

TOM MERRY and Co. GRAMMARIANS

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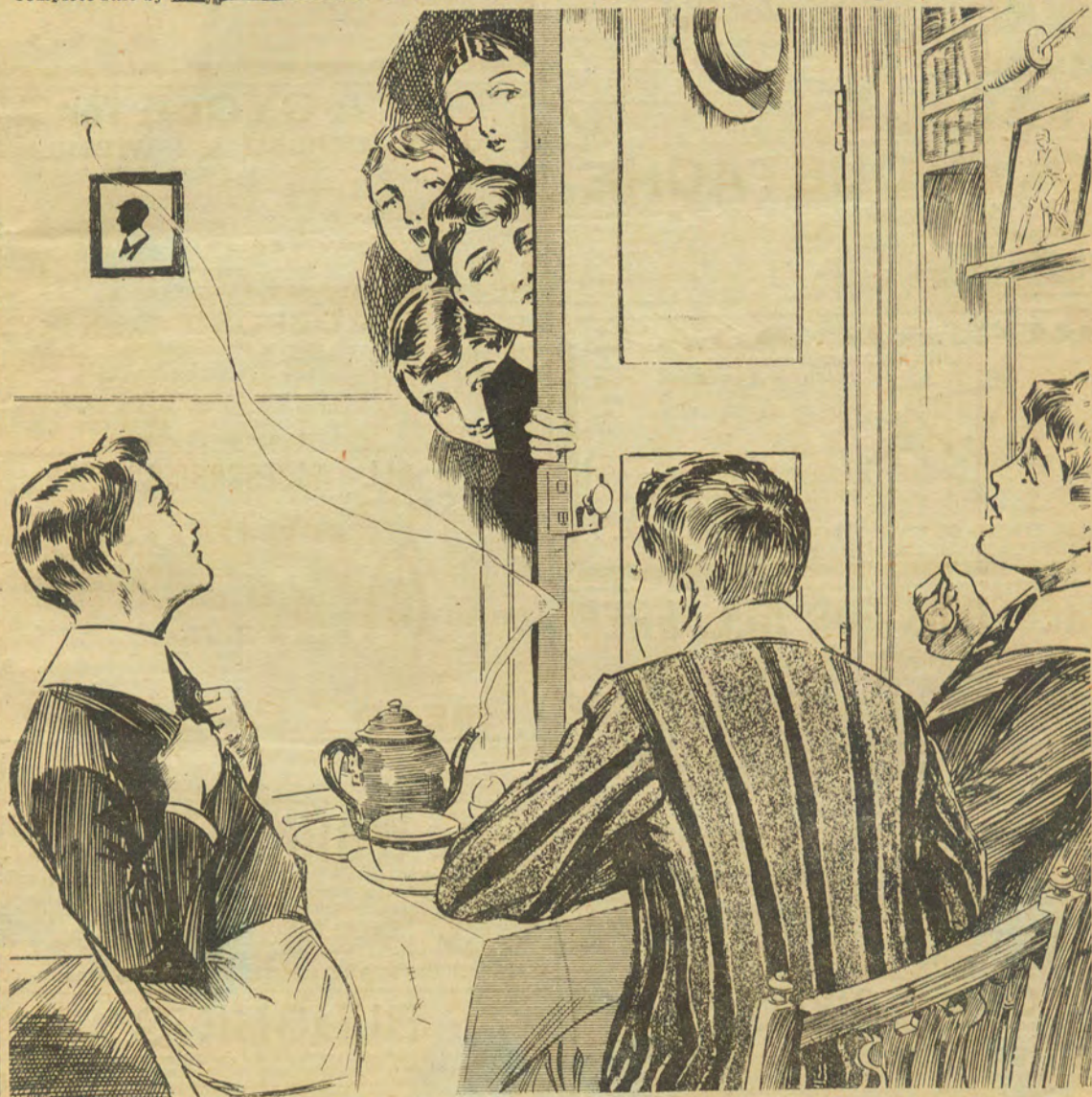
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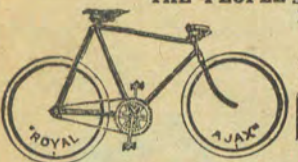
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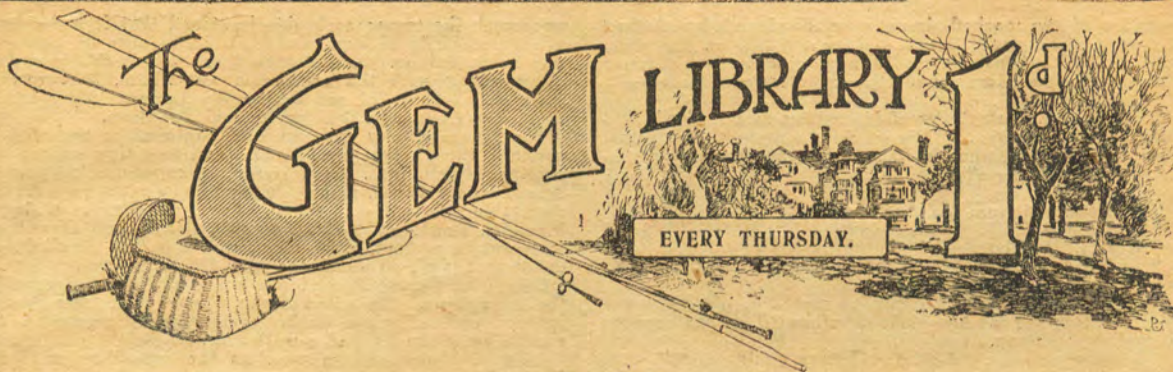
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"PLAYED OUT!"

A Splendid Tale of
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A Splendid, Extra Long, Complete School Tale of Tom Merry & Co.
By **MARTIN CLIFFORD.**

CHAPTER 1.

D'Arcy is Kept Waiting.

ARTHUR AUGUSTUS D'ARCY came into Study No. 6, in the School House at St. Jim's, looking a perfect picture in white flannels, with a bat under his arm. Blake, Herries, and Digby, the chums of the Fourth, were talking somewhat excitedly, and they did not cease or look round as D'Arcy entered.

"I say, deah boys—"

The dear boys did not seem to hear. Arthur Augustus let the end of his bat slip down with a heavy clump on the floor.

Then Jack Blake looked round.

"Hallo, what's that row? That you, Gussy?"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Well, run away and play." And Jack Blake turned to Digby and Herries again, and went on: "You see, kids—"

"Weally, Blake—"

"You see, kids, it's the old story. Ever since that chap Merry came to St. Jim's—"

"Weally, deah boys—"

"Ever since he came, there's been something of this sort.

I don't say that Tom Merry hasn't his points—he has—but—"

"I twust, Blake, that you have not forgotten—"

"Hallo, are you still there, Gussy?"

"Yaas, I am still here, Blake," said Arthur Augustus, with a great deal of dignity. "I twust you have not forgotten that we are playin' the New House juniors this aftahnoon, and that it is nearly time for the kick-off—I mean nearly time for stumps to be pitched."

"By Jove," said Jack Blake, "so it is! Run away and tell 'em I'm coming."

"I wefuse to do anythin' of the sort. If you don't come down immediately to the cwicket-field, we shall have Tom Mewwy comin' for you. Pway follow me at once, deah boys."

"That's all right, Gussy; there's heaps of time. As I was saying, Tom Merry has his points, and he can play cricket—and I've seen him kick a footer straight—but when it comes to taking the post of leader among us chaps—"

"Then it's time to call halt," said Digby

And Herries nodded assent.

"You see, it's not only our little House rows with the New House at St. Jim's," went on Blake apparently

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No. 72 (New Series.)

unaware of the marked impatience displayed by Arthur Augustus, as he stood, first on one leg and then on the other, waiting, "it's when we come to dealing with the Grammar School that Tom Merry shows the enormous smallness—"

"The which?"

"The enormous smallness of his powers as a leader," said Blake, with emphasis. "It's on such occasions that I feel very strongly that what is wanted is a leader chosen from the Fourth Form—"

"Hear, hear!"

"And selected from his study—"

"Hear, hear!"

"Weally, deah boys—"

"And so," went on Blake, "I've been thinking seriously

"Blake, I wegard this discussion as out of place when it is almost time for the first oval to be bowled. I shall wufuse to wait any longah. I'm off."

"I know you are, old chap—off your giddy onion."

"If we were not about to engage in a contest with the New House," said D'Arcy, with a withering look at his chum, "I should wegard it as impewative to give you a feahful thwashin' for that wibald wemark, Blake."

"Therefore," went on Blake, still looking at Digby and Herries, and exasperatingly unconscious of D'Arcy's wrath—"therefore, I consider—"

"I shall wufuse to wait any longah for you wottahs!" said Arthur Augustus; and he turned to stride from the study.

As he strode from the doorway in great state, there was a pattering of rapid feet in the passage, and Tom Merry, of the Shell, came rushing into the study.

They met in the doorway with a terrific impact.

"Ow!" gasped Arthur Augustus.

His hat crashed on the floor, and Arthur Augustus followed it, assuming a sitting posture, with a prolonged gasp like escaping steam.

Tom Merry reeled back, and caught at the doorpost to save himself.

"You—you ass!" he gasped.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Blake.

"Bai Jove! You uttah ass, Mewwy! What do you mean by wushin' into the study like that just as I was comin' out?"

"You shrieking duffer! What do you mean by coming out of the study just as I was rushing in like that?" demanded Tom Merry, with equal indignation.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—"

"I came to tell you fellows to come down to the ground," exclaimed Tom Merry. "You ought to be down there by now. Figgins & Co. are there, and I want you to go in first, Blake."

"I'm coming."

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy staggered to his feet. He was very red and breathless, and his beautiful flannels had collected a certain quantity of dust. He dusted them carefully with his handkerchief.

"I wegard you as a clumsy beast, Mewwy," he said, in measured tones.

"Thanks! Are you ready?"

"I considah you an uttah ass!"

"Good! Come on."

"I look upon you as a barbwous wottah!"

"Right-ho! Let's get out."

D'Arcy gave it up. There was no disturbing the cheerful equanimity of the junior captain of the School House. D'Arcy picked up his hat, and followed Tom Merry, and the chums of Study No. 6 followed him.

Outside, in the wide quadrangle, there was a blaze of sunshine. Manners and Lowther, Tom Merry's chums in the Shell Form, were waiting for him at the door.

They went down to the junior ground together.

On that bright sunny afternoon—a Wednesday, and a half-holiday at St. Jim's—nearly all the school had turned out for cricket.

The Sixth were playing away, with Kildare, the captain of the school. The Fifth had a match on at home with a team from Rylcombe. The playing-fields at St. Jim's were of great extent, for St. Jim's was an athletic school. The junior ground was in excellent condition. On that afternoon a regular fixture of the junior Forms was coming off—a match between the School House and the New House.

The rivalry between the two Houses at St. Jim's found its keenest expression on the playing-fields. Which House led was a question it would not be easy to answer; and each House answered it in its own way. Statistics, it is said, may be made to prove anything, and certainly Tom Merry worked out a goal average in favour of the School House, and Figgins worked one out in favour of the New House; so that, if their figures were correct, both Houses were ahead as far as football was concerned. In cricket it

was much the same; each side imagined that it had taken a huge majority of runs, and that the balance of victories was in its favour. And though there was certainly something wrong with the arithmetic somewhere, that was a mere detail that did not bother the juniors. They knew they were right, and that was enough for them.

The House rivalry gave an added interest to the cricket matches, though the game itself was interesting enough to healthy, athletic lads. Tom Merry was captain of the junior School House eleven, and it included in its ranks such really creditable players as Blake, Herries, Digby, D'Arcy, Manners, Lowther, Reilly, Kerruish, Smith, and Harrison. Tom was very proud of his team, and he hadn't the slightest doubt that it would knock the New House eleven sky-high.

Only Figgins, the New House junior captain, had exactly the same views. He led an eleven selected from New House juniors, each of whom looked upon the House match as something in the light of a walk-over.

Most of the cricketers were on the ground when Tom Merry & Co. reached it. They were mostly busily talking, but they were not talking cricket. As in Study No. 6, the talk ran on the subject of the Grammar School. The Grammarians had lately been showing what Figgins termed the "cloven hoof," and the general opinion was that it was time that the Grammarians were put in their place. Only the task of putting them there was not an easy one.

But Tom Merry's arrival was the signal to get to business. The stumps had been pitched, and the players were ready. Figgins, the long-legged chief of the New House juniors, strolled over to Tom Merry.

"We're waiting," he remarked.

"Right-ho! We're ready. I had to go and look for these Fourth-Form kids," explained Tom Merry.

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—"

"No time to talk now, Gussy. Head or tail, Figgy?"

"Head!"

"Tail! We bat first."

Figgins whistled, and then ordered his men to their places in the field. The ball was given to Fatty Wynn, who had lately developed wonderful powers as a bowler.

Kerr was keeping wicket.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy nudged Tom Merry.

"I suppose, Tom Mewwy, that you intend to open the innings with me?"

"Something wrong with your supposing-machine, then," said Tom Merry pleasantly. "I'm going to put Blake in first, with Lowther."

"Of course, I do not wish to dictate to a cwicket captain on the field of play, but it is a vewy good wule to open an innings with the best playah, in ordah to encouage the side."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I uttably fail to see any cause for wibald laughtah in that wemark, Tom Mewwy. As the best batsman in the School House side, I—"

"Oh, come off, old chap!" said Monty Lowther.

"Weally, Lowthah—"

"Of course," said Lowther, "there are some things in cricket you can do as well as any fellow in the Sixth."

D'Arcy looked pleased.

"I am vewy glad to see that personal feelin' does not obscure your judgment, as it seems to do with Tom Mewwy, Lowthah."

"What-ho!" said Lowther heartily. "You can do some things as well as Kildare himself."

"Well, weally, I—"

"Such as putting the figures up on the score-board," went on Lowther blandly.

"Lowthah—"

"Or scoring in the tent—"

"Weally—"

"Or oiling a cricket-bat, or setting up stumps."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You can do all those things, though I must admit that you can't bat or bowl or field."

"I wufuse to listen to these silly wemarks, Lowthah. It only remains for Tom Mewwy to say whethah I am to go in first. Yes or no?"

"No," said Tom Merry cheerfully.

"Then the wespensibility of a bad beginnin' wests entirely on you, Tom Mewwy. I wash my hands of it."

"Good!" said the junior cricket captain, apparently quite undisturbed. "Get on your batting-gloves, you two. The game's waiting for you."

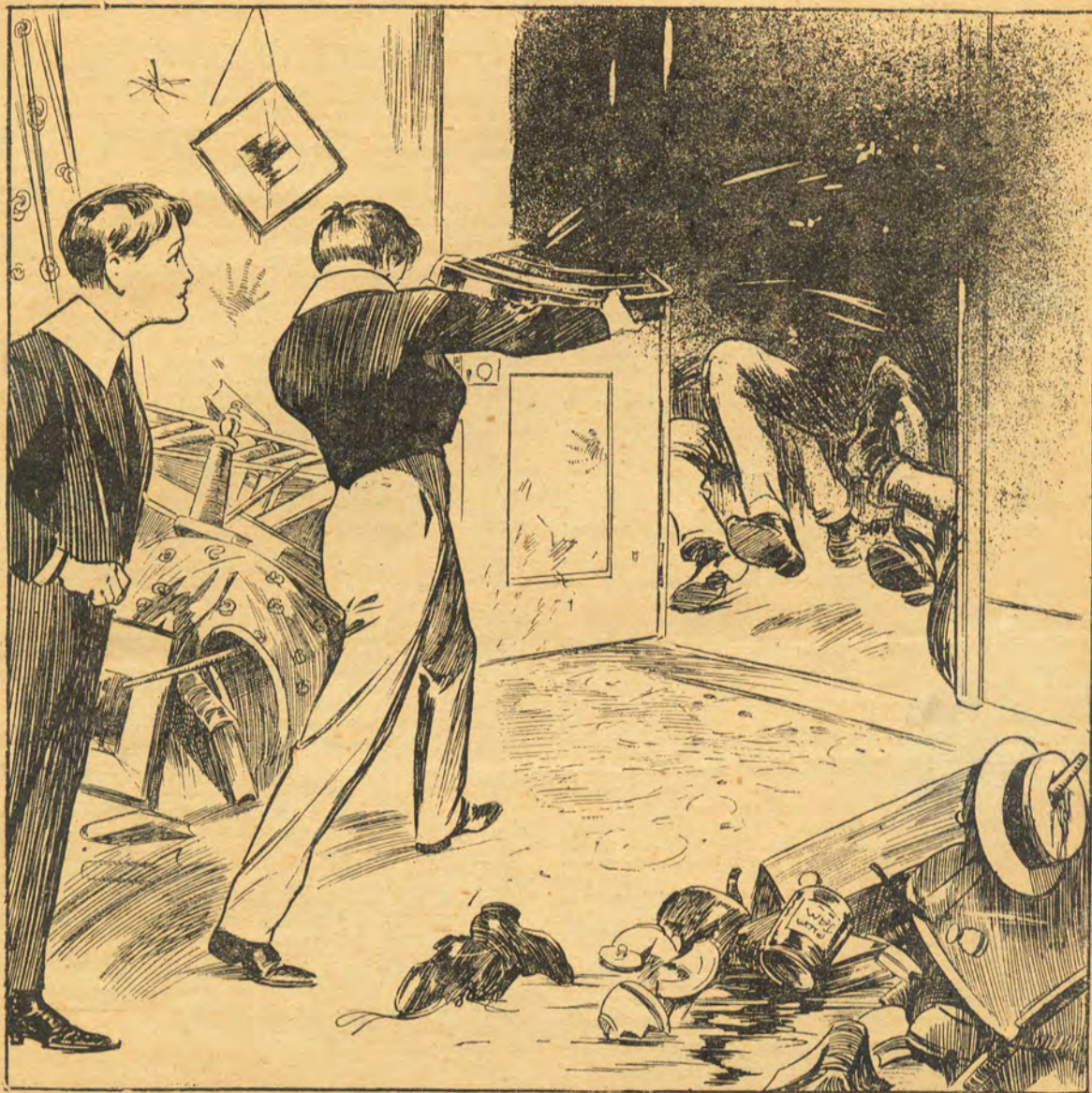
And Blake and Lowther went out to the wickets.

ANSWERS

NEXT WEEK:
Tom Merry & Co. Make Merry.

"PLAYED OUT!"

A Long, Complete Tale,
By Martin Clifford.



Lowther caught up the ashpans from under the grate. The door opened, and the ashes flew in a blinding cloud through the air, and there was a fearful yell. "My hat!" gasped Tom Merry. "It's Figgins & Co.!"

CHAPTER 2.

The House Match.

FATTY WYNN grasped the round red ball, and backed away from the bowler's wicket. Wynn—the Welsh partner in Figgins & Co.—was a fair batsman, but he had his faults in the field. He had so much weight to carry about that he could not be expected to dodge about after a cricket-ball like Kerr, the slim Scotsman, for instance, or the long-legged Figgins. But Wynn had taken to bowling this season like a duck to water. Figgins and Kerr had watched him at practice with a blissful anticipation of working off his skill in the House match, to the destruction of Tom Merry & Co.

The batsmen were not looking for anything dangerous. They had heard about Wynn's form; but, as Blake said, the New House chaps were always blowing their own trumpets in one way or another. The batsmen confidently expected to knock Wynn's bowling all over the field, and Monty Lowther, who was to receive the first over, took his middle with a superior smile upon his face.

Arthur Augustus stood outside the tent with his hand resting on his bat, and an ominous look upon his face. The recklessness of Tom Merry in declining to open the innings with him appalled the swell of the School House. He didn't want the batsmen to go out with a collection of duck's eggs,

but his expression showed pretty plainly that he expected something of the sort.

So did the New House fellows who were collected round the ground, looking on with suppressed glee.

As Fatty Wynn backed away to get room for his run, there were ejaculations and cries of encouragement from his House-fellows.

"Go it, Fatty!"

"Put your beef into it!"

"Mind your eye!"

"Buck up!"

Fatty Wynn took no notice. He looked neither to the right nor to the left. He took a little jerky run, turned himself into a sort of catherine-wheel, and the ball whizzed from his hand.

Monty Lowther played forward to it. How was he to know that Fatty Wynn had put a screw on that ball which Roberts or Stevenson might have envied on a billiard-table? In explaining the matter afterwards, Lowther worked it out to his own satisfaction, if to nobody else's, that the ball oughtn't to have slipped under his bat in that way, according to all the known laws of mechanics. All the same, it did slip under the bat; there was a click as it whipped his middle stump out of the ground.

"How's that?"

It was a roar from the New House fellows.

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A Long, Complete Tale.
By Martin Clifford.

NEXT WEEK:
Tom Merry & Co. Make Merry.

"PLAYED OUT!"

And Lefevre, of the Fifth, who was umpiring the match for the juniors, grinned, and said with Spartan brevity:

"Out!"

"Bai Jove!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

Monty Lowther looked at the wicket, which had a curiously toothless look, and then put his bat under his arm, and with slow steps sought the seclusion of the tent. And Gore, of the Shell, asked, as he went, in a decidedly audible voice, the market price of duck's eggs, and Mellish, of the Fourth, ventured the opinion that they were cheap that afternoon.

Lowther did not reply. He hid his blushes in the tent, and a big round nought on the board showed the score of the School House side, so far.

D'Arcy looked at Tom Merry. Surely now was the time for the captain to send in the best junior batsman in the School House.

But Tom Merry did not look at him. He only made a sign to Digby, who walked down to Monty Lowther's place, and clumped his bat on the crease with a determined air.

Arthur Augustus sniffed.

"Vewy well," he murmured, "we shall see!"

And they did see! Fatty Wynn was on the war-path with a vengeance. Again that curiously jerky little run; again that semi-revolution of the plump body; and again that whizz of the ball—and again the cluck of falling bails.

And the New House yelled.

"How's that?"

"Out!"

"My hat," said Gore, "this is getting a bit monotonous! Duck's eggs are a drug in the market to-day."

"I guess so," remarked Buck Finn, the American chum in the Shell at St. Jim's. "I kinder reckon that fat galoot is up to snuff, some."

"Bravo, Wynn!"

"Hurrah!"

"Make it the hat trick, old son!"

Again Arthur Augustus D'Arcy looked expressively at Tom Merry. Again Tom Merry seemed to be totally unconscious of the fact that he was leaving out the finest junior batsman in the side.

Herries went in next, and Herries had a grim look. He had a great reputation as a stone-waller, and that was what was wanted now. If he could keep his end up till the over finished, it would give Blake a chance with the bowling. But alas for Herries!

There was a trickiness in Fatty Wynn's bowling which was miles above the reach of Herries. The ball came down like a four-point-seven shell, and before Herries knew where it was, his bails were on the ground.

