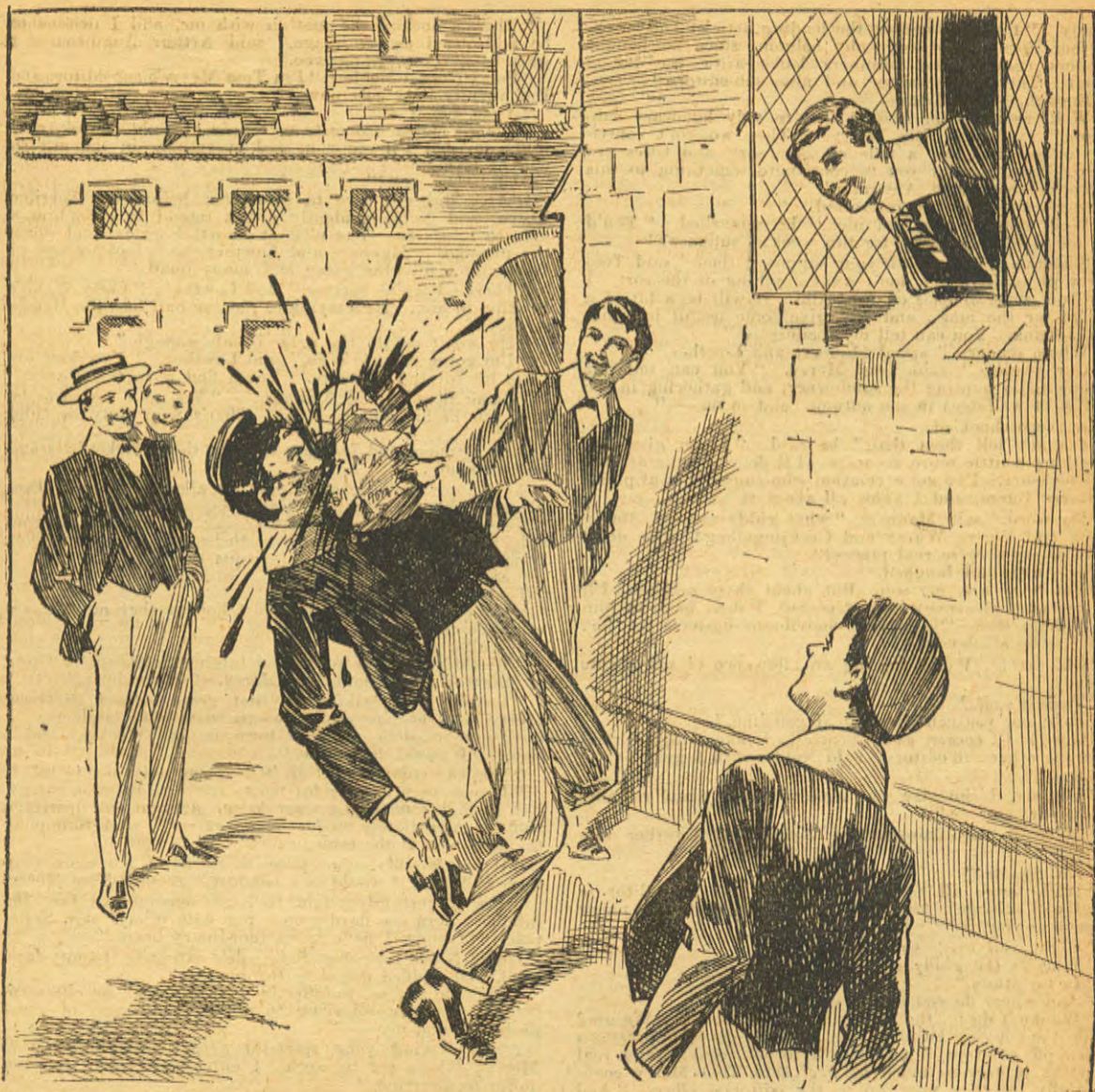
Arthur Augustus was anxious to approach Kangaroo on the subject again. But the Cornstalk took care that he had no chance.

As soon as he could get a turn at the wickets, he began to bat, and though he did not succeed in sending a ball anywhere near the Head's window, he sent one through Mr. Linton's, which was much nearer at hand. The face of the master of the Shell appeared at the gap in the window, with a frown on it.

"Please, sir, may we have the ball?" said Tom Merry, who was fielding, meekly.

"Merry! Who has broken my window?"

"It was an accident, sir. Kangaroo—I mean Wallaby——"



The inky bundle of rags and papers sailed gracefully through the air, and smote Figgins upon his countenance with a mighty smite. "Oh!" roared Figgins.

that is to say, Noble—was batting at the Head's window, sir."

Mr. Linton muttered something indistinctly. He tossed out the cricket ball, and Tom Merry caught it.

"This breakage will be put down in Noble's bill," he said. "If anything of the kind happens again, I shall take more drastic measures."

"Ye-es, sir!"

And Tom Merry returned to the ground.

"Is he going to give me a cricket bat?" asked Noble, with a grin.

The hero of the Shell laughed.

"No; he's going to give you a hiding if you do it again."

"Phew! I'd rather have the cricket bat."

The juniors batted away merrily till dinner-time. The batting did not get the prize, but it proved one thing—that very few of the youthful batsmen had any chance of getting it. But their hopes were still high. Arthur Augustus was hovering round the ground, and he tried to get an opportunity of speaking to Noble, but it was in vain. The Cornstalk went into the house with a crowd of cricketers, and he sedulously dodged Arthur Augustus till afternoon lessons, when they went into different form-rooms, and D'Arcy had to give it up.

CHAPTER 9.

A New Member of the Staff.

TOM MERRY tapped Harry Noble on the shoulder when the Shell came out after lessons that afternoon. Noble looked round quickly, expecting to see D'Arcy, and grinned as he saw that it was Tom Merry who had tapped him. There was an important expression upon the face of the hero of the Shell.

"Where are you off to?" he asked.

"I was thinking of knocking up some cricket before tea."

"No time for that, kid. I want you."

The Cornstalk looked a little aggressive.

"My dear duffer," he remarked, "as head of the Shell

"As what?" bawled Tom Merry, Manners, and Lowther instantly.

"As head of the Shell—chief of the new firm of Cornstalk & Co.—it's for me to give the giddy orders. You three will follow me to the cricket ground and put in some practice."

"Well, of all the cheeky young bounders," said Tom Merry, laughing. "Look here, I suppose you've heard of 'Tom Merry's Weekly'?"

"Yes; a sort of rag you kids publish, isn't it?"

"It's a ripping school newspaper," said Tom Merry.

warmly. "I edit it, and do the leading articles and so on. Lowther does the photography column, since he bought Manners' camera, and Manners looks after the hobby column. There's one editor and nine sub-editors."

"Enough, I should think."

"Well, as a matter of fact they're only honorary sub-editors," explained Tom Merry. "They wouldn't contribute unless they had a title of some sort, and titles are cheap. Now, I want you to contribute something to this week's number about Australia."

The Cornstalk looked interested.

"Well, that's not a bad idea," he remarked. "You'd like me to edit the paper for this week, I suppose?"

"Something wrong with your supposer, then," said Tom Merry pleasantly. "I don't want anything of the sort. I just want some articles on Australia. It will be a bit of a change for the mag., and will give some useful information, I think. You can tell my readers—"

"Whose readers?" asked Manners and Lowther.

"Our readers," said Tom Merry. "You can tell our readers about hunting the sundowner, and gathering in the harvest of wallabies in the autumn, and so on—"

Kangaroo chuckled.

"I won't tell them that," he said. "I can give 'em something a little more accurate. I'll do you some articles with pleasure. I've got a relation who runs the local paper at Burra Burra, and I know all about it."

"My word," said Manners, "what giddy names! Burra Burra and Wurra Wurra and Croajingalong! You don't mean to say they're real places!"

The Australian laughed.

"Yes, they are, my son. But about these articles. I'll do 'em with pleasure; but, of course, I shall have to join the regular staff. No outside contributor business for me! Am I to be a sub-editor?"

"Oh, rats! We've too big an allowance of sub-editors already."

"Then it's off."

"Hold on, you can be a sub if you like."

"Good! Of course, as a Cornstalk, I take a higher rank than the other sub-editors," said Noble, with a grin.

"Rats!"

"You see, I can give you a lot of points about running the paper, and—"

"Make it sub-editor-in-chief," suggested Lowther sarcastically.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Well, that's all right," said Noble. "Sub-editor-in-chief will suit me. And I'll come and sub-edit your paper as soon as you like."

"Right you are! Come on."

"Where's the giddy editorial office?"

"In my study."

"And where do you do the printing?"

"We don't do it; the Rylcombe printer does it. We used to do the copying business, you know—a dozen impressions taken off gelatine—but it was a lot of trouble, and real printing is ever so much better," said Tom Merry confidentially, as they went up to the editorial office. "And the local printer chap does it at a reasonable figure. But you've seen 'The Weekly,' and you know how ripping it is."

"Yes, I've seen it," said Noble.

They entered Tom Merry's study. There were stamps and a bat on the table, with a heap of lesson books and an inkpot, and a rabbit's cage. Tom Merry proceeded to clear the table by shoving the things over the edge. Lowther gave a yell as the cricket bat bumped on his toe.

"Ow! You clumsy ass!"

"I wish you wouldn't keep on getting in the way when I'm clearing the table, Lowther!" said Tom Merry, in a tone of remonstrance.

"Fathead!"

"We shall want the inkpot. The books can go on the hearthrug. Here's plenty of blank paper. Hallo, Gussy, have you come to help with the editorial work?"

D'Arcy's eyeglass was glimmering in at the door.

"No, Tom Mewwy, I have not. I have othah mattahs to think of now."

"Oh! Have you heard from Cousin Ethel?"

"Cousin Ethel!"

"Yes, ass. Don't you remember you said she was coming to see Mrs. Holmes to-day?" exclaimed Tom Merry.

"Yaas, wathah, but I had weally quite forgotten."

Tom Merry stared at him in astonishment. When Arthur Augustus forgot Cousin Ethel, it showed that there was decidedly something on his mind.

"What's the matter with you, image?" demanded Tom Merry.

"There's nothin' the mattah with me, and I decline to be addressed as an image," said Arthur Augustus. "I want to speak to Kangaroo."

"Sorry!" said Noble. "I'm Tom Merry's sub-editor, and I'm awfully busy just now."

"Yaas, but—"

"It's all right. Come to my study at eight o'clock, as I told you, and I'll see you, and everything in the garden will be lovely."

"Oh, vewy well!"

D'Arcy did not care to speak out before the Terrible Three, and Noble evidently didn't intend to give him a private interview. The elegant Fourth-Former went down the passage. Manners and Lowther were looking out of the window into the green and sunny quad.

"There's Figgins batting," said Lowther; "Fatty Wynn's bowling to him. He's trying to put the ball into the Head's window."

"He won't do it; the prize is safe enough."

"I'm going to have a go," said Lowther. "I've done my little bit for the 'Weekly.' You'll find it in the drawer."

"Same here!" said Manners. "You can instruct the new sub in his duties, Tom. That's your duty as chief editor."

And Manners and Lowther took up their cricket bats and left the study.

"Well, we shall be quiet now, at all events," said Tom Merry, taking a sheaf of blank foolscap from a drawer. "Here you are. There's lots of ink and paper, and you only require brains for the rest to become a great author. If no silly ass comes and interrupts us—"

"Ah, you are here, Merry!"

Tom Merry groaned.

"Hallo, Skimpy! I was just hoping that no silly ass would come and interrupt us."

"Really, Merry—"

"Would you mind going and talking Socialism to Gore, or young Wally?" said Tom Merry. "We're busy."

"I have been talking on that great subject to Gore, Merry, and he has replied to me with utter rudeness. I have not yet done my part towards the 'Weekly,' and I thought I would do it now."

"You can come in and do it if you promise not to talk."

"It may be necessary for me to converse to some extent, but I shall confine my remarks to observations upon the subject immediately under consideration," said Skimpole, taking a seat at the table.

"If you would confine them to words of not more than three syllables, it would be a comfort," grunted Tom Merry.

"Yes, I certainly ought to have remembered that the intellects here are hardly on a par with mine," said Skimpole. "I know I have an extraordinary brain."

Harry Noble looked at Skimpole's extensive, bumpy forehead, and nodded assent to the remark.

"I should say so, judging by appearances," he observed.

"Ah, you are referring to my splendid grip of great problems, and my—"

"Never mind your splendid grip," interrupted Tom Merry; "let's get to work. I only hope you're the last duffer to interrupt."

The three juniors sat down round the table. Harry Noble turned over a copy of the previous week's magazine.

"Is this the sort of stuff you want?" he asked. "'The Black Chief. A Romance of the Red Braves.' G. Figgins. B-b-b-b-r-r-r! 'Sir Fatted and his Fayfe Ladye,' a serial in Rhyme, by J. Blake. Hum!"

"Nuff of that!" said Tom Merry. "Those serials have been dragging their weary length through the magazine since the start, like—like wounded snakes. Don't give us any piffle of that sort. Something lively about Colonial life, and about the first impressions of an Australian in England. People in this country are awfully interested in the Empire beyond the seas, you know, and any first-hand information will be welcome."

"Good! I think I can work it."

And the three juniors settled down to work.

Noble started on "A Cornstalk's Impressions at an English School"; and to judge by the grin on his face, some of the impressions were comical. Skimpole was deep in an article on Determinism—an "ism" which nothing could shake Skimpole's faith in, though he probably did not understand it in the least—but that, we believe, is no unusual case with Determinists. Tom Merry was writing an article on cricket, in which he explained the Head's offer of a new cricket bat, and invited all the youthful cricketers of both Houses at St. Jim's to "roll up in their thousands," and knock the Head's window-panes to smithereens.

The three were very busy, and for a time nothing was heard in the study but the steady breathing of the editors and the scratch-scratch of the pens.

The silence was broken by a tap at the door, which was ajar.

Tom Merry grunted.
"Come in, fathead!" he called out, without looking up from his work. "Come in, fathead, and shut the door!"
A low laugh fell upon his ears, and the next moment Tom Merry was on his feet with a crimson face.

CHAPTER 10.

A Rebellious Sub-Editor.

COUSIN ETHEL stood in the doorway, a smile upon her lips, and a dimple in her cheek. Her blue eyes were glimmering with fun.

Tom Merry was dumb for the moment. His face was as red as a poppy, and for a moment he wished that the floor would open and swallow him up.

"Oh!" he gasped.

Cousin Ethel laughed again.

"Do you always greet visitors like that?" she asked sweetly.

"Oh! Ahem——"

"Perhaps you did not know——"

"Of course I didn't know it was you!" cried Tom Merry. "I'm a fearful ass, I know. I'm sorry."

"Never mind, Tom."

"I'm awfully sorry, Ethel. I had no idea——"

"Of course you hadn't," said Ethel, laughing. "Never mind, Tom. But I see you are very busy now."

"Not a bit of it! This is only the 'Weekly,' you know," said Tom airily. "As a matter of fact, what I want at the present moment is a rest. The other fellows can get on with the paper."

Skimpole blinked at him.

