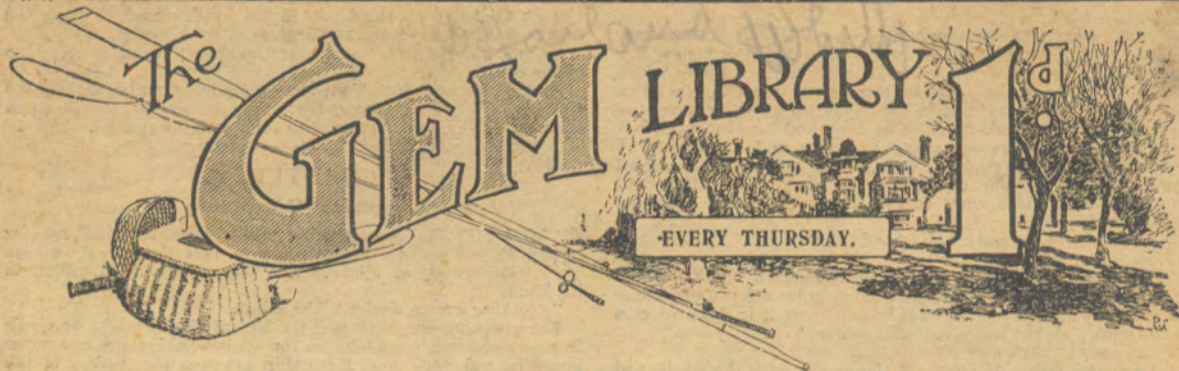


"TOM MERRY & CO."



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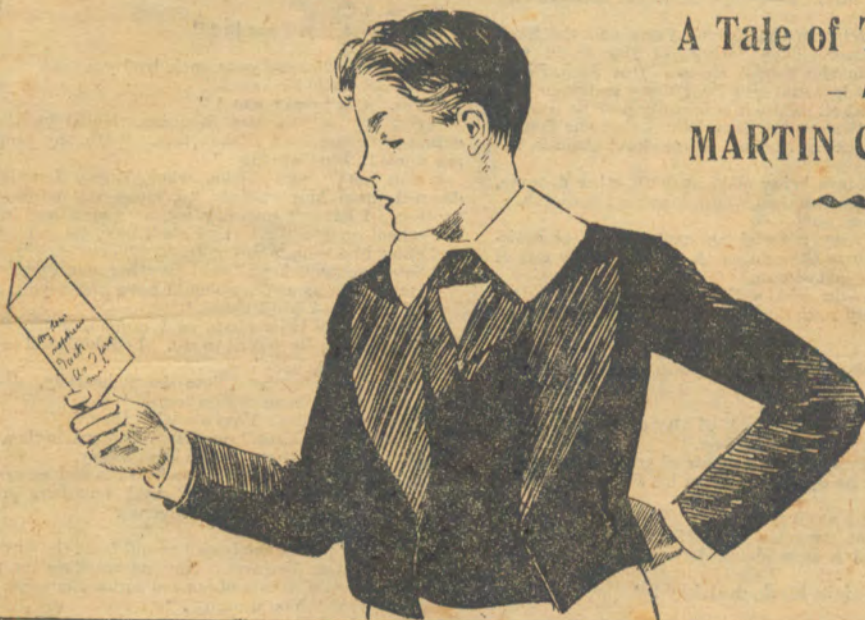


Complete Stories for Everyone, and Every Story a Gem!

A Tale of Tom Merry,

— BY —

MARTIN CLIFFORD.



JACK BLAKE'S PLOT.

CHAPTER 1.

A Surprise for Blake!

"MY dear Nephew Jack,—As I promised some time ago, I am about to pay you a visit at the school. I am in London for a few days, and shall have time to run down to Sussex for an afternoon. You may expect me on Wednesday, unless I should wire to the contrary.—Your affectionate uncle,
HENRY BLAKE."

"My hat!"

That was Jack Blake's ejaculation as he read the foregoing letter. The letter had come by the evening delivery on Tuesday, and Jack Blake was standing in the hall, reading it with a curious expression upon his face.

He had recognised his Uncle Harry's hand on the outside of the envelope, and he had opened the letter with a grin of anticipation: for funds were low in Study No. 6, and Uncle Harry was the most affectionate and generous of uncles as a rule.

Instead of a postal order, Jack found the above letter. And Jack Blake, after drawing a deep breath, ejaculated:

"My only summer hat!"