And the New House yelled with a yell that might have been heard in every nook and corner of St. Jim's.

"How's that?"

"The hat trick!"

"Hurrah!"

It was the hat trick right enough; and Herries carried out his bat with a dismayed expression upon his face.

Figgins gave Fatty Wynn a sounding slap on the shoulder that made him stagger.

"Good old Fatty! Keep it up!"

Fatty Wynn wiped the perspiration from his plump face.

"It's good fun, isn't it, Figg?"

"Ha, ha! Yes, for us!"

"There's only one thing about it—it makes a chap jolly hungry," said Fatty Wynn. "Exercise always has that effect on me, and I always get extra hungry, too, in this summer weather."

Figgins grinned.

"You young porpoise! You had enough dinner for an elephant before you came out."

"Oh, Figg, you know I only had the ordinary school dinner, with a steak-pie and some sausages and ham I provided myself, and—"

"Poor kid, you must be perishing!" said Figgins sympathetically. "Never mind, there's the cold mutton in the study, you know."

"No, there isn't, Figg."

"Yes; you remember the cold mutton from last night."

"Yes; but I had that after dinner. I thought I'd better have enough, in case I got hungry during the match."

"Well, of all the cormorants!" said Figgins. "Still, so long as you don't get hungry—"

"Only the trouble is, Figg, that I am getting hungry now," said Fatty Wynn pathetically. "You see—"

"I see Tom Merry's got his man in now, and it's time to bowl," said Figgins; and he went back to the slips without waiting for any more of Fatty Wynn's woes to be confided to him.

Manners, of the Shell, was next man in. Manners was a better photographer than he was cricketer, but he could always be depended upon to play a steady game and keep

his end up. And Manners was very much on his guard now.

He didn't take any runs, but he stopped the rest of Fatty Wynn's bowling, and that was something to be thankful for, under the circumstances. With three men out, and a succession of noughts on the score, Tom Merry was glad to see his man keep the wicket up.

Figgins bowled from the other end to Blake, when the field crossed over. And Figgins waved his men back deep, for he knew that Jack Blake was a hitter.

Figgins was a first-rate bowler, and Blake had all his work cut out to deal with him. But Blake batted splendidly, and played up like a young Fry or Jessop. He stopped the first three balls, and then he began to smite. The fourth ball went into the long-field for two, the fifth to the boundary, and the sixth and last ball was knocked through the slips for a single.

Tom Merry clapped his hands.

"Bravo, Blake!"

It was a relief to have somebody start the ball rolling. Seven runs were registered for Jack Blake, and it was a good beginning. And the last single had brought Blake to the pavilion end, so that he still had the bowling. He had to face the Welsh junior, and Figgins tossed the ball to Fatty Wynn with a grin.

"Do your best, Fatty."

"Yes, rather! Figgins, I say, old fellow—"

"Well, what is it?"

"Have you got any toffee, or anything, about you?"

"Not a bit."

"I say, Kerr, have you got any toffee about you?"

"No, I haven't."

Fatty Wynn sighed. He was not ashamed to admit that he had a healthy appetite, though the other fellows declared that it was an appetite that would have done credit to a healthy rhinoceros.

But hungry or not, Fatty Wynn was a bowler to be feared. Jack Blake was very careful—perhaps a trifle too careful. His late out was a little too late, and there was an ominous clack.

"Out!"

And Blake looked down at his wrecked wicket and made a grimace, and carried out his bat for 7.

CHAPTER 3.

A Sudden Attack.

TOM MERRY was looking quite serious now. Four down for 7 was a serious matter. The New House crowd grinned gleefully over it, and during the pause that ensued before the next batsman came in they made remarks on the subject that were, in the expressive language of Truthful James, "frequent and painful and free." And the School House fellows had nothing to say.

During the play a number of fellows had strolled up to look on, without being particularly noticed. They were fellows who did not belong to St. Jim's, as their Grammar School caps showed. But the juniors were too keen on the House match to care whether the Grammarians were there or not.

Although the two schools had been at loggerheads ever since the Rylcombe Grammar School was founded, it was not an unusual thing for the fellows to look in at the football or cricket matches played on either ground, though these informal visits sometimes ended in rows. The Grammar School had not forgotten how, on one celebrated occasion, a crowd of St. Jim's juniors had invaded their football ground, driven them off, captured their football, and played a match there—on the Grammar ground, within sight of the defeated and raging Grammarians.

If the Grammar lads had been inclined to forget it, they would not have been allowed to do so, for the matter had become historic, and the "Saints" were never tired of alluding to it when they met their rivals; and that defeat had never been wiped out.

Three youths in mortar-board caps stood together, looking on at the game—Frank Monk, Lane, and Carboy, the leaders of the Grammarian juniors in their wars with the older school.

There was a mischievous expression upon Frank Monk's face, which would have warned the St. Jim's juniors of trouble to come, if they had been observing him.

But most of them were hardly conscious of the fact that the Grammarians were there at all, so keenly were they engrossed in the progress of the House match.

Monk looked round the field, and noted his followers, in groups of three or four, mingled with the crowd of spectators at various points.

"We're nearly all here now, I think," murmured Lane.

Monk nodded.

"Looks like it. Wait a bit, though, till they're batting again."

"My hat, they will be startled!" murmured Carboy. "They've never let us forget about that row on the footer field. This will give them something else to talk about."

"Yes, rather! You two get behind the tent, and when it goes down, that's the signal for the row. We're nearly all here, and it's no good waiting any longer. They may notice that there's a big crowd of us, and smell a mouse."

"Right-ho!"

Monk stood looking on at the game, while Lane and Carboy, with exaggerated carelessness of manner, strolled behind the scoring-tent.

Little thought were the St. Jim's juniors likely to give them. The fall of Blake's wicket had produced a dismay among the School House fellows, and a corresponding glatation in the New House ranks, that drove every other consideration out of their minds.

Arthur Augustus tried to catch Tom Merry's eye once more as Blake carried out his bat.

But Tom was thinking of other things. He put on his own, batting-gloves, and picked up his bat, and took Blake's place at the wicket.

Then the attention of the spectators was redoubled.

There was not a batsman in the Lower School the equal of Tom Merry, and there were very few even in the Fifth and Sixth who were his superiors.

If anybody could stand up against Fatty Wynn's bowling, it was Tom Merry, and boys of both Houses looked on eagerly to watch the result of this battle of the giants.

Fatty Wynn forgot all about the toffee he had been unable to obtain, and gave all his attention to his bowling. He knew that Tom Merry would not be easy to dispose of. He delivered his next ball with his very best skill, but Tom Merry had the eye of an eagle, and, better than that, he had the unailing instinct of the born batsman.

Click!

The willow met the leather, and the leather flew—away—away—away, and Tom Merry and Manners were running like deer.

To and fro—to and fro!

Twice, thrice, and yet again, ere the ball came whizzing in from the hand of Figgins, straight for the wicket; but Tom Merry's bat was clumping on the crease a second before the round, red ball came whizzing in, and the clack of the wrecked wicket was followed by a shake of the head from the umpire.

"Not out!"

And the relieved feelings of the School House juniors found expression in a ringing cheer.

"Bravo, Tom Merry!"

Tom Merry, flushed and contented, took his stand again. He had broken the ice, with a vengeance; 4 for a start was decidedly good. Fatty Wynn's plump face wore an unusually determined look as he grasped the ball again. He meant to have that wicket if the power lay in his good right arm.

But apparently it didn't! For the next ball was cut away through the slips, and as the fieldman went in hot chase of it, the batsmen crossed, and recrossed.

Two more up—and the School House juniors yelled.

"Good old Tommy!"

"Bravo, Merry!"

"Go it!"

And Tom Merry did "go it." The rest of the over gave him 3, and he retained the bowling when Pratt delivered the next over from the other end.

Pratt's bowling was cut over the field in fine style.

Nine for the over was Tom Merry's record, and then again he faced Fatty Wynn. But Wynn could not take that wicket. A 2 and a 4 made the School House juniors cheer themselves hoarse, and made Figgins ruefully conscious of the fact that there was at least one batsman in the opposing side who was a full match for his champion bowler.

Another ball—swiped away into the long field—and the batsmen were running again. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, forgetful of his own unregarded claims, stood in the doorway of the tent, clapping his hands.

"Bwavo, Mewwy! Wun, boys—wun like anythin'! Bwavo!"

"Look out!" suddenly shouted Blake.

His warning did not refer to the play. At that moment the tent itself was seen to sway, as if the ropes had been cut and powerful hands were dragging on the canvas—as was indeed the case.

The Grammarians had done their work.

"Look out!"

"Bai Jove!"

"What's the matter?"

There was a yell within the tent. It was echoed by Arthur Augustus, as he rolled on the ground, enveloped by the crumpling folds of the canvas, and gasping for breath. Every eye was turned upon the collapsing tent, and at the same moment a shrill whistle rang through the air.

It was the signal from Frank Monk!

It was obeyed instantly by the Grammar School juniors, of whom more than two score had gathered on the ground.

There was a sudden rush, and then the scene on the junior cricket ground was of the wildest and most whirling description.

CHAPTER 4.

Routed.

"S OCK it to 'em!"

Frank Monk's voice rang out.

And the Grammarians obeyed to the letter. There were, as a matter of fact, more "Saints" than there were Grammarians on the ground, but the surprise of the attack was so complete that they seemed helpless. It was some moments before they grasped the fact that there was an attack at all, and in that time the invaders had worked havoc.

The tent was down, with a dozen St. Jim's juniors struggling under the flapping canvas, hors de combat for the time; the wickets were whipped up, and the cricketers rolled on the grass.

The astounded spectators joined in the struggle, but the

NINE New Readers. See What Happens Next Week!



advantage was everywhere with the Grammarians, and the St. Jim's juniors were knocked right and left.

Tom Merry was on his back, and Carboy was affectionately sitting on his chest and squeezing a squirt filled with red ink over his face, and Tom struggled and gasped and yelled in vain.

Figgins was rolling over and over on the pitch in a deadly embrace with Lane, while Kerr was sparring frantically with Frank Monk and another Grammarian.

Gore and Mellish led a retreat towards the School House, sprinting off at top speed, and some of their friends followed them, setting an example of flight that had a further disheartening effect upon the Saints.

Had the St. Jim's juniors had time or a chance to rally, they would have given a better account of themselves.

But the surprise was too sudden. They were scattered right and left, rolled over, chased, and knocked completely out of time, and their leaders, engaged in close combat with the Grammarians who had picked on them specially, could not call the scattering juniors together.

In a few minutes the Grammar invaders were masters of the cricket field.

Tom Merry and Blake and Figgins, Kerr and Wynn and Manners and Lowther, were prisoners, jammed down in the grass and held there by the victorious Grammarians, and under the flapping tent were still several more fellows.

The rest had been scattered.

The victory was, of course, a brief one. Frank Monk well knew that the defeated Saints would soon rally, and there were sufficient reinforcements at hand to eat the Grammarians if they liked.

He did not mean to delay on the field of victory. A masterly retreat was the next move, before they could be cut off.

Monk waved his cap in the air.

"Three cheers for the Grammar School!"

"Hip, hip, hurrah!"

"Down with St. Jim's!"

"Hurrah! Down with St. Jim's!"

"Who's top school?"

"We are! Hurrah!"

"You—you beasts!" gasped Tom Merry. "I wish we'd known you were coming!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You unspeakable rotters!" gurgled Figgins, wriggling under the weight of a plump Grammarian. "Fancy stopping a game of cricket—yah!"

"Almost as bad as stopping a game of football. Ha, ha, ha!"

And Figgins had no more to say. He had been the leader on that memorable occasion, though he had forgotten it for the moment.

"Let me get a chance at you!" gasped Kerr. "Lemme get up!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Time we were going," grinned Monk. "We've left our mark here. Don't forget the trophies of victory, Lane."

"What-ho!" said Lane, who had the stumps and a couple of bats under his arm. "I've got 'em! If you want these things back, you kids, you can come to the Grammar School for them."

"Or send over a polite note, confessing yourselves licked, and we'll let you have 'em," said Frank Monk.

Tom Merry struggled desperately.

"Rescue!" he yelled. "School House! Buck up!"

"Rescue, New House!" shrieked Figgins.

Frank Monk laughed.

"Come on, kids! Let's be off!"

And the Grammar School party marched off with shouts of triumph. They paused in the road to shout once more, and wave the captured stumps in the air, and then they disappeared.

The defeated juniors sat up in the grass.

Tom Merry's face was drenched with red ink, a great deal of which had trickled into his mouth. Figgins rubbed a nose that had already swollen to nearly twice its usual size. Kerr tenderly caressed a black eye. From under the tent came a wailing voice demanding aid.

"Pway lend me a hand, deah boys!"

"My word!" gasped Digby. He dragged Arthur Augustus D'Arcy out from under the overturned tent.

"This is a go!"

"Who'd have thought it!"

"Bai Jove! I feel nearly suffocated!"

"Where are those rotters?"

"They're gone."

Figgins jumped up.

"Let's get after them."

The St. Jim's juniors, recovering from the panic, were

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NEXT WEEK:

Tom Merry & Co. Make Merry.

gathering on the field again. Some of them rushed off after the Grammarians. But Frank Monk & Co. were gone. They did not mean to impair their glorious victory by a tussle against long odds afterwards. They were gone, and pursuit was evidently useless.

"Well, this is a go!" repeated Digby.

"Bai Jove! I have been thrown into quite a fluttah! Tom Mewwy— Gweat Scott! Look at Tom Mewwy! He is feahfully injahed!"

"It's all right—"

"My deah boy, your face is covahed with blood—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"It is no laughin' mattah, Blake. Wun for a doctah immediately, somebody—wun like anythin'!" cried D'Arcy, in alarm.

"Ha, ha, ha! It's all right!" gasped Tom Merry. "It's only red ink that that beast Carboy squirted over my face."

"Oh, I see! Bai Jove, you know, I nevah thought of that!"

Tom Merry mopped his face on his handkerchief. He reduced the handkerchief to a crimson rag, but he didn't make much difference to his face.

"The—the rotters!" he said. "Fancy their having the awful nerve to come here, on our own ground, and mess up a cricket match! I never expected anything of the sort!"

"Of course you didn't!" said Blake sarcastically. "That's where we score in having such a jolly ripping leader. He never expects anything till it happens!"

"Yaas, wathah! If Tom Mewwy feels inclined to wesign the leadership into my more able hands, I shall not wefuse."

"I've said all along, and I say it again, that the junior leader ought to be chosen from the Fourth Form."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"My idea exactly," said Figgins, rubbing his nose. "I don't want to sing my own praises, but I must say that I—"

"Oh, don't be funny!" said Blake. "Of course, the leader ought to be a School House chap."

"Of course, that's mere rot."

"Weally, Figgins, I do not wegard it as wot. I'm the last fellow in the world to put myself forward in any way, but what is wequired is a fellow of tact and judgment, and undah the circs.—"

"What about this match?" asked Kerruish.

"You are intewwuptin' me. Kewwuish."

"I know I am. What about this match, Merry?"

"As fah as I'm concerned," said D'Arcy, "I am too exhausted by this extwemely surpwisin' occuwence to be able to bat. I am also in a wumpled and dusty state. I am goin' in to change my clothes."

And the swell of St. Jim's started off towards the School House.

Tom Merry laughed.

"I don't think anybody here feels inclined to finish the match," he said. "With the pitch trampled on, and everything messed up, to say nothing of the state we're in—"

"Better put it off," grunted Kerr. "I know I can't bowl straight with one eye closed up. By George, we'll make those Grammarian rotters sit up for this!"

And the cricketers slowly and seriously left the ground. The Grammarians had "messed up" the game, and carried off trophies of victory which it would be a difficult if not impossible task to recover, and for the time the thoughts of the St. Jim's juniors were turned from cricket to the prospect of avenging their defeat. And for the rest of that afternoon that was the one topic in both the School House and the New House at St. Jim's.

CHAPTER 5.

Tom Merry Thinks it Out.

TOM MERRY sat on a corner of the table in his study in the School House. Save for a tinge of redness about his face, he showed no signs of the outbreak on the cricket-field. There was a thoughtful shade upon his brow, and he appeared to be immersed in reflection, while Manners and Lowther were busily engaged in preparing tea.

The kettle was singing on the fire, and Manners was boiling three small eggs in the glue-pot, while Lowther washed teacups in the sugar-basin. But Tom Merry was not lending a hand in these festive preparations. He sat on the corner of the table, his hands deep in his trousers pockets, and his legs stretched out, his brow wrinkled as if he were thinking out mighty problems.

"These eggs are nearly done," said Manners anxiously. "They've been boiling for three or four minutes, and they're not very big ones. Why doesn't somebody lay the cloth?"

"PLAYED OUT!"

A Long, Complete Tale.
By Martin Clifford.

"I'm busy," grunted Lowther. "I can't wash teacups with one hand and lay tablecloths with the other."

"I say, Merry, get a move on."

"Eh?"

"Lay the cloth."

"Oh, yes, presently."

"What is the image mumbling about?"

"Got something on his mind. I say, Tom, tea's nearly ready. Are you going to lend a hand, or are you not?"

"Not!"

"Look here——"

"Can't you shut up when I'm thinking out a wheeze?" demanded Tom Merry indignantly. "When I'm setting my wits to work——"

"Well, you shouldn't start these things at meal-times; and besides, the cloth isn't laid. Let the wheeze stand over."

"It's a jolly good scheme for making the Grammar School sit up."

"They can go on sitting down till we've had tea. I'm hungry."

"You are an unpatriotic animal, Lowther. I tell you I'm thinking out a really ripping wheeze."

"These are really ripping eggs," said Manners. "And we know your wheezes of old. You've kept our end up against the Grammar School jolly well to-day—I don't think. Lay the cloth, and we'll excuse you from thinking of any more wheezes."

"Just so!" said Lowther.

Tom Merry laughed, and slipped off the table.

"Right-ho! Where's the cloth? But, you see——"

"Yes, I see the eggs are done. Get out the egg-cups."

"There's only one."

"Well, there's the broken salt-cellar, and the inkpot. Get a move on."

"But about that wheeze——"

"Blow the wheeze! You can tell us while we're having tea, if it's worth while, which I'll bet my Sunday socks it isn't."

Tom Merry laid the cloth. But he was still deep in thought, and a chuckle broke from him, apparently due to the unexplained "wheeze." He threw out the cloth over the table to "lay" it, and knocked the eggs off the table, where Manners had just placed them.

"Hallo, is that something knocked down?" he asked.

Manners gave a yell.

"Yes, you ass, it's the eggs."

"What were they doing on the table? You asked me to lay the cloth."

"You utter duffer! I only laid them on there for a second, because the glue-pot was boiling over. Couldn't you look where you were shying that rotten cloth?"

"Couldn't you look where you were putting those rotten eggs?"

"Br-r-r-r! They're smashed now, of course!"

"This one isn't," said Monty Lowther, picking up one that had rolled to his feet. "The shell is cracked, that's all. Phew! It's jolly hard."

Manners grunted.

"I suppose they're boiled hard, Jolly lucky, under the circumstances. There'd have been a nice mess if they had been soft. Where are the others?"

"Under the armchair, I think."

Manners scouted after the eggs. Tom Merry spread out the cloth, and Lowther set the newly-washed crockery upon it.

"Anything else besides eggs?" he asked.

"There's bread-and-butter, if Tom Merry will take that grumpy look off his chivvy, and get 'em out of the cupboard."

"I wasn't looking grumpy."

"What do you call it, then?"

"Thoughtful."

"Well, stop it, anyway, and get out the grub. It's tea-time, and everybody ought to lend a hand, instead of going about scowling like a demon in a pantomime."

"Oh, hold on, you know! I wasn't——"

"Well, don't, then. Trot out the grub."

Tom Merry laughed, and "trotted out" the grub. The table was not groaning under good things, but there was a sufficient quantity for a good tea. There was jam to finish with, and it was none the worse for being in a soap-dish. The soap-dish, at all events, was scrupulously clean.

Lowther cracked his egg. It was pretty well cracked already, as a matter of fact, and so hard that he skinned it like a potato, and laid it whole in his plate. This was meant as a silent reproof to Manners, but Manners made it a special point not to observe anything.

"About that wheeze——" began Tom Merry.

"Pass the salt, old chap."

"Here you are. I was thinking——"

"Pass me a spoon."

"Certainly! After what happened to-day——"

"Sugar this way."

"Look here——"

"Now you can go on," said Manners, being provided with everything. "Do you mind if I read the 'Magnet'?"

"I'm looking over Eutropius," said Lowther. "But it's all right; you can go on, Tommy. I don't mind a bit."

Tom Merry looked disgusted.

"Well, of all the rotten, unpatriotic mugwumps," he remarked, "I think you two take the Huntley & Palmer! I've got an utterly new, unheard-of, shrieking scheme for kyboshing the Grammar School——"

The door of the study opened, and four heads looked in. "Busy?" said Jack Blake affably.

"Yes," said Tom Merry, scarcely looking round. "Shut the door after you."

"Weally, Tom Mewwy——"

"They're having tea," said Digby; "we've come at the right time."

"Right-ho!" said Herries heartily. "Tom Merry isn't any good as a leader, but I don't mind having tea with him."

"We mind," said Lowther. "Travel!"

"Weally, Lowthah——"

"Come in to tea by all means," said Tom Merry cordially. "There's three egg-shells, half a stale loaf, a scratch of butter, and a whisper of marmalade. You're welcome; only don't over-do it on the rich fare."

Jack Blake grinned.

"We won't bother the tea-table," he remarked. "They can keep their mouldy grub. We've come here to talk business, Tom Merry."

"Couldn't you do it in your own study?"

"We're going to avenge the honour of St. Jim's."

"Well, go on with the avenging. Don't mind us."

"We want to know if you kids are going to back us up."

"Well, no; but I'll tell you what," said Tom Merry thoughtfully. "I've got a ripping, shrieking wheeze for sitting on the Grammarians."

"You can keep it," said Blake. "I can think of schemes enough, and we're getting fed up with your wheezes. Are you going to back us up?"

"I don't think!"

"Weally, Tom Mewwy, I wegard it as unpatriotic of you in the extweme to wefuse to back us up. We are goin' to make the Gwammawians eat coke."

"Well, go and do it, and take your features away with you. They worry me."

"Bai Jove, I——"

"Look here," said Blake warmly, "you must acknowledge that you're utterly played out as a junior captain, Tom Merry."

"Rats!"

"We're willing to take you into a scheme for avenging the honour of the school. If you don't back us up, we shall take it as an—unfriendly act," said Blake.

"Good! Now buzz off."

"Not so fast. As this study has proved itself to be degenerate and unpatriotic, it is our bounden duty as——"

"Bounders?"