"I should be very pleased to fill up your space as well as my own, Merry," he said. "My article is rather running over the page."

"Go it, Skimmy!"

"I don't see how I can get on without my chief editor," said Noble thoughtfully. "Still, I should like to take a rest, too."

He was looking at Cousin Ethel, and his expression showed how charmed he was with the fresh, frank face of the young English girl. Tom Merry remembered that they had not met, and he introduced Noble. It was pretty clear from the Cornstalk's manner that he didn't mean to be left in the study. Tom Merry took down his cap.

"There's a Sixth Form match on," he remarked. "You'd like to have a look at the cricket, Ethel."

"Very much; but I expected to see my cousin here. Glyn told me that the editorial staff of the 'Weekly' were at work, and I was certain that Arthur would be here."

Tom Merry laughed.

"D'Arcy's too busy, he says, to do any editing just now. We shall find him in the quad."

"Very good!"

And Tom Merry, with a warning glance at Noble, put his cap on, and conducted Cousin Ethel away. Noble looked after them, and grinned, and then looked at Skimpole.

"I say, Shipole——"

"My name is Skimpole," said the amateur Socialist mildly.

"Ah, Skimpole, then—it's all one. Do you think you could fill up my space this week as well as Merry's?" Skimpole beamed.

"Yes, certainly! As a matter of fact, I could easily fill the whole magazine with my arguments on the subject of Socialism."

"That would be all right if the readers were all insured," remarked Noble. "Fill up my space, will you? Leave me about half a column—I shall want that."

"With pleasure."

And Noble put on his straw hat and left the study. Nothing loth, Skimpole covered page after page with his sprawling writing. Noble strolled down to the quadrangle, and found Tom Merry and Cousin Ethel on the cricket-ground. Tom glared at him.

"What price your article?" he demanded.

"Oh, that's all right!" said Noble easily. "Skimmy's doing it for me—same as yours."

"Stuff! Only a chief editor is entitled to work it that way. You just cut off and do your article."

"Oh, come off! You can treat common or garden sub-editors like that, but I'm a sub-editor-in-chief," said the Australian. "A sub-editor-in-chief does as he likes."

Crash!

The sound of a cricket ball smashing through a window interrupted the argument, which was growing excited.

Cousin Ethel uttered a little exclamation.

"Dear me! That is a window broken!"

Figgins had batted, and he was looking anxiously towards the House. He did not seem sorry for the accident, but rather pleased, much to the surprise of Cousin Ethel.

"What window's that?" sang out Figgins.

"Ha, ha, ha! It's the Third Form-room!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Never mind; better luck next time."

Figgins grunted.

"I'll have a ball through the Head's window sooner or later, if I have to bust every giddy pane of glass at St. Jim's," he said.

Cousin Ethel looked at Tom Merry in wonder.

"Are they trying to break the windows?" she asked.

"Ha, ha! Not exactly. Mr. Railton sent a cricket-ball through the Head's window the other day—it was a marvellous drive—and in the excitement of the moment the Head offered a prize of a new cricket-bat to any boy who could do it. The Head's an old cricketer himself, you know, and awfully enthusiastic about the game. I shouldn't wonder if he's sorry for the offer in the long-run, though."

Cousin Ethel laughed.

"Yes, I should imagine so."

Three or four untidy heads and inky faces had appeared at the Third Form-room window, and several voices were bawling to the cricketers. Loudest of all was the voice of Wally, the younger brother of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

"Do you call that cricket?" bawled Wally. "You slab-sided duffers! You unspeakable asses! You—you—you goats!"

"Shut up, you Third-Form fag!"

"You Fourth-Form dummies!" roared Wally. "You've nearly frightened Pongo out of his seven senses! Do you call that cricket?"

"Oh, go and eat dog-biscuits!"

Wally's wrathful face disappeared from the broken window. He had been teaching Pongo to jump over a desk, and the cricket ball had suddenly interrupted the course of instruction. Pongo had promptly bolted from the classroom, and when Pongo bolted, it was no easy matter to find Pongo again. No wonder D'Arcy minor was disturbed.

But little cared Figgins. He raised his cricket cap to Cousin Ethel, as he caught sight of the graceful form of the girl between Tom Merry and Harry Noble, and went on batting. He intended to win the Head's prize, if possible, and at any cost of windows to the ancient foundation of St. Jim's.

"Give me a good one, Fatty!"

"Right-bo!" said Fatty Wynn, who was bowling, and doing his best to help the batsman. "We'll manage it somehow!"

Down came the ball again, and smack went Figgins's bat. The ball flew, and flew, and again there was a crash of glass.

"Hurrah!"

"It's Linton's window this time!"

"Bravo, Figgy!"

"I'll win that prize," grunted Figgins, "if I have to smash every blessed pane of glass in the blessed house!"

"Cave! Here comes Linton!"

The master of the Shell, with an angry frown upon his face, was seen to emerge from the House and make his way towards the cricket-ground.

CHAPTER 11.

Figgy's Rival.

FIGGINS ceased to bat, and he looked a little dismayed. Mr. Linton, the master of the Shell, was a trifle touchy in some matters, and this was the second time his window had been broken that day. His face expressed wrath as he came with long strides towards the cricket-ground.

"Figgins!"

"Ye-es, sir?"

"You have broken my window!"

"I'm sorry, sir——"

"Possibly; and no doubt Noble was sorry for breaking it to-day——"

"Yes, sir; awfully sorry!" said the Cornstalk.

"Ahem! But that does not make any difference to the fact. The window has been broken twice, and my nerves have been very much upset. I feel as if I were in a state of siege in my study!" exclaimed Mr. Linton heatedly.

"You see, sir——"

"You seem to be deliberately trying to knock the balls towards the facade of the School House, instead of trying to avoid it!"

"You see, sir——"

"And you have taken down the nets which should be erected on that side of the ground!" exclaimed Mr. Linton angrily.

"You see, sir——"

"I shall report this to your House-master, Figgins!"

"You see, sir——"

"Enough!"

"May I say a word, sir?" said Tom Merry, coming forward. "Figgins was trying to hit the ball through the Head's window, sir—to win the prize, sir."

"Oh!"

"Somebody will win the new cricket bat in the long run, sir, and then it will be all right," ventured Jack Blake.

"Ahem! And by that time, I suppose, there will not be a whole window left in the front of the House!" exclaimed Mr. Linton.

"Sorry, sir—"

"Well, as Dr. Holmes has seen fit to make this offer, I suppose you cannot be blamed for taking advantage of it," said the master of the Shell; "but I warn you all that if my window is broken again, the boy who breaks it will be severely caned!"

And the Form-master walked away in high dudgeon.

"That's the worst of the chap!" said Manners. "He's no sport. He's all right in the Form-room, but he's no sport!"

"Well, I suppose nobody likes being biffed on the napper with a cricket ball," Jack Blake remarked; "and the next one might get a wicket on his head, you know!"

"Well, there's a certain amount of risk in being alive at all," said Lowther. "I don't see why Form-masters can't run risks as well as anybody else. But I suppose we shall have to give his window a wide berth in future. It means that there mustn't be any more wild hitting."

"Wild hitting!" exclaimed Figgins indignantly. "Who's been doing any wild hitting?"

"Well, I was only judging by appearances, Figgy."

"Let you know about batting!"

"My dear chap, Linton's window is more than twenty yards from the Head's window, and if you were aiming at the Head's window—"

"Look at the distance!" hooted Figgins. "I'll wager you couldn't get as near!"

"That's not the question. What I say is—"

"Rot—rank rot!"

"Look here, Figgins—"

"And look here, Monty Lowther—"

"Hold your row, you asses!" growled Tom Merry. "There's Cousin Ethel looking at you!"

Figgins ceased at once, turning very red. He was extremely anxious to keep the good opinion of Cousin Ethel.

"I'll try again!" he grunted. "Here, Fatty! Fatty! What's become of Fatty?"

"He's gone!"

"The young boulder! I want him to bowl! Where's he gone?"

"I heard him say he was hungry," grinned Kerr.

"Hungry! I'll—I'll make him hungry!" said Figgins wrathfully. "I can play his bowling better than any other. Here, you can take the bat, Merry, if you like!"

"Well, I'll have a shot!"

Tom Merry took the bat, and Jack Blake bowled to him. Figgins, with a slight blush in his cheeks, walked over to Cousin Ethel, who was chatting with the Australian. Brief as their acquaintance had been, Harry Noble had contrived to improve upon it, and he was on very good terms with Ethel Cleveland already.

There was an easy way about Noble, a complete self-reliance, and at the same time an evidently profound respect for the gentle sex, which was very taking, and Figgins could see at a glance that Ethel liked the Cornstalk.

Figgins was not a selfish fellow, and he never expected to keep Cousin Ethel to himself. He was big and sturdy and honest and good-natured, and brave as a lion, but his dearest chum would not have called him handsome.

Mellish, the cad of the Fourth, had once referred to Cousin Ethel and Figgins as Beauty and the Beast, and Figgins had been cut too deeply by the remark to even resent it. Like many big, kind-natured fellows, Figgins had a diffidence and a lack of confidence in his own personal qualities.

Noble was chatting away cheerily, and Cousin Ethel was chatting, too, and Figgins would have liked to chat also; but somehow he couldn't.

Noble seemed to be saying all there was to say, and there was nothing left for Figgins, and he stood silent.

"By Jove! That was a good stroke!" exclaimed the Cornstalk, as the ball flew from Tom Merry's bat.

It disappeared into the branches of an elm-tree at a great distance, and dropped to the ground amid a shower of leaves.

"Good!" said Figgins. "There was the distance, if the aim had been as good! I shouldn't wonder if Merry pulled off the prize."

"I knew a chap in Cronjialong—" began Noble.

Cousin Ethel smiled, and listened to the story. Figgins listened to it, too, but he did not smile.

"I haven't seen any batting over here like that I was used

to on the other side," Noble remarked, when the story was told. "I'm going to have a shot at seeing the Australian eleven play at Lord's during the summer, though. I wonder if you would care to go, Miss Cleveland?"

Cousin Ethel smiled very brightly.

"Yes, of course!"

"Miss Cleveland will be going with some of us from St. Jim's," said Figgins, in a tone he vainly endeavoured to render genial.

"Good! Then I shall join the party!" said Noble cheerfully. "I know most of the Australian players by sight, Miss Cleveland, and I shall be able to point them out to you."

"That will be very interesting."

Figgins relapsed into silence.

A little later, as the batting was ending, Arthur Augustus D'Arcy hove in sight. The thoughtful shade was still upon the noble brow of Arthur Augustus, but it lifted at the sight of his fair cousin.

"Bai Jove, Ethel!" he exclaimed, raising his silk topper in that graceful way which was only possible to the swell of St. Jim's. "I did not know you had awvived."

"I went to the editorial office to look for you, Arthur, but you were not there."

"I have had some wathah weighty mattahs to think out lately," said D'Arcy. "But it is tea-time, deah boy—I mean, deah gal! You will have tea in No. 6, of course?"

"Oh, not at all!" exclaimed Noble. "I am sure Miss Cleveland will be kind enough to have tea in the new study. You see, Miss Cleveland, there's a new study been opened at the end of the Shell passage, and it's ripping and airy and spacy, you know. We had a study-warming yesterday, but if we had known you were coming, we should have put it off till to-day, of course. I really think you ought to come to the end study to tea this time, and your cousin will bring you. Gussy is my most particular friend at the present moment."

"Yaas, wathah!"

Figgins bit his lip. He would so gladly have asked Ethel to tea in his study in the New House, but he had taken it for granted that she would have tea with D'Arcy in No. 6, and now it was too late. There was a far from amiable expression in Figgins's eyes as he glanced at the Australian.

As D'Arcy backed up the Cornstalk, Cousin Ethel had no alternative but to accept. So, with a sweet smile, she accepted.

"Shall we say half-past six?" asked Noble eagerly. "And I'll buzz off and get the place ready."

"Yes, certainly!"

"Good! You'll bring your cousin, Gussy?"

"Yaas, wathah! Shall I bring Blake and Hewwies and Dig, too?"

It was impossible to say no, and as the Kangaroo had to say "Yes!" he did so with a good grace.

"Yes, rather; bring the whole family!" he said. "I'll buzz off now!"

And he raised his straw hat to Cousin Ethel, and hurried away to prepare for the great occasion. The first thing was to visit the school shop to lay in a supply of delicacies for the tea.

He passed round an angle of the buildings, out of sight of the cricket-ground, on his way to Mrs. Taggles's shop, and as he did so he heard a footstep behind him. He felt a hand on his shoulder, and swung round in surprise.

He found himself looking into the face of Figgins—a face that was white with rage.

CHAPTER 12.

Friend or Foe?

FIGGINS did not speak for a moment; it seemed that he could not. The Cornstalk looked at him in blank astonishment.

"Anything the matter?" he asked.

"Yes, you cad!"

Noble started.

The word was a stinging one, and it was flung at him savagely, and for a moment the Cornstalk's teeth came together hard, and he clenched his hand. Had a fellow like Gore said as much, he would have been on the ground the next moment, and Figgins came near getting one of the "Cornstalk upper-cuts" for which Noble was already famous in the School House.

But Noble restrained himself.

He rather liked Figgins. From what he had seen of the character of the leader of the New House juniors, it was a very likable one. And he had no idea why Figgins had so suddenly picked a quarrel with him.

They were silent for some moments, looking at one another.

Figgins's face was quite white, and his eyes seemed to burn. It was seldom that the quiet, easy-going Figgins



The silence in the editorial office was broken by a tap at the door, which was ajar. "Come in, fathead!" called out Tom Merry, without looking up from his work. "Come in, fathead, and shut the door!"

was so disturbed, and either Kerr or Fatty Wynn would have been amazed to see him like this.

"That's a hard word," said Noble, at last. "I don't think I deserve it. I've a jolly good mind to knock it back down your throat—"

"That's what I want you to do," said Figgins. "Begin!" Noble shook his head.

"There's always time to pommel one another," he said, with a slight grin. "Suppose we have a little argument first. What's the row about?"

"You know jolly well."

"Blessed if I do. Have I trod on your corns in any way?"

"Don't pretend you don't know," shouted Figgins. "Put up your fists!"

"I'll put them up as soon as I see reason to. You know I'm not afraid of you," said the Australian quietly. "I'm not going to fight you for nothing, though. As a matter of fact, I rather took to you."

"Thank you!" said Figgins, with a sneer that did not become his homely, honest face. "That was very good of you!"

"Not at all. I thought you were a decent chap."

"Oh! You've changed your opinion now, I suppose?"

"You're changing it for me. What on earth have you

suddenly pounced on me like a giddy ferret on a rabbit for?"

"You know very well what you've done, you interloping rotter!"

A comprehensive look came over the Cornstalk's face.

"Do you mean asking Miss Cleveland to tea in my study?"

"That—and the rest."

"But why shouldn't I? Do you think I haven't known her long enough? Surely that's for the lady to settle; besides, her cousin is coming with her," said Noble. "Did you want an invitation?"

"I don't want anything from you!" said Figgins. "Only I want you to put up your hands. We'll see who's best man."

"We can do that presently," said Noble, putting his hands into his pockets. "It seems to me that you're interfering in an affair that doesn't concern you."