"Bai Jove!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, his Form-fellow in the Fourth, and his chum in Study No. 6, stopping as he caught sight of Blake, and read the dismay in his face. "What's the mattah, deah boy?"

Blake grunted.

"Letter from my uncle."

"That all? Nothin' to wowwy about in that, I suppose."

"He's coming to see me."

"Well, they will do these things," said Arthur Augustus, consolingly. "A chap's uncle expects to wun down and see him at times, you know. Aftah all, it's only to be expected."

"Ass! He—"

"I wefuse to be called an ass, Blake. I am quite willin' to advise you if you are in a difficult posish., but it must be undahstood first of all that I wefuse to be called an ass."

"He's coming on Wednesday afternoon."

"All the more convenient, I should say, as it is a half-holiday at this coll. I should imagine that the worthy old gentleman has awwanged that on purpose, so as to have time for a talk with you, deah boy."

"Of course he'nas, ass!" howled Blake, "but have you forgotten that we're playing the Shell that afternoon?"

A DOUBLE-LENGTH TALE OF TOM MERRY NEXT THURSDAY.

No. 79 (New Series).

"Bai Jove!"

"That's where the shoe pinches," growled Blake. "Of course, I want to see my uncle. He's an awfully jolly little beggar. I haven't seen him for six or seven years—not since I was a kid, in fact." Blake spoke as if he were now quite in the calm and tranquil vale of middle life. "Not since I was eight or nine years old, but he sends me ripping tips, and he always shoves along a first-class present every birthday and Christmas. I want to see him, of course. Only the thing's unfortunate all round. We're playing the Shell on Wednesday afternoon. Funds are low, and I want to give him a jolly time when he comes—"

"I will wire to my governah for a fivah."

Jack Blake grinned.

"The worst of it is, that if I put off the match with the Shell, he may not come. He's only in London for a few days, home from abroad on business—and if he can't put it in, he'll wire to let me know—at the last minute, of course."

"Bai Jove! that's wuff!"

"Of course it is. If I put off the match with the Shell, and the wire comes to say it's all right—"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy wrinkled his brows reflectively.

Blake looked glum.

As he had said, he wanted to see his uncle. He was an affectionate lad, and his uncle had treated him well. But a cricket fixture was important. He could put the fixture off. But if his uncle couldn't come after all—well, that would be distinctly rotten!

That cricket match between the Fourth Form and the Shell was an important matter. Tom Merry, of the Shell, was junior cricket captain in the School House. But Jack Blake was quite convinced that he could give Tom Merry endless points in the noble game of cricket. Just in a friendly way he wanted to have a Form match, to show the Shell fellows that the Fourth knew as much about cricket as the next Form above them in the school.

Most of the half-holidays being filled up with other fixtures, Blake had been lucky to secure that Wednesday for the match.

It had been settled, and now—

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy uttered an exclamation of satisfaction. He had evidently thought of an excellent way out of the difficulty. Blake looked at him.

"I think I can tell you what's the pwopah thing to do," Arthur Augustus D'Arcy remarked. "The Shell match ought not to be put off."

"Of course not."

"But if your uncle comes you can't captain the Fourth Form team?"

"That's it."

"Then there is only one way out of the difficulty—I will captain the team instead of you, deah boy."

D'Arcy made this suggestion with an air of great satisfaction, evidently deeming that he deserved well of his Form for having thought of it.

But Blake did not seem at all grateful.

Instead of jumping at the offer, and telling D'Arcy that he was a clever chap, and a true chum, he sniffed—not to say snorted.

"What do you think of the ideah, deah boy?"

"Rotten!"

"Eh?"

"Rotten! Piffle!"

"Weally, Blake—"

"We're playing the Shell to show Tom Merry and his gang that we can play cricket quite as well as the Shell," said Blake. "I wasn't thinking of giving an exhibition of humorous cricket."

D'Arcy jammed his eyeglass into his eye, and surveyed Blake from top to toe, and then from toe to top again.

His intent gaze travelled from Blake's curly hair down to the toes of his boots, and from his boots to the topmost curl on his head once more.

Blake ought to have been shrivelled up by the lofty scorn in that stare; but he wasn't; he didn't even appear to notice it. He looked at the letter again.

"It's all right," he said, "the match is off. I'll tell Tom Merry so. I'm going to look after my uncle if he comes, that's a cert. He's an awfully decent little chap. Did you speak, Gussy?"

"I wegard you with scorn."

"Go hon!"

"I shall insist upon playin' the Shell all the same, and if you do not get up a team, I shall get up a team."