"As chiefs of the School House juniors," said Blake, unheeding, "to inflict an exemplary punishment——"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"So go it, kids!"

And the four chums of the Fourth rushed into the study. If Tom Merry had not been so engrossed by his unspoken wheeze, he might have noticed from the fact that D'Arcy had left his eyeglass behind that he had come prepared for trouble. As it was, the rush of the four juniors took the chums of the Shell to a great extent by surprise.

They sprang to their feet; but in a moment Tom Merry and his chair were rolling over, and Lowther was clasped round the neck by the burly Herries, who waltzed him round the study. Blake up-ended the table, and Manners shrieked under a shower of teacups and tea. Digby caught Lowther by the legs, and brought him down, with Herries on him.

"Bai Jove!" exclaimed D'Arcy. "That will do! Come on, deah boys!"

And the Fourth-Formers, shouting with laughter, rushed from the study, slamming the door after them.

Tom Merry staggered to his feet.

Manners sat up on the hearthrug, streaming with tea, and with the last fragment of the study butter clinging lovingly to his chin.

"The—the beasts!" gasped Tom Merry. "After them!"

"You can go after them if you like," grunted Manners. "I'm going to change my beastly clothes! I'm soaked with tea."

And he slung out of the study. Monty Lowther rose to his feet and rubbed his aching bones.

"They took us by surprise," said Tom Merry apologetically.

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By Martin Clifford.

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"PLAYED OUT!"

"That's because this study has such a ripping leader," said Lowther.

"Oh, don't grouse, old man!"

"Br-r-r! Go and eat toffee!"

Tom Merry set the table to rights. But the tea was gone, the bread was replying in the ashes, and the butter had left the study on Manners' chin. Lowther surveyed the wreck, and grunted.

There was a clump of a boot at the door, and the chums of the Shell turned wrathfully towards it.

"Cheek!" muttered Lowther. "Coming back here like that!"

He caught up the ashpans from under the grate. The door opened, and the ashes flew in a blinding cloud through the air, and there was a fearful yell.

CHAPTER 6.

A House Row.

"GROO! Gerroooooh!"

"My hat!" gasped Tom Merry. "It's Figgins & Co.!"

Lowther looked rather sheepish as he lowered the ashpans. He had jumped to the conclusion that the chums of Study No. 6 were returning to look upon their handiwork—a little bit of thoughtfulness that was rather rough on Figgins & Co.

Figgins had received most of the ashes, and he was a perfect picture. But Kerr and Wynn had had a fair share of them.

"You—you maniac!" roared Figgins. "What are you up to?"

"Sorry!" gasped Lowther. "I—I thought it was Blake."

"Couldn't you look first? Of all the dummies—"

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

"Well, what are you New House wasters doing in the School House, anyway?" demanded Monty Lowther.

Figgins coughed out the ashes that had gone into his mouth.

"We came over to propose to you—"

"You must ask mamma," said Tom Merry.

"Oh, don't be funny! We came to propose to you to join us in a little scheme we're getting up against the Grammar School—"

"Can't be did! But if you like to back us up, I've got a ripping wheeze—"

"Oh, blow your wheezes! I—"

"Kerr could help especially," said Tom Merry. "We're willing to take you into it—"

"We don't want to be taken in. We've been taken in often enough with your wheezes," said Figgins. "If you're going to help us—"

"We're not!"

"Then you'll jolly well be made to smart for chucking those ashes over us," said Figgins darkly.

"Hold on a minute!" said Kerr. "Let's hear the wheeze, and if it's a good one we'll take it in hand, and—"

"Not much! You'll follow, not lead—"

"Of course, that's all rot."

"Then you can buzz off. I—"

"Hold on another minute," said Fatty Wynn. "If Tom Merry is just going to have tea, I don't mind if—"

"We've just had it, my son!"

"Then go for 'em!" said Fatty Wynn. "We'll teach the School House wasters to chuck ashes over their betters."

"Here, hold on, you asses—"

But Figgins & Co. were attacking.

They were three to two, and in a few seconds they had the Terrible Two on the floor, and were rolling them in the spilt ashes.

Tom Merry and Monty Lowther struggled desperately, and gave their assailants some hard work to do; but as Figgins & Co. couldn't get much more messed up with the ashes than they were already, they didn't mind.

The struggle was tremendous, and when Figgins & Co. released the Shell fellows at last, the state of Merry and Lowther was indescribable.

"There!" gasped Figgins. "That's all right! Come on!"

And the three New House juniors left the study, leaving Tom Merry and Lowther gasping on the ashy carpet. Lowther sat up in the ashes and yelled at the top of his voice:

"Rescue! School House! Rescue!"

Figgins & Co. broke into a run in the passage.

"Buck up, kids!" muttered Figgins. "We don't want to get caught in here."

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NEXT WEEK:

Tom Merry & Co. Make Merry.

It would indeed have been serious for the New House trio to be caught in the School House in the midst of a raid. A ducking in a bath-room or a frog's march up and down the passages would have been the lightest reprisal they could have expected.

Lowther's voice rang along the passage, and study doors were opening on all sides. The New House trio ran along at top speed, and only one Shell fellow was out quick enough to get into their way. It was Skimpole, who dashed out of a study in hot haste, and without having any clear idea what was the matter. He got into the path of Figgins & Co., blinking round him through his big spectacles.

The New House juniors lifted him off his feet, and deposited him on his back, and left him lying there staring at the ceiling through his spectacles, quite astounded, and not knowing in the least what had happened to him. And other fellows rushing out of their studies fell over him, and there was a yelling and a shouting behind Figgins & Co. like Babel broken loose.

Figgins & Co. ran down the Fourth Form passage towards the staircase. Two or three Fourth-Formers dashed into their path, but receded as they saw the state Figgins & Co. were in. But Arthur Augustus D'Arcy popped out of No. 6 and squared up to dispute their passage, too excited to notice that Figgins & Co. were shedding ashes wherever they trod, and leaving a trail of them behind in the passage.

"Stop!" exclaimed D'Arcy. "You New House wastahs, pway stop, or I shall have no alternative but to use violence!"

"Scoot, you ass!" gasped Kerr.

"I wufuse to be called an ass! Wescue, deah boys! New House wastahs!"

Blake, Herries and Digby had rushed out of the study, and rushed in again as they saw the state Figgins & Co. were in. The New House trio closed round Arthur Augustus, and hugged him. They shed their ashes all over his elegant clothes, they tore out his collar and tie, and rumpled and dusted him from head to foot, and left him sitting on the linoleum in a dazed condition of mind.

Then they raced downstairs and flew into the quadrangle, and chuckled as they sprinted towards their own house.

"Bai Jove! Wescue!" moaned Arthur Augustus feebly. "I am howwibly wumped! I am in a feahful state! Wescue, deah boys!"

"Faith, and where are the spalpeens?" shouted Reilly, racing along the passage in pursuit of the raiders. "Where are they intirely? I— Ow! Ooooh!"

He fell over D'Arcy, and rolled on the floor. Too excited to notice whom it was he had fallen over, Reilly curled round like an eel, and seized Arthur Augustus, and got his head into Chancery.

"Faith, and I've got wan of thim!" he bawled. "Rescue, bhoys! I've got wan of thim! Take that, ye spalpeen! Take that, ye goosoon! Take that and that, ye murderin' thafe of the worruld!"

"Ow! Woohoo!"

"I've got him! Rescue! I've got the spalpeen!"

"Wow! Wescue!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Jack Blake, nearly doubling up with merriment as he came to the rescue. "Stop that, Reilly, you ass! You—"

"I've got him!"

"That's not a New House chap! It's Gussy!"

"Howly smoke!"

"Dwag him off," murmured the swell of the School House feebly. "Dwag the howwid wottah off! My clothes are simply wuined."

"Faith, and it's sorry I am!" gasped Reilly. "Sure, I—"

"You howwid wottah! Pway assist me to wise, Blake. Thank you! I wegard you as a set of howwid wottahs for not comin' to the wescue. Weilly, I wegard you as an ass!"

"Faith, and sure I—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Pway stop that silly cacklin', Blake. I am not sure whothah I can continue to wegard you as a fwiend."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

D'Arcy glared wrathfully at his chums, but the laughter was echoed by all the fellows crowding in the passage, and there was no stopping it.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Ho, ho, ho!"

Arthur Augustus bestowed a withering glance upon the mockers, and strode haughtily away, shedding ashes at every step, and the yell of laughter followed him down the passage; and, in fact, did not die away till a prefect came up with a cane to see what the noise was about.

"PLAYED OUT!"

A Long, Complete Tale.
By Martin Clifford.

CHAPTER 7.

Blake's Idea.

ARTHUR AUGUSTUS D'ARCY was not, as he had said, sure whether he could continue to regard Blake as a friend; but on the following day he recovered his good-humour. The scheme in which Blake had sought to obtain the support of the Terrible Three—without success—was to come off that day, and D'Arcy's assistance was wanted. In fact, Blake declared that the scheme was impossible without the co-operation of Arthur Augustus, and he added many more remarks of a complimentary nature, which might have made a more worldly-minded fellow than D'Arcy a little suspicious.

"You haven't told me what the scheme is, deah boy," D'Arcy remarked. "Of course, I am willin' to give you any assistance in my powah. What you weally wequire in a case like this is a leadah with tact and judgment, and I am quite willin' to offah my services."

"I'm not exactly looking for a leader," said Blake blandly. "But we can't work the wheeze without you, Gussy, and that's a fact."

"That is only natuwal, undah the cires."

"And you'll help?"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"That's right!" exclaimed Blake, giving his elegant chum a slap on the back that made him stagger. "That's the right sort, Gussy!"

"Ya-a-as, wathah! But pway don't be so beastly wuff about it, Blake. You thwow me into quite a fluttah, and wun the wisk of cwumplin' my clothes, you know."

"My dear kid, you mustn't think of clothes on such an occasion as this—"

"I am afraid, Blake, that I cannot imagine any occasion upon which I should not wegard it as important to take pwopah care of my attire," said D'Arcy. "Howevah, pwocceed with the scheme, deah boy."

"Well, this is how I have worked it out," said Blake thoughtfully. "I want you to dress in your very best things—"

"I shall be vewy pleased to cawwy out that part of the plan."

"Your best fancy waistcoat, toppest topper, and creasiest trousers, and nobbiest spats, you know—"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Then you're to go to the Grammar School—"

"Eh?"

"And walk in at the gates—"

"What?"

"And, of course, the Grammar cads, seeing you got up in that style, will go for you—"

"I wathah think so."

"Then you bunk—"

"Weally, Blake—"

"And we'll all be waiting outside—heaps of us—and you'll lead them into the trap—"

"Weally, Blake—"

"And we'll all jump on 'em, and give 'em such an awful licking," said Blake, with great satisfaction. "Isn't it a ripping idea?"

"Ripping!" agreed Digby.

"Gorgeous!" said Herries.

"Weally, deah boys—"

"You don't look very enthusiastic about a really ripping wheeze, Gussy—"

"I don't feel vewy enthusiastic about it, Blake. I wegard you as an ass! I do not know whethah you are wottin'—"

"My dear kid, it's bound to work. The Grammarians will pile on you like anything, and then—"

"Yaas, wathah! But where do I come in? I shall be tweated with uttah wuffness, and my clothes uttably spoiled!" said D'Arcy indignantly. "I shall wefuse to do anythin' of the sort."

"But you've promised."

"Eh—what?"

"You've promised," grinned Blake.

"Weally, Blake, I do not compwehend—"

"You shouldn't make promises without comprehending." D'Arcy jammed his monocle into his eye, and glared at Blake. His indignation was almost too deep for words.

"Bai Jove! I wegard you as a wank wottah," he said. "Howevah, you are quite wight. As I have made a pwomise, I suppose I must stick to it."

"That's like a sportsman."

"I am weady, then. I shall, howevah, uttably wefuse to put on my best clothes, and I shall weah my vewy oldest toppah."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I fail to see anythin' to laugh at, Blake."

"Look in your pocket-mirror, then, old chap. On second thoughts, I won't hold you to the promise. Let

this be a lesson to you, my son," said Blake, with a wave of the hand. "Never make reckless promises. Always taste before you buy—"

"Of course, I knew you were wottin' all along."

"Of course you did—I don't think!" grinned Blake. "Gussy, you are too rich for real life; you—you ought to be on a picture-postcard."

"I wegard that observation as fwivolous. I—"

"To come to business," said Blake seriously. "We are going to raid the Grammarians. You know that now the weather's getting very fine they're beginning their little after-school walks with a master, two and two, like good little boys, and I happen to know that they're going out this evening. Frank Monk doesn't like that walk any more than we do when we have to go through it—but he can't help himself. You know the route they take, and there's a high hedge on both sides in one place. What's the matter with laying an ambush—"

"But they will have a mastah with them, deah boy."

"I know that, ass!"

"I wefuse to be chawactewised as an ass; and weally, Blake, I cannot agree to any scheme which involves tweatin' a mastah with diswespect," said Arthur Augustus firmly. "We must dwaw the line somewhere."

"Let me finish, kid. We're not going to touch the master; we should jolly well get a complaint from the Grammar School, and a licking all round from Railton if we did. We're going for the Grammar kids. My idea is to ambuscade them in Low Lane, and lay in a supply of clods, and peashooters, and rotten apples, and things, and let them have a fusillade as they go through—"

"Bai Jove! That's a wippin' ideah!"

"If you approve of it, Gussy, there's no more to be said," remarked Blake, with perfect gravity. "It's settled."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Then all we've got to do is to beat up recruits," said Digby. "It's no good speaking to those Sholl rotters on the subject. They won't back us up. Besides, better stick to our own Form."

"Right-ho! We may as well give the New House a show, though. Figgins & Co. would like to be on to this."

"Yaas, wathah! Let's speak to them now, deah boy."

Figgins & Co. were sunning themselves on the steps of the New House when the chums of Study No. 6 strolled over to speak to them. The New House juniors looked suspiciously at them, and evidently made ready for war—Figgins taking his hands out of his pocket, Kerr gripping the handle of a cricket-bat a little harder, and Fatty Wynn hastily bolting a chunk of toffee that was in his mouth. But Jack Blake made a sign of amity, and Arthur Augustus raised his silk hat with the greatest politeness.

"Pax," said Blake. "We're going to look for the Grammarians in their evening walk. Will you come?"

Figgins grinned.

"Curious! I was just thinking of the same thing."

"Then come along with us. My idea is to ambush them in Low Lane—"

"Well, I hadn't planned that exactly," said Figgins cautiously, "but I suppose I should have thought of it."

"I suppose you wouldn't," said Blake. "But we needn't argue over that. Will you come along and back us up?"

"We'll come along and let you back us up."

"Now, don't be funny, Figgins."

"I'm speaking seriously. As it's my idea—"

"Your idea!" shouted Blake indignantly. "Why, I—I like that! Why—"

"Well, if you like it, what are you yelling about? It's practically my idea, and if we let you come in it, we shall expect you to keep your places," said Figgins.

"Of course," said Kerr. "It's only on that condition that we can let you in."

"Let us in!" said Blake dazedly. "You—you cheeky villains!"

"That's how the case stands," said Figgins, with an air of finality.

"Well, you New House wasters," said Blake, "I've a jolly good mind to wipe up the ground with the three of you."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"We're ready for the wiping-up to begin," said Figgins amiably.

As there were a score of New House juniors within easy call it would hardly have been a safe proceeding for the School House youngsters. Besides, Blake had other matters to think of then.

"It's pax," he said. "There's only about time to get to Low Lane and get ready for the Grammar cads. Are you coming with us?"

"Yaas, that's the question, Figgins, deah boy."

"I'm not going to follow the lead of any School House waster unhung," said Figgins flatly. "That's settled. But

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"I'll tell you what. I'll bring my fellows along, and we'll do it on our own. There's plenty of clods to chuck, and we can do it without interfering with each other."

"Well, the more the merrier," said Blake. "Will you be ready in ten minutes?"

"Yes, rather."

"Then it's a go."

And the rivals of St. Jim's parted. When the chums of Study No. 6 united with Figgins & Co. it was easy enough for them to get the whole Form to follow. As Jack Blake went into the School House to call up his recruits, he passed the Terrible Three, who were just strolling out.

"Hold on a minute, Blake—"

"Can't; I'm in a hurry."

"About that wheeze I was speaking of—" said Tom Merry.

"My dear kid, I haven't time for any of your old, mouldy wheezes. We've got a plan on that is better than anything you Shell-fish could think of in a month of Sundays."

And Blake hurried on, leaving the Terrible Three considerably curious. But their curiosity was not to be satisfied, for not a word did Blake & Co. say on the subject of their scheme. They were content with the éclat that would follow when they returned, covered with the glory of great victory to St. Jim's.

CHAPTER 8.

On the Warpath.

"HERE'S the place!" said Blake.

The crowd of juniors stopped. There were a good two score of them, belonging to both Houses of St. Jim's, and they were all looking very warlike and determined.

In the golden evening they had arrived at Low Lane, a turning off the Rylcombe Road near the Grammar School. It was a somewhat narrow lane, and, as its name implied, it lay low between banks of earth.

The high earthy banks were patched with shrubs and roots, and crowned with thick hedges. A more excellent spot for an ambushade could hardly have been desired. Even Figgins, though little disposed to give credit to a School House suggestion, admitted that the spot was well-chosen.

"That is, of course, if the Grammar cads come this way," he added.

Blake snorted.

"I tell you they are coming this way."

"How do you know?"

"Because their walk is round by Oakwood Farm, and they must come through here, or else go round an extra half mile."

"Well, I rely on your information. I shouldn't wonder if you've got it wrong."

"I shouldn't wonder if you got a thick ear, if you keep on wagging your chin," said Blake darkly.

"If any School House waster can give me a thick ear—"

"I jolly well can—"

"Then come on, and—"

"Hold on, deah boys! It would be wathah wotten if the Gwammah cads came along and found us in the middle of a House wow—"

"Well, if Figgins won't shut up—"

"If Blake won't shut up—"

"Faith, and suppose ye both shut up intirely?" suggested Reilly.

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

Jack Blake sniffed.

"Look here, we've got to ambush behind this hedge," he said. "We can get up the bank on this side of the road, and there's openings in the hedge that we can chuck things through. Come on."

"Follow your leader!" said Figgins, clambering up the bank.

The juniors swarmed up eight or nine feet of sloping clayey earth, and plunged through the gaps in the hedge at the top. Beyond the hedge was a field, recently turned up by the plough, and so it was easy enough for the juniors to obtain clods of earth, and break them up into the required handy sizes. A recent fall of rain had made the earth soft enough, and, as D'Arcy remarked, the clods more resembled pats of mud. But they looked as if they would answer the purpose, and that was enough.

With heaps of ammunition at hand, the juniors looked through the gaps in the high hedge for a sign of the approaching enemy.

If the procession of Grammar School boys marched along the low lane under the hedge, they would certainly be

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exposed to a withering fire of mud-pats and peas from the shooters, and the juniors waited with gleeful anticipation. The defeat on the cricket-field at St. Jim's was about to be avenged!

Jack Blake had thought it best to come amply early, in case the Grammarians should come upon the scene before the ambush was quite prepared. Perhaps he had been a little bit too early. The juniors waited ten minutes, and still there was no sign of the Grammarians.

Naturally enough, they began to grow restive. Boys are not the most patient animals in the world, and a long-enforced wait, crouching among puddles on a soft soil, was not wildly exciting as an occupation.

The ambuscaders shifted their position, moved and twisted, and grumbled and mumbled. Figgins inquired, with an air of irritating patience, whether Blake was, after all, quite certain of his information. Kerr observed that if he had been brought out there for nothing, somebody would get a thick ear presently. Fatty Wynn sympathetically referred to the fact that he was hungry, and growing hungrier every minute. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy rubbed the mud-spots off his trousers, and rubbed them off again and again, but as fast as he rubbed them off more of them came on. He finally announced it as his fixed opinion that it was imposs. to keep clean in such a place, and suggested a retreat "if the Gwammawians did not vewy soon appeah." And as Blake was getting restive and uneasy himself, it may be imagined that he did not bear all these remarks with the fortitude of Job.

"Bai Jove, I'll have a look and see if they're comin'!" said D'Arcy, making a motion to pass down the lane.

Blake grasped him just in time, and dragged him back. The swell of the School House sat down in muddy earth with a squelch.

"Ow! Wow! My twousahs!"

"Blow your trousers! Can't you keep out of sight?" grunted Blake.

"You have wuined my twousahs!"

"Oh, scat!"

"You—you uttah ass! I—"

"Give him a dot on the boko, Gussy!" said Figgins encouragingly. "We want something to pass the time! It looks as if we're going to wait here till locking-up at St. Jim's."

"You needn't wait if you don't want to," growled Blake.

"Well, I was thinking it was about time we made a move."

"Clear out, then, if you're afraid of the Grammarians!"

Figgins jumped.

"Who says I'm afraid of the Grammarians?"

"Oh, go and eat coke!"

"I'll jolly well—"

"No, you won't!"

"Look here, you School House ass—"

"Look here, you New House rabbit—"

"Faith, and shut up intirely!" exclaimed Reilly. "Hould that duffer Figgins, Kerr—"

"Who are you calling a duffer?" demanded Kerr.

"Faith, Figgins is a duffer, and you're another, and—ow! Begorra, and it's wipin' up the mud with ye I'll be doin'!"

"Hold on there!" exclaimed Digby, as Reilly and Kerr rolled in the mud in a desperate scramble. "You New House rotter—"

"School House cad!"

"Look here—"

"Yah!"

"Boo!"

Exactly how it happened, it is hard to say, but Figgins and Blake, in trying to separate Kerr and Reilly, found themselves punching one another's heads instead. Herries and Fatty Wynn rushed towards them and came into collision, and rolled on the ground fighting.

A few seconds more and School House and New House were at it hammer and tongs, tramping in the mud, and pommelling away like demons.

The tramping, the shouting, the gasping, made a din that was audible enough to a procession of youths in Grammar School caps who were entering the end of the lane. Frank Monk grinned at his friends.

"Hallo! You hear that, kids?"

"It's the cads from St. Jim's."

"Yes, a House row out here."

"Let's lend a hand."

"Ha, ha, ha! Come on!"

Mr. Spicer, the master in charge of the Grammar School juniors, was a little spectacled gentleman, of the tamest disposition. He stopped as he heard the sounds of lively conflict from beyond the hedge, with an expression of amazement upon his face.

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"Look out!" suddenly shouted Blake. At that moment the tent was seen to collapse, as if the ropes had been cut and powerful hands were dragging on the canvas—as was indeed the case. The Grammarians had done their work.

"Dear me!" he said. "That sounds as if—as if some persons were assaulting one another with their fists in a—a violent manner!"

"Shall we see what it is, sir?" asked Monk demurely.