Figgins almost gasped.

"The young lady is D'Arcy's cousin. I suppose she doesn't happen to be your cousin too, by any chance?"

"You know she isn't."

"I didn't know. I might have imagined she was your cousin, or your sister, by the way you've shoved your oar into this matter," said Noble. "What is your interest in the affair, anyway?"

Figgins did not reply. His pale face flushed a little. It began to dawn upon him that he had acted in a rather ridiculous manner.

"I suppose the young lady isn't your private property?" suggested the Cornstalk.

"Cad!"

"That's no argument; it's only a rotten, piggyish word," said Noble calmly. "If you can explain how I've acted in any way that I shouldn't, I'll apologise to the injured party, and willingly. But swearing at a chap doesn't make things better."

Figgins panted. A storm of anger in his breast had led him to follow the Colonial, yet to explain was impossible. And it had already occurred to him what Cousin Ethel would think if she ever knew that she had been the cause of a fight between two boys. Figgins pictured the surprised, scornful glance of the blue eyes, and trembled.

A slightly amused look was creeping over the Cornstalk's face.

He had a quick intuition, and it had dawned upon him what Figgins's interest in the matter was, and he knew very well that it was impossible for Figgins to explain without making himself look absurd.

"Look here, kid," said the Australian good-naturedly, "I'm sorry if I've trodden on your corns, but if a fellow mustn't look at a lady visitor to the school, you ought to put up a notice to that effect, or something of the sort, so that a new-comer could keep off the grass."

"Look here—"

"That's all right; I'm looking. If I thought this was simply gas on your part," went on the Cornstalk coolly, "I should knock you into a cocked hat."

"Try it!"

"I'm not going to. I think I could do it, and I'll have the gloves on with you any time, with pleasure. But I'm not going to fight you, especially now. I don't want to entertain a lady with a black eye."

Figgins could not help grinning a little.

"You see, kid," went on Noble, "I hadn't seen you and Miss Cleveland together before, and I hadn't the faintest idea that a kid of your age—"

"Shut up!"

"Certainly—when I've finished. I didn't know how the wind blew, so to speak, but now you've enlightened me, it's different. I can see that you're ass enough to feel deeply in the matter, a very silly thing for a chap of your age—"

"Shut up, I tell you!" exclaimed Figgins furiously.

"You've given yourself away completely, and a jolly good many fellows would take the yarn all over the school, and make you look a giddy ass."

"If you say a word—"

"Rats! Even if you licked me you couldn't gag me, you know," said Noble cheerfully. "I'm not going to say a word. But I'm not going to be interfered with. I shall chum with a jolly nice girl if I like, without being bullied by you or anybody else."

"By George, I—"

"All the same, I don't want to be unpleasant. You're a decent chap, though a bit of an ass."

"Look here—"

"Let me finish. Blessed if you're not getting as windy as Skimpole. I suppose I ought to have noticed how mum you were when I was talking to Cousin Ethel. But bless you, I was thinking about myself, not about you. However, I'll do my best for you."

"I'm not asking any favours at your hands."

"No; you're asking for a hiding, and you've come jolly near getting one," said the Australian, with a grin. "But it's all right. I'll keep off the grass as far as you're concerned in the future. If you had any eyes in your head, you'd have seen—"

"What?" said Figgins eagerly.

The Cornstalk laughed.

"That Cousin Ethel wasn't half listening to my chatter, and seemed to be thinking about something else. I can see what it was now."

"What?"

"Why, I think she was wondering what you were such a mum ass for!"

Figgins brightened up.

"Do you really think so? I say, Noble, you're a decent sort."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"What are you cackling at?" demanded Figgins suspiciously, struck by the unpleasant thought that the Cornstalk was perhaps only "pulling his leg."

"Why, it's a rather sudden change—a cad one minute, and a decent chap the next," said the Australian good-humouredly.

"I—I—I take that back," said Figgins. "I suppose I'm

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an ass. I'm blessed if I know how I flew into such a beastly temper. It's a new thing to me."

"Jealousy," grinned Noble. "I suppose it's my good looks and general air of distinguishedness. I didn't know I was so fascinating. You know what Shakespeare says on that subject: 'Beware the green-eyed monster, that doth mock the meat it feeds on.' Beloved youngster—"

"Oh, don't rot, you ass!"

"Well, my son, keep your temper a little better in future, and then you won't bother me to give you lectures, when I ought to be getting the grub in," said Noble.

"I—I—I'm sorry. I suppose I was an ass."

"No supposing about it," said Noble calmly. Then, as Figgins was turning away, he added: "Hold on a minute."

Figgins looked back.

"What is it?"

"Wouldn't you like to come to tea?"

Figgins's face flushed.

"Do you—do you mean it?"

Noble roared.

"Ha, ha, ha! Why not? Come, you duffer, and welcome!"

"I'll be jolly glad to."

"Only don't suddenly start pounding me if I speak to Cousin Ethel. I shall have to address her once or twice, you know, as she's my guest. I'll keep to the topic of the weather if possible."

Figgins turned crimson, and walked away. But there was a satisfied look upon his face. Noble grinned as he went on to the tuckshop. It had been a bit of a breeze, but they were the best of friends now.

CHAPTER 13.

Skimpole Enters the Lists.

"BAI Jove, there goes the time!"

Half-past six rang out from the clock-tower. Four juniors issued from Study No. 6 in the Fourth Form passage. A girl was coming along from the direction of the house-dame's quarters; Cousin Ethel was in time.

The juniors greeted her with cheerful grins.

"It's ripping of you to come to St. Jim's, and it's led Noble to stand a ripping tea," Digby remarked. "You're always sure of something good in Noble's study. I think you'll have a good time, Miss Cleveland."

Cousin Ethel laughed.

"I hope so, I am sure," she said demurely.

"Weally, Dig, I wegard you as an ass. Do you think Ethel cares as much for ham sandwiches and jam tarts as you do?"

And Arthur Augustus marched on ahead with his charming cousin, Blake, Herries, and Digby followed, the last-named looking rather red, and murmuring something about punching heads.

Skimpole looked out of his study as they passed, and ducked his head to Miss Cleveland.

"Ah! Have you seen Tom Merry? I have finished the copy for the 'Weekly,' and done enough for both Merry and Noble. By the way—"

"Pwecisely," said D'Arcy, passing on with Cousin Ethel.

"Ahem! Really, Blake—Digby—Herries. I say, Herries, is it true what the fellows are saying about the Head?"

"Depends on what it is," said the good-natured Herries, stopping behind his chums as he saw that Skimpole was in quest of information, and was not going to talk "isms."

"It's about the cricket," said Skimpole, blinking. "Gore was telling me that the Head has offered a new cricket bat as a prize—"

"So he has."

"Yes, but to anybody who can put a cricket ball through his study window," said Skimpole. "It cannot be true, surely."

"Quite true," said Herries. "The whole school's known it for two days or so. Do you mean to say you haven't heard it before?"

"I did not credit the report."

"Well, it's true," said Herries, passing on.

"Wait a moment, Herries. It seems really incredible. The Head can have nothing whatever to gain by having his window broken—"

Herries snorted.

"He's a sportsman, you duffer! Of course, a bookwormy chap like you wouldn't understand that. It's for the sport of the thing."

"I fail to see where the sport comes in."

"You would," said Herries, with a sniff. "You haven't got as much sportsmanship in you as my dog Tower."

"Don't be ratty, Herries. I am only seeking to ascertain

ascertain the fact, because if it is really true about the Head's offer, I intend to get the prize."

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Herries. "You get the prize! My only summer hat! Are you setting up as a humorist, Skimmy?"

"Really, Herries, I cannot see anything to be amused at in that observation. I shall certainly get the prize, and if you care to purchase the bat cheap, I will sell it to you at a bargain. My object is to raise money enough to get the new edition of Professor von Dummkopf's book on Determinism."

"Oh, I'll give you a thousand pounds for that bat if you win it," said Herries, wiping his eyes. "Oh, my only Aunt Matilda!"

"Nonsense, Herries! You could not raise such a sum," said Skimpole, who took everything with the most deadly seriousness. "Besides, the bat, though doubtless a good one, would not be worth anything like such a sum. A guinea would be nearer the mark."

But Herries did not stay to hear more. He rushed on after his chums, to tell the tea-party the joke. Skimpole blinked after him doubtfully. He seemed very much astonished to find that the Head's offer was really genuine, but it was impossible to doubt Herries' word. Skimpole was still standing in the passage, blinking after Herries, when Figgins came by. Figgins was in a hurry, for the clock had struck as he was crossing the quad. He had stayed to put on an extra clean collar, and to make a vain attempt to get his necktie to set straight. He pushed Skimpole gently out of the way, and the amateur Socialist bumped against the wall.

"Really, Figgins— Stop a moment, please—"

"Can't! Sorry."

And Figgins strode on and disappeared. Skimpole bawled after him:

"I say, Figgins, is it really true about the Head's offer about the cricket bat?"

"Yes, quite true, ass!" bawled back Figgins.

And he disappeared into the end study. Skimpole rubbed his bony hands together with an expression of great satisfaction.

"Clear out of the way, cocky!"

It was the voice of an untidy, inky-fingered junior of the Third Form, who came hurrying along with a ragged mongrel at his heels. It was D'Arcy minor, accompanied by his inseparable chum Pongo.

"Come off, Pong!" growled D'Arcy minor, as Pongo yapped round Skimpole's thin calves. "There's nothing but bones there. Come here, you beast!"

"Wait a moment, young D'Arcy. Have you heard about the Head's offer?"

"Yes, of course I have," grunted Wally, "and had a jolly good try for the cricket bat, too, but it was no go."

"You did not succeed?"

"Of course I didn't. I'm going to have another shot."

"Yet it seems to me a remarkably easy feat," said Skimpole thoughtfully.

Wally snorted.

"You'd better try it!" he remarked.

"I intend to do so. I was afraid that the Head's offer might be only a jape of some of the fellows, or I should have tried at once."

"Oh, it's genuine enough, but you couldn't get within miles of it!" said Wally, with a sniff. "You're talking out of your hat. Come on, Pong. You'll be late for tea, you unmannerly young waster."

And D'Arcy minor and Pongo disappeared. Skimpole went into his study and looked round it for a cricket ball. There was one belonging to Gore, and Skimpole picked it up, and went slowly and thoughtfully downstairs with it under his arm. He met the Terrible Three near the door.

"I have finished the copy for the 'Weekly,' Merry," he observed. "I have written enough for the whole number if necessary."

"Ha, ha! I don't think it will be necessary. What are you going to do with that cricket ball?" asked Tom Merry, looking curiously at the round red object under the arm of the amateur Socialist.

"I am going to win the Head's prize—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The Terrible Three burst into a roar. It seemed funny for Skimpole to attempt to win the prize which batsmen like Kildare and Darrel and Monteith had tried for in vain. Skimpole blinked at them.

"You seem to regard the matter as humorous," he remarked mildly.

"Ha, ha, ha! Yes, rather!"

"Indeed, I see no reason why I should not win the prize. The surprising thing to me is that it has not been won before. However, I am now going to try."

And Skimpole went out. The chums of the Shell looked

at one another in amazement, and burst out laughing again.

"Well, this is too rich!" Manners remarked. "Skimmy has made some curious breaks in his time, but this is about the funniest. Fancy Skimmy as a batsman!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"He must have misunderstood the matter somehow,"

said Tom Merry. "He— Hark!"

Crash!

It was the crash of a smashing window.

"My hat!" said Lowther. "He's done it!"

CHAPTER 14.

Skimpole Does Not Win the Prize.

M R. LINTON, the master of the Shell, was in the Head's study. There was a frown on his face, and a slightly worried look on Dr. Holmes's.

"Twice, sir," he said—"twice to-day."

Dr. Holmes nodded.

"Yes; I am sorry, Mr. Linton."

"The whole school seems to have been seized with a mania for batting against the School House, sir," said the master of the Shell. "Even the New House boys are now doing all their practice whenever possible on this side of the ground. My window has been broken in two panes, and the Third Form-room window has gone. The nets have been taken down on this side of the cricket ground. Anybody passing in that direction has to look out for cricket balls, as if he were crossing the line of fire on a battlefield."

The Head smiled slightly.

"It is true that my offer to the boys has turned out not exactly as I wished," he said. "I did not anticipate all this. I imagined that only the Sixth and Fifth Form cricketers would take advantage of it, but no condition was made to that effect, and so the Lower Form boys naturally imagined themselves included in it. It would not be quite fair—not exactly cricket, in fact—to make a distinction now."

"But, sir—"

"Besides, I like to see this spirit of emulation displayed," said the doctor. "I know it leads to certain inconveniences. But for the sake of the game—"

"Ye-es," said Mr. Linton, who was no cricketer, and did not feel the force of this appeal. "But the nets—"

"Well, the nets would of course prevent the batsmen smashing any windows—including mine. That would be the same as rescinding the offer."

"It is dangerous to walk on this side of the cricket ground now."

"Ahem! I have no doubt the prize will be won soon by one of the batsmen in the Sixth," said the Head. "I do not see how I can withdraw the offer. I can perhaps fix a time limit. But really, I expect almost any hour for a cricket-ball to come crashing through the glass—"

"That is not likely to hap— Oh—oh!"

Crash!

A pane of glass in the Head's window flew to fragments, and a cricket ball came flying into the study.

It bounced on the Head's writing-table, and knocked an inkpot sprawling over a heap of papers, and then shot off into the fender with a terrific clang.

The Head jumped.

"Bless my soul! What is that?"

"Hem!" Mr. Linton smiled a little maliciously. "That is the cricket ball, sir."

"Bless my soul! Then the prize has been won! Curious, there are only juniors batting now," said the Head, with a glance towards the cricket field. "Surely it was impossible—"

"Ahem! I think the ball was thrown through the window."

"Eh? Thrown!"

"There would be some excitement on the cricket field if the ball had come from there. They do not seem to be disturbed at all."

"Bless my soul, you are right!" The Head went to the window. Skimpole was standing in the quadrangle, blinking up at the window through his spectacles, with an expression of satisfaction upon his face. A number of juniors were gathering round, wonder-stricken.

"Skimpole!"

"Yes, sir!" said Skimpole, raising his cap. "I have done it, sir!"

"Bless my soul!" gasped the amazed doctor. "He admits that he has smashed my window, as coolly as though it were a meritorious action. Skimpole, come up to my study at once."

"Yes, sir!"

And Skimpole went into the house. The boys outside stared after him, and at the broken window, blankly.

"Faith," said Reilly, "and it's off his giddy rocker he is, intirely!"

The Head turned away from the window, greatly puzzled. He knew that Skimpole of the Shell was a somewhat peculiar youth, but he was not as a rule mischievous. In fact, he was too solemn for his years. The Head could not possibly assign any motive for the boy's present action. He took up a cane, tested it in his hand, and laid it on the table in readiness.

There was a tap at the door, and Skimpole entered, cap in hand. The Head looked at him severely.

"Skimpole, is that your cricket ball?"

"No, sir!"

"What! You said—"

"It is Gore's, sir," explained Skimpole. "I borrowed it for the purpose. Of course, it is only a matter of form to call it Gore's cricket ball. All property is, as a matter of fact, common to us all, though wrongfully withheld at the present moment by the so-called owners. Under Socialism all the cricket balls will be nationalised."