"Oh, you can get up a chimney, if you like," said Blake, and he turned and marched off towards Tom Merry's study to break the news.

"Blake—"

"Sorry—can't stop."

"I wegard you—"

But Blake was gone. D'Arcy looked after his chum through his monocle for a few moments, with wrath in his aristocratic countenance, and then he slowly turned and made his way into the quadrangle.

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Jack Blake, with the letter in his hand, marched along the Shell passage, and kicked at the door of Tom Merry's study.

"Come in, fathead," sang out the cheery voice of the hero of the Shell.

And Blake went in. Tom Merry, Manners, and Lowther, the chums of the Shell, were at tea. The anxious expression upon the Fourth-Former's face excited their interest at once.

CHAPTER 2.

Captains Courageous

TOM MERRY was pouring out a second cup of tea for Manners, when Blake came in, and he paused to look inquiringly at Blake. The tea-pot remained poised in his hand.

"Nothing wrong, Jacky?" he asked.

For although the Shell and the Fourth Form might be rivals in many matters, especially on the cricket-field, there was never anything but real, good fellowship between the leaders of the rival Forms, at bottom.

Jack Blake nodded.

"Not exactly wrong," he said, "I've had a letter from my uncle—"

"Too bad," said Monty Lowther, the unquenchable joker of the School House, with a look of exaggerated sympathy. "Is the ticket up?"

"What?"

"What was it you put in?"

"Put in!"

"Yes, and what did your uncle lend you on it?"

"M—my uncle lend me!"

"Yes. Can't you renew?"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Manners, tickled by the bewildered expression upon Jack Blake's face. "Oh, my prophetic soul—my uncle! Shakespeare!"

"You ass!" said Blake, when Monty Lowther's meaning dawned upon him at last. "I mean my uncle—my father's brother. I haven't seen him for dog's ages, and he's coming to the school on Wednesday. I shall have to chum up with him and show him round, and so forth. The match is off."

"Saves you a licking," said Lowther, consolingly.

"Rats! Of course, we should have licked you hollow."

"Of course—I don't think."

"He's a jolly little chap, as I remember him," said Blake. "He's been awfully decent to me. I couldn't fail to play up, you know, on Wednesday."

"That's all right," said Tom Merry, heartily. "If the match is off, we'll help you show him round."

"Thanks awfully. That's settled then."

"So are the sardines," remarked Monty Lowther.

"Eh! What's that?" said Tom Merry.

"You've been pouring the tea into the dish of sardines for the last two minutes, that's all," said Lowther, grinning. "If you've done, you may as well leave off."

"My hat!"

Tom Merry jerked the teapot round from the sardines. There was a yell from Manners. He was reaching for the radishes, and he received a stream of hot tea across the wrist.

"Ow! Yow! You dummy!"

"Sorry—I—"

Tom Merry jerked the teapot back, and Lowther shrieked as he was splashed across the legs.

"Hold on! Ow!"

"Sorry, I—"

"You utter ass!" roared Lowther, "What's the good of being sorry? You've scalded me!"

"I'm sorry. The tea's wasted now—"

"The tea! I'm scalded!"

"Never mind, it's jolly lucky there's some more hot water in the kettle. Stick it on the fire, Manners, and stir the fire."

"You shrieking idiot—"

"Seems to me you're doing the shrieking," said Tom Merry, "I'm sorry—"

"Br-r-r-r-r!"

Jack Blake grinned and left the study. The voices of the Terrible Three were raised in wrathful argument as he walked away. There was a sound of smashing crockery as he went down the passage, and he chuckled.

Herries and Digby, his chums in the Fourth, stopped him as he passed Study No. 6. They were looking serious.

"What's this about Wednesday's match being off?" asked Digby. "Gussy has just told us you—"

"Yes. My uncle's coming—"

"You won't be able to play?"

"No—rotten, isn't it?"

"Yes," said Digby, not, however, showing the sorrow that might have been expected. "But I don't see cutting the match. I wouldn't mind captaining the side."

"Oh, rats!" said Herries warmly. "Of course it would be rot to put the match off. But I'm the fellow to cap—"

"Now, look here, Herries—"

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In whispers, with many a chuckle, the three New House juniors plotted the plot!