"I—I hardly know—"

"We may be able to stop them, sir, and—and restore peace," said Monk.

"Yes, it is possible. But—"

But without waiting for more, the Grammarians scrambled up the sloping bank and burst through the gaps in the hedge upon the scene of action.

CHAPTER 9.

Not Quite a Success.

THE combatants had quite forgotten the existence of the Grammar School and the Grammarians by that time. It was a "House row" of the most outrageous description, carried to a much more riotous excess than would ever have been possible within the walls of St. Jim's. The two parties, wildly excited, were fighting as if their lives depended upon the result of the conflict—and as they were about equally matched in point of numbers, they were not likely to leave off fighting till they were fagged out, or interrupted.

As it happened, they were interrupted. The Grammarians, whom they had come there to ambush, interrupted them.

"Go for 'em!" muttered Frank Monk, as the Grammar youths burst up through the hedge. "Knock 'em into the middle of next week! They came here to lay for us—I'm pretty certain of that!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The Grammarians rushed to the attack. The rush came utterly by surprise, and the St. Jim's juniors were sent simply flying. Then the heaps of missiles that had been prepared for the Grammarians were turned against the makers. The Grammar youths clutched up handfuls of the muddy clods and poured in a deadly volleying upon the broken and confused juniors of St. Jim's.

The latter scattered in all directions.

Some of them were still fighting—all of them, as soon as they realised what was happening, felt too disorganised to face the new foe.

They scattered right and left, and the few who tackled the Grammarians were overcome by force of numbers, and had hard work to break away and escape. But only one prisoner remained in the hands of the victors.

It was Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

Arthur Augustus had put on his oldest topper, in case of

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accidents, but even his oldest topper was a thing of beauty and a joy for ever. It rolled off his head in the scuffle, and he rushed to rescue it before he fled. He captured the hat—and the Grammarians captured him!

Arthur Augustus struggled desperately in the grasp of half a dozen pairs of hands.

"Welease me, you wottahs!" he gasped. "I ordah you to welease me immediately! Othahwise, I shall lose my tempah and stwike you!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Welease me, you howwid boundahs!"

"Hold him!" cried Monk, gasping with laughter. "He's a giddy prisoner of war! Give me that topper!"

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

"Hand it over, ass!"

"I uttably wefuse—oh!"

Carboy jerked away the hat, and handed it to Monk. The chief of the Grammar juniors stooped by a deep puddle and filled the topper with oozing mud.

D'Arcy watched him with apprehension. It was his oldest topper, fortunately—but what was Monk about to do with it? It was half-full of slimy mud, as black as ink!

"Now, Gussy—"

"Keep that howwid thing away fwom me, Fwank Monk!"

"Don't you want your hat?" demanded Monk, apparently in great surprise.

"No, I don't, you wottah!"

"Oh, stuff! You don't know what you want! I suppose you chaps came here to ambush us, didn't you?"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Ha, ha, ha! A nice mess you have made of it! I suppose you were going to pelt us—give us a high old time generally?"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Ha, ha, ha! Well, it's only worked out the other way round—you've had the high old time! Here's your hat!"

"Ow—ooh! Wow! Groo!"

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

Frank Monk had placed the silk hat on D'Arcy's head. The mud ran down over his face in thick streams, and the picbald appearance of Arthur Augustus's face was comic in the extreme.

The Grammarians roared with laughter. The voice of Mr. Spicer came from beyond the hedge.

"Boys! Monk! Come back immediately!"

"Yes, sir," said Monk. "We've stopped the fighting, sir. They were a lot of naughty youngsters from St. Jim's, sir."

"Very good! But now, come back!"

The Grammarians obeyed. Blake and several other juniors, finding that Arthur Augustus had been left in the enemy's hands, were rushing back recklessly to the rescue. D'Arcy turned towards them as his captors left him alone, and was greeted with a roar of laughter.

His chums could not help it.

The swell of the School House rubbed the mud from his eyes and jammed on his eyeglass.

"Weally, Blake—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I wegarud you as uttah wottahs!" gasped D'Arcy. "I am in a shockin' state! Ow! I feel as if I shall nevah be clean again, and my toppah is uttably wuined!"

"Ha, ha, ha! It's a sell this time, and no mistake!"

The Grammarians were marching off. It was too late to gather the juniors again for a renewal of the conflict. By different paths, and all of them gloomy and muddy, the unfortunate raiders made their way back to the school. The Terrible Three and several other Shell fellows were standing in the gateway as the Fourth-Formers came in in the dusk.

"My hat!" said Tom Merry, staring at them. "Have you been out collecting mud, kids?"

"Oh, rats!" grunted Blake, pushing past and going in.

"They've been carrying out Blake's ripping scheme!" chuckled Lowther. "This is the result! Bravo, Blake!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"My word!" said Manners. "Here comes Figgins in the same state!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, chuck it!" said Figgins crossly.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Go and eat coke! Come on, kids, don't stop here to listen to those Shell duffers going off like cheap German alarm clocks.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

That unflattering description of their laughter did not stop the Terrible Three. They laughed more than ever as Figgins & Co. strode grumpily away. And the shouts of merriment drew fellows from all quarters to see the plight of the retiring raiders. Even fags in the Third Form came along to cackle at them. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy especially caused a sensation.

"My only Aunt Jane!" exclaimed D'Arcy minor, of the Third. "Here comes the wild man from Borneo!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Weally, Wally—"

"Why, it's Gus!" exclaimed the younger brother, in apparent astonishment. "Fancy Gus turning himself into a mud-rake, in his old age!"

"You impertinent young wascal—"

"I've heard of chaps collecting queer things," said Wally. "But to think of Gus going out and collecting mud in a silk hat—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I wefuse to submit to this wibald laughtah, Tom Mewwy. As for you, Wally, I shall have no alternative but to administah a feahful thwashin' if you do not tweat me with the wespect due to an eldah bwothah."

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"Oh, go and wash!" said Jameson, of the Third.
 "I wese to do anything of the sort—I mean, I am about to do so," said D'Arcy, who was rather flurried. "I wegard you as a set of little beasts, and you Shell fellows as a set of big beasts."

And the swell of St. Jim's walked on haughtily towards the School House, followed by a roar of laughter. It was just D'Arcy's luck that he should meet Mr. Railton, the House-master of the School House, in the hall as he went in. Mr. Railton was naturally surprised. D'Arcy was usually most careful of his appearance, and his appearance now was past all words.

"D'Arcy! Is it really you, D'Arcy?"

"I'm sure I don't know, sir," said D'Arcy feebly. "I have nevah been in such a shockin' state in my life, sir. I weally do not know for certain wethah it is I or not."

The House-master smiled.

"How did you get into this state, D'Arcy?"

"It was an—an—"

"Ann!" said the House-master, mystified. "Do you mean to say that a girl—"

"Ha, ha! I mean—sowwy, sir!—no! I was goin' to say an accident."

"Oh, an accident! It is very shocking! Go and clean yourself at once, and please take care that you do not have any more of these accidents, D'Arcy."

"Yaas, wathah, sir."

"Dear me! Here is another."

Herries had just come in, and he almost ran into Mr. Railton as he darted for the stairs. The House-master stopped him.

"Herries! How did you come into this state?"

"It was an accident, sir."

"Ahem! Dear me, here is Digby in the same state! Have you had an accident, Digby?"

"Ye-e-es, sir."

"H'm! There seem to have been a great many accidents just now," said Mr. Railton severely. "Really—"

"We didn't get like it on purpose, sir," said Digby meekly.

"No; I suppose it was an accident in that sense. However, you may go."

Mr. Railton went into his study, and the juniors gladly scuttled away. There was soon a terrific splashing in the bath-rooms. When the Terrible Three came in, there were tears of laughter on their cheeks. The Fourth Form campaign had ended ingloriously, and it remained for the Shell to avenge the honour of St. Jim's—if that could be done at all!

CHAPTER 10.

Wally Takes the Matter in Hand.

THERE were cross looks in the Fourth Form that evening. The juniors had to explain away their defeat—to an unbelieving public. It was easy for Figgins to declare that it was all due to School House bumpiousness. It was equally easy for Blake to explain that if the New House wasters had understood the elementary rules of discipline, the disaster wouldn't have occurred. The disaster had occurred, and the other fellows stuck pertinaciously to that fact, and ignored the explanations.

Figgins maintained that he had done everything humanly possible, and offered to fight, with or without gloves, any fellow who undertook to maintain the contrary, which, of course, was an unanswerable argument.

"I can't say fairer than that," said Figgins.

And the Co. agreed that he couldn't. And as the challenge wasn't taken up in the New House, the opposition was considered to be convinced.

But in the New House Figgins & Co. were the head of the juniors; in the School House it was different. There the supremacy was disputed between the chums of Study No. 5, belonging to the Fourth Form, and the Terrible Three, who belonged to the Shell. And the defeat that had fallen upon Study No. 6 certainly seemed to give Tom Merry & Co. the lead. Blake had a chastened look for a whole day after the defeat. Even Arthur Augustus left off explaining how he could have crushed the enemy at one fell swoop if his generalship had been trusted. Study No. 6 took a back seat for a little till it blew over.

But the juniors of both Houses were extremely excited about it. The excitement did not soon die away, either. The Grammarians were victorious, and at chance meetings they alluded to the fact, and made affectionate inquiries about the health of the juniors they had licked, which exasperated the Saints more and more, till it was pretty clear that the lower Forms were on the verge of an explosion. Wally & Co., of the Third, declared their intention of taking the matter into their own hands—a piece of cheek that made the Middle School gasp. Since Wally had come to St. Jim's, the Third Form fags had grown more and more

sacking in respect to the Fourth and the Shell, and the latter were of opinion that something ought to be done about it.

"You see, deah boys, the youngstahs ought to be kept in their places," Arthur Augustus observed, when the subject came up one evening after prep. in Study No. 6. "I wegard it as most important for youngstahs to be kept in their places. I have seweral times lately turned it ovah in my mind wethah I ought to give that young bwothah of mine a feahful thwashin'."

"I say, they're holding a meeting in the Third Form-room," said Digby, coming into the study, grinning. "Young Wally is getting up some scheme for going for the Grammar School! Fancy the cheek of those Third Form fags!"

Jack Blake's brow darkened.

"This is a little more than a joke," he said. "We can't allow the Third Form to chip in this."

"Wathah not!"

"We've put our foot down on the Third Form joining in House rows," said Blake, looking round. "We can't have them joining in this row with the Grammar School, either. It wouldn't do. They'd mess everything up."

"Yaas, wathah! It's a question of dig with us."

"Of course," said Blake magnanimously. "They can follow us! We don't mind them backing us up! But as for anything else, it's—"

"Imposs., deah boy."

"Exactly."

"I wathah think we ought to explain that to the young wasals," remarked Arthur Augustus thoughtfully. "Pew-waps if we went to see them, and ordahed them to stop their wiculous meetin', they would see weason. Othahwise, we could call in the fellows and thwash them."

"That's what I was thinking."

The chipping Blake and his friends had received had left their temper a little "edge-wise" on the subject, and the cheek of the Third Form was really passing all bounds. A severe lesson to the fags seemed to be called for by the circumstances, at least in the opinion of Study No. 6.

The four chums walked along to the Third Form, and the terrific noise that proceeded from it showed that the meeting was in full progress. Tom Merry and Manners and Lowther were passing the door, and they stopped their ears as they did so. The Terrible Three grinned cheerfully at the Fourth-Formers.

"Hallo! Are you going to the meeting?" asked Tom Merry.

Blake frowned darkly.

"No, we're not! We—"

"Oh, I hear they're holding a meeting on the subject of going for the Grammarians, and as you chaps are so successful in that line—"

"Ha, ha, ha!" cackled Manners and Lowther.

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—"

"Oh, don't take any notice of those rotten Shell-fish!" said Digby. "Come on!"

The Fourth-Formers stalked on and kicked open the door of the Third Form-room and entered. The Terrible Three stared after them in surprise.

"They're not going to the meeting," said Tom Merry. "But they've gone in. What's the little game, I wonder?"

Monty Lowther chuckled.

"They're going to bust the meeting, perhaps."

"Ha, ha, ha! They're more likely to get busted if they go in among that horde of inky fags!"

Tom Merry was right; but the chiefs of the Fourth Form were too incensed to think about that. They strode into the Third Form-room, which was crowded with fags. Wally was standing on a chair, and addressing the meeting, but as nearly every member of the Third Form was talking at once, little could be heard of the observations of D'Arcy minor.

The four Fourth-Formers glared at the meeting, and the buzz of talk ceased, and the fags turned round to glare at them. The speaker ceased his speech.

He looked across at the intruders, and made an emphatic sign with his thumb towards the door.

"Outside!"

"Weally, Wally—" began Arthur Augustus.

"Now, don't you begin, Gus! Outside!"

But the Fourth-Formers did not get outside. They strode into the crowd of fags. Blake waved his hand imperiously.

"Cut!" he said.

There was a roar of indignation.

"What!"

"Cut, I say!"

"We're in our own room, you Fourth-Form rotter!"

"Catch us cutting for you!"

"Cut yourself!"

"Yah!"

"You'll get warmed if you don't!" said Blake darkly.

"Yaas, wathah!"

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 By Martin Clifford.

NEXT WEEK:
 Tom Merry & Co. Make Merry.

"PLAYED OUT!"

"Rats!" exclaimed Wally indignantly. "We're in our own quarters, you cheeky bounders, and it's a meeting!"

"We've come to break up the meeting."

"Eh? What?"

"You've got to cut."

"Boo! Yah!"

"Are you going?"

"No!" roared two score fierce voices.

"Call the chaps in, Herries, and we'll clear them out."

"Yaas, bai Jove!"

"Will you?" said Wally. "You'll get cleared out yourselves first. Collar them!"

"Hurrah! Give 'em socks!"

Numbers made the fags bold. They crowded round the Fourth-Formers menacingly. Blake put up his fists, and frowned.

"Now then, keep off! We shall hurt you! Line up, you chaps! Rescue, Fourth!"

"Sock it to 'em!"

"On the ball!"

"Hurrah! Down with the Fourth!"

The fags swarmed to the attack. They were in crowds, and in spite of a gallant resistance, the four Fourth-Formers were rushed off their feet. The floor was carpeted, so to speak, with fags that were bowled over in the struggle, but still numbers told. The quartette were rushed to the door, tumbling and struggling and rolling and gasping, and hurled forth into the corridor.

A roar of laughter greeted them there.

The Terrible Three were looking on, and the sudden and inglorious exit of the chums of Study No. 6 made them yell.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Breathless, untidy, gasping, and dusty, the Fourth-Formers rolled in the passage, and the fags, after a parting yell of derision, slammed the door and locked it on the inside.

Arthur Augustus sat up, and groped for his eyeglass. Jack Blake staggered to his feet, and held dazedly on to the wall, and blinked at the shrieking chums of the Shell.

"Wh-wh-wh-wh—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Bai Jove! I feel an uttah w'eck!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Blake gathered his strength, and hurled himself upon the door. But the strong oak held true. He reeled back, and murmured something.

"We can't get in," said Digby.

"Bai Jove!"

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

"Cackling asses! We—we'll deal with the Third Form later!" said Jack Blake hesitatingly. "Come on, kids!"

And the chums of Study No. 6 took their slow and painful departure, leaving the Terrible Three shrieking. And in the Third Form-room, amid a babel of voices all going at once, the meeting continued triumphantly.

CHAPTER 11.

Many Interruptions.

TOM MERRY entered his study and took out his books. The Terrible Three had been in the gym., and had left their prep. unusually late. If it was not done that evening, there was likely to be trouble with the Form-master on the following morning. Mr. Linton was not a gentleman to be trifled with on such points. The chums of the Shell were in a humour for anything but work, but there was no help for it.

"We've got an hour," said Manners. "We can manage all right if no idiots come in to interrupt us! Oh, of course, the inkpot's empty, now we're in a hurry!"

"I want a new nib for my pen," said Lowther.

"They're in the drawer. You can fill the inkpot at the same time!"

"You can get me a nib as I'm sitting down!"

"Well, so am I, ass!"

"Now, don't be a lazy beast, Manners!"

"Look here, I—"

"Peace, my children!" said Tom Merry, taking a box of pen-nibs and a bottle of ink from the drawer. "Here you are!"

He shot a stream of pen-nibs into Monty Lowther's collar, and a stream of ink upon the shoulder of his other chum. Manners yelled and jumped up.

"Ow! You ass! Look what you're doing!"

"My hat! How was I to know the cork wasn't in the bottle?"

"Of all the utter idiots—"

"Now, there's half the ink wasted!"

"Ink! What about my jacket?" hooted Manners.

"Oh, never mind your jacket!"

"But I do mind it!" Manners roared. "How could you

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be ass enough to put the bottle of ink in the drawer without a cork in it, anyway?"

"I didn't! It must have been Lowther!"

"Bosh!" said Lowther. "I shouldn't have been such an ass. It must have been Manners, in one of his absent-minded fits!"

"Look here, Lowther—"

"Well, it's no good arguing about it! Let's get to work, or there will be a row with old Linton in the morning. If anybody comes in, kick him out! I—"

The door opened, and a big bumpy forehead adorned with a big pair of spectacles, with a beaming smile under it, projected itself into the study. It was Skimpole, the brainy man of the Shell, who beamed upon the Terrible Three. They did not beam back. They glared. But the genius of the Shell was exceedingly short-sighted, and he did not see it.

"I have been waiting for you fellows to come in," he said.

"Where have you been waiting?"

"In the next room—my study."

"Well, go and wait there again till we go out! Then you can come back!"

"Really, Lowther—"

"Shut the door after you!"

"I am not going yet. I am sorry about the ink. I borrowed some, as I had run out of it, and I must have forgotten to replace the cork. I was thinking out the details for the four hundred and thirteenth chapter of my book on Socialism, and that must have driven the minor matters out of my mind."

"You ass!" growled Manners. "I have a great mind to pour the rest of the ink down your silly neck!"

"Are you going, Skimmy?" demanded Lowther, picking up a round ebony ruler.

"Certainly not, Lowther! I have been waiting for you to come in, to speak to you upon an important subject. There is a great deal of feeling rife upon the subject of the Grammar School—"

"Go and talk to Blake about it!"

"I have done so, and he has repulsed me quite rudely! I have been thinking of a splendid idea for stopping this warfare between the two schools, for good and all, at a single blow," said Skimpole.

"Oh, dear! Can't you go and tell Reilly or Glyn?"

"I want to tell you—"

"If you're under the absolute necessity of telling somebody, go and shout it out of your study window! We're busy!"

"My idea is this," said Skimpole, unheeding. "You are aware that I have been carrying on a great deal of Socialist propaganda work at St. Jim's. Suppose we were to extend this to the Grammar School—"

"Eh?"

"That is my great idea—to propagate Socialism among the Grammar youths," said the learned member of the Shell. "They would then want to live in concord with everybody, as all sincere Socialists do. I have mapped out a course of lectures, each occupying about two hours, and I want you fellows to make some arrangement by which I can deliver them to the Grammarians. That is all you have to do. I should charge nothing for my time."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I don't see anything to laugh at," said the amateur Socialist, looking puzzled. "If you can suggest any improvement in the scheme, I shall be glad to— Ow! Ow! What are you up to, Lowther?"

"I am poking you with a ruler!" said Monty Lowther, jabbing away at Skimpole's bony person. "I am going to keep it up till you bunk!"

"I have not yet—ow!—explained—wow!—my idea—o-o-o-oh!"

"Keep it up! Don't mind me!"

"Ow! I— Oh, oh! Really—wow!—I must say—gerrooh! I think I may as well go, Merry, as Lowther is— Ow! Wow!"

And Skimpole went.

Lowther grinned and flung down the ruler, and the Terrible Three settled down to their prep. But that prep. was fated to be interrupted. Like many youths who leave their work till the last possible moment, the chums of the Shell found that the Fates conspired to prevent them from getting it done.

There was a tap at the door, and it opened about five minutes later. Four faces looked in, and as they belonged to the chums of No. 6, it was a surprising fact that they were all very quiet and unusually civil. Lowther uttered an exclamation of annoyance.

"More duffers!"

D'Arcy turned a gleaming monocle upon him.

"Weally, Lowther—"

"We're busy!" said Tom Merry. "Do cut!"

"We've come to speak to you," said Jack Blake. "We've



Wally, extended at full length on the roof, watched all that passed in the barn through a hole in the old thatch.

been turning it over in our minds, and we've come to the conclusion—

"Thank goodness! Good-bye!"

"We've come to the conclusion that if you've really got an idea for getting even with the Grammarians, we'll help you to carry it out!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Can't you see we're busy?"

"But I suppose you want us to back you up?" said Jack Blake, growing rather excited. "When we've taken the trouble to come to you—"

"Yaas, wathah! Aftah turnin' the mattah ovah in our minds for a considerable time—"

"Leave it to me, Gussy! You see, Tom Merry—"

"Weally, Blake, I considah that I could put it bettah to Tom Mewwy! You see, Tom Mewwy—"

"Ring off, you ass!"

"I wefuse to wing off, and I uttably decline to be called an ass! You see, Tom Mewwy—"

"I can see four silly asses," said Tom Merry cheerfully, "and they're interrupting my prep. Good-bye!"

"Look here!"

"We're doing our prep. Good-bye!"

"Your prep. ought to have been done long ago; ours is."

"Yaas, wathah! Weally, you Shell fellows ought to have

to do your pwep. in the pwesence of a mastah, like the Third Form fags!"

"Will you travel along?"

"What about the idea? I suppose you were only gas-sing!" demanded Blake.

"Not a bit of it!"

"Then explain it, and if it's good we'll back you up!"

"I'm busy! I'll explain it to-morrow if you like—meeting in the wood-shed at 12.30 p.m.," said Tom Merry. "Now bunk!"

"Yah! I suppose it was all wind!"

"You can suppose what you like, my son, so long as you do your supposing in your own study! Cut!"

The chums of Study No. 6 glared, and looked greatly inclined to rush the Terrible Three. But they restrained themselves, and withdrew. Arthur Augustus stopped in the doorway to hurl back his opinion of Tom Merry & Co.

"I wegard you as thwee wottahs!" he said, jamming his eyeglass into his eye, and bestowing a withering glare upon the juniors. "I considah that you have failed to tweek us with pwopah wespsect—"

"Good-bye!"

D'Arcy tried to find words to express his feelings, but they would not come; and in the midst of his mental struggle Lowther kicked the door shut, and he jumped out

of the way just in time. Tom Merry granted expressively as he returned to his work.

"I wonder if we shall ever get this done," he said.

"Doesn't look like it," growled Lowther. "It all comes of leaving it till the last minute."

"Why, it was your idea to stay in the gym., and—"

"Oh, don't begin arguing, when we're in a hurry!"