"I did not send for you to hear you talking nonsense, Skimpole."

"That isn't nonsense, sir!" said Skimpole, in astonishment. "That's the result of long and strenuous meditations upon the social system—"

"Ahem! Never mind the social system now. Did you throw that cricket-ball through my window?"

"Yes, sir!"

The Head and Mr. Linton exchanged glances of amazement. It was not uncommon, certainly, for a junior to own up to a fault. But to own up in this calm, matter-of-fact way, as if he considered he was worthy of praise, was rather new.

"I scarcely understand you, Skimpole. You say that you, with your own hand, hurled that cricket ball through my window?"

"Yes, sir!"

"Then," said the Head sternly, "I presume that you are prepared to take the consequences?"

"Certainly, sir; that is what I have come for."

The Head almost gasped.

"Hold out your hand, Skimpole!"

Skimpole held out his hand—to receive the prize cricket bat, as he thought. His eyes grew round behind his spectacles as the Head took up his cane. The cane swished down, and the amazed junior drew his hand quickly away.

The cane, meeting no resistance, swept downward, and gave the doctor a smart cut on the calf. He uttered an exclamation.

"Good gracious!" exclaimed Mr. Linton, horrified.

The Head was speechless. Such a trick might be played upon a Form-master by a particularly daring youth; but on the Head himself! Incredible! But for the tingling where the cane had struck him, Dr. Holmes would have refused to believe the evidence of his own senses.

"Skimpole! Skimpole! What—how—"

"I am sorry, sir, if you have hurt yourself," said Skimpole anxiously. "I did not understand your action, sir. Were you going to cane me?"

"Certainly I was!" shouted the Head.

"But—but why, sir? Why were you going to cane me? I understand that you were going to give me a prize cricket bat."

Dr. Holmes dropped the cane.

"You understand what, Skimpole?"

"I was told by Gore and several others that there was a prize for hurling a cricket ball through your window," said the amateur Socialist, looking bewildered. "I asked several more reliable fellows if it was true, and they all assured me that it was. Is it possible I have been deceived? You appear angry."

The Head certainly did appear angry. Skimpole was nearer at that moment to receiving a terrific thrashing than he had ever been before.

"Is it possible, Skimpole, that you allowed yourself to believe such nonsense? Are you attempting to deceive me, boy?" thundered the Head.

"N-n-n-o, sir! It is impossible for a sincere Socialist to attempt to deceive anybody," stammered Skimpole. "I thought it was a curious offer for you to make, sir; but they all assured me that it was the fact, so I—"

Mr. Linton involuntarily burst into a laugh.

"This boy is in many respects the most stupid in my Form, sir," he said. "It is evident that he is the victim of an absurd joke."

"Skimpole," said the Head severely, "I will take your word that you have acted in good faith, but I cannot sufficiently express my amazement at your utter stupidity. If you paid a little less attention to dreamy theories, and

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more to the everyday matters round you, it would be better for you. You may go."

"But aren't I to have a cricket bat, sir?"

"The cricket bat! Certainly not!"

"Haven't I won it, sir?"

"The cricket bat was offered as a prize to whoever should knock a ball from the cricket-field through my study window."

"Oh! Still, sir, so long as the window is smashed, the result is just the same, sir," ventured Skimpole. "I have smashed the window pretty completely, sir."

The Head could not restrain a smile.

"You may go, Skimpole. You are a very stupid boy."

And Skimpole went.

CHAPTER 15.

A Third-Form "Jape."

COUSIN ETHEL appeared delighted with the end study, and she had a word of praise for the papering, the painting, and the furnishing. The New Firm were in the best of tempers, greatly pleased with their guest, even more than with the excellent spread the Australian had provided. The Cornstalk did not do things by halves. He had spent a small fortune—for a junior—upon the study-warming the day before; but the feed in honour of Cousin Ethel, though less extensive, was quite as good, if not better.

The chums of Study No. 6 grinned amiably when they saw the table. Figgins, when he came in, hardly noticed it. But then Figgins was thinking of other things. The little party settled down to a very cheerful tea, and had begun it in the highest of spirits, when a fresh visitor appeared at the door. It was D'Arcy minor of the the Third, with his dog at his heels.

"Hallo!" said Wally cheerily. "I thought you would miss me if I didn't come, so I managed to work it in."

Noble made a sign towards the passage.

"Outside!" he said.

"Oh, no, I couldn't leave Pongo outside!" said Wally, affecting to misunderstand. "He's quite quiet and harmless, and very fond of Colonials. Are you getting up to give me your seat, Gus?"

"No, I certainly am not doin' anythin' of the sort, Wally! I am gettin' up to hurl you forth."

"Who's first, second, and third?" asked Wally innocently. "Are you going to begin with Blake, and Herries, and Dig, if you hurl me fourth?"

"I did not say fourth. I said forth, you young wasscalion. Ethel, I beg to tendah my most sincere apologies for this intewruption of the harmony of the meetin'."

Cousin Ethel smiled.

"But I am sure Wally has come to see me," she said. "If our host does not object, why not let him remain?"

"Object!" said Wally. "Why, Kangaroo particularly wanted me to come, didn't you, Wallaby? I came at the special wish of our friend Dingo."

Noble grinned.

"Stay, by all means," he said. "Find a chair somewhere. It's all right, Gussy; let him live!"

Wally found a seat beside Cousin Ethel, calmly pushing himself in between Ethel and his elder brother. Figgins was on Ethel's other side. Arthur Augustus sat down again, simmering with suppressed wrath.

Pongo took his place under the table, and kept D'Arcy in a state of endless nervous apprehension by an occasional growl or two. Not that Gussy was afraid for himself. He was as brave as a lion. He was thinking of his trousers—for which Pongo had shown a liking more than once before.

However, it was a very pleasant meal. If there was a shade of thoughtfulness on the brow of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, it passed unnoticed in the general clatter and chatter. Figgins was in high spirits. He coloured once or twice as he caught a humorous twinkle in Kangaroo's eye. But the Colonial was keeping his word. While Figgins was present, Noble made no attempt to monopolise Cousin Ethel.

The New Firm did the honours of the feed as well as could be desired. Bernard Glyn, when tea was over, showed Cousin Ethel some of his inventions, and offered to give her an electric shock—an offer that was declined with thanks. Clifton Dane, who had some powers as a hypnotist, was willing to mesmerise her, another offer that was promptly declined.

D'Arcy, with a somewhat defiant glance round the study, suggested a little music, and followed up the suggestion with a generous offer to sing the Prize Song from "Die Meistersinger." Fortunately the clock struck while he was speaking, and then Cousin Ethel uttered a little exclamation.

"Dear, dear! Is that really a quarter to eight?"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Then I shall have to hurry away."

"Weally, Ethel—"

"Mrs. Holmes was expecting me ten minutes ago at least."

"Bai Jove, that's wathah wotten, you know!"

"Yes, isn't it? Good-bye! Thank you, so much!" said Ethel, with a sweet smile to Noble. "It has been so very, very pleasant."

"I hope you will come again, Miss Cleveland," said Noble, as he opened the door for his guest. "It was jolly of you to come."

"Yes, indeed! I hope so."

Arthur Augustus went out with his cousin, to see her to the Head's house. Noble waited till they had passed the turn of the passage, and then closed the door.

"Jolly ripping girl," he said. "Now, you young rascal," he went on, addressing Wally, "I think it's about time you had a licking for your cheek."

"Oh, rats!" said Wally. "You've made it pax."

The Cornstalk laughed.

"I suppose I had better let you off."

"Yes—you might get hurt otherwise," remarked Wally, rising. "Pongo! Pongo! Pong! Come here! You've finished with that bone."

"I say; I'll give Pongo an electric shock if you like," said Bernard Glyn. "It does animals good, you know."

Wally glared at the cheerful electrician.

"Let me catch you giving him electric shocks, that's all!" he said. "I'll jolly soon give you a shock of another sort!"

And he marched out of the end study with Pongo. As he came downstairs two juniors of the Third Form pounced upon him.

"You young bouncer!" exclaimed Jameson. "Where have you been? We've been looking for you everywhere."

"Oh, I've been to tea in a Shell study!" said Wally, with an air of assumed carelessness.

Jameson and Gibson stared at him. They were never asked to tea in a Shell study—and very seldom in a Fourth-Form one.

"Come off!" said Gibson tersely.

"Fact!" said Wally. "I've been having tea with Kangaroo—not a bad chap, either."

"Oh," said Jameson, comprehensively, "I understand. I know your cousin Ethel was having tea in the end study. You shoved yourself in."

"Are you looking for a thick ear, Jimmy?" asked Wally pleasantly. "You're going just the right way to get one."

"Look here, while you've been guzzling in a Shell study, we've been looking for you," said Curly Gibson aggressively. "It's a jape we've thought of, but we wanted you to help."

"That's right, my sons," said Wally serenely. "Don't you ever try any japes without your Uncle Wally. They're bound to come a buster."

"Stow the gas," said Jameson. "Look here—it's a feed."

"I've fed."

"But we haven't!" exclaimed Jameson indignantly. "You guzzling young sweep, we're jolly hungry, and funds are out. It's a rag against the Fourth, too."

"Now you're talking! Get on!"

"It's Fatty Wynn," said Jameson, lowering his voice to a mysterious whisper as the three fags walked out of the School House. "We saw him in the tuckshop. He's laid in a feed and gone off to enjoy it all by himself. Figgins is having tea in the School House, you see, and Kerr has filled up the study over there with fellows practising part-singing. Fatty Wynn is on his own; we saw him getting the things in Dame Taggles's shop—sausages, and cream puffs, and jam tarts."

"First-rate prog," said Gibson, smacking his lips. "We asked him for some—"

"And he told us we were cheeky fags," said Jameson darkly. "We didn't slay him, because—because—"

"Because he would have given you a hiding if you had started," observed Wally.

"Oh, don't be a beast, young D'Arcy! We thought we'd scoff his grub instead. He's taken it into one of the rooms at the back of the gym, so as to be quiet and uninterrupted," grinned Jameson. "We watched him through the window. Come on, and we'll show you."

Wally chuckled, and followed his two comrades. In a couple of minutes they were looking into one of the windows at the back of the ground floor of the gymnasium. It was a small room, where some of the paraphernalia used in the gym. was stored, and there, sitting on a chest, was the Falstaff of the New House. There was a seraphic smile upon the plump face of Fatty Wynn, and a gleam of greedy anticipation in his eye.

He had opened his parcel of good things from the tuckshop, and they were spread around him—sausages and ham and rolls and tarts and cake. The fat Fourth-Former was

evidently "flush" just then, for he was "doing himself down" remarkably well.

"Looks ripping, don't it?" murmured Gibson.

"Makes me feel quite peckish again," said Wally.

"We could raid it as easy as falling off a form. A rush in at the door, and we could bounce him over, and before he could get up—"

Wally shook his head.

"No; we won't collar his grub!"

"Look here," began Jameson hotly, "if you're not hungry, we are!"

"I don't care whether you're hungry or not! We've got some grub in the Form-room, anyhow. I tell you, you sha'n't touch his grub!" said Wally obstinately.

"I can see you've got some other jape in your head, you young ass! What is it?"

"I was thinking of the tortures of Tantalus."

"Eh? Who's Tantalus?" asked Jameson, whose attainments in classic lore were not great. "Is it a dog?"

"Ha, ha! No. Tantalus was one of those ancient Greek bouncers who offended the gods, and was stuck in Tartarus with a lot of ripping tommy just out of his reach, you know—like a carrot tied just ahead of a donkey's nose. I was thinking we could fix up Fatty like that. Here, come in!"

"But—"

"Don't jaw! Follow your uncle!"

And Wally led the way.

CHAPTER 16.

The Tortures of Tantalus.

FATTY WYNN had just taken his first mouthful when the door opened, and three Third-Formers presented themselves to his view. Fatty laid down his knife and fork, and bestowed a glare upon the intruders.

"Get out!" he said.

"Rats!" said Wally. "Collar him!"

"Why, you cheeky young rascals," exclaimed Wynn, in amazement at the nerve of the Third-Form hero, "I'll—I'll pulverise you! Ow!"

Outrageous as it was for fags to lay hands upon a Fourth-Former, Wally & Co. made no bones about it, so to speak. They rushed at Fatty Wynn, who rose to defend himself. He hit out, and Jameson rolled in one direction and Gibson in another. But Wally fastened desperately upon the fat Fourth-Former, and shouted to his comrades to back him up, while Pongo barked furiously.

Jameson and Gibson quickly returned to the fray. Fatty Wynn struggled desperately, but three to one was too long odds. He went down with a heavy bump, and the fags sprawled over him.

"You—you young rotters!" gasped Fatty Wynn. "I'll—I'll punch you to little bits! You—you cheeky imps!"

"Got him!" said Wally, crowing triumphantly.

"Yes, rather! Hurrah!"

"Hip-pip!"

Wally sat astride of Fatty Wynn's chest, and kept him pinned down. The fat Fourth-Former could only struggle and heave spasmodically. There was no dislodging the scamp of the Third Form from his perch.

"Now, get one of those ropes, Jimmy!" said Wally, with the air of a general giving orders. "Keep still, Wynn! That's the worst of those Welshmen, they never know when they're beaten!"

"We—never—are—beaten!" gasped Fatty Wynn breathlessly.

"Well, you're jolly near it at the present moment! Gibby, my son, drag out those weights from the corner—the heaviest ones!"

"Oh, rats, Wally; you're not going to start weight-lifting now!"

"I'll start eye-blackening, if you don't do as I tell you!"

"Yes, but—"

"Yank out those weights, ass! I'm going to tie Fatty to them!"

"Oh, I see!" said Gibson, chuckling.

And he dragged out the heavy weights one by one from their receptacle.

It did not take the scamps of the Third long to sling the weights upon lengths of cord, and fasten the cords to Fatty Wynn's wrists and arms.

Then the fat Fourth-Former was allowed to rise.

He rose—breathless and rumpled and gasping, as red as a poppy. He wrenched at his arms to free them, but that was a little beyond his powers. He could not get them loose, neither could he shift the mass of heavy weights that dragged upon him.

Wally, with a quiet grin, arranged the feed just out of Wynn's reach, and then the chuckling fags quitted the room and closed the door.

"The—the young beasts!" gasped Fatty Wynn. "I'll—"

I'll pulverise them! I'll mash them like potatoes when I get hold of them! The rotters! Ow!"

He dragged at the cords. The weights clattered a little, but did not budge. There was a tap at the window and a yell of laughter. Three faces were looking in there, in evident enjoyment of Fatty Wynn's predicament.

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled Wally suddenly. "Look there! I forgot Pongo!"

Jameson and Gibson chuckled hysterically. Through the window they could see Pongo, who had been left in the room. Wally had forgotten him, and Pongo had been quite willing to be left in the presence of the sausages.

Pongo was making for the sausages now, and it was quite touching to see the expression that came over the fat face of Wynn.

He made frantic gestures at the dog as well as he could with his hands dragged behind him, and clattered his feet on the floor.

Pongo retreated, growling.