"Look here, Dig——"
 "You know something about dogs, but your cricket would make an angel weep, and you jolly well know it."
 "And yours would make a gargoyle snigger, if you come to that."
 "If you want a swollen nose, Herries——"
 "If you want a blue eye, Dig——"
 "I'll jolly well——"
 "No, you won't, you ass!"
 "Who are you calling an ass, you cheerful idiot? I——"
 "Look here——"
 "Rats!"
 "Go it!" said Blake cheerfully, and he strolled on, leaving the two juniors arguing matters out on the linoleum. Reilly, of the Fourth, collared him as he reached the stairs.
 "Faith, Blake, darling——"
 "Hallo, Tipperary? What do you want?"
 "Don't put off the match on Wednesday——"
 Jack Blake chuckled.
 "Are you willing to be skipper in my place?" he asked.
 "Faith, and that's just what I was thinking of, darling!"
 "Go and talk it over with Herries and Dig," said Blake.
 "They're discussing the matter now."
 And he strolled away, grinning.

CHAPTER 3. Plotting a Plot.

ARTHUR AUGUSTUS D'ARCY wrinkled his brows in thought as he strolled in the quad. Arthur Augustus, like others in the Fourth Form, didn't see putting that match off. The cricket season was drawing towards its close, for one thing, and the number of fixtures still remaining could be counted. Then, most of the halves were already booked up. If the match weren't played this Wednesday, it never might be played; and that was what D'Arcy characterised as "wot."

For the Fourth-Formers meant to knock the Shell sky-high that time, and, of course, every fellow in the side was fully capable of acting as captain at a pinch—in his own opinion at least. There never was a cricket eleven that didn't contain eleven possible captains, if the opinions of the eleven were to be credited.

"Wats!" said Arthur Augustus, aloud. "I weally can't stand this absurd obstinacy in Blake. I'm surprised at it, for he's usually a sensible chap. I've pointed out the pwopah thing to do, and he ought to have jumped at it."

"And didn't he?" said a voice.
 Arthur Augustus jumped himself.

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In his abstraction, he had nearly walked into three youths who were standing near the fountain in the quadrangle, regarding him with broad smiles.

The three were Figgins, Kerr, and Wynn—Figgins & Co. of the New House, the ancient rivals of the School House juniors.

"Bai Jove! Did you speak, Figgins?" asked D'Arcy, turning his eyeless upon the long-limbed chief of the New House juniors.

"Yes, rather. Didn't he jump at it?" asked Figgins cheerfully.

"No, he didn't. He absolutely refused."

"Too bad!" said Figgins sympathetically. "Altogether bad—altogether rotten. By the way, who was he, and what did he refuse?"

And the Co. chuckled.

"It weally does not concern you chaps, as New House boundahs," said D'Arcy, with an air of reflection. "This ewicket match is confined to the School House. New House boundahs are not admitted."

"Yes, I hear you've got some measly match on for to-morrow afternoon," assented Figgins. "You've got the check to call it Fourth Form v. Shell."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"You seem to forget that a big part of the Fourth Form and the Shell dig in the New House, and that the leader of the Fourth Form is there, too."

"Wats!"

"We were thinking of coming," said Figgins patronisingly. "We should like to see how you chaps play cricket on your own. It will be worth watching."

"The match isn't coming off, deah boy!"

"Oh, you find you're not quite up to it, eh? Look here, if you like we'll get you half a dozen Fourth-Formers from the New House to give your team a sort of backbone," said Figgins generously. "With Wynn and Kerr to bowl, and me to bat, you would be able to give the Shell fits."

"You are awfully kind, deah boy—"

"I mean to be kind."

"But I refuse all the same. You see, this is a School House match, and only School House fellows are playin'. Besides, the match is off."

"Well, of all the asses—"

"I refuse to be called an ass. The posish is a wathah cawious one," said D'Arcy. "I should weally be glad of your opinion on the mattah, deah boys!"

"What-ho!" said Figgins, with a wink at the Co. "Gather round, my sons! Now, then, Gussy, go ahead! Get on with the confession!"

"You see, Blake has an uncle—"

"Where did he get it?"

"Weally, Figgins—"

"Some are born with uncles," said Figgins, "some haven't uncles, and some have uncles thrust upon them. Shakespeare! Which is Blake's case?"

"His uncle is comin' to the school to-morrow aftahnoon—"

"Well, I've had an uncle come to the school, and no bones broken," said Figgins. "What is there to worry about?"

"You see, this uncle chap has been abroad six or seven years, and Blake wants to do the pwopah thing by him when he comes. Of course, that's only wight and pwopah. I have always approved of great respect bein' shown to eldahly relatives. Blake says he's a nice little chap, too, this uncle. Blake is goin' to cut the match, so as to show his uncle wound."

"Good old Blake! We'll help him!"