"Yes," said Tom Merry indignantly; "but—"

Monty Lowther leaned back in his chair with an air of martyr-like resignation.

"Oh, go on!" he said. "If you want to talk, I'll let the work stand over, and risk Linton to-morrow morning."

Tom Merry snorted, and turned to his books again. There was silence in the study for about ten minutes, and then there was a knock on the door. Monty Lowther sniffed savagely.

"Don't come in!" he called out.

But in spite of that inhospitable remark, three juniors entered cheerfully. They were, of course, Figgins & Co. from the New House. They grinned amiably at the Terrible Three, who were looking terribly worried.

"Hallo!" said Figgins. "We've come to give you a look-in—"

"Could you manage to make it a look-out instead?"

"Busy?" asked Figgins, in nowise disturbed.

"Yes, awfully. Good-bye!"

"Never mind; leave it over."

"We can't; it's the prep. for to-morrow morning."

"It ought to have been done before," said Kerr. "It will only serve you right to get a wiggling. We've come over—"

"Good-bye!"

"We're willing to hear that wheeze you were jawing about the other day," said Figgins. "If there's anything in it we'll back you up."

"Meeting in wood-shed 12.30 to-morrow," said Tom Merry, speaking very rapidly. "Good-bye!"

"Good-bye!" said Manners and Lowther.

Figgins & Co. stared at them, and then at each other, and grinned.

"Oh, all sereno!" said Figgins. "We'll come."

They moved to the door. Fatty Wynn gave a look round the study, as if half expecting to see something to eat, and then followed his comrades out. Tom Merry politely closed the door after them.

"Just our luck," he said. "Thank goodness they've gone quietly! A House row now would have messed up our work nicely."

Exactly three minutes had elapsed when the study door opened again, and the cheery, ruddy face of Reilly, the boy from Belfast, looked in. Lowther picked up the ink-bottle.

"Faith, and I thought I'd find ye at home," said Reilly.

"I hear ye've got a wheeze against the Grammarians, and I want to say—Gerrooooooooooh!"

The ink flew in a stream, and it caught the astounded Irish junior under the chin. He stared dazedly at Lowther.

"Howly smoke! Why, and what—who—"

Lowther brandished the ink-bottle.

"Off with you!"

"Phwat—he's mad—mad—"

Lowther hurled the bottle, taking care not to let it go within a yard of the Irish junior, and it smashed to pieces on the door. Reilly made one bound out of the study.

"Ochone! He's mad! Mad as a hatter!"

Monty Lowther sat down again with a grin.

"Got rid of him jolly quick!" he remarked. "Hear him? He's spreading the news that there's a lunatic here—"

"So there is," said Manners.

"Br-r-r-r! We sha'n't be disturbed again."

But Lowther was not quite right. Reilly, in great alarm, was relating his experience to a startled crowd in the passage. The Irish junior was greatly excited, and fully convinced that Lowther had suddenly taken leave of his senses. Kildare, the captain of St. Jim's, came along in time to hear his excited words, and in some surprise he determined to look into Tom Merry's study and see whether anything was the matter there. Reilly called after him anxiously as he went to the door.

"Sure, and he's dangerous, Kildare! Take care of yer-self."

Kildare laughed, and tapped on the door. Head of the Sixth as he was, Kildare always tapped even at a junior's door before entering. On the present occasion, however, it had an unfortunate result. For the chums of the Shell naturally supposed that it was another junior who was bent upon interrupting their work, and already they were so far behind that it was impossible to get finished by bedtime.

Lowther rose angrily, and ran to the door. Instead of saying "Come in!" he dashed out to wreak blind wrath upon the interrupter. Kildare staggered back from the impact, but the next moment he grasped Monty by the collar and shook him.

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NEXT WEEK:

Tom Merry & Co. Make Merry

"Ooooooh!" gasped Lowther, finding himself unexpectedly in the grasp of a senior. "Ow! Oooh! Leggo!"

Kildare dragged him into the study.

"What does this mean?" he demanded. "What do you mean by rushing out at me like a madman?"

"Kildare!"

Lowther was too dismayed to do more than gasp out the captain's name. Kildare shook him again, and he stuttered breathlessly instead of explaining.

"Will you explain, you young duffer?"

"I—c-c-c-c-c-c-can't—while—you're—"

Kildare gave Lowther a twist that laid him face downwards upon the table. Then the senior's heavy hand rose and fell, and the dust rose from Lowther's garments. He wriggled spasmodically, and the table jerked and jolted. Tom Merry and Manners were shouting with laughter now, but Lowther did not feel like laughing. Three times the open hand of the school captain smote him with a crack like a pistol-shot, and then Kildare left him wriggling.

"There!" he exclaimed. "Now you'll have more sense than to pretend to be mad again, I hope."

And he strode from the study. Lowther twisted over, and all of the juniors' work that was not already on the floor with the spilt ink, went there then. Monty gasped for breath. Tom Merry and Manners roared.

"I—I can't see anything to laugh at!" gasped Lowther. "Ow! I'm hurt! And—look at our prep!"

He squirmed off the table.

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

"Oh, shut up! If anybody else comes to this study—"

"Ha, ha, ha! You'd better look before you leap next time!"

But there were, fortunately, no more interruptions. The work was done—after a fashion—but there were strained relations between the Terrible Three and their Form-master the following morning.

CHAPTER 12.

The Meeting.

TOM MERRY wore a smile that morning. He had received fifty lines from Mr. Linton, but that did not weigh on his mind. He was thinking of his "wheeze." That wheeze had been kept back till the other fellows had tried their hand at tackling the Grammar School, and had failed. Tom Merry was in no hurry. He was quite content to wait, knowing that when he was wanted he would be asked for. Now the other fellows had asked for him, and the time had come.

The idea he had in his mind was—in his own opinion, at least—a really ripping one. It was at least a startling one, and he chuckled as he imagined how the juniors of St. Jim's would gasp to hear it.

It was time, however, that something was done. With Wally and the fags of the Third Form taking the matter up, it behoved the Middle School to "hustle." The seniors, of course, were of too lofty a dignity to take any interest in the rivalry of the two schools—at least, so they said. At all events, active warfare was left to the juniors. But the Upper Form fellows did not fail to make sly jokes about the defeats the Shell and the Fourth Form sustained at the hands of the Grammarians. Lefevre, of the Fifth, was heard to say that such matters had better be left to the fags, as the Fourth Form and the Shell were no good. His saying was repeated in the Third Form quarters with enthusiasm. And the Fourth Form very nearly made up their minds to wreck Lefevre's study for saying it.

But Tom Merry's time had come. He was asked to explain his idea, and offered the backing-up of his rivals if it was a good one. And Tom Merry knew it was a good one, so he had no doubts.

After morning school he strolled along to the wood-shed, the appointed place of meeting, with Manners and Lowther. A great many other fellows followed. The news of the meeting had spread through the lower Forms, and the Fourth and the Shell had resolved to turn up en masse. The Third Form had heard something of it, and they intended to come, too, but the flat had gone forth that no fags were to be admitted. Their discretion could not be trusted, and they were to be barred from the meeting in the wood-shed.

Tom Merry entered the shed, and found a crowd already there. The chums of Study No. 6 had come along as soon as they were dismissed from their class-room, and Figgins & Co. had come in with them. The Terrible Three were greeted with a loud buzz. Then there was a scuffle at the door as Wally strove to force his way in, with Jameson and Dudley and Curly Gibson of the Third backing him up.

"No admittance for fags!" called out Lowther. "Sheer off!"

"Rats to you!"

"Don't let those kids in, there."

"Bosh! We're coming in!"

But Lowther and Figgins and Blake and Reilly formed up

"PLAYED OUT!"

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at the door, and the Third-Formers were pushed out. They returned to the attack, and tried to rush the juniors, but they did not succeed. They went out once more, on their backs this time. Then they rose and dusted themselves, and left off attacking. But Wally, if he was not equal to his adversaries in physical force, was great at "slanging." He took up his stand outside the door of the wood-shed, and greeted all the fellows that came along with remarks that were personal and stinging.

Twice or thrice he was chased away by indignant Fourth-Formers, and then he made his observations from a safe distance until it was prudent to draw near again. They let him alone at last, and pretended to ignore him.

"Walk up, gentlemen!" said Wally, as Pratt and French of the New House drew nigh. "This is the Monkey House, and there is no charge for admission to any members of the monkey tribe, so you can go in free."

French made a dash at him, and Wally retreated. Then the New House juniors went in, and Wally sent a piercing catcall after them.

"Young wascal!" said D'Arcy, looking out of the wood-shed. "Wally, I wegard you as a young beast."

"Is that you, Gus? Get your hair cut."

"I wufese to do anythin' of the sort. I wegard you as a young wottah, and if you do not cease your personal remarks I shall give you a feahful thwashin'."

"Come out, then!"

"Bai Jove! I shall have to thwash that young wascal! Hold my hat, Blake, deah boy!"

Blake held Arthur Augustus instead.

"You stay where you are," he said. "This is a junior meeting, not a dog-fight. You stay here."

"Weally, Blake—"

"Stand where you are, kid. The meeting's just beginning."

"Upon reflection, I will chastise Wally aftah the meeting. You see—"

"Exactly. Fasten the door, you chaps, or those fags will be poking their heads in and interrupting."

Figgins bolted the door. The wood-shed was an extensive place, and the juniors had taken the liberty of clearing back all the lumber that Taggles, the school-porter, kept there. But the place was pretty well crowded. Tom Merry had mounted upon a wheelbarrow as upon a rostrum, and from this coign of vantage he surveyed the meeting.

"Gentlemen—"

Crash! It was a ferocious attack upon the door. The juniors looked round wrathfully, but Monty Lowther, chairman of the meeting, called them to order.

"The meeting is requested to take no notice of the noise made by young hooligans outside," said Lowther. "Get on with the washing, Tommy."

"Hear, hear!"

Crash! Bump! Bang!

The meeting, as requested, took no notice of the noise, and it was heard no more. The fags did not want the trouble of bumping a stool at the door unless it had the effect of making Tom Merry & Co. open it.

"Gentlemen," said Tom Merry, "this meeting has been called—"

"Hear, hear!"

"Of course it's been called here," said Monty Lowther, who never could resist the temptation to pun, in season or out of season.

Figgins jumped up from the bundle of faggots he was sitting on, and raised his hand.

"Hold on!" he exclaimed. "Before the honourable speaker proceeds, I want to speak a word to the honourable chairman."

"Go it, Figgins!"

"I want the honourable chairman to pronounce whether it is in order for the proceedings to be interrupted by idiotic puns."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Monty Lowther looked cross. He was chairman, and he didn't want to have to decide that question.

"Oh, ring off!" he grunted.

"I demand an answer from the honourable chairman."

"Answer! Answer!"

"Hear, hear!"

Tom Merry laughed.

"The chairman is bound to answer that question," he said.

"No," said Lowther, with a wry face, "it is not in order."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Keep your idiotic puns for Tom Merry's study, then."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Order!" roared the chairman. "The next ass who laughs will be turned out. Order for Tom Merry's speech."

"Gentlemen, this meeting has been called—"

"Faith, and we know that!"

"Silence in court—in the wood-shed, I mean! Shut up, Reilly! This meeting has been called to discuss the plan

of campaign against our ancient and hereditary enemy, the Rylcombe Grammar School."

"Hear, hear!"

"Hold on!"

"Don't interrupt!"

"Hold on! There's a chiel among us takin' notes!" exclaimed Digby. "Look there!"

He pointed to the window. It was open, and at the opening appeared the cheerful face of D'Arcy minor. Wally was grinning and drinking in every word.

There was a roar at once.

"Turn him out!"

A dozen juniors scrambled towards the window. Wally disappeared promptly, and from a distance hurled remarks at the wrathful faces in the window. The window was closed and fastened, and Wally's remarks died away.

The chief of the Third Form growled.

"The cheek!" he said. "They're going to keep us out—keep us out of the meeting! The cheek of it, you know!"

"Yes, rather!" said Jameson. "We could manage the matter better than they could, I fancy. They're jealous of us, I suppose. But we're done in now—we can't hear a word."

Wally looked very determined.

"Not half!" he said. "I haven't been a Boy Scout for nothing. As they shut us out of the meeting, we are justified in looking on them as enemies, and discovering their giddy plans, ain't we?"

"Yes, rather!"

"Well, I'm going to do it. There's the loft over the wood-shed—"

"Good egg! I didn't think of that."

"I think of these things," said Wally. "We'll get a ladder, and I can get in at the loft window without being seen by those rotters. There's a trapdoor into the loft from underneath, and without opening it I can hear all that they say in the shed."

"Ripping! I'll come with you."

"No, you won't! You'd make a row, and give us away. I'll go alone, but you chaps can help me get in."

"Oh, all right, then!"

And Wally carried out his scheme with the promptness which made him so successful as a captain of fags. Meanwhile, the meeting was proceeding, and the juniors were far too busy to have any time to think of what the fags might be doing.

—4—

CHAPTER 13.

An Amazing Scheme.

TOM MERRY waited till order was restored, after the fastening of the window. The fags did not reappear, and out of sight was out of mind in this case. The juniors gathered eagerly round the hero of the Shell.

"Go ahead, old son!" said Blake. "We're giving you a chance. If there's anything in the wheeze, we'll back you up."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"But for goodness' sake get to business!" urged Figgins.

"How can I get to business with so many interruptions?"

"Oh, get on with the washing!" said Kerr.

"Look here, Kerr—"

"I appeal to the chairman whether it is in order for the speaker to argue."

"No, it isn't," said Monty Lowther. "Go ahead, Tommy, and don't leave off to answer these New House wasters."

"New House what? Look here—"

"We'll jolly well—"

"Order! Shut up!"

"Ordah, ordah, deah boys!"

"Go ahead, Tommy! On the ball!"

"Very well, if the meeting has done kicking up a row, I'll go ahead. Gentlemen, I have a wheeze for giving the Grammar School the kybosh, and knocking them into the middle of the next century."

"Hear, hear!"

"I have ben requested to explain this wheeze. The requests have come from both Houses, and I am assured of general support in case this wheeze is deemed a good one, and likely to effect its purpose—that of kyboshing the Grammarians."

"Hear, hear!"

"Gentlemen, I am going to explain—"

"Go it!"

"We have had many encounters with our ancient and hereditary foes in the open field, but though we have undoubtedly had the balance of victories on our side, we must admit that of late the fortune of war has been against us. Now, my idea is to carry the war into Africa."

"My only hat!" said Figgins. "What on earth have you got to do in Africa? Are you going abroad again?"

"Don't be funny, Figgins. That is a term meaning to carry the war into the enemy's country."

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"Thanks, very much! Go ahead!"

"We are going to carry the war into Africa," said Tom Merry, with a severe glance at Figgins—"right into the Grammar School."

"Hear, hear!"

"Excuse me a moment, Mr. Chairman," said Figgins; "I protest against this being considered a new idea. We've been in the enemy's country before, and played a game of footer on their ground. That's what gave Frank Monk the idea of raiding our cricket-field here. It was a New House wheeze."

"Yes, rather!"

"The honourable member of the honourable meeting is making an honourable mistake," said Tom Merry politely. "Without bragging, I think I may say that no School House fellow would demean himself by borrowing any mouldy old wheeze from the New House."

"Right-ho!" said Herries; and the School House crowd cheered.

"My idea is quite different from Figgy's. I propose to carry the raid into the Grammar School itself—into the House, the class-rooms, and the dormitories."

"Phew!"

"Talk sense!"

"Rats!"

"Gentlemen—"

"I move that the meeting absconds—I mean adjourns," said Figgins. "The honourable speaker is off his honourable rocker, and it's no good staying here to hear him talk honourable piffle."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Order!" roared Lowther. "Order!"

"Yaas, wathah! Give the fellow a chance, you know."

Tom Merry waited patiently for silence. As the fellows were curious to know what he really had to suggest, silence was at last restored.

"My idea is to get at the Grammarians in their own stronghold, and knock them into a cocked hat there," said Tom Merry. "I do not propose marching on the Grammar School, and capturing it by force of arms and burning it to the ground."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Go hon!"

"No! My idea is to use a stratagem, and it is in that that my scheme consists. I propose to enter the Grammar School in disguise."

"Phew!"

"Through my old governess, Miss Fawcett, I can get a few days' holiday. I propose to adopt some simple disguise, and in that I should have the assistance of Kerr, whom you all know as the shining light of our Amateur Dramatic Society."

"Hear, hear!"

Kerr bowed. The fellows listened with redoubled attention as Tom Merry proceeded. The scheme might be a wild one, but it was certainly novel.

"In some disguise, and under a new name, I shall present myself at the Grammar School as a new boy—"

"What!"

"My only hat!"

"And take my place there," said Tom Merry calmly.

"During a couple of days in the Grammar School, I leave you to imagine what a high old time I can give the Grammarians, to say nothing of letting in raiders after dark."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I can put the Grammarians through it in a way that will make them sit up, and when I've finished, I think they will have to acknowledge themselves done."

"Unless they spot you," said Blake; "then you'll be the one that'll get done—done brown."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"I'm willing to take the risk of that. What do you fellows think of the idea?"

"You'd never have the nerve," declared Figgins.

"I undertake to find the nerve. The question is, whether this meeting approves of the wheeze, and whether you all agree to back me up?"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Hear, hear!"

"Hurrah!"

"Gentlemen, one moment!" said Figgins. "We agree that it is a ripping idea, though the perpetrator will get slaughtered if the Grammar cads spot him. But Tom Merry can't be allowed to go alone."

"Bai Jove, you're wight, Figgins! I had bettah go with him—"

"You? Rats!"

"Weally, Figgins, what is wequired is a fellow of tact and judgment to back up Tom Mewwy, and—"

"Oh, go and eat coke! I—"

"I wefuse to do anythin' of the sort. I could disguise myself wippily, and—"

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"You couldn't disguise your beautiful accent," grinned Blake. "You ring off, Gussy. Of course, I am the proper person to go with Tom Merry."

"Faith, and it's off the thrack ye are! I'm the bhoys—"

"Come, don't talk rot, all of you," said Figgins. "Of course—"

"Weally, deah boys—"

"Look here!"

"Order!" bawled the chairman. "It must be left to Tom Merry to decide whether he takes anybody with him, and whom the party is."

"Vewy good! Of course, Tom Mewwy will select me."

"Of course he won't."

"Weally, Pwatt—"

"Gentlemen, on second thoughts, I think it would be advisable for me to take a chap with me. Two heads are better than one. And I think it would be only fair to take a New House fellow."

"Right-ho!" shouted the New House.

"I should be glad to select Figgins, but I think Figgy's chivvy is a bit too well known to the Grammar cads; and, besides, his long legs and big feet would give him away."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You let my feet alone—"

"My dear chap, I wouldn't touch 'em. But I think the choice should fall upon a member of Figgins & Co., as leaders of the little house—"

"You mean the cock-house at St. Jim's?"

"I don't mean anything of the sort. I mean that rotten old casual ward—"

"Order—order!"

"Withdraw! Yah!"

"Very well, gentlemen, I withdraw the casual ward," said Tom Merry gracefully. "To resume: Figgins is too long, and Wynn too fat, to escape undetected, so I shall select Kerr. Kerr is a jolly good actor, and he will be useful."

"Bravo!"

"Good old Scottie!"

"Right you are!" said Figgins immediately. "I'd just as soon that Kerr went, and I really think he'll do as well as I could. So long as there's a New House chap there, it will be all right."

"I'll come with pleasure," said Kerr modestly.

"Kerr's the man," continued Tom Merry. "He's always explaining to us that a Scotsman is required wherever there's any brainwork to be done, so this is just the job for him."

"That's right," said Kerr. "You can cackle, but that's the solid truth. We provide you with Prime Ministers and Leaders of the Opposition. We build your railways, and edit your newspapers, and run your banks. Wherever you find a Scotsman, you find him at the top. A Scotsman can—"

"Ring off!"

"No, he can't," said Fatty Wynn. "That's the one thing he can't do."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"It being settled that the affair couldn't be managed without a Scotsman, Kerr is the unspeakable Scot I select," said Tom Merry amid laughter. "The matter is now settled, except for details; but keep it dark. If the Third Form got hold of it, they might jaw it outside the gates, and the Grammar cads might get hold of it; then all the fat would be in the fire."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"But when is the wheeze to be carried out?" demanded Jack Blake.

"This week. I know that Dr. Monk is away, and is not returning till next week. You see, now's the chance, while the head-master of the Grammar School is away. The second master, Mr. Slinger, is in charge, and he will naturally think Dr. Monk knows all about it when two new boys present themselves at the school."

"Bai Jove, you will want some nerve, Tom Mewwy!"

"That's all right."

"Pewwaps, on wefection, you will wecognise the undoubted fact that I ought to come—"

"If I do, I'll let you know, Gussy. Gentlemen, the meeting is at an end. Further details will be settled in private."

And as the dinner-bell was sounding, the meeting willingly broke up.

After the excited juniors had cleared out of the woodshed, the trapdoor of the loft above opened, and a grinning face appeared. It belonged to Wally. The scamp of the Third Form was in possession of the whole of Tom Merry's great idea.

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CHAPTER 14.

A Question of Disguise.

THE scheme propounded by Tom Merry at the mass meeting in the wood-shed was discussed in all its bearings by the juniors of St. Jim's. The more they thought of it, the more harum-scarum it appeared to some of them, and the more attractive to others.

Some were of opinion that the hero of the Shell would never have nerve enough to carry it out; others declared that he would be detected the moment he presented himself at the Grammar School; but some, whose faith was great, regarded it as the best scheme that had ever been devised against the enemy, and were ready to back Tom Merry up through thick and thin. And all agreed that it would be an interesting experiment.

If Tom Merry came home defeated and licked, the laugh would be up against him; but if he triumphed, the triumph would be great. As for wanting nerve, neither Tom Merry nor Kerr showed any sign of that as the time drew nearer.

The first step was to get leave for a few days. That was not difficult for Tom Merry. He had already interested his governors in the matter. Miss Priscilla Fawcett, to whom Tom Merry was still as dear as when she had brought him home from India a baby, would have done anything for her ward.

Tom did not, of course, confide the facts to her. Miss Fawcett would hardly have understood the warfare that raged between the two schools. He had simply told her that he wanted a few days' holiday, to go and stay with some acquaintances—which was the exact truth—and leave to take a friend with him. He asked her to use her influence with the Head of St. Jim's, and Miss Fawcett willingly did so.

And as Miss Fawcett was a personal acquaintance of the Head's, and a liberal subscriber to various charities in connection with the school, and a generous donor to the chapel restoration fund, the Head was not likely to disoblige her without good reason.

As a matter of fact, Tom Merry stood so well in his class that his Form-master had no objection to raise, and that was sufficient for the Head.