"Oh lor!" gasped Fatty Wynn. "Get back, you beast! Shush! Scat! Gr-r-r! Be off! Yah! Bunk! Gr-r-r! Booh!"

Pongo growled, and kept back. But he soon observed, with canine sagacity, that Fatty Wynn could only stand still and clatter his boots and shout, and could not advance towards the provisions.

Pongo crept forward again, eyeing Fatty cautiously, and this time the shouts and clattering of feet did not frighten him back.

He growled, and showed his teeth, and crept on.

"Booh!" roared Fatty Wynn. "Yah! Scat!"

But Pongo declined to scat.

He fastened his teeth in the sausages, and began to eat them.

The perspiration rolled down Fatty Wynn's face.

"Oh!" he groaned. "My sausages! My ham! My ham! My sausages! You beasts! My sausages and ham! My ham and sausages! Oh!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" shrieked the fags outside the window.

"Help! Help!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Fire!" shrieked Fatty Wynn. "Murder! Fire!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Pongo growled, and ate. Fatty Wynn stamped and yelled. The tortures of Tantalus were a joke to this. Tantalus never saw a dog eating the good things he could not reach. But Fatty Wynn did.

"Help!" yelled Fatty. "Fire! Fire!"

There was a clattering of feet in the gym., and the door of the little room was thrown open, and Tom Merry rushed in.

"What is it? Where's the fire? Why—What—"

"Kick that dog! Kick him! Jump on him!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"He's eating my sausages! My ham! My grub! Jump on him!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"What's all this row about?" said Darrel, of the Sixth, looking in. "Who's that shouting fire?"

"It's Wynn!" gasped Tom Merry. "He's—he's in a fix! I don't think there's any fire!"

"There's no fire!" snapped Wynn. "That was to make somebody come! Look at that beast! Let me loose! Haven't you a pocket-knife?"

Tom Merry, with tears of laughter running down his cheeks, opened his pocket-knife and cut Fatty Wynn loose. Wynn made a straight rush for the dog.

Pongo dashed off—with half a dozen sausages in his jaws. Fatty Wynn rushed in pursuit, and Pongo made a break through the open door, and dashed into the quadrangle, still with the infuriated junior in pursuit.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Darrel, all the gravity of a lordly Sixth-Former deserting him at the ridiculous sight. "Ha, ha, ha!"

Tom Merry almost staggered from the gym.

Pongo was making a good run of it, with the fat junior in hot pursuit, and the dog was shedding sausages, so to speak, as he ran. He had only one left by the time he whisked round a corner of the School House, and Fatty Wynn, breathless and enraged, halted, and gave up the chase.

"What on earth's the matter?" demanded Figgins, coming out of the School House, and staring at his breathless chum.

"Matter enough!" snapped Fatty Wynn. "That horrid beast of young D'Arcy's has wolfed my sausages!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"It's nothing to laugh at!"

Figgins apparently thought it was, for he continued laughing. Fatty Wynn snorted, and hurried back to the gym, to secure the remainder of his feast. But a disappointment awaited the fat Fourth-Former.

There had been a crowd of fags on the scene, and the last

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crumb had vanished before Fatty Wynn returned to the spot. A good many of the fags, with smears of jam on their mouths, assumed expressions of almost preternatural innocence as Fatty Wynn came in.

The Falstaff of the New House looked round him, snorted, and retired. He spent a considerable time that evening looking for Pongo; but Pongo, like a wise dog, understudied Brer Rabbit, and "lay low."

CHAPTER 17.

A Deed in the Dark.

THE tea-party in the end study was over, the cheery voices were silent, and the lights were out. Arthur Augustus, coming along the Shell passage, was struck by the silence and darkness of the quarters of the New Firm. There was a shade upon the noble brow of Arthur Augustus and an uneasy glimmer in his eye behind his monocle. He tapped at the door of the end study, and opened it. All was blackness within.

"Bai Jove! It's stwuck eight, and the boundah isn't here!"

Arthur Augustus was keeping his appointment. In the interval since it had been made a change had come over D'Arcy's sentiments on the subject, but he turned up dutifully at the appointed time to explain to the Cornstalk.

The darkness and silence of the study surprised him. It looked as if Noble had forgotten all about the appointment.

"Are you here, deah boy?" asked D'Arcy, peering into the gloom.

"Enter!"

It was Noble's voice, speaking in a deep, solemn tone. D'Arcy started. He did not know why Noble should adopt that tone, or why he should say 'enter' instead of 'come in.' It was frequently done on the stage and in novels, but not in the lower Forms at St. Jim's. D'Arcy felt vaguely uneasy as he stepped into the shadowy room.

"I'm here, deah boy; I've entahed! Why haven't you got a light?"

"It is better that such a deed were done in darkness!"

"Bai—bai Jove! What are you talkin' about?" asked D'Arcy, in alarm.

He could not see Noble, and that deep voice from the darkness was somewhat uncanny, and a little alarming.

"Do you forget what this appointment is for?"

"N-n-n-o; but—"

"You have been struck?"

"Yaas, wathah, but—"

"Not hit, or smitten, or cuffed, but struck. A gentleman who is struck—by anything but lightning—has only one resource, as you can read in any sixpenny novel. He must have blood!"

"Pway don't be howwid."

"You demand satisfaction—"

"Yaas, but—"

"There are no 'buts' in a case like this. You demand satisfaction—satisfaction you shall have. You have asked me to act as your friend."

"Yaas, but—"

"I shall stand by you. I shall see that the affair is carried out according to all the rules of the duello," whispered Kangaroo. "The body can be disposed of—"

"The—the what?"

"The body. Of course, there will be a body."

"You—you uttah ass—"

"What! Do you mean to say that you recede—that you submit to be struck?"

"N-n-n-o; but—but—"

"Think of your aunt's sisters—I mean your ancestors. Think of them in the roll of history, looking down on you from the ancient pictures on the walls of Eastwood. Think of their heroic deeds in the past; how they wallowed in mud and blood on the field of battle—"

"Weally, deah boy—"

"Think of how they girded on their armour for the fray, and led their followers—who didn't wear any armour—to die for their country," whispered the Cornstalk. "Thinking of that, you cannot recede. You must have blood!"

"Yaas, wathah, but—"

"No more! I will see you through!"

"But—but—"

"You can rely on me. Come; all is arranged."

"All is awwanged!" exclaimed D'Arcy, starting. "But—"

"Come!"

The swell of St. Jim's broke into a cold perspiration. He had never expected Noble to take it like this. In the heat of the moment he had declared that he would have satisfaction, but he had been thinking over it since then.

"Where—where am I to come?" he stammered.

"To the ruined tower," hissed the voice in the darkness, "and strew the hungry churchyard with his bones!"

"I absolutely wufuse to do anythin' of the sort!" stammered D'Arcy. "I uttably decline to strew any hungwy churchyard with anyone's beastly bones! I——"

"Aha! You falter!"

"I don't falth, but——"

"You tremble!"

"I do not twemble, but——"

"You are afraid!"

"Nothin' of the sort! But——"

"Come!"

"Where, you ass!"

"To the box-room, then," whispered Kangaroo. "There you shall imbue your hands——"

"I wufuse to imbue my hands——"

"I will keep you up to the mark. Come!"

With a strong grip on his arm, the Cornstalk drew the dismayed swell of St. Jim's from the study. The end study adjoined the box-room, the door of which was open. D'Arcy stumbled in in the darkness, and barked his shins against a box, and uttered an exclamation:

"Bai Jove! I'm hurt!"

"Never mind,"

"But I do mind, you ass! My beastly shin——"

"Never mind your beastly shin. Take this!"

D'Arcy shivered all over as he felt the butt of a pistol thrust into his hand. He grasped it mechanically.

"Don't fire till I give the word!" whispered the Cornstalk.

"I uttably wufuse to——"

"Silence!"

A pale blue flame glimmered in the darkness. It made the forms of the juniors dimly visible. It was an eerie, phosphorescent light, and had D'Arcy been a little calmer he might have guessed that Bernard Glyn, the St. Jim's inventor, had a hand in it. As it was, he blinked at it in horror.

"What—what is that?"

"Listen! He comes!"

"Who comes?"

"He!" whispered Noble. "Hark! The doomed wretch's footsteps echo through the night!"

"Oh, wats! I——"

"Hark!"

Footsteps approached the box-room door. They came closer, more audible, and D'Arcy felt, with a thrill of horror, that it was Kildare coming to the meeting. A dim form, wrapped in a black cloak, stepped silently into the room. A slouched hat hid the features.

"He is here!"

"Bai Jove!"

"Are you ready?"

"Ready for what?"

"The fight to the death!"

"Look heah, Kangawoo, I wufuse to do anythin' of the sort. I didn't mean you to take it so sewiously. I think you are a howwid wottah!"

"Aha! You flinch!"

"Nothin' of the sort! But——"

"But your honour must be avenged. Give me the pistol, and I will do the deed!" said Kangaroo, in a terrible whisper.

"But—but—you ass——"

D'Arcy was too disturbed and excited to notice that what he was holding in his hand was simply the ornamental head of a massive walking-stick, shaped something like a pistol-butt. Had it been light, and had he been cooler, he would have known that it was the electric walking-stick he had handled before in Glyn's study.

"Give me the pistol!"

"I wufuse!"

"But blood must flow!"

"You howwid ass! I——"

"Then fire when I give the word!" The cloaked figure raised a hand, and something glimmered dimly in the pale, ghostly light—and how was D'Arcy to know that it was only a silver pencil-case? "Look! Your foe is ready!"

"Weally, Kildare——"

"One!"

"Weally, Kangawoo——"

"Two!"

"I wepeat that——"

"Three!"

"I tell you——"

"Fire!"

There was a crash—it sounded more like a hammer crashing on a firegrate than the report of a pistol. It rang with deafening noise through the silence of the box-room, and at the same moment D'Arcy felt a shock through his arm which ran instantly through his whole body.

He jumped.

"Ow! I'm wounded! Bai Jove! I'm shot, you know!"

"Where is it?"

"Ow! I don't know!"

"Drop the pistol!"

"I—I—I can't!"

"Fly!" exclaimed Noble dramatically. "Kildare! Fly—fly for your life!"

"Oh, hang it!" said the cloaked figure. "I'm not a giddy aeroplane. Turn on the light."

The gas was suddenly lighted—and D'Arcy blinked in the light and looked round him.

CHAPTER 18.

Coals of Fire!

D'ARCY blinked—and well he might!

For there was no sign of Kildare in the box-room, no sign of blood, and no sign of a pistol. He was holding the head of a walking-stick in his hand, and in the light he knew that walking-stick, and understood the shock that had run through him. The current had been turned off as the gas was lighted.

The cloaked figure had thrown aside the cloak, and stood revealed as Clifton Dane. Bernard Glyn, with a hammer in his hand, was standing near the fire-grate, beside an electric-battery. Kangaroo was doubled up with laughter, and Clifton Dane and Bernard Glyn were shrieking.

"Bai Jove!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled Noble. "Fly—fly for your giddy life! Ha, ha, ha!"

"Ho, ho, ho!" roared Glyn. "He must have satisfaction!"

"There must be blood!" said Dane, grinning. "Are you satisfied, D'Arcy?"

"Bai Jove!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Am I to undahstand," said the swell of St. Jim's majestically, "that this is a twick?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You have been widiculin' me, Noble."

"Ha, ha, ha! Oh, carry me home to die!" gurgled the Colonial. "I know this chap will be the death of me—I know he will!"

The frown of wrath gathered on D'Arcy's brow. He was greatly relieved to find that he was not wounded, and that he had not wounded anybody. But to discover that the whole affair was a jape of the New Firm was too ridiculous.

D'Arcy turned his eyeglass from one to another of the members of Cornstalk & Co., seeking to crush them with his scorn, but without any apparent effect, for they only shrieked the more.

"Bai Jove! You uttah wottahs!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I wegard you as beasts!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"And undah these cires, Noble, I have no wesource but to administah a feahful thwashin'. Pway put up your hands! I—— Ow-wow-wow!"

Glyn had suddenly switched the current on again from the battery. It ran through D'Arcy's limbs and made him jump. He began a sort of war-dance with the electric stick in his hand.

"Ow, wow! Leggo! Leave off! Wow!"

"Are you going to make it pax?" grinned the Cornstalk, who had no desire for the jape to end in a bout of serious fisticuffs.

"Certainly not! Ow!"

"Then you can go on dancing!"

"Oh, ow! Leggo!"

Kangaroo began to beat time with his hands, as if D'Arcy were executing an impromptu step-dance.

"Go it! That's right! Keep it up!"

"Wats! Ow! Gr-r-r-r! Stop it! On—on second thoughts, deah boys, I will make it pax."

Glyn grinned, and shut off the current.

Arthur Augustus dropped the stick, and jammed his glass into his eye, and turned a withering look upon the practical jokers.

"I have made it pax," he said, "and so I cannot give you all thwee a feahful thwashin', as you wicly mowit. Howevah, I wegard you as feahful wottahs, and in future I shall be obliged if you will not address me. I dwop your acquaintance."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Arthur Augustus walked out of the box-room, leaving the New Firm giggling hysterically.

Feeling very much disturbed and exasperated, D'Arcy walked along towards his own quarters. He met Kildare in the passage. The captain of St. Jim's stopped.

"Anything wrong, D'Arcy?"

D'Arcy looked at the big, athletic Sixth-Former a little shamefacedly. The recollection of the ridiculous scene he had gone through made his cheeks burn.

"No, Kildare, I'm all wight."

"You are looking queer. Did I touch you up a little too warmly yesterday?" asked Kildare, with his good-natured laugh.

The swell of St. Jim's went scarlet.

"Weally, Kildare—"

The captain of St. Jim's laughed again, and passed on. D'Arcy went slowly and thoughtfully on his way.

"Upon the whole, I suppose I have been wathah an ass," he murmured. "Pewwaps it served me wight. Kildare's an awfully decent chap."

He entered Study No. 6. Blake, Herries, and Digby were doing their preparation there, but they left off as D'Arcy came in, and grinned at him.

"All right?" asked Blake.

"All wight? Certainly! What do you mean?"

"What have you done with the body?"

"The—the what?"

"The body. I suppose there was a body?" said Blake.

"Did you shoot Kildare dead, or did he shoot you dead?"

"Pway don't be an ass!"

"Well, this is a bit of a swindle," said Digby. "Fancy a scion of the house of D'Arcy going in for satisfaction, and finishing up without a body."

"Rotten!" said Herries emphatically. "I was thinking that I could lend Towser to the authorities to track down Gussy, so as to get him arrested for—"

"And then we shouldn't be bothered by his hat-boxes in the study. But now—"

"It's a swindle!"

Arthur Augustus glowered at his chums.

"So that wottah Kangaroo told you that he intended—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I shall not stay here with a set of cacklin' asses—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I twust you will cease this wibald laughtah, or I shall have no alternative but to take my books into Tom Mewwy's studay and do my pwep. there."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I wegard you as beasts!" said Arthur Augustus; and he gathered up his books and left the study, slamming the door behind him. He left his chums laughing hysterically. With a heightened colour, D'Arcy went along to Tom Merry's study, and he found the Terrible Three sitting round their table at prep. They looked up gravely.

"Pway may I do my pwep. here, deah boys?" asked D'Arcy. "Those wottahs in No. 6 are kickin' up too much wow."

"Certainly!" said Tom Merry. "Come right in. Shove your books down here. I suppose there's no blood on them?"

"Eh?"

"I shouldn't like any of the gore to come off on the table-cover," explained Tom Merry. "It's been washed lately."

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—"

"What have you done with the body?" asked Lowther.

"Weally, Lowthah—"

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled Manners, unable to contain his mirth any longer. Lowther and Tom Merry looked at him severely.

"Really, Manners," said the latter, "I'm surprised at you. An affair of honour is no laughing matter; and besides, we shall have all the trouble of a new election for captain now that Kildare is gone."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You uttah wottahs! I suppose Kangaroo told you—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Arthur Augustus marched out of the study with his books under his arm, and slammed that door too. Through the closed door followed a merry yell.

D'Arcy paused in the passage, hardly knowing where to go. He finally decided upon the Third Form-room, where the Third did their prep. in the presence of a master. He could get a quiet corner there to work. But as he entered the Form-room he discovered that prep. was over—Mr. Selby was gone—and the Third were indemnifying themselves for an hour's restraint by various kinds of horsplay. Wally was balancing a pointer on his chin when D'Arcy entered. He gave a yell at the sight of his major, and the pointer dropped on Jameson's toe, and then Jameson yelled too.

"Here he comes!" yelled Wally.

"Ow! My toe!"

"Blow your toe! 'See the Conquering Hero comes!'" chanted Wally. "I say, Gussy, what have you done with the body?"

"Ha, ha, ha!" screamed the Third. "What have you done with the body?"

D'Arcy halted, petrified.

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He knew that Kangaroo would not have taken the fags into his confidence over that jape; but undoubtedly Wally & Co. knew all about it. Doubtless some fag had heard the New Firm talking it over, or telling Study No. 6 about it. However it came about, they knew it.

"The body!" roared Curly Gibson. "Where's the giddy corpus?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You young wapsallions!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I have a gweat mind to give you all a feahful thwashin'."

"Don't shoot us!" pleaded Curly Gibson tearfully. "Don't sh-sh-shoot us with a walkin'-stick!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The swell of St. Jim's walked out of the Third Form-room, leaving the fags shrieking. Feeling as if he had nowhere to rest his head, he walked away with his books, when a hand was clapped on his shoulder, and he looked up and saw Kildare.

"Still looking down in the mouth?" said the captain of St. Jim's.

"N-n-not pwecisely, Kildare, but—"

"What's up?" asked the Sixth-Former tersely.

"Nothin', only—I'm lookin' for somewhere to do my pwep. I'm—I'm not on good terms with the wottahs in Study No. 6."

Kildare laughed. He had been a junior himself, and he knew the uncertainty of life—in junior studies.

"Come into my room," he said. "I've got a fire there, and my fag is making me some buttered toast. There's enough for two, and you can do your prep. on my table."

D'Arcy muttered something unintelligible as he followed the captain of St. Jim's into his study. It was coals of fire, with a vengeance. The study was very cheerful and cosy, and the buttered toast was ripping, and D'Arcy did his prep. on a corner of the captain's table in perfect ease and comfort.

And his comfort was not diminished by the awed and admiring expression of several fags who looked into the study, and beheld him on such intimate terms with the head of the Sixth. When D'Arcy left the captain's study at last, he was feeling in a good humour with everybody, and Kildare could have struck, hit, smitten, or cuffed him to his heart's content without the slightest danger of Arthur Augustus demanding satisfaction.

CHAPTER 19.

Trouble in the Editorial Office.

WHEN Arthur Augustus D'Arcy encountered the New Firm the next day, his manner was cold, not to say chilling. But Noble slapped him on the back cheerily.

"It's all right, old chap!" he said.

D'Arcy drew back.

"It is not all wight," he said; "I wegard you as a beast."

"It was a jolly good jape," pleaded Kangaroo. "It would make a ripping article for the 'Weekly.'"

Arthur Augustus changed colour.

"You would not be such a feahful wottah as to pwint anythin' of the sort in the 'Weekly'!" he exclaimed.

"Why not? I'm the new sub-editor-in-chief, you know, and a sub-editor-in-chief is expected to shove in a thing a bit out of the common," grinned Kangaroo. "The story of the duel in the box-room would—"

"I wefuse to give my permish. Upon the whole, Kangaroo, I will ovahlook that mattah," said D'Arcy hastily. "I will continue to wegard you as a fiend. You will not mention that nonsense in the papah, I twust?"

"I'll bury it deep from human eyes," said Kangaroo solemnly. "Wild dingoes or wallabies should not fear the dread secret from my bosom."

"Oh, pway don't wot!"

So friendship was restored between the swell of the School House and the New Firm. But with the chums of No. 6 it was a different matter. D'Arcy still looked upon them with an eye of coldness, and a chilling silence reigned in the study when he was there.

With the Terrible Three Gussy had no choice but to make it up, because it was the last day for sending in copy for the "Weekly," and Tom Merry's study was the editorial office.

When D'Arcy looked in after morning school, he coughed a little awkwardly. Tom Merry and Harry Noble were already busy there. They were filling up columns at a great rate, making up for lost time. The visit of Cousin Ethel to St. Jim's had taken up a great deal of time which would otherwise have been devoted to the "Weekly," and editor-in-chief and sub-editor-in-chief had to slog a little now.

"Ahem!" said Arthur Augustus. Tom Merry looked up genially, apparently having forgotten all about the episode of the previous evening.

"Hallo, Gus! Come in, and get to work."

"Certainly, deah boy!"

And D'Arcy took his place at the table, and pulled out a fountain-pen and a sheaf of paper. He started work, and then started gnawing the handle of the pen, and looked at the ceiling. Kangaroo looked at him.

"Got a pain anywhere?" he asked.

"Certainly not! I was thinkin'. Can you tell me a rhyme for glowious?"

"Writing poetry?" asked Kangaroo. "I don't know if I can let it into this week's number. We've got a lot of poetry on hand now."

"Weally, Kangawoo, I wasn't thinkin' of askin' you. As a sub-edtah of this papah—"

"Common or garden sub-editor, old fellow? I'm sub-editor-in-chief."

"Wats! I shall certainly w'ite as much poetry as I like."

"Ahem! I am afraid I shall have to sling this insubordinate contributor out of the office, chief."

"Order!" said the chief, without looking up. "Can't you kids scribble without interrupting your lord and master? Seat!"

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—"

"Oh, get on with the washing!" grinned Kangaroo. "I'll let it in if it isn't too rotten. What's it about?"

"This is the line. 'Her eyes so blue are b'right and glowious.' That's watah a tellin' line, isn't it?"

"Ripping! What's the next?"

"I don't know yet. I want a rhyme."

"Hum! How would 'Her voice is sweet, and not up-roarious' do?"

"Wats!"

"Or, 'She talks a lot, but is not jawious.'"

"Weally, deah boy—"

"Lemme see! I—"

"Shut up!" bawled Tom Merry. "I'm doing the leader. How can I do the leader if you keep on like a pair of magpies?"

"Don't ask me conundrums."

"I refuse to be called a pair of magpies—I mean—"

"Hallo!" said Blake's cheery voice, as he came in with Herries and Digby. "Hard at work, I see. Room for three little ones?"

"You needn't bother," said Tom Merry, without turning his head. "Skimpole has done enough for you three, and I shan't want any of your stuff this week."

Jack Blake looked warlike at once.

"What you really want is a thick ear, I suppose!" he remarked. "None of your old buck, Thomas. Nice sort of a 'Weekly' it would be without any stuff of mine in it, I suppose! I'm thinking of winding up my poetic serial."

"About time, too."

"Well, it's very popular, anyway," said Blake aggressively; "which is more than can be said for your rotten leading articles. What do we want with leading articles in a magazine, anyway? They're all right for a daily paper. A daily paper appeals to a very different class of intellect. With our intelligent circle of readers, we ought to give them better stuff."

"I was just thinking the same," remarked Kangaroo. "As a matter of fact, I was thinking of making a clean sweep of the usual piffle this week."

They glared at him.

"Well, of all the cheeky wasters," said Blake, in measured tones, "I think you take the giddy biscuit! What's it got to do with you, anyway—you, you kangaroo?"

"I'm sub-editor-in-chief."

"Sub-duffer-in-rats!" said Blake. "You ring off! I don't see how we're to find any room for you at all, as I'm doing an extra column on the subject of duels this week."

Arthur Augustus jumped up.

"Tom Mewwy, I protest against the pwesence of these boundahs in the editowial office!" he exclaimed. "I call upon them to wettire!"

"Hallo! Here's Gus!" exclaimed Blake, as if he had not seen him before. "Here's the giddy duellist! Here's the chap who imbrues his hands in gore at the shortest notice, and disposes of the bodies—"

"I wegard you as a wottah!"

"Dear me! He wants satisfaction!"

"Pway wettire fwom the editowial office!"

"Rats! We've come here to work!"

"If you do not wettire, I shall be under the painful necessity of thwowing you out!"

"Now, don't be ferocious, Gus. There are only three of us, and I know you won't leave a rag of us when you're bnce started. You should remember how terrible you are, and keep the brake on!"

D'Arcy jammed his eyeglass into his pocket, pushed back his cuffs, and advanced upon his erstwhile chums. They grinned, and stood ready.

"Are you going, Blake?"

"Lemme see. Are we going, Dig?"

"Lemme see. Are we going, Herries?"

"I don't think!" chuckled Herries.

"Then I have no wresource but to use violence," said D'Arcy; and he proceeded to use it.

He seized Blake, and waltzed him out of the study with surprising ease. Then he would have re-entered to waltz Herries and Dig out, but Blake would not let go. He went on waltzing—right down the passage, and Arthur Augustus struggled in vain.

"Leggo, you wottah! Ow! Let go!"

"It's all right. You're throwing me out, you know!"

"Hold on. Let go!"

"Can't do both."

"Welease me! I— Ow!"

But Blake waltzed on, and there was no help for it. Past the end study they went, and into the box-room, and there, with a final whirl, Blake let go. Arthur Augustus spun round, and sat down dizzily on a box, and Blake went out and shut the door behind him.

As D'Arcy sprang to his feet, there was a click in the lock.

"Bai Jove, the wottah has locked me in!"

Arthur Augustus rushed at the door, and dragged at the handle. It did not yield. He thumped on the upper panels.

"Blake, you wottah, unlock the door!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The laugh was followed by the sound of receding footsteps. Arthur Augustus thumped on the door again, and shouted. There was no reply.

"Bai Jove!"

D'Arcy walked to and fro like a lion in a cage. It was too bad. He had started to throw Blake out of the editorial office, and he had got himself locked up in a box-room. And what was he to do?

His contributions to the "Weekly" remained unfinished—his poem was half done, and the rhyme for "glorious" was still undiscovered.

Arthur Augustus sat down on a trunk, with his hands in his pockets, looking very disconsolate. He would willingly have made it pax with Study No. 6 just then, but his voice would not reach from the box-room to Tom Merry's study. He could picture the staff working away busily in the editorial office.

Half an hour passed, and D'Arcy was still a prisoner. He walked about the room, and sniffed and murmured vows of vengeance. At last footsteps were heard in the passage. He ran to the door, and thumped on it.

"Hallo!" said a voice from the passage—the voice of Reilly.

"Pway let me out, Weilly, deah boy!"

"Faith, and phwy can't ye let yerself out, intirely?" asked Reilly, opening the door of the box-room and looking in at amazement.

D'Arcy almost staggered.

"Bai Jove! Wasn't the door locked?"

"Ha, ha, ha! Faith, there's no key in it, intirely!"

D'Arcy looked at the outside of the lock. There certainly was no key in it. He guessed now that Blake had made the "click" with the latch, and that he had been holding the door when it was pulled from inside.

Words failed to express the feelings of the swell of St. Jim's at that moment. He looked at the keyless lock, and looked at Reilly, who was roaring with laughter. At any moment during his imprisonment he might have opened the door and walked out by simply turning the handle.

"The—the wottah!" gasped D'Arcy. "It was a twick!"

He rushed along to Tom Merry's study—really in want of satisfaction this time. But the editorial work was done, and the editorial office was empty. The bell called the juniors to dinner, and D'Arcy was greeted with a cheerful nod and a smile from Blake as he entered the dining-hall—to which he replied with a stare that might have brought a blush to the cheek of a gargoyle.

CHAPTER 20.

Figgins Keeps Goal.

"PASS!"

"Pass, you duffer!"

Figgins gave a growl as the shouts came in at the open window. The New House Amateur Dramatic Society was holding a meeting in one of the rooms on the ground floor of the New House, Figgins's study not being quite spacious enough for the purpose.

The New House meant to knock spots off the School House

shortly with a new dramatic performance, and it was, therefore, a serious matter, and the yells just under the window were distracting.

"The utter asses!" said Kerr. "Football in June! Yell at 'em!"

Figgins went to the open window.

A dozen or more juniors were kicking something about in the quad, which looked like a football at a glance. But there was no bounce in it, and it fell after being kicked with a dull "plop." As a matter of fact, it was a ball made up of old newspapers and string, and there seemed to be ink and mud on it in equal proportions.

The fellows who were enjoying the kick-about were all School House juniors, and Figgins shook his fist at them wrathfully.

"Stop that row!" he bawled.

Tom Merry paused in his run, and grinned at the New House junior.

"Hallo, Figgy! What's the row?"

"We're holding a meeting in this room—"

"I know that, my son."

"You're interrupting us with that row."

"I know that, too."

"Yaas, wathah! As a mattah of fact, Figgins, it is our intention to intewwupt you."

"You duffers!" shouted Figgins. "Get over your own side! I'll come out to you, and if I do I won't leave a rag to tell the tale!"

"Bai Jove!"

Tom Merry laughed.

Figgins turned back wrathfully into the room, and Tom, who had been about to take a shot at the open window, paused.

"Yell," he whispered. "Make him come out here into the quad."

"Ha, ha! Rather!"

And the School House juniors yelled in earnest.

"Pass! Pass! On the ball!"

"Play up, there!"

"Hurray!"

Figgins rushed out into the quad.

Biff!

Just as his wrathful face appeared, Tom Merry kicked. Tom Merry was a regular Steve Bloomer for getting goals in the football season, and he had not lost his old skill.

The bundle of rags and papers sailed gracefully through the air, and smote Figgins upon his countenance with a mighty smite.

"Oh!" roared Figgins.

Kerr, who was looking out of the window, gave a shriek.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Figgins glared. His face was a study in mud and ink, and he rushed at Tom Merry.

Tom Merry gave a shriek of laughter, and disappeared. The New House Dramatic Society were laughing, too; they could not help it.

"Groo!" said Figgins, rubbing his face. "Groo! The beasts! Groo-oo! What are you silly asses cackling at?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Groo! This meeting's broken up. Groo-oo! You can all go and eat coke!"

And Figgins rushed off to the nearest bath-room, and the meeting of the New House Dramatic Society broke up amid shouts of laughter.

"Bai Jove, I wogard that as wathah funnay!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, as the School House fellows walked off the scene—rather hastily, as a matter of fact.