The required permission was given, and Tom Merry and Kerr were free to leave St. Jim's on Wednesday, not to return until the following Saturday unless they liked.

Tom Merry was called into the doctor's study and told that he had leave, and he hurried away to communicate the good news to his chums.

Monty Lowther and Manners cheered when they heard it, and so did the chums of Study No. 6. Although they were left out of the scheme, they were keenly interested in its success.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy still thought that his presence was necessary to make the thing really go; but, although nobody else thought so, he was quite placable about it. He only asked them not to blame him if the scheme fell through, and they promised that they wouldn't.

Figgins & Co. were equally delighted. The first step had been taken successfully; it now remained to carry out the daring scheme.

The question of the disguises was a difficult one. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy suggested false beards, in a council held in Study No. 6, and was immediately howled down. He put up his eyeglasses, and surveyed the meeting calmly while they howled, and resumed his suggestions as soon as silence was restored.

"Weally, Tom Mewwy, I wegard a false beard as a wippin' ideah," he said. "I weally considah that a false beard would completely altah the appearence of your face, and they always wear false beards in detective stowies."

"Ye-es; but this isn't a detective story," said Tom Merry, laughing. "I'll wear as many false beards as you like when I start in life as Sexton Blake the Second; but just now—"

"I wathah think a false beard would make Kerr look absolutely diffewent."

"You shrieking ass—" began Blake.

"I wufuse to be alluded to as a shwiekin' ass!"

"What would they think of a fellow in a beard joining the Fourth Form?" yelled Blake.

"Bai Jove, you know, I nevah thought of that!"

"I vote that Gussy is gagged and put under the table," said Monty Lowther; "then we can get to business."

"I should uttaly wufuse to be gagged."

"Oh, give us a rest!"

"I wufuse to give you a west, Digby. I—"

"We sha'n't be able to wear any elaborate disguise," said Tom Merry thoughtfully. "You see—"

"You are intewwuptin' me, Tom Mewwy."

"Yee, I know that, Gussy. You see, we shall have to wash and eat and sleep with the Grammar cads, and we can't have anything elaborate. Besides, elaborate disguises

are only possible in romances. The idea is to make some slight change—colouring the nose and eyebrows and so on, and perhaps staining the cheeks, wearing the hair a different way, and wearing a different sort of clothes, and a different coloured tie, and speaking in a different voice."

"That's so," agreed Kerr. "You know, my father's an actor, and I've heard him say that a good disguise consists in strict attention to the details. Nobody but Gussy, of course, would think of a kid of fifteen wearing a beard."

"Weally, Kerr—"

"I've got enough paints and props to get us up in good style, and I'm pretty certain we can take in the Grammar cads," went on Kerr; "but it won't do to adopt the disguises here. We can think it out, but we shall have to be far enough away from St. Jim's before we put anything on, in case we are spotted. If the Head guessed what we want that holiday for, I rather think he would rescind it."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"We're leaving on Wednesday, so the rest of you fellows could come along, if you liked, as it's a half-holiday, and we could all meet somewhere away from the school, and fix the thing up."

"That's a good idea," said Figgins; "and, meanwhile, a telegram ought to be sent to the Grammar School, announcing that the two new boys are coming."

"And from London."

"That's all wight. I can get somebody in my governah's house to send the wiah," said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "You can leave that to me."

"Good!"

"The wiah will be sent all wight. As it is now the last moment for decidin', you had bettah think out whethah you will say in the wiah that three new fellows are comin' to the Gwammah School, and—"

"Rats!"

"I am giving you a last chance—"

"Thanks; but we don't want it."

"Then don't blame me if it all falls through."

"We won't! What are you wrinkling up your chivvy for, Kerr? Are you thinking out something specially brilliant, or getting hungry?"

"I'm getting hungry," remarked Fatty Wynn. "There's something in the weather at this time of the year that makes me awfully peckish."

"Oh, we know you're hungry, Fatty—that's no news!"

"I've got a good idea," said Kerr; "a good wheeze for the disguise! You remember that chap Bunter we saw with the Greyfriars cricket team that played us?"

"Bunter! Yes—what about him?"

"I was thinking of his spectacles. When he had them on and when he had them off he looked a different chap. Then there's Skimmy, too—it's the same with him. It's marvellous how a pair of spectacles alter the look of a face—especially the big, heavy kind. If Tom Merry and I go as chaps in spectacles—"

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

"Here, draw a line!" cried Tom Merry in alarm. "I can't wear glasses! You can't see through them unless your eyes are rocky!"

"Ass!" said Kerr. "Of course, you can have 'em made with plain glass, and then you see as well as if you weren't wearing them!"

"H'm! How will they look?"

"Well, they won't improve your beauty, I suppose. But you're not going to the Grammar School to mash anybody."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Well, no," said Tom Merry. "I suppose I can wear 'em. Let's have Skimmy in and try his glasses on and see how they look."

"Call Skimmy in, somebody!"

Digby went to look for Skimpole, and brought him to the study. Skimpole was busily engaged upon the four-hundred-and-fiftieth chapter of his wonderful book on Socialism, but he willingly left it to come to Study No. 6. Digby simply told him they wanted him, and Skimpole, whose ideas naturally ran on his own hobbies, jumped to the conclusion that he was wanted to give information on Socialistic subjects—information which he often offered without finding any takers.

"I will come with pleasure, Digby," he said. "Wait a moment while I get my volume of Professor von Krakpate's Social Economics!"

"Never mind that—come on!"

And Skimpole was dragged off to No. 6 minus that great volume. He found the study full of juniors, all waiting for him.

"Here he is!"

"Shove him in!"

"You need not shove me," said Skimpole mildly. "I shall be very pleased to enter without any rough impetus being applied to my person. I am very glad you fellows

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have sent for me, and I shall be glad indeed to help you in this matter."

"Good old Skimmy!"

"Yaas, wathah! I wegard Skimmy as an obligin' sort of an ass, you know!"

"Not at all. It is my duty as a sincere Socialist to help my brethren in all things in my power," said Skimpole benevolently. "Will you commence with social economics on the lines laid down by Professor Von Krakpate—"

"Eh?"

"Or shall I instil into your as yet untrained and ignorant minds the first principles of political economy—"

"He's raving!"

"I am not raving, Manners, I assure you. Take the question of the nationalisation—that is to say, the public ownership of the land. It stands to reason in the first place that all the land of a country belongs to the people of that country. To put the question simply, suppose there are two men on an island—"

"Ring off!"

"Bai Jove, yaas! We should take it as a special favah if you would wing off, deah boy!"

"Suppose there are two men on an island," said Skimpole, fairly embarked upon the favourite illustration of the land-nationalisation party; "two men, who—"

"Shut up."

"A sincere Socialist never shuts up. There are two men on an island—"

"Leave them there."

"These two men are—"

Tom Merry seized Skimpole by the back of the collar and squashed him into a chair. Lowther relieved him of his spectacles, and the amateur Socialist blinked blindly to and fro.

"Really, my friends—"

"Dry up."

"I understand that you wished me to come here and give you some first-hand information on the subject of Socialism—"

"We didn't! We want to borrow your spectacles to see how Tom Merry's chivvy looks in them!"

"Really, Lowther—"

"You needn't talk, Skimmy! Sit in that chair and be quiet—that is all we want!"

"Pray take care of my spectacles, Lowther! It is extremely annoying when a foolish and inconsiderate person takes one's glasses and—ow!"

"Not so much of your 'foolish and inconsiderate person'!" said Lowther. "Shove them on your boko, Tom!"

"They're too big for me."

"Well, they were bound to be, as your napper is only half as big as Skimmy's. But they will show the effect."

Tom Merry put the glasses on. They were strong glasses, and they made him blink and screw his forehead, and the faces and forms of his chums were strangely distorted to his view.

The glasses altered his aspect greatly.

He was still Tom Merry, but a very different-looking Tom Merry, and it was clear that, with one or two touches added, a pair of spectacles would render his face unrecognisable to his nearest relative.

"That's all right!" said Figgins.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Now you try them, Kerr."

Kerr put on the spectacles, and the difference in his aspect was even greater than in the case of Tom Merry.

"Ripping!" said Digby. "They make him look a bit

uglier, but I don't suppose that will matter. The Gram-marians are not particular, judging by their own chivvies!"

"Besides, he can't go very far in that direction," remarked Lowther; "Nature gave him a good start!"

"Weally, Lowthah, I wegard that wemark as person-al—as hantin' that our fwiend Kerr is wemarkably lackin' in good looks. Now I—"

"Here's your glasses, Skimmy."

"Now I wegard Kerr as—"

"Ring off, old chap! Kerr knows what his chivvy is like!"

"You don't know what yours is like," said Kerr, "or you'd bury it!"

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

"Order! Personalities are barred!" said Tom Merry.

"I'm surprised at you, Gussy! Now—"

"At me!" exclaimed D'Arcy. "Weally, Tom Mewwy—"

"Order! You can bunk, Skimmy! We don't want any information on the manners and customs of Socialists! Good-bye!"

"Really, Lowther—"

"Yaas, weally, Lowthah—and weally, Tom Mewwy, I insist—"

"Order—order!"

"I wefuse to ordah—I mean—"

"What you mean is not in order. Silence!"

"Shut up!"

"I absolutely wefuse to shut up till this mattah is satisfactorily settled. Tom Mewwy has accused me of makin' personal wemarks, when it was Lowthah—"

"You're only making matters worse," said Tom Merry gravely. "You had better shut up, D'Arcy. This lan-guage—"

"Language! What language?"

"You had better go and lie down for a bit."

"I wefuse—I uttably wefuse to go and lie down! I considah you a wottah! I wegard you all as a set of gwinnin' dummies!"

"Order!"

"That is my firm opinion—gwinnin' dummies!"

"D'Arcy, having delivered his firm opinion, is called upon to shut up. Let's get on with the washing."

D'Arcy remained loftily silent, and the juniors proceeded to settle the details of the scheme. Tom Merry and Kerr were to present themselves at the Grammar School in spectacles as cousins and new boys, and D'Arcy's final offer of making a third was finally declined. All was arranged, and it remained only to put the amazing scheme to the test.

CHAPTER 15.

In Deep Disguise.

ON Wednesday afternoon a party of juniors, wearing very mysterious and important looks, and some of them carrying bundles, left the gates of St. Jim's. It was a fine summer's afternoon, and the greensward seemed to cry aloud for bat and ball, as Digby, in a rather poetical vein, remarked. But it cried in vain. Cricket was cricket, but the juniors of St. Jim's had something even more important than cricket to think of.

Tom Merry and his friends went out with Figgins & Co. on the best of terms. The unusual harmony between the chiefs of the rival parties at St. Jim's was a suspicious circumstance in itself, and Kildare, the captain of the school, noticed it and remarked upon it as he met the party at the gates.

The big Sixth-Former stopped, and as he raised his hand they stopped too.

"What's the little game?" said Kildare.

The juniors looked at one another in astonishment, of course, far too innocent by nature to dream of ever having anything to do with any little game—at least, that was what their looks expressed.

"Weally, Kildare—" began Arthur Augustus.

"I suppose you are going to some quiet corner for a fight?" said the captain of St. Jim's grimly.

"Not at all, Kildare!" said Tom Merry promptly. "We don't look as if we were going to fight, do we?"

"There's no trusting your looks. Still, if you give me your word, that's enough."

"We're not going to fight, Kildare."

"Honest Injun, deah boy!"

"Then, if you're friends for the afternoon, it's some mischief," said the captain of St. Jim's laughing. "Mind, I've got an eye on you."

And he walked on, leaving the juniors greatly relieved at not being questioned more closely. Monteith, the head prefect of the New House, cast an eagle eye upon them a little later, and beckoned to them to stop.

"What's this?" he demanded.

Lowther looked about him.

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"Are you alluding to Gussy? We've been asked before what it is, and—"

"Weally, Lowthah—"

"I'm not alluding to Gussy," said Monteith, with a laugh;

"I mean what's the game—where are you off to?"

"We're going through Rylcombe."

"Oh! Looking for the Grammar School kids at the tuck-shop, I suppose?"

"Oh, no, really, Monteith!"

"Well, I've got an eye on you."

"My hat!" said Tom Merry, as they walked on. "The prefects seem to be specially wideawake this afternoon! One would think they had a suspicion!"

"Impossible, dear boy; we've kept the secret!"

"Yes, we've kept it dark enough, unless Gussy has let it out," Blake remarked. "We all know Gussy's way of keeping a secret."

"I refuse to be weferred to in that dispawagin' way—"

"Hallo!" said a cheery voice, as the juniors came in sight of a stile by the wayside. "Going home to the menagerie?"

It was Wally, of course. Wally, Jameson, and Curly Gibson were seated in a row on the top bar of the stile, and they regarded the passers-by with mocking grins. Herries turned towards them, with the intention of sweeping them off the stile. In a second the heroes of the Third were off it, on the safe side, and with their hands to their noses, were making ungraceful signs of defiance to Herries.

Herries, turning red, put his foot on the stile to clamber over, but Jack Blake called him back.

"Hold on, Herries! No time to row now!"

"They ought to be licked!" growled Herries.

"Yaas, wathah! That young bwothah of mine weally wequires a feahful thwashin' ewevy now and then to keep him in ordah."

"Oh, come on!" said Figgins. "We've got a lot to do before the new boys arrive at the Grammar School."

"Ha, ha! Yes. Come on."

Leaving the three fags chuckling, the party hurried on. They turned from the lane by a path that led to a barn, in a lonely spot, where they designed to make the change in the appearance of Tom Merry and Kerr.

Having ascertained that the coast was clear they set to work.

The St. Jim's clothes were taken off, and the bundles being unrolled, the new clothes prepared for the occasion were donned by the two juniors.

It was a rule at the Grammar School that all boys should be dressed in black or dark colours, and the "brothers" had selected two suits of a quiet brown cloth, very dark and unnoticeable. It was a complete change from their usual Etons. They donned ties of a different cut and colour and boots of a different make, and, in short, there was nothing whatever, except their faces, to identify them with Tom Merry and Kerr, of St. Jim's.

"Good, so far," said Jack Blake, with satisfaction. "I shouldn't wonder if the bounders pull it off, after all."

"Yaas, wathah, though I should feel more certain about it if I were with them. It is not yet weally too late—"

"Rats! Hallo, what was that?"

Blake looked round suspiciously. He had heard a slight sound, and he was suspicious of eavesdroppers at once. Any curious fellow from St. Jim's might have followed them. Blake and Digby and Lowther ran quickly out, and looked about the building, but there was no one in sight, with the exception of a solitary ploughman in a distant field. It did not occur to them to climb up and look on the roof of the barn, and they re-entered the building satisfied that it was all right.

"Nobody about," said Blake.

"I didn't hear anything, deah boy."

"You wouldn't, anyway."

"Weally, Blake, I must say—"

"Rats! Let's get on with the washing. We can't be too careful. If the Grammar cads got scent of this, the whole game would be up."

"Where's the paint, Kerr?"

"Here you are."

"And the glasses?"

"I've got them."

Kerr was an artist at the work. With a few touches, his practised hand could effect more than any other of the fellows could have done in hours.

He darkened Tom Merry's eyebrows, and his own. He gave a slight tint to the nose, which changed the whole expression of the face. Then the glasses were donned. They were of plain glass, and though exceedingly uncomfortable at first, they did not impede the view after a time.

And Wally, extended at full length on the roof, and watching all that passed through a hole in the old thatch, could hardly restrain a chuckle.

Had he met Tom Merry and Kerr by chance in that guise, he felt that he would not have known them.

The disguise was complete.

Even without the glasses, it would have been very effective; but the spectacles, with their thick, heavy frames, were a final touch that made everything safe.

The juniors stood round, looking at the disguised pair, and they expressed their admiration in emphatic chorus.

"Splendid!"

"Ripping!"

"Absolutely the thing, deah boys."

Tom Merry grinned cheerfully, and the effect of the grin on his altered face made the juniors burst into a roar.

"My hat!" gasped Blake. "I think it's too funny for words! If they have the nerve to carry it out—"

"Oh, Kerr will be all right!" said Figgins confidently. "I'm a bit doubtful about any School House chap having a hand in it, but as it was Merry's idea—"

"Oh, ring off, Figgys! I shall be all right," said Tom Merry. "So will Kerr. But look here, we musn't call one another Merry and Kerr, you know. That won't do. We're brothers, and our name is—blessed if I remember what our name is!"

"Jimson—that means a son of St. Jim's, though the Grammarians won't guess that."

"Ah, yes, that's it—Jimson major and Jimson minor! I'm major, as I'm the elder."

"You're precious little the elder," said Kerr, "and I ought to be major, as I've got more sense."

"Rats! Don't begin to argue about precedence at this time of day," said Tom Merry severely. "I'm Jimson major, and you're my minor. We don't know any of you fellows—you're St. Jim's cads."

"Bai Jove!"

"Keep out of sight till we've got clear," said Tom Merry.

"We've got to cut across here to Wayland, and arrive at Rylcombe by train, so as not to excite any suspicion. The wire was delivered there at the Grammar School this morning, and I shouldn't wonder if there was somebody at the station to meet us. I think we've done the lot now. I'll take this bag, and the boxes can be supposed to be coming on later."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Then we're off. If we meet again, we meet as deadly foes, mind."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

And Jimson major and minor left the barn, and took the short cut through the wood to the market town of Wayland, where they took the train for Rylcombe.

THE END.

(Another long complete story of Tom Merry & Co. next Thursday entitled: "Played Out!" by Martin Clifford. Please order your copy of THE GEM LIBRARY in advance. Price One Penny.)



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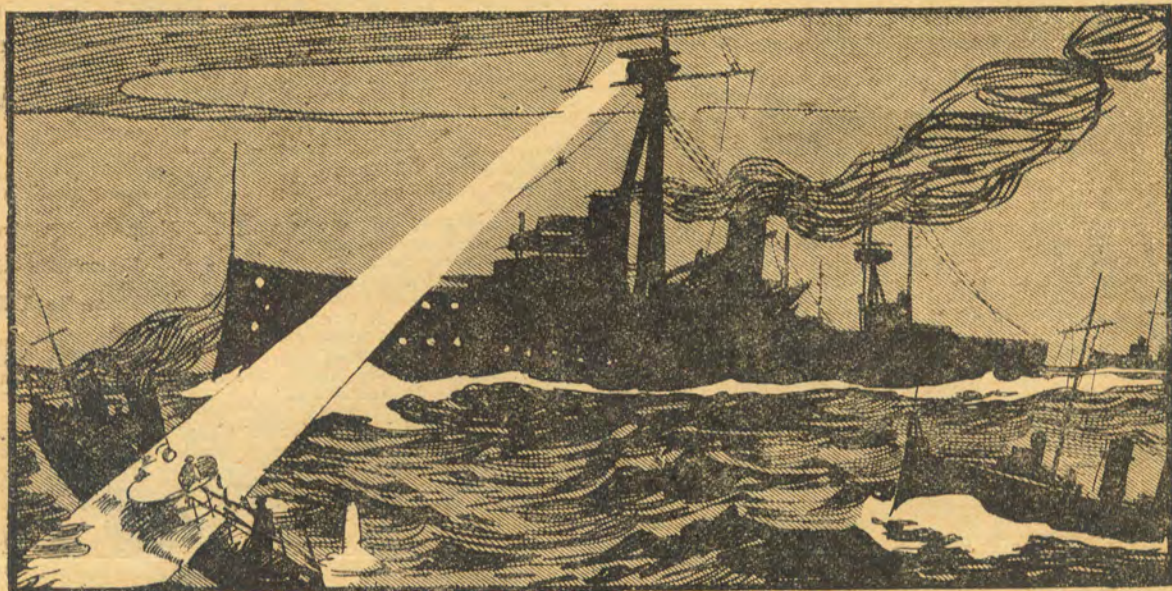
A Long, Complete Tale,
By Martin Clifford.

NEXT WEEK:
Tom Merry & Co. Make Merry.

"PLAYED OUT!"

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BRITAIN AT BAY.



A Powerful and Stirring War Story.

THE FIRST CHAPTERS.

Sam and Stephen Villiers, two cadets of Greyfriars School, by a combination of luck and pluck render valuable service to the British Army during the great German invasion. They are appointed special scouts to the Army, which is forced back on London by Von Krantz, the German commander.

At the time when this instalment opens, Sheerness has just been recaptured from the Germans by Colonels Vincent and Blake, Sam and Stephen, with Lieutenant Cavendish, R.N., having materially helped them with a torpedo-boat they have wrested from the enemy.

While the boy scouts are resting after the battle, Cavendish interviews a Volunteer corporal, who reports that the Germans are escaping from the Isle of Grain by boat. At the conclusion of the corporal's report Colonel Vincent rides up.

(Now go on with the Story.)

Cavendish's Scheme.

Vincent was riding out on his way from the fort, and the Volunteer at once hastened up to him, and reported what he had seen. Cavendish, very much on the alert, joined him, and heard the news given.

"Confound it!" said Colonel Vincent, half to himself. "And I can't get my men across the Medway in time by any possible means. There are boats. The beggars will get away!"

"I beg your pardon, sir," said Cavendish, stepping forward, "but I can soon stop that with my captured torpedo-boat, if you'll say the word. You command here."

"The very thing!" said the colonel instantly. "I had forgotten your prize. Can you do them any damage?"

"Lots of damage, sir!"

"Take all you want from the dockyard-stores—everything you need."

"I rather fancy that we've done that already, sir," said Cavendish, grinning.

"I'll be bound you have!" chuckled the colonel. "Make all speed, then. I wish you luck!"

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"Look here," said Cavendish to the corporal, as the colonel rode off, "if you want to do me a good turn, scoot out and wake up the two Villiers at the Rutlands' camp, and tell 'em what's up. You know 'em by sight, don't you?"

"Who doesn't?" said the corporal; and off he went.

"I hope to goodness Mac hasn't unshipped the boilers, or anything!" murmured Cavendish, as he hurried to the dockyard. "He seemed so keen to turn her inside out. If she ain't ready we shall be too late."

He gave hail as soon as he reached the dock, and Mac appeared on deck. Cavendish bombarded him with questions before he was fairly aboard her.

"Have you got the coal, Mac? Is she in trim? How long before we can start?"

"In five minutes, if there was any occasion for it," said the engineer deliberately. "I've kept a working-pressure o' steam in her, not knowing what might be needed. Man, if ye could see how I've looted your dock-stores? I just had the free run of them!"

"You're a brick, Mac! I never thought we'd be ready anything like so soon! Let's have steam as soon as ever we can. There's a whole division of Germans we've got to go and talk to. Get the ammunition up and clear the tubes. I hope those chaps will be quick. I can't wait for 'em."

Just as the torpedo-boat was casting loose to steam out, Sam and Stephen came sprinting down the yard breathlessly, and jumped on board.