They were in dangerous territory, if there should be a rush of the New House juniors out of the house in force.

Tom Merry chuckled.

"Not a bad shot," he said. "Hallo! There's Kangaroo at the wicket again! Phew! There goes Selby's window!" Crash!

Noble was batting, in another attempt to win the Head's prize. His ball went nearer to the Head's window than any previous one had gone—excepting Skimpole's, of course; but it did not go quite near enough. It smashed through the window of the master of the Third.

Mr. Selby's irritable face was seen at the window the next moment. He glared out in search of the offender; but when he saw that the ball came from the cricket-field, he drew back again with a grunt. The Head's offer was growing very unpopular with the masters at St. Jim's; but it was very probable that the glaziers of Rylcombe looked on it with great favour.

"Better luck next time!" chuckled Monty Lowther. "Go it, Kangaroo!"

But the Cornstalk came off the pitch.

"I'm going to have another try after school," he said.

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determinedly. "I hear there's talk of a time-limit, so we've no time to waste."

"Yas, wathah! I weally think I shall have to wire in, deah boys."

"Oh, do!" said Kangaroo, laughing. "I sha'n't grudge you the prize if you get it, Gussy. By the way, are all the papers in for the 'Weekly'?"

"Yes; the lot's finished now."

"Then I'll buzz off down to Rylcombe to the printer's on my bike. I suppose that's part of the duties of a sub-editor-in-chief?"

"Certainly!" said Tom Merry, who was not sorry to get out of the journey himself. "You can manage that all right."

And before afternoon school Kangaroo pedalled away, with a bundle of manuscript under his arm, and a peculiar grin on his face.

CHAPTER 21.

Bravo, Kangaroo!

THE rumour of a time-limit to the Head's offer turned out to be correct. There was a notice on the board the same day, informing St. Jim's generally that the offer of a new cricket bat to whosoever could send a ball from the ground through the window of the Head-master's study held good only till the end of the week. If it was not won by Saturday, the offer would be rescinded, and the sum of money equal to the cost of the prize would be contributed to the school clubs instead.

Needless to say, the limit put all the cricketers on their mettle.

The great batsmen of the Sixth slogged away on the pitch with untiring energy, and great was the destruction of glass.

But the Head's window remained intact.

Once, and only once, by a mighty swipe from Mr. Railton's bat, had a ball been sent through that window, and some of the young cricketers expressed an opinion that even Mr. Railton couldn't do it a second time.

At all events, it seemed pretty certain that none of the boys, senior or junior, could do it.

Even the mighty Kildare, even Darrel and Rushden, had to acknowledge that it was a little bit beyond them, unless they were favoured by luck.

That did not, however, prevent the juniors from pegging away. Wally was most anxious to secure that prize bat, to hang it up in the Third Form-room as an eternal testimony to the prowess of the Third. Kangaroo was still determined to bring the difficult hit off somehow, and Tom Merry and Blake and Figgins had not given up hope.

Tom Merry had other matters to think of on Saturday, however. After morning school, the copies of the "Weekly" were to be delivered, as usual, by the printer's cart at St. Jim's, and the arrival of the "Weekly" was always an affair of great interest to the juniors. For, although it was "Tom Merry's Weekly," it did not appear regularly every week, other interests sometimes supervening, and it had sometimes dropped for a fortnight or three weeks at a time. Blake, in a sarcastic moment, had even suggested that the title should be changed to "Tom Merry's Annual," a suggestion, however, that was frowned upon by the editorial staff.

And so when, after dinner, Kangaroo & Co. went down to the wickets, Tom Merry and his chums walked down to the gates to meet the printer's cart, and receive the big bundle of "Weeklies."

As was more usual than not, the copy had been sent in at the last possible moment, and Kangaroo had taken it upon himself to inform the printer that he needn't trouble to send any proofs, to save time. As it was not unknown for the proofs to knock about for a whole week before being corrected and sent back, Tom Merry had forgiven this assumption of authority on the part of his new sub-editor.

"Only you mustn't do it again," he said severely. "You ought to remember that I am chief and you are sub. You seem to be getting rather mixed on that point."

Kangaroo grinned.

"Never mind; you'll be pleased when you see the 'Weekly'!" he said.

Tom Merry remembered that remark as he strolled down to the gates on Saturday afternoon. There had been a curious glimmer in Kangaroo's eye as he spoke. And it had struck Tom since that the Cornstalk might have had some purpose of his own in preventing the proofs being sent in to the editorial office.

"I suppose he can't have been larking with the copy," Tom Merry remarked, as he turned the matter over in his mind.

"Larking with the copy!" said Lowther. "I'll jolly well lark with him if he's touched my 'Seaside Reveries'!"

"Or my 'Sonnets to a Gentle Lark'!" said Manners warmly.

"Or the photographic column!"

"Or my leading article," said Tom Merry thoughtfully. "I don't suppose, though, he would have nerve enough for that. More likely he's cut out some of Blake or Figgins's piffle, if he's been japing."

"Well, that wouldn't matter so much, as far as the mag.'s concerned; but it will mean a row whichever piffler he's left out."

"Hallo! Here's the cart!"

The Terrible Three received a big, heavy bundle, and carried it back between them to the School House. There was a shout from the cricket-field. Kangaroo was batting to the bowling of Clifton Dane, and he had knocked a ball through the branches of the big elm near the Head's window, bringing down a shower of leaves.

Careless of the cricket, the chums of the Shell hurried up to the study with their bundle, and it was unfastened on Tom Merry's table.

Fifty copies of the "Weekly" lay there, fresh printed, and the cover with the title looked just the same as usual. Tom Merry opened the first page, and gave a snort.

"Taken the first page for himself! I distinctly told him that my leading article was to go on the first page!"

The first page was headed "A Cornstalk's Impressions of England." The "impressions" were brief enough, consisting of only one line: "Pretty little place, but requires a microscope to get a good look at it!"

The rest of the page was blank, except for the footnote: "To be continued, when I have borrowed a microscope."

The Terrible Three looked at one another rather grimly.

"That's meant to be funny!" said Lowther. "Turn over!"

Tom Merry turned over.

Then the Terrible Three gave a simultaneous roar.

The next page was blank!

Save for the heading "Tom Merry's Weekly" along the top of the page, there was nothing to soil the purity of the paper.

Dazed, the three turned the pages over, hurriedly, anxiously.

The same blankness met their view on every page!

It was not till they came to the final page that anything printed met their eye, and then it was the following brief notice:

"Notice to our readers! The new sub-editor-in-chief has decided to leave out all the piffle this week!"

That was all.

They laid the magazine on the table, and looked at one another. Then Tom Merry picked up a stump, Lowther an Indian club, and Manners a dog-whip. With these weapons they turned to the door, Tom Merry carrying a copy of the "Weekly" in his left hand. They passed the chums of No. 6 in the passage. Tom Merry held up the copy of the "Weekly" without a word. The Fourth-Formers read it, and gasped.

"Wait a minute for us," said Blake, in a strained voice.

"Yaas, wathah!"

The four went into their study, and came out with cricket-stumps in their hands. In serious array they marched downstairs, and met Figgins & Co. on the steps of the School House. The New House juniors were coming to get their copies of the paper.

"Got the 'Weekly'?" asked Figgins.

"Look!"

Figgins looked, and gasped.

"The—tho cheeky boulder! Wait a tick for me!"

Figgins darted into the hall, and returned with three walking-sticks. At such a moment there was no time to stop and consult the owners. The New House Co., armed for the fray, marched down to the cricket-ground.

The humorous sub-editor saw them coming, and he knew what it meant; but with superb nerve he went on batting. The avengers marched straight on to the pitch.

"Stop that!" shouted Tom Merry. "We're going to lay you!"

The last ball was coming down, and Kangaroo slogged it. The next moment he lifted up his bat to use it as a weapon of self-defence, but at that moment there was a wild roar.

Crash!

"The window!"

"Hurrah!"

"Kangaroo takes the cake!"

Noble looked round in astonishment. In the middle of a pane of the Head's window appeared a jagged hole.

Dr. Holmes was in his study at that moment, speaking to Mr. Selby on the subject of broken windows. Mr. Selby was in an annoyed frame of mind, and showed it. The Head was pacifying him.

"I have limited the extent of the offer to this week, Mr. Selby," the Head was saying. "If the prize is not won to-day, I—Dear me!"

The cricket ball crashed through the window.

Mr. Selby jumped, as if he had been shot. Dr. Holmes jumped, too. A shade of annoyance crossed his face; he suspected another little mistake like Skimpole's. The ball smashed a hole through the glass, and crashed on the table. It bounced off to the mantelpiece, and there was a second crash as it landed fairly upon the face of a marble clock.

"Dear me!" said the bewildered Head. "I—I really—"

He rushed to the window.

From the cricket-ground an excited crowd was rushing, shouting and cheering. In their midst, borne high upon the shoulders of Clifton Dane and Tom Merry, floated the Australian junior.

For that splendid hit from the wicket had turned away the wrath of the Editor and sub-editors of the "Weekly." In the enthusiasm of the moment they forgave the little joke of the Cornstalk.

"Boys!" gasped the Head. "What—"

"Hurrah!"

"Kangaroo's won it!"

"What! Was that ball—"

"Knocked from the cricket-field, sir!" shouted Tom Merry. "Honest Injun, sir!"

"Bless my soul!"

"Yaas, wathah, sir! I was goin' to give Kangaroo a fearful thwashin', but, undah the cires, I shall ovahlook his diswespectful conduct! I wegard him as a gweat man!"

"Hurrah for Kangaroo!"

"Bravo!"

"Bless my soul!" said the Head again. "I—I must say that—that considerable damage has been done in my study—a—very regrettable amount of damage; but I am glad the prize has been won! I shall certainly present the prize bat to Noble, and I congratulate him with all my heart!"

And the juniors cheered again, cheering the Head this time; and then they carried Noble round the quad in a triumphal procession. New House and School House, Fourth Form and Third Form and Shell, rejoiced alike. Arthur Augustus beamed upon his study-mates, with whom he had been on terms of such estrangement, forgetting everything else in this hour of triumph. For the prize had been won by a junior—where the seniors had tried and failed—and it was a time when all minor differences could be sunk.

Kangaroo had won the prize, and he had won it at a lucky moment, too; for, but for that fortunate occurrence, there would certainly have been a very warm time that afternoon for Tom Merry's sub-editor.

THE END.

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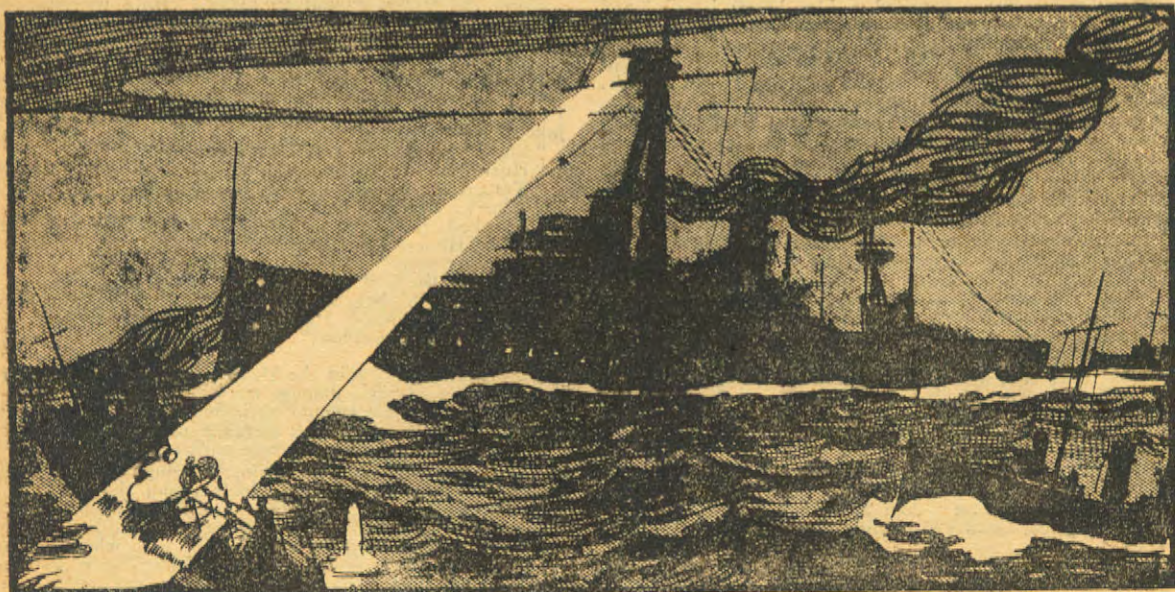


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Sam and Stephen Villiers, two cadets of Greyfriars School, by a combination of luck and pluck render valuable service to the British Army during the great German invasion. They are appointed special scouts to the Army, which is forced back on London by Von Krantz the German commander.

At the time when this instalment opens, Sam and Stephen, with their friend Lieutenant Cavendish, R.N., are with the British forces on Sheppey Isle. Colonel Blake and Vincent have driven the Germans back into Sheerness, and are preparing to attack them there. Stephen is just remarking that the Germans have no hope of help except from the seaward, when the thunder of guns breaks out from the direction of the sea.

(Now go on with the Story.)

The Beaching of the Prinz.

"Hallo!" said Cavendish. "That sounds as if my little lot were hard at it. The Germans are gettin' it by water and land!"

"Let's go an' see!" exclaimed Stephen. "There'll be nothing doing here for hours. Vincent an' Blake'll have to sit down in front of Sheerness an' wait. Come on!"

He led the way impetuously, and the others followed. It was on the sea that the key to victory lay, and they were eager to know what was happening. The sound of firing grew louder and fiercer every moment.

"My place is on the Orion," said Cavendish. "That's where I ought to be now; but as far as I can see, there's no gettin' to her, even if—Great James, they're at it! Come on there, lads!"

The shore was reached, as he spoke, by one of the descents between the earthy cliffs, and the bluejackets came scrambling down after the boys and the engineer. One glance showed that a stiff naval fight was in progress.

"It's the cruiser squadrons!" cried Sam.

Far out in the deep water, the big armoured cruisers were hammering away within a mile of each other, British and German, steaming to and fro at full speed, the flashes of their great guns showing vividly over the grey sea.

"They've chased the German squadron in from the north—"

ward!" exclaimed Cavendish. "My aunt, but I wish I were there! There's no sign of the Orion, though. Aren't the Germans gettin' it?"

Hot as the fight was, it was difficult as yet to say for certain which way it was going. Closer in shore were the smaller cruisers of the second class—five German and four British, slamming at each other with all their batteries. The nearest of all, the Tavy, was rather badly hit, and three German torpedo-boats were rushing in to finish her.

"Great Scott! Will they get her?" exclaimed the first gunner of the Orion. "My old shipmate Tom Firr's behind her forr'ad big gun, or ought to be. It's a near thing!"

The group on the beach watched with tense anxiety. A destroyer was tearing along from the eastward to help the Tavy, whose guns were plying furiously. One of the German torpedo-boats was struck and sunk, and the second blew up as a shell reached her boilers. The third, swerving aside as she fired her torpedo, was hit twice by the destroyer's 12-pounders, and made for the Sheppey beach, wobbling and awaying badly.