"If you'd gone without us, Bob," panted Sam, "I'd have stolen a submarine from somewhere, and gone out and sunk you!"

"Only just in time, both of you," said Cavendish cheerfully. "Steady for the dock-gates, there! Now for the picnic. Did the corporal tell you what was up?"

"Rather! Shall we be in time?"

"Hope so! We want to catch them well out in the middle."

"Here's luck to the Converted Sausage!" said Stephen. "Long may she wag under these colours!"

The torpedo-boat glided out, turned sharply to the right, and slid northwards out of the Medway's mouth. On her right was Sheppey and Sheerness, held by the British. On her left, across the Medway, the Isle of Grain—where the boys had been cast ashore after blowing up the Blaine Castle—still in the hands of the Germans, but which they

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were now very anxious to leave. The Isle of Grain lies at the point where the Medway joins the Thames, and the Germans there—now that Von Weisshaus was defeated—were trying to get across the estuary of the latter river and into Essex.

As soon as the torpedo-boat cleared the Medway, and was able to look up the Thames, Cavendish ran her dead slow, proceeding very cautiously, and looked along the shores of Grain with his glasses. The distant crackle of musketry could be heard inland, and he saw the lighters and barges mustering, several of them already filled with troops.

"We're in time!" he said cheerfully. "By Jove! There's a tug coming out of Yantlet Creek! She can't draw much water, I should think. She's going to tow the barges across. Mustn't show ourselves up too soon."

"What's the firn'?" said Stephen.

"Must be some British troops taking them in the rear of Grain. They call it the Isle of Grain, but it's not really an island like Sheppey. The railway-embankment crosses the creek that used to run round it to the south. The Germans are in time to get off here before our chaps reach them, though," added Cavendish. "They're ready to go now. We'll let them get well out, and then we'll slip through the Jenkin Swathway, behind the Nore Sand, and give them something to think about."

"How will they get back at us?"

"There'll be plenty of bullets about. I don't want my crew wasted by any German lobsters, so I shall keep them in cover, more or less. There goes the flotilla!"

The Germans, in full view now, were putting in from the shore. There were two tugs, each with a string of four lighters crammed with armed troops. As they steamed out slowly northwards the boys watched them intently through their glasses, and saw the tugs dipping their colours mockingly at the belated troops that were left behind.

"They're playing the funny dog," said Cavendish. "There will be a grin on the other side soon. Full-speed ahead!"

How Ned of Northey Brought News.

The swift vessel shot forward, and covered the distance like a greyhound. As yet the flotilla did not seem to have remarked her, or thought she was—naturally enough—a German vessel by her build. But as she came racing up to within long gun-range, and the British flag was seen at her stern, sudden consternation reigned in the German flotilla. The tugs were urged onwards at all possible speed, and on the nearest a machine-gun suddenly opened fire hurriedly at the torpedo-boat.

"Let them have it—both guns!" said Cavendish. "Hard over there, the wheel!"

Away went the vessel at right angles, so swiftly that the Germans dropped hopelessly astern of her for the time, for their gunners were evidently not used to hitting torpedo-boats at full-speed. Both the six-pounders opened at once, and the handy gunners of the Orion poured their shells slap into the tugs with such effect that the two machine-guns were carried and dismounted almost at once.

A vicious rifle-fire burst from the lighters, and the guns of the Converted Sausage at once turned on them, and created such havoc among the closely-packed troops that their musketry became hopelessly erratic, and scarcely as much as touched the torpedo-boat.

"Keep it on them!" ordered Cavendish sharply, turning the vessel's head straight at the enemy. "Give them blazes; spread it out among them! Ready both tubes, here!"

Like lightning the long, narrow craft made her dash at the foe, both guns hammering furiously, and a Maxim on the port side adding its fire. They sprayed the lighters with shells, playing over them as though squirting death with a hose, while the prize sped on her way, thus preventing the patient riflemen from doing any serious damage.

It needs a good many rifles to stop a torpedo-boat, or to make any certainty of picking off her crew, and to fire accurately was impossible for the Germans under such a slashing onslaught from the quickfiring.

The tugs were straining ahead, with greasy smoke and yellow flame vomiting from their funnels, in a desperate effort to get across the wide estuary to the Canvey.

But the captured craft was far too swift for them.

"Let go!" cried Cavendish.

The fore torpedo-tube shot out its charge, and the deck tube followed immediately after. They were the last torpedoes the vessel carried.

But the thickest tugs were easy marks, and first one and then the other was fairly blown out of the water. There

were two dull, thudding explosions, and the lighters were left floating helplessly on the broad tideway.

The loss of them during the attack had been fearful, and each being at the mercy of the torpedo-boat, the crew hurriedly showed the white flag.

"Good job!" said Cavendish, with a sigh of relief, as his guns instantly ceased fire. "I don't want to butcher the poor brutes—as I'd have had to if they'd gone on shooting."

He ran down quickly towards the lighters, his guns still manned, and hailed them in German.

"All rifles overboard, please. Out with them, or I shall have to fire on you! The troops ashore will take charge of you."

"What are you going to do with 'em, Bob?" said Sam, as the Germans obeyed, throwing their rifles overboard.

"Nothing. We don't want 'em on Sheppey. Blake has all the prisoners he can guard already. The wind's drifting 'em back where they came from. They'll be on the sands at Grain again in twenty minutes, and our troops can rope 'em in. Only I don't want 'em opening fire on our chaps once they get ashore, so over go the rifles. They're no good to our side, for they don't fire the same cartridge."

"It's a holy knock-out," said Stephen, as the Sausage turned and steamed back for Sheerness. "There's a full brigade of 'em in those lighters—or was, before we started, an' it's well worth while preventing them from joining Von Krantz again. An' not one of our Fleet in sight. What's that little wind-jammer coming down Sea Reach?"

"I was just looking at her," said Sam. "A fishing smack. Rare nerve she must have to have come sailin' down-river towards that flotilla. Where are my glasses? By gum!"

"What's up?" said Cavendish.

"Here, put round again!" exclaimed Sam, in much excitement. "As I'm a living sinner, it's the Maid of Essex!"

"Whoop!" shouted Stephen, focussing his glasses. "You're right! Where in the world can she have sprung from? An' Ned's on board. Good old Ned!"

"Is he, by Jingo!" said Cavendish, turning the Sausage and scudding back. "Good egg! A better chap never wore a jersey. I'll bet he's got some news, too!"

"She's picking something up—he's hove to," said Stephen. "My word, he's hauled a German aboard! I never thought there'd be any left alive off the tugs."

"Nor did I, or I'd have gone to look," said Cavendish.

The torpedo-boat bore down on the smack, and Ned of Northey—his own self, in jersey and long boots—was sitting at his tiller as coolly as ever. Two limp Germans in rifle-men's uniform were draining on the deck.

"Ned, ahoy!" yelled both the boys together.

The young smackman seemed even more surprised than they had been.

"Gosh, here's a sight for sore eyes!" he said. "Is it really you, misters? Why, this is the best hit I've made since I left the Channel!"

"Down sails an' come aboard, old ducks-and-eels!" said Cavendish. "We'll tow your ship into Sheerness. Pass a hawser there aft, men. Watson, go aboard the smack an' take her helm."

Ned was glad enough to come, and gave all three of his old friends a hand-grip that nearly sprained their fingers.

"It's my lucky day when I run across you—oh, Master Sam?" he said. "Yes, I've got a pair o' Dutchies aboard there. Off the tugs? No, they fell out o' the lighters, I think. They've swallowed considerable salt water, but aren't otherwise damaged, so I've left 'em to dry. There weren't any others. Well, I never dreamed it was you when I saw this craft make a hash of the flotilla. She's got the cut of a German. What's come to you all this while, sirs?"

Sam gave a brief summary of their adventures since leaving the Terrific, and Ned whistled loud and long.

"I've missed suthin', then," he said. "I've had a quieter time nor what you have, though I've seen a little work, too. Brought the Maid up here to the Thames after we parted, as I told you I should. Lay a week in Leigh Swath, among the bawleys—the shrimpin' fleet—which, o' course, are mostly lyin' deserted. Germans never noticed me there, bein' at anchor amidst 'em. I saw the Blaino Castle go down an' blow herself up off Sheerness. Guessed what that meant, pretty easy."

"It made me afraid you was wiped out in her, an' precious low I felt. I had a cruise round next night, lookin' for any signs of you. Put into Havengore Creek, on the Essex side, afore mornin', an' ran right through the creeks at the back o' the islands into the Roach River."

"Did you, though! We were on Sheppey then—t'other side," said Stephen.

"I smelt around the Roach for a tide, in the dark, to see

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how things was there, an' laid up in a creek all day. This mornin' I heard the big guns thunderin' away off Thames mouth; guessed the two squadrons was at it, an' that the Germans'd be a heap too busy to bother about me an' my little smack. Nipped through into the Thames again, an' ran up to Thames Haven. I saw the Kaiser's ships had got it hot an' cleared out, so I upped sail an' come down, meanin' to try Sheerness. An' here I be."

"But wasn't it too hot for you in the Essex creeks an' the Roach estuary?" said Stephen. "The Germans are in force there, aren't they?"

"Ay; but not so thick as they was! Now they're mostly gathered round London way. Their depots, as you might say, is on the creeks there. That's where they run a lot o' their ammunition an' explosives an' things ashore. Small steamers come across, an' bring the stuff up the creeks at night. It's all quiet an' lonely up there, you know, an' they've got a hold o' all that side of the Thames."

"Ah," said Cavendish, "that's how they do it, is it? Saves convoys an' transports. Did you find all that out?"

"Yes. I went for a longish cruise in my punt all night round the creeks. I knows how to keep out o' sight."

"Good man! It's well inland, isn't it? Some way from the Thames?"

"Ay; half-way between the Thames an' the Crouch estuary. The creeks join the two. The Germans have got a big magazine sort o' place on the Roach, just by Paglesham."

"Have they?" said Sam, pricking up his ears. "What do they store in it?"

"Most o' their dangerous explosives—nitro-glycerine, picric acid, an' the like—from what I could see of the way they handled it. There was a little steamer brought a load, an' I warn't far off."

"What's the magazine like?"

"Why, they've run it up themselves, by what I could see. It's a great, big, round building of corrugated iron, like what you roofs sheds with. I should say they seized the stuff from somewhere to build it. The magazine stands on the saltings, near where the boat-buildin' sheds used to be. It looks rather like one o' those big gasworks buildin's, made of iron, that you see outside towns, an' at high tide there's about two foot o' water round the side of it that's nearest the creek."

"What! Against the walls of it?"

"Yes, sir. I should say there's water nigh all round it when the tide's full. For safety, I suppose. It must be ticklish stuff to have such a lot of all together. They send it along to the front as they want it, I think, an' keep fillin' up with more."

"Ticklish stuff!" said Cavendish, as Sam gave a long whistle. "I should say so! Water's the safest thing to have round such a magazine as that!"

"Yes, by the holy poker!" exclaimed Sam, catching him by the arm in unwonted excitement. "And there's one thing—just one—that water could carry to it. They'd never dream of such a thing happening, I suppose. But what if it could be done?"

"What on earth d'you mean?"

"A torpedo!"

"A good chap," said Cavendish, rather staggered, "a torpedo up a ditch in the middle of Essex! How would you get it there?"

"Ned says there's two feet of water against the iron wall at the top of the tide," said Sam quickly.

"Two feet's no good—a torpedo won't run in that depth."

"Would it run in three?"

"It might in three. One of those long, thin German torpedoes would, I should think. But two foot can't be made into—"

"Look at the moon and the wind," said Sam, pointing to the thin crescent that showed already in the still daylit heavens. "It's two o'clock tide to-day by the moon. That's the very top of the high spring tides before they wane. An' a north-west wind, which always drives the tide at least a foot higher. At three o'clock this mornin' there'll be three feet of salt water against the wall of that magazine—perhaps four. It's the one chance in a fortnight. At neap tides it would hardly be wetted. But to-night—"

"But the torpedo?" urged Cavendish. "How's it to get up there?"

"Can't this craft go where the small steamers go?"

"Master Sam's right!" cried Ned. "I could pilot her there myself, daylight or pitch dark. It's but a six-mile run in from sea!"

"Then, by all the powers, we'll try it!" exclaimed Cavendish. "Their vessels are all cleared away to sea. They held command over the mouths of the rivers—"

"They hold 'em no longer. Our squadron's made a clean sweep of the lot!" put in Stephen.

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"We'd try it if they were there still," said Cavendish. "This isn't a chance to miss. By Jove, there's one thing, though! We've used our last torpedo! An' the British pattern won't go in these tubes. Confound—"

"I'm thinkin' ye needn't fash yourself about that," said Mac's voice behind them. His head was out of the hatchway, and he had been listening quietly. "There's a store o' German torpedoes at the dockyard. I saw them. They've been usin' the place as a base for their own ships, ye ken, an' there's a lot of their stuff there. I hadn't time to get any more aboard before we started, for their war-heads weren't fitted, but—"

"Good heavens," said Cavendish, "that's all we want! We'll get 'em aboard before dark, an' we'll leave at half-tide."

"Hurrah!" cried Stephen. "Another little job on hand. We needn't smell round for orders—eh?"

"We'll do it on our own—we're all freelances here," said Cavendish, with a wink. "I don't know where my admiral is. Vincent don't command over Essex, either. I'll tell him what the game is, and you bet he'll wish us luck."

"It looks like a wonderful chance," said Stephen. "Just the one time in the whole month, with the north wind favouring us as well, when it might be done. Well, here's success to the trial!"

It was eleven o'clock in the dark hours when the Converted Sausage, much more active than her name implied, slid quietly out of Sheerness Government Dock and turned her head north-eastwards down the Swin Channel, along the sea-coast of Essex. Sam and Stephen, who had been sleeping soundly below since five, there being nothing for them to do, sniffed the salt wind as they came on deck and prepared for the night's cruise.

"Got the torpedoes all right, then?" said Sam.

"Mac shipped eight of them aboard, and I've fitted their war-heads. We're all ready; but it's occurin' to me more an' more what a gamble this trip is," said Cavendish. "It's a shot in the dark at nothing in particular. However, if we get there, we shall jolly soon know if it succeeds."

Cavendish decided not to go through the Havengore creeks, on account of their being more easily guarded by the Germans, but to run down the coast and enter the river by its main mouth. At one o'clock they had rounded the Whitaker Beacon, and were feeling their way with the lead to the mouth of the Crouch. The inky blackness of the night favoured them, and with all lights out they steamed quietly up the very centre of the mile-wide river. No rifle-shot of sentries gave the alarm from either of the low, marshy banks by the sea-wall, for it was doubtful if the low-sided craft could be seen from them.

"They know the whole of this side of England's in their hands," said Sam, "and an attack by water, right up inland here, is not a thing they're likely to fear. There's the Roach, Ned—mind the Blankfleet Spit."

"Ay, ay!" returned Ned, who was at the helm, acting as pilot. They had reached the point where the Roach enters the Crouch, and, turning up into the former, they followed the broad, winding salt creek for a couple of miles into Essex.

"Man both tubes, there!" said Cavendish quietly. "Stand to the guns!"

"I say," said Stephen, "how are you goin' to count on our torpedo striking through the wall of the place an' reachin' the explosives?"

"It needn't do that. It will go off when it strikes the iron, and the shock of all that gun-cotton explodin' so close is bound to touch off such high-power stores as there are inside."

"Wouldn't a few shells from the guns do it?"

"No. Our little shells haven't shock enough, unless they burst right into or over the stuff. I expect they've protected it from shell-fire. But the full torpedo-charge'll do it, for it'll drive right through buildings an' all. It's a marvel to me we haven't been spotted and challenged from the banks, by the way."

"She's a German boat, old cock," said Stephen. "Even in the dark they can spot her build, if they see her at all. 'Tisn't likely they've heard one of their craft is captured and in use."

"Jove, no—I'm always forgetting that!" said Cavendish, peering ahead. "I dare say they'll want to halt us before we get too near their magazine, though, in any case."

"Yonder it be, sir," said Ned, pointing forward as they slid quietly round the next bend. A few hundred yards ahead, on the right-hand shore, a great, round, flat-topped building like a gasometer loomed against the sky. Its base was shrouded in darkness, but the water was washing round the outer side of it.

"Full high tide," murmured Sam, glancing at the banks,

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"and a brimful one. There'll be three feet at the wall, if not more."

There was silence as the magazine came into view. The man at the fore-tube stood ready, and the tension became intense.

"I suppose you chaps know what we're in for, by the way?" said Cavendish, quietly taking the helm from Ned.

"Wreckin' the Germans' chief explosive depot, if we're lucky," said Stephen.

"And wiping ourselves off the chart as well, I haven't much doubt," added the young naval officer. "We're not torpedoin' a ship. A magazine like that is liable to kill everything within a quarter of a mile of it when it goes off."

"Can't be helped," said Sam grimly. "It's got to be done."

"Well, there's no tellin' which way an explosion'll work. They're rum things," said Cavendish. "Stand by, there!"

Suddenly from the river walls beside the magazine came a sharp, challenging cry. There was no answer from the vessel, and the cry was followed instantly by a line of flames from hidden rifles, while bullets drummed on the steel plates.

"Let her go!" cried Cavendish.

The sudden "plop!" was heard as the torpedo sped on its errand. The rifle-fire redoubled.

Then came one awful, devastating crash, and the whole scene was lit by blinding flame as the great magazine exploded. There was an instant's glimpse of uniformed figures near it, blown to pieces by the shock.

The torpedo-boat lurched violently, her crew reeled and fell headlong, and she drove helplessly into the opposite bank, and stuck fast.

—

The Mysterious Headquarters at Boleyn Hall.

What happened to Sam at the time he could not have told himself. He was only conscious of an appalling noise, and of being hurled along the deck as if somebody had pushed him. He brought up heavily against the after-grating, and something came crashing down through the engine-room hatch, and seemed to bury itself in the vessel's vitals.

Most of the ship's company on deck had fared in the same way—some of them worse. The explosion was a considerable distance off, yet the force of it heeled the torpedo-boat for a moment or two as if a squall had struck her. It seemed as if the whole company were killed or stunned, and for half a minute nobody moved save one.

It was the head and shoulders of Mac, the engineer, that poked up through the wrecked hatch. He took one look round, and dived below again. The engines had been stopped, but now they started astern at half-speed, and the torpedo-boat was drawing her nose back from the bank of salt-marsh into which she had run when Mac appeared above once more.

"Is there no anybody that can tak' a turn at the helm?" he said. "Or are ye all deid? I've got her afloat again, but—"

"I'll take it," said Sam dizzily, pulling himself together and making for the wheel as well as he could. "We may be all 'deid' in earnest for all I could tell you to the contrary, Mac. Keep her dead slow till I find out which side of the river's which!"

"Ye seem to have got it hot an' strong here on deck, laddie!"

"We did. I thought the whole of Essex was blown to bits. How did it take ye below?"

"Not so bad as up here. My firemen are on their legs. But there was a big chunk of iron came through the top fra' somewhere, an' it's done my engines no good. We're maist crippled."

"Will she steam?"

"Ay, after a fashion. I can get her right again in half an hour, though I wonder it didn't go clean through the keel o' her. There's the skipper wakin' up. I must get below."

Sam's rather-damaged senses came back to him quickly, though his head sang like a concertina, and his nose was bleeding freely, though he had not struck it against anything. There was a dull glow from the place where the magazine had stood, but of the building itself there was not the smallest trace. Livid smoke and fumes were circling up from the spot. Of any human enemy there was no sign.

Sam turned the vessel's head away from the direction of the ruin, and kept her moving down the creek by the way she had come. The others were beginning to stir, and Cavendish, blinking as if dazzled, came beside Sam.

"Something went off, didn't it?" he said.

"Yes," returned Sam, laughing rather feebly. "A few tons of nitro-glycerine and some little trifles like that, I

think. We've wiped out their giddy magazine, anyway—an' any of 'em who were nearer it than us. Hurt?"

"No, only bumped about a bit, I think. Glad you were able to handle her. Keep her going so while I look round."

One of the gunners and Stephen joined him, both rather shaken up, but not daunted seriously. Two of the others were completely stunned, though with no bones broken, but the torpedo-gunner by the starboard deck-tube—which had not discharged its torpedo—was stone dead. How, they could not discover for the moment, nor was there time.

"Poor chap!" said Cavendish. "Take him below, two of you. Get to stations as quick as you can, the others. There's no knowing when we shall need the guns."

"I don't believe there's much enemy left to tackle us," said Sam, at the wheel. "Here, Ned, you take her again—you know this route best. How is it we aren't all spifficated? That's what I want to know!"

"There's no reckoning how an explosion'll work," said Cavendish; "it's full of whims. This one must have spent its force mainly the other way. We were a good distance off, but I fancy fifty yards nearer would have settled our hash."

"Well, it was worth while to see that giddy firework go up in the air, instead of bein' used to kill off our men at the front," said Stephen, feeling his limbs tenderly.

"Ra-ther!" rejoined Cavendish. "I hope Mac won't be long gettin' her full-powered again, though, or we may find ourselves up against something. It was a chunk of iron from the magazine that smashed into us, wasn't it?"

The Sausage went steadily ahead through the night, barely making four knots, and her crew kept an alert look-out for danger. She would have been an easy prey just then for anything armed and floating, or for a field-gun or two on the river-wall. But there was no sign of any attack. The Germans, wherever they were, seemed to be caught at a loss by the terrific and unexpected blow.

"Come to think of it, the enemy probably don't even know what they've got to look for," said Sam. "A torpedo-boat's about the least likely thing they'd guess at for the damage, an' it's long odds all those who actually saw us up yonder are blown to flinders."

"They must have some defending vessels of some sort left in the rivers, surely!" said Stephen. "There used to be a couple of torpedo-boats lyin' off Burnham, in the next river. If they were to get wind of us—"

"Vessel ahead, sir!" called the look-out forward sharply, as the Sausage curved round the next bend.

A long, swift, picket-boat was suddenly seen approaching, neither vessel seeing the other till they cleared the point between. The stranger scuttled round sharply, blowing her whistle, and dashed away at racing speed.

"Both guns there!" cried Cavendish. "Let him have it!"

Crack! Crack! Crack! went the six-pounders. The night was so dark, and the mark so small, that all watched eagerly, fearing the stranger would get away. But the third shell struck the flying picket-boat fair and square, and she opened out like a matchbox, and went down. As the torpedo-boat passed, the boys saw some of her crew scrambling out on to the mud on the east bank.

"They're on the Foulness shore now—which is an island," said Cavendish. "They won't get off it in a hurry, having no boat. Well shot, Watson!"

"Was she sent to look for us, d'you think?" said Stephen. "Sent to scout. She'd have gone back to take news of us, an' it's lucky we stopped her. Mac ahoy!"

"Ay, ay!" said the engineer, coming up with a spanner in one fist.

"How long before we count on any speed again?"

"A matter o' half an hour yet, an' maybe more. The damage is worse than I thought. It'll be no good callin' for more steam before then," returned Mac, retiring below once more.

"Mustn't complain," said Cavendish thoughtfully. "We're lucky to be afloat at all. That's a coastguard ship ahead, isn't it?"

"Was once," said Ned, as a moored hulk on the Foulness side came into view. "The old Frolic. Wonder if the Germans ha' seized her for a store-ship? Would ye like to ram one o' those bust-up cigars o' yours into her an' see, sir?"

"No, we don't want any more blow-ups just now. Is that the Crouch opening ahead?"

They were within a mile of the end of the Roach, where it opened at right angles upon the wider Crouch, which ran down to the sea, eastwards, and stretched ten miles inland, westwards.

"Searchlights!" exclaimed Sam, as two long rays were seen in the distance westward up the Crouch, sweeping slowly down and across the other river towards the sea.

Cavendish rang off the engines instantly, and let the Sausage glide to a standstill as he peered in the direction of the distant lights.

"A brace of 'em," said Sam. "They must have some torpedo-boats after all, or, maybe, river defence gunboats."

"Humph!" grunted Cavendish thoughtfully. "I say, this won't do. While we can only crawl at a snail's pace, we've no chance on earth of manœuvring an' torpedoing two fast vessels. They can mop us up without our being able to do a thing to 'em."

"Clear enough, I should say," said Stephen.

"An' then they'll have those searchlights on us in no time if we try to go to sea by way of the Crouch. I don't want to chuck this prize of ours away uselessly. There's many a job she may do yet, an' it'd worry me to know she was in German hands again."

"We haven't had her twenty-four hours yet," said Sam.

"No," agreed Cavendish, ringing the engines on again, and putting his helm over. "We'll 'bout ship an' go to sea the other way through the creeks. I'd give my head if we'd got full steam; then I'd tackle 'em both. But there's no help for it."

The torpedo-boat turned round and retraced her way up the reach again, till Yokefleet Creek opened on the left, winding its way through the maze of islands till it joined the sea again off the Thames Mouth.

"It's a queer way, this gettin' out by the back door," said Cavendish. "I suppose you can take her through, Ned?"

"Ay, ay!" said the marshman. "Lucky it's a big tide to-night; we shall just save it through an' over the Maplins to sea. It's high dry here at low water time, though."

"Hallo, what's that?" said Stephen, as two or three flashes were seen sweeping across the sky high up and away over the flat land to the westward.

"Signallin' of some sort," said Cavendish. "Though whoever it is they can't see anything of us at that distance. Likely it's about the explosion. But where can it be from?"

"That's from Boleyn Hall, over towards Rochford," said Ned, glancing at the ray of light. "It comes from the top of the new tower, I think."

"What is it, another German depot?"

"More'n that," replied the marshman. "There's rare games done there."

"Games! What d'you mean, Ned?" said Sam.

"It's a sort o' headquarters, I believe, sir. A signallin' station, with wireless installation, an' all sorts o' things. When I was up here t'other day in the punt I had a talk wi' a marshman off Wallasea Island. He'd been smellin' round up that way a lot, on an' off, an' he told me about it. There ain't many folks left in this district, you see, except the marshmen, who can get a livin' any time, an' know their way about. From what he said, an' what he'd heard tell, a good piece o' the war is directed from that place."

"Why did he think that?" said Sam keenly.

"Because, sir, there's wires an' cables laid to it, besides the wireless affair, an' several o' their best hussifers are often there, an' messengers come gallopin' up, off an' on, in the daytime. It's a high point over this flat country, you see, sir. It commands a view o' the coast an' the Thames, an' it's within touch of London, no such great way. A rare handy place."

"You've got the hang of it well, Ned," said Cavendish; "but you can't mean Von Krantz, the German Commander-in-Chief, runs the war from there? It's well known he's stationed in North London."

"No, not Von Krantz, sir; but Von Krantz's messengers are always comin' there. It's believed, somehow, on that account, he gets his orders from Boleyn. There's somebody there who makes things hum."

"Gets his orders from Boleyn Hall!" exclaimed Cavendish in astonishment. "What are you talking about, Ned? Who should the Commander-in-Chief take orders from? You don't suppose the German Minister of War is there?"

Sam and Stephen exchanged a quick glance.

"Nay, sir, I dunno who it is," said Ned, shaking his head; "but puttin' two and two together, there's somebody who's got a big finger in the pie, an' can order generals about. That's all I can tell you, an' even that's largely guesswork."

"Sounds queer," said Cavendish. "I don't know much about shore campaigning myself, and it's beyond me. What d'you think of it, Sam?"

The young scout made no reply. He was watching the distant light winking across the sky, and seemed deep in thought. His brows were puckered anxiously. Meanwhile the torpedo-boat was threading silently through the creeks.

"Look here, Bob," said Sam suddenly, laying his hand on Cavendish's arm, "you'll have to pass near the Wakering shore before you get out of here. That's on the mainland, clear of these islands. If there's anything like a stretch to be found clear of Germans, I want you to put me ashore there. I'm bound to go, anyhow."

"What!" exclaimed Cavendish. "What on earth for?"

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NEXT WEEK:

Tom Merry & Co. Make Merry.

"Business purposes. Anywhere on the Southend side will do. I want to look round."

"But my dear chap, it's impossible! Unless we're out of here in half an hour the tide'll leave us stranded. I can't wait for you."

"Don't want you to. Take the boat away southward for us again, to Sheerness or somewhere. Just put me on the mud, Come old chap, that's all."

"What, and leave you here in Essex? Right in the thick of the Germans, cut off by water, an' with no escape? My dear Sam, I'm hanged if I do anything of the sort! It's they simply chucking yourself away!"

There was a general pause of surprise among the ship's company, and Ned scratched his head with one hand while being he steered with the other.

"Well, old chap," said Sam, "I'm certainly going, even if I have to drop over the stern and swim ashore. So you might as well shove me there in the dinghy and let me land dry. You needn't stop, you can sheer her into the bank on a long painter."

"Oh, I'll put you there if you're set on it," said Cavendish. "I know there's no stopping you. Only I hate to see you chuck yourself away. After all the fun we've had, What is it you're after, really?"

"I want to scout the country up to Boleyn Hall," rejoined Sam, "an' the place itself, if I can. I want to see what there is to report there, and who it is that's running the show. It looks to me like a big thing."

"Phew!" said Cavendish; "but the place is sure to be guarded like a blessed barracks, especially after this affair with the magazine. It's certainly against you, I should say."

"I've got through lines of pickets before," said Sam. "As for the risk, the game's worth it. There's the Wakering shore in sight now; we're opening the creek. That'll do for me, Bob, if you'll shove me on the mud there."

"I'm comin' too, Sam," said Stephen resolutely. "You aren't going to leave me out!"

"Very well," said his brother after a moment's reflection. "I shall be glad of you, old boy, if you care to come. I don't need to tell you what the risk is."

"An' me, sir?" said Ned eagerly.

Sam shook his head.

"Sorry, Ned, but three's too many. Besides, you've got to get the Sausage out of here."

"Rather!" said Cavendish. "I'm not going to lose my pilot. But do you chaps expect to get out of this business alive?"

"Yes. Why not? Bar accidents."

"The whole country's crammed with Germans, and the Thames cuts you off even if you succeed in your job. How will you get out of Essex?"

"We can't count on it, but if you could be off Hole Haven—if nothing else turns up—about this time to-morrow night you might pick us up. If we're not shot we'll be there."

"Right," said Cavendish, and he gave orders for the canvas dinghy to be fitted together.

There was no need to stop and ferry the brothers ashore. A quick farewell was bidden, and the boys, getting into the dinghy, were paid out astern at the end of a long rope.

The Sausage slowed down. Sam steered the dinghy suddenly in towards the bank, and both boys jumped nimbly out on to the saltings.

The torpedo-boat went ahead quickly again, hauling up the dinghy and getting it on deck in a few moments, while the brothers crept quietly to the sea-wall that shut the creek off from the lowland beyond.

"Now's the critical moment!" whispered Sam. "If anybody's seen us come ashore we sha'n't get any further."

"An' there they are, confound 'em!" murmured Stephen, as, peeping over the embankment, they saw several dark forms hurrying towards it.

The men were German riflemen, there was no doubt about that. And, marooned on that desolate strip of salting, with the water behind and the enemy in front, the position of the young scouts was as ticklish as it could be.

"Shall we swim back across the creek an' hide on the island?" whispered Stephen.

Sam shook his head, watching the men keenly.

"They're after Cavendish—not us," he said.

It was soon evident that Sam was right. The Germans had not seen the boys land.

From where the enemy were the creek and saltings were not visible, being shut off from the embankment; but the top of the torpedo-boat's low smoke-stack could be seen moving along above the top of the latter, and the men, six or eight of them, were hurrying along on their own side of the embankment, trying to keep up with the Sausage and travelling away from the boys.

"They're goin' to try an' catch him at a favourable point

"PLAYED OUT!"

A Long, Complete Tale.
By Martin Clifford.

—most likely the mouth of the creek," said Sam. "Shouldn't wonder if they've a machine-gun there."

"Hope they won't scuttle Cavendish, then," said Stephen anxiously. "He'll have to pass it to get out."

"I don't fancy he'll take much harm, an' its a lucky thing for us—draws 'em off an' gives us our chance to get through. Come on!"

Just before they left, the brothers heard a rapid outbreak of rifle-fire near the point where the creek opened upon the sea, but they could not tell how the encounter went. All they could see was the fire-spurts of the distant rifle-shots, evidently helped now by a machine-gun, and the glow and sparks from the Sausage's smoke-stack, showing she was being pushed along at forced draught.

"Mac's givin' her ginger down in the stokehole," commented Sam. "Now then, come on!"

They crossed over the embankment quickly, ran down the other side and jumped the rushing dyke at its foot, and started off at a rapid pace across the dark marshes. The coast was clear for the time, and they made the most of it.

Before long the creek and sea-wall were left far behind, and after a long circuit to avoid a small bivouac of Germans which Stephen's keen eyes discerned in good time, they skirted the watery waste called the "Pool" and gave Barking village a wide berth, guessing some of the enemy would be quartered there.

A stranger to that wild district would have been hopelessly lost a dozen times over and spent the night wandering among the maze of deep marsh dykes and fleets that met each other in all directions and were uncrossable except at distant spots.

But Sam knew every inch of the ground, having shot all over it for many a winter past. As has been said, he had made a speciality of scouting in this district long before there was any hint of a war, and there was scarcely a square mile of Essex that he did not know like a book.

"We've got to get there, an' away again, before day-break," said Sam, as they went. "In fact, we shall most likely have to lie 'doggo' all day an' move on again after dark."

"Provided we get through to-night with whole skins," added Stephen, "which doesn't seem to me very likely. However, lead on, Macduff!"

Sam made no reply. He did not believe in meeting troubles till they arrived. Once away from the creeks and into the marshes, they were less troubled by Germans; the country was fairly clear of the enemy. And so it continued as they made their way onwards towards Rochford.

"We shall find 'em thick enough when we get near Boleyn Hall," opined Sam.

"It's sure to be guarded like a blessed fortress," said Stephen, "guns an' things bristling everywhere."

"Not so bad as that. They can't expect any attack, for they know there are no troops of ours within any possible reach of them. I doubt if they've any guns at all, nor many men. It's a sort of staff headquarters, not a stronghold; but they're sure to keep a pretty keen eye on it. Look out! Down on your face!"

The words were whispered quickly, for not far ahead they caught sight of a spark of fire that flickered and went out.

Someone had struck a match.

"Smokin' on outpost duty," commented Sam. "That looks pretty slack. The officer on rounds must be a good way off. We'd better crawl through an' see how they're placed."

A quiet, stealthy stalk of several hundred yards followed. The night was dark and the hedges were thick and plentiful, and it was hard to locate the men, who were evidently somewhere ahead. The boys did not want to blunder into them by accident, and so they went with extreme caution.

Sam expected to place them by the glow of the pipe which, he was pretty sure, the man on outpost duty had lit.

But before they saw anything of it, the sound of gruff voices speaking low came to them from the other side of a hedge, and both the young scouts crouched flat.

A whiff of tobacco smoke came to them through the hedge, and a voice growled in a harsh, North-German dialect:

"Keep the top on that pipe, Fritz. I would be sorry to smoke myself in range of him up at Boleyns."

"Ach," was the reply, "it is all right! The round's officer is past, and they are all running round like a bee in a bottle since that explosion down by the water."

"Himmel!" said the first speaker. "What a crash it was—eh? I felt the very ground shake even up here. There is no doubt it was the Paglesham magazine. But an accident, do you think, or spies?"

"Who knows?"

"Only he up at the Hall. I'll wager a week's pay he knows by now. And a rare rage he'll be in, sure enough. Somebody will suffer."

"I don't know who, then, for the guards of the magazine

must have been blown into sausage-meat. No wonder if he is in anger, Hans, it is a very big loss. The powder and stuff was badly wanted, and now those British have cleared our fleet from the Thames it will be very hard to get any more steamers over."

"It is only the cruiser squadron that is beaten," growled Hans, snicking the lock of his rifle. "Our battle fleet still holds the East Coast, and you don't tell me it won't come out on top when the big fight comes."

"Well, we'll hope it will," said Fritz, "but the big fight's such a long time coming that it's pretty plain our Prince is dodging it as much as he can to gain time. He's playing blindman's buff with the British admirals, and that doesn't look as if he were so dead sure of winning."

"Bah!" returned the other voice, "he beat their home squadron at the opening of the war, and now he's strengthened he'll beat these. Besides, we've swamped the country here and beggared the people. We've such a grip on this tight little island, as the fools used to call it, that they'll never shake it off."

"Well, I don't know. It's dull work sitting down here on our tails night after night, and we're too near the terror up in the Hall there to please me. I sha'n't be sorry to get back in Emden again. Remember the beer in the Kleiner Garten, Hans?"

Sam nudged his brother as the sentries' talk verged on German matters, and the boys crept along the hedgerow noiselessly as snakes. They skirted round into the next field, out of sight of the outpost, and made their way onward again.

"There's no doubt about it," said Sam, "somebody who's up in that Hall has got a mighty big finger in this pie. I wish they'd mention his name."

"Can't you guess?"

"Yes, I can."

"Von Krantz, is it?"

Sam shook his head.

"We needn't talk about it now. What we've got to do is to find out for certain. Look, the lights are stopping on the tower!"

It was not far now to Boleyn Hall. They could even see the dark mass of the old house, on the rising ground among the trees, and from the top of the tall tower the search-light was still flashing its beams by dots and dashes across the sky. But as Sam spoke they ceased altogether, and darkness reigned. There were dim lights, however, in one or two of the windows, and especially in some low ones near the ground.

"Now for the final crawl," said Sam, "and if we take till daylight I mean to find out something about the place, even if I have to get into the house itself. You see those low windows just beside the house?"

"Yes."

"That used to be the estate office. It's built on to the east wall. We'll have to separate here. I'll creep up towards the south side, and you to the east. Meet down at the little spinney yonder just before dawn, if all goes well. We'll have to try and crawl past the pickets."

Stephen nodded, and they parted company. The younger boy waited till his brother was out of sight, and then started on his own account. He worked up towards the distant house in the manner he knew so well how to follow. He had not been Sam's pupil throughout the campaign for nothing.

It was not long before, lying flat so as to look upwards along the ground, he caught sight of the first of the German pickets that guarded the approaches to the house. The silent form of the man on guard, with bayoneted rifle over his shoulder, showed clear against the stars. A strip some distance to the right showed Stephen another picket, the sentry marching back and forth towards the other.

"I think I can slip in between those, with luck," thought Stephen, "though what it is Sam's expecting to do is more than I can make out, and I doubt if he quite knows himself."

It was no time for speculating on Sam's plan of action, however, so Stephen set himself to creep along, under cover of the stunted hawthorn-bushes, till he neared the sentry's line, and there he waited, quiet as a crouched partridge, till the man gave him a chance to worm his way past. Once beyond the line of pickets, Stephen made quick but cautious progress towards the house, now a few hundred yards distant.

The luck was with him, for he did not stumble on any surprise. The trees made it very dark, and he realised that luck had as much to do with it as anything, for it was almost impossible to tell where an out-posted sentry might be in wait. So, when he was half-way to the house he halted, lying flat between some thorn-bushes, and waited.

"Sam was right," he thought to himself. "This is a

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NEXT WEEK:
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precious important place to 'em, by the way they guard it. And there's a whole lot of telegraph or telephone-wires leading away yonder. I suppose that spire-thing on the top of the tower is the Marconi wireless installation, or whatever they call it. I wonder where Sam—"

A sudden noise well away to the left startled him, followed by a rifle-shot, the sound of German oaths, and a struggle. The night was very still, and the boy heard it perfectly. His scalp tickled as he listened.

"Great guns!" he thought in consternation. "Can they have caught Sam? It sounds like it!"

His heart beat fast, and his fingers closed on the carbine slung over his back, as he strained his eyes in the darkness. Nothing was to be seen, but the tramp of heavy feet and the sound of hoarse orders were audible. Presently, farther up, he saw a small knot of men nearing the house itself, and they seemed to be dragging somebody with them.

Stephen's heart sank into his boots.

"They have got him!" he thought, barely suppressing a groan. "It's all up! What shall I do?"

For some time Stephen lay thinking rapidly, his brain on fire. To rescue Sam from that armed horde was impossible. To get help was impossible. Soon there would be a thorough search all round to see if more British scouts were approaching the house, and if Stephen stayed, discovery was almost certain. But to leave his brother in the lurch and save himself was equally beyond Stephen's power.

"They'll get me, anyway," he thought desperately. "I can't leave him. I'd as soon be shot. May as well go forward as back."

What he expected to do the boy himself could not have told. All notions of strategy and scouting were thrown to the winds. Some wild idea entered his head that Sam might be set free by a desperate stroke if he were found at once, and that they might make a run for it.

At any rate, he rose and ran straight towards the house. Nobody stood in his way—the commotion was mostly on the south side, while he was on the east. The first portion of the building he came to was the annexe which had once served as an estate-office. The windows were lit and the door stood ajar.

"Wonder if there is any way into the house through here?" he thought. "If I could only get in—"

He darted through the doorway at once into a narrow passage which led nowhere, but had a room opening on each side. Stephen quickly entered the left-hand one.

It was empty. A table in the middle was strewn with papers, despatches, and writing materials. Two telephone-receivers, evidently newly fixed, were in the room, and charts and ordnance maps hung round the walls. The place looked like a field-marshal's temporary quarters.

But there was no other door out of it, and Stephen was about to leave again at once, when he realised that his way was barred. A step was heard in the passage outside, entering by the outer door. The boy's heart beat faster.

"Somebody's coming in," he thought, rapidly unslinging his carbine. "If he enters here, one of us will have to peg out on the spot."

The step, firm and sharp, made louder by the ring of the spur, neared the door, and the next moment the new-comer entered. Stephen threw his carbine up, the stock under his armpit, the muzzle pointing at the stranger's breast.

"Halt, or you are a dead man!" he said swiftly.

The next moment a cry of amazement escaped the boy's lips, though the carbine remained steady to its aim.

The grim face before him was one which no man could fail to recognise. The stranger before Stephen's levelled carbine was Wilhelm, the German Emperor.

Stephen's Prisoner.

The pair, a few paces apart, stood facing each other steadily, and no sound was heard but their breathing. There was not an atom of doubt in Stephen's mind. The strong square face, the useless left arm that hung at its owner's side, the fierce, upturned moustaches, all told the boy at once who the stranger was. He was facing the ruler of the German Empire, and he knew it.

Nor did the Kaiser move. Great potentate though he was, he knew that one small pressure of the finger on that carbine's trigger would cost him his life. He did not as much as change countenance, and looked as commanding as ever, his cold-grey eyes fixed on those of the boy. But he remained still, none the less.

Some in Stephen's place might have betrayed themselves in the face of such a surprise, and the Kaiser might well have expected the boy to drop his carbine in sheer astonishment at coming across Germany's ruler at such a time. But Stephen had nerves of steel, and the long campaign had taught him to be surprised at nothing when danger threatened. He realised, now, whose was the masterhand that directed Germany's forces from those lonely headquarters at Boleyn Hall, and why the place was so perfectly fitted with cables and wires.

The two watched each other for a few seconds in silence, and Stephen felt a flash of admiration for the German ruler's air of dignity, even before the muzzle of the carbine. Some men would have been either angry or foolish in such a position, held up by a mere boy, but not so the Kaiser.

Stephen was the first to speak, ignoring the rule that Royalty is supposed to open conversations. But then the carbine made all the difference.

"I must ask you not to make any sound," said Stephen in a low voice. "My life depends on it, and I shan't hesitate to take yours if I'm forced to!"

"Do you know who I am?" said the Kaiser.

He spoke quietly and in perfect English, save for a very slight accent.

"Quite well," replied Stephen. "You are William, Emperor of Germany!"

The Kaiser nodded gravely, and, as he looked at the boy, a sudden flash of recognition came into his eyes.

"We have met before, I think," he said.

"Yes," replied Stephen; "on board your yacht in the Blackwater River, the first night you came across to England."

"I remember you. You escaped through an unscrewed porthole," said the Emperor quietly—"very unfortunately for the crew who allowed you to do it. You are the younger of the two lads Villiers, volunteer scouts, of a cadet corps in Essex."

"That's so," said Stephen.

He felt his hands growing very hot, somehow, but the carbine was held perfectly steady. Its muzzle pointed at a five-pointed star that hung from some order decorating the Emperor's breast.

"Then it is, doubtless, your elder brother whom my men report having captured ten minutes ago. I have not seen him yet."

"It would be he," said Stephen; and his last hope that Sam had escaped capture, fled.

"What brings you here?"

The Kaiser's voice sounded as though he were putting questions and giving orders with a perfect right to be obeyed.

"To look for him," replied Stephen bluntly.

"Well," said the Emperor, "you are a courageous lad. However, only one thing remains to be done," he added, stepping towards an electric bell-push that was fixed at the right hand of the writing-table. "I shall now ring this bell and have you arrested!"

(Another long instalment of this splendid serial in next Thursday's "Gem Library." Order it in advance.)



HOW DO YOU DO?

WHOM TO WRITE TO: The Editor, "GEM" Library, 23-9, Bouverie Street, Fleet Street, London, who will be pleased to hear from you.

"PLAYED OUT!"

Under the above expressive title our Story for next week will tell of the result of the meeting of the St. Jim's and Grammarians factions, and while the fun is great the situations are tense with the combined attempts to score!

The Editor

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