"They're goin' to beach her!" cried Stephen.

"Yes, the beauties!" exclaimed Sam. "She ain't sinkin', but her steerin' gear's gone wrong, an' they're afraid of her being captured. There she takes it!" he added eagerly, as the German torpedo-boat grounded heavily and stuck fast, out of the destroyer's reach, not two hundred yards away from where the boys stood, while her crew became suddenly busy about her amidships. "What'll they do, Cavendish? Oh, I see! They're going to blow her up, so she shouldn't fall into British hands."

Cavendish, who had been watching her intently, gave a shout.

"By gum, we'll stop that, boys!" he cried. "We'll grab her for the British Navy! Who comes with me?"

"I'm there for one!" cried the engineer. And the boys were already racing down the beach. With a cheer, the bluejackets put their best feet foremost. In a very short time they were all splashing out through the shallow water towards the stranded vessel.

The torpedo-boat's crew, who were hastily preparing to blow up their craft, turned from their work, and opened fire on the attacking party with revolvers. Waist deep, Cavendish and the little force made their way swiftly to the craft's side, two of the sailors dropping before they reached her, while a third was wounded, and a bullet tore

away the lobe of Stephen's ear, but did not make him wince.

"Board her!" shouted Sam, springing up to catch the vessel's rail. "Quick—before they blow her to blazes! Once on deck, and she's ours!"

How the Prince Put to Sea.

The rest was a blind, bewildering, hand-to-hand struggle, that stamped and raged over the torpedo-boat's sloping steel decks from stern to bow. Pistols cracked, stretchers were brandished, and man after man went down.

Two German sailors rushed at Sam the moment he gained the deck. One doubled up and fell at a snap-shot from the revolver, the other dealt a swinging blow at him with a sheath-knife, which he barely parried with his left arm. Next moment the man was stretched upon the deck by a blow from a heavy wooden stick in the hands of the engineer, and Sam had to tackle a big torpedo-coxswain, who made a bad shot at him with a big Service revolver. The struggle was a perfect melee for some minutes.

Man after man of the Orion's bluejackets leaped nimbly aboard, though three of them were shot down in the water before they reached the vessel. Stephen scrambled up by the stern soon after his brother, and saw one man—the second in command, a torpedo-gunner—leaving the fight and hurrying down through the hatch. The boy guessed the danger at once, and rushed after him, unslinging his carbine as he went.

"Drive 'em up into the bows, you chaps!" he shouted, at the top of his voice. "Keep 'em away from the hatch!"

He dived below after the gunner, and found him in the main cabin, stooping hurriedly over a heap of tins and gun-cotton cakes that had been piled upon the floor, ready to blow the vessel up. It was plain the gunner meant to explode the heap, either by fire or fuse, and Stephen was only just in time.

The gunner sprang up with a shout as he heard the boy behind him, and sprang round, pistol in hand, to face him. The sharp report of Stephen's carbine echoed through the cabin instantly as he took a quick snap-shot from the elbow, and the German collapsed on the pile of gun-cotton.

Stephen pulled him off, hastily but gingerly laid him aside, and made a rapid search to see if any fuse had been lighted.

"I think she's safe for the present," he muttered thankfully; and, bolting the door in the forward bulkhead so that nobody could reach the place from the fore-hatch, he left the dead gunner where he lay, and regained the deck.

The fight was going strongly in favour of the boarding-party. The engineer, though armed only with his heavy stick, was fighting like a madman, with a gash on the side of his face, and two Germans had gone down under his blows like ninepins. Sam, whose pistol was empty, was grappling with the big coxswain, bare-handed, and the German lieutenant, mad with rage, had singled out Cavendish. Both the young officers had their swords out, and Stephen thought his friend was gone when he saw the German drive in a lunge that nearly ran him through the body. Cavendish just turned the blade aside, and the next moment the torpedo-boat's commander dropped with a cloven skull.

The Germans, having lost half their number, and seeing their leader down, shouted for quarter, which was given them at once.

"Drop your weapons!" ordered Cavendish, in their own tongue, and all were stacked on the fore-deck at once.

"Stephen, is there anyone below?"

"No one alive," replied Stephen. "There's a big pile of explosives that ought to be doused overboard at once, I think, or made safe."

He ran aft to the poop-staff and hauled down the German flag, at which a cheer was raised by the bluejackets. The Prince was saved, and they were masters of her.

"What about the prisoners?" said Sam, who had let go the big coxswain.

"We can't be bothered to keep them," said Cavendish. "I want to overhaul this vessel. Let 'em go, and if Blake's men like to take charge of 'em, they can."

He turned to the defeated German crew, who stood silent and sullen on the fore-deck.

"Overboard with you, and wade ashore!" he said. "You've fought a good fight, and I don't want to hold you prisoners. If you can get clear away you're welcome to, for all I care. If our troops catch you that's your lookout. Any of you who are wounded can go to our ambulance section back of the troops, and they'll tend you. Skedaddle!"

The Germans scuttled over the side, and were only too glad to wade ashore. They soon disappeared, and all was activity on board the torpedo-boat, to ascertain what damage she had. She was hard and fast ashore, and crippled as well by the British shells, but she was a prize,

and the first they had taken, for prizes are scarce in the iron navies of to-day. Cavendish hurried below with Stephen, who told him what he had found.

"Well done, youngster!" said Cavendish. "I wonder if that chap would have blown us all up, an' himself as well? He's dead, poor beggar, anyhow. Here, two of you, lift him up on deck. Bear a hand here to shift this stuff," he added, striding over to the pile of explosives. "We'll save and stow what's useful, and dump the rest into the water."

Underneath the pile, surrounded with gunpowder and nitro-cotton, was the bulk of the packing of a torpedo, and it was evident the capture was only made just in time.

"There'd have been precious little of this ship left if that arrangement had been exploded!" said Cavendish, as the stuff was rapidly re-stowed, and a good deal of it jettisoned.

He helped to put this matter straight, as it was the chief and only danger, and then hurried on deck, where the bluejackets were busy clearing up.

"Fit that collapsible canvas boat together," said Cavendish. "Ferry the dead ashore, and lay them under the cliffs. The decks must be cleared. Watson, set the hose going and wash down. We must see what can be done."

"We've won her!" said Sam, binding up a knife-cut on his left fore-arm. "Just tie the ends of this cloth, Steve, will you? She's fairly ours! Look seaward there—how the cruisers are going it!"

The noise and thudding of the fight at sea drew their attention now that their own struggle was over, and Cavendish and the boys, standing on the after-deck, watched eagerly. The cruiser-squadrons, both British and German, were still in the very thick of it, but the smoke of bursting shells, that hung like a pall round each ship, made it hard to see how things were going. Three ships were on the bottom, as their steel masts and funnel tops proved, for the sea was shallow, and there was no great depth even under those afloat. The thunder of the guns was continuous as the fighting monsters steamed to and fro, pouring their hail of death into each other at short battle range.

"We're on top already!" cried Cavendish, after a short survey through a pair of glasses he had found in the cabin of the Prince. "The big ships out in the deep are at it hot and strong; but there are two Germans out of action, and a third that can barely hold on. An' two of those that are sunk near us are Germans as well. The third's ours, though; it's the little Severn, I think. She's an old vessel, an' must have fought a grand fight to stand up to the new German ships so long."

"The smaller class closer in are doin' well, too," observed Sam eagerly. "Phew! But it must be hot work aboard 'em!"

Those who think or are told that a naval battle is settled in a matter of minutes would have had their eyes opened that day. The fight had raged for over an hour, and was going on with dogged, relentless force. Many of the ships were rent and battered almost to pieces, but still they kept afloat and worked their guns. The Germans were suffering most, for the deadly precision of the British fire, concentrated on their weakest parts, told heavily.

The battle was cut almost clearly in two divisions. The large armoured or protected cruisers were fighting on the broad tract of deep water beyond the Kentish flats, while the divisions of second-class cruisers were manoeuvring in the shallower water among the banks, where their superior knowledge of the range of shoals served the British well, for two German ships were ashore already, stuck fast on the hidden sands a mile or more from land, and in a bad way. But the Germans were still in strong force, and were three ships to the good, for several British cruisers were a hundred miles to the north with the main fleet.

"It'll last a while yet," said Cavendish; "there's no fight for either side. They'll hammer it out till one side's smashed up. It's the biggest fight I've seen yet—an' we're out of it."

"If we could only get this steam-pot off, an' join in!" said Stephen regretfully.

"Well, why not?" said Sam, with sudden eagerness. "She's not altogether wrecked, is she? What a game if we could strike a blow for our side with her!"

Cavendish stared at him, and then glanced round the torpedo-boat. Her decks still red with the fight, and canting over at an angle, her stern almost out of the water, and the shot-marks all over her, she looked little like ever taking the sea again, unless after a week in dry-dock.

"They'd never have beached her, I suppose, if she hadn't been done for," suggested Stephen.

"That was to save her being caught by the destroyer," said Sam quickly.

"Dash it all, can't we try? There's nothing else for us to do here, an' waitin' to look on at a great fight like that, with our hands in our pockets, gives me the —"

"I'm thinking," said the Scots engineer, coming up from below, where he had been foraging about on his own account.

since the end of the fight, "this prize of yours is in no such a very bad way, Mr. Cavendish. She's not making any water, her plates are sound, an' there's nothing wrong wi' the engines."

"By gum! But the steering-gear!" exclaimed Cavendish, hurrying aft to the transom and looking over. "She was as lame as a winged duck when she came ashore—they'd no command over her!"

"I was peering at that just now," said the engineer, pointing at the rudder, part of which could be seen. "You'll observe, she's got the ground amidships, an' her stern is cocked up, givin' a view. There's one o' the rudder-chains gone, an' maybe the plate a wee thing buckled, but that's all."

"D'you mean to say it can be righted now?" cried Cavendish.

"Havers man, I'd rig a staging over the stern and fix that up in thirty minutes or less," said the engineer. "Say the word, and I'll do it, unless you think we'd be better employed ashore wi' the troops."

"She's fixed nearly high and dry, though!" said Stephen.

"The tide's coming in like anything!" exclaimed Sam. "There's two feet more water already. If we can lighten her she'll float by the time Mac has got her in trim. I say, Bob, let's try it!"

"You bet we will, if she can steam, and has a torpedo that can be used!" said Cavendish, still more eagerly. "Fire away at that rudder, and get it fixed if you can! Lay aft here, men, and rig that staging. What about the fires?"

"Steam's still in her," said the engineer, diving below and reappearing with several tools from the store. "Bid four of your deck-hands go below and stoke like old Nick! Get the pressure-gauges up again, an' I'll have her ready."

"My aunt! What a bit of luck running across this chap!" said Sam, as they darted off to bear a hand below. "He's a first-class engineer!"

"Can't beat the Scots at that," said Stephen. "Did you see him walking into those Germans, with nothing but a stick, too? I'll bet he'll run those engines single-handed, with a sailor or two to stoke for him. How goes it, Bob—can she fight?"

"She's goin' to, if it busts the lot of us!" said Cavendish, who had been making a rapid examination of the vessel's tubes and gear with two of his men. "There are three torpedoes left, and though they don't work like ours, I'll bet we have the hang of them enough to send 'em going! I've got one of the best torpedo-guns of the Orion here, thank goodness, and if there's any way of driving a war-head home at one of those Germans, we'll find it between us. But don't let's count our chickens before they're hatched—it's still odds we don't get off here. Meanwhile, let's work like niggers, and get this crippled tin-pot in fighting trim. Bear a hand to jettison coal; we'll keep no more than'll see us through the next three hours."

Sam and Stephen took their stations on deck, and for the next half-hour the stranded torpedo-boat teemed with bustle and hard work. Every man had his job, and did it swiftly and surely.

Two of the bluejackets were toiling to get the guns into trim. The forward six-pounder had been half dismantled, and the handymen of the Orion had a job to get it fit for use again on its bearings.

Cavendish and the torpedo-men were at the fore and deck tubes, rapidly accustoming themselves to the different details of the German plan. The young naval lieutenant showed wonderful quickness in mastering them, and soon had everything in order. Meanwhile, the canny engineer, as cool as a cucumber, was sitting in a staging-slung over the turtle-back aft, and hammering away at the bent rudder-plate. He had already fixed a new chain.

His brothers were new to the science of doctoring

a sick ship, and so they were put to unskilled labour, at which they worked with a will. The coal was sent up from the bunkers in baskets, rigged by a derrick, and they swung it up and shot the coal overboard as fast as the baskets could be filled. Others were dismantling everything of weight that could possibly be done without for the time, and dumping it overboard to lighten the ship.

"Will she be able to handle and fight with her trim so much altered?" said Stephen, as they toiled away at the pulley and baskets. "I should have thought she'd be rolling light, with all this weight out."

"It'll be a bit awkward, but you bet Cavendish knows what he's doing," returned Sam. "The great thing is to get her off, and it can't be done unless she's lightened. Work away! By jingo, she's nearly afloat now, or I'm a German!"

The torpedo-boat was now upright. The tide had risen several feet. The slope of her decks was noticed no longer, and her stern was level. The engineer had left the staging some time ago, and had gone to the engine-room with three bluejackets.

"Easy with the coal, there!" called Cavendish, coming up through the fore-hatch. "We can't spare any more. By Jove, I believe she'll come off now!" He shouted below to the engineer: "Got a head of steam, Mac?"

"Ay, all she'll carry!" came the answer.

"Run away an anchor astern!" ordered Cavendish. "All hands tail on the hawser! Now, try her!"

The screw began to revolve, slowly at first, and then briskly, hard astern. All hands on deck hauled with all their weight upon the hawser leading to the kedge-anchor that had been paid off.

The torpedo-boat did not budge. They eased, and tried again.

"She feels it! She's moving!" said Sam.

Once more they hauled, and the engines put forth all their power. There was a grind under the keel, a sliding heave, and suddenly the vessel drew clear of the sand's grip and shot astern rapidly, all afloat fore and aft.

A cheer went up, and Cavendish, jumping to the helm, rang the engines to half speed and let her go some distance stern first, till the water deepened considerably. Then he swung her round in a short circle, and away she headed seaward. There was an anxious time while he tested her steering-powers. She was rather unsteady, being so light on the water, and steered still a trifle wildly in answer to her helm, but it was soon seen there was plenty of use in her.

"She goes, then?" said the engineer, popping his head up through the hatch.

"She can handle an' fight, too!" cried Cavendish exultingly. "Mac, you're an angel!"

"Good old Scotland!" said Stephen, as the vessel gathered way and went tearing over the seas. "Now, where are we bound? How's the fight going?"

So full had everybody's hands been during the past half-hour that none had had time to watch the progress of the naval battle. Now it was seen that the first-class British cruisers out at sea were getting much the best of it, while nearer to Sheppey, the smaller ships were still fighting hard, but with the advantage all on the side of the White Ensign. Two German cruisers, away to the eastward, were trying to make off, their guns out of action, the British ships following and hammering them to a standstill.

Closer still, however, the smart cruiser *Tees*, of the "River" class, was in much worse case than her sisters. She had stood up to two German ships and sunk one of them, but had sustained much damage, and her larger guns were out of action.

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