"Yaas, that's all wight, but he wants to cut the match. Of course, there's no harm in his cuttin' it himself, as I could captain in his place quite as well, pewwaps a little bettah; but he insists upon scwatehin' the match."

"Oh, that's rot!" said Figgins solemnly. "He ought to have jumped at the chance of letting you skipper them."

"Yaas, that's what I thought; and I was thinkin' that it was weally my duty to get up an eleven and play the Shell myself."

"Good wheezes!"

"You weally think it is a good wheeze, Figgins?"

"Ripping! What do you say, Kerr?"

"First chop!" said Kerr.

"What do you say, Wynn?"

"I'm hungry," said Wynn, coming out of a reverie.

"Eh?"

"I'm hungry."

"You ass!" roared Figgins. "I didn't ask you if you were hungry. I knew that without asking. I asked you what you thought of D'Arcy's wheeze?"

"Oh, jolly good!" said Fatty Wynn. "What is it?"

"Weally, Wynn—"

"It's ripping," said Figgins. "Go ahead, Gussy!"

"Yaas, wathah! You see, Blake's uncle says that he may

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wire at the last moment to say he isn't coming, if he can't find time aftah all. Undah those cires, it seems to me it would be a cwyin' shame to put the match off."

"So it would, rather. Besides, we want to see Gussy & Co play. It will be worth seeing—it will be as funny as the time you disguised yourself as a boots, and tried to take the Gram-marians in."

"Weally, Figgins—"

"I say, I'm jolly hungry," said Fatty Wynn. "Are you coming towards the tuckshop, D'Arcy?"

"No, I am not, deah boy!"

"Then good-bye!" said Fatty Wynn.

The New House trio strolled away, and D'Arcy, fortified in mind by Figgins's advice, went back to the School House, with a very determined expression upon his face.

Kerr was looking thoughtful. In the tuckshop, Fatty Wynn asked him twice whether he would have an ice, without eliciting any reply.

"By gum!" said Kerr, at last. "I wonder if it would work."

"Will you have an ice?" bawled Fatty Wynn, for the third time.

But Figgins dropped his hand upon Fatty's shoulder, and told him to "ring off."

Wynn stared at him.

"It's a wheeze," said Figgins. "I know it by the gleam in his eye. It's time we wiped down the School House again. Now then, Kerr, what is it?"

Kerr was still thinking deeply. He did not reply for the moment, and Figgins waited patiently.

For although Figgins was the great chief of the New House juniors in their alarms and excursions against the School House fellows, Figgins himself would have been the first to admit that Kerr supplied most of the brains to the Co. Kerr was one of those quiet fellows, with a total absence of anything like "swank" about him, who, nevertheless, "get there" all the time, to use an Americanism. Kerr could think things out, with his clear, quick brain, while other fellows were fumbling with the subject. Nothing ever escaped Kerr's keen eye. Kerr played the violin, and took photographs, and composed Latin odes, and wrote the best articles in "Tom Merry's Weekly." His great gift, however, was impersonation—he was the son of a famous actor, and inherited all his father's gifts. He had played off a joke on the Grammar School by visiting it in the guise of a new boy, with Tom Merry. He had lately passed himself off on a company of Territorials in the guise of a brigadier. And Figgins, who freely admitted that in brains he wasn't in the same street with his Scottish chum, always listened to Kerr's ideas with the greatest respect. When Kerr thought of a wheeze, Figgins was always ready to play up and carry it out.

"I wonder—" said Kerr again, and then he stopped.

Figgins waited.

"It would be tremendous!" said Kerr. "Amazing!"

"The wheeze?"

"Yes."

"Up against the School House?"

"Yes."

"Tremendous?"

"Yes."

"Amazing?"

"Yes."

"Good!" exclaimed Figgins. "Now, what's the wheeze? We'll work it, if it costs us a leg! Go ahead, my bonny boy!"

Kerr was still looking very serious.

"It all depends upon Blake's uncle not coming," he said.

"Blake's uncle!"

"Yes. You heard Gussy say he was a little man."

"What on earth—"

"Blake is to have a wire to-morrow if he isn't coming."

"That's right."

"Then, my sons, look out for that wire," said Kerr. "If that wire comes, Blake's uncle won't—and then there'll be the biggest, most frabjous jape we've ever worked off in our lives."

"Explain!" shouted Figgins and Fatty Wynn together.

"Listen, then."

And Kerr lowered his voice. In hushed tones of great caution, he explained—and Figgins gasped and Fatty Wynn yelled. In whispers, with many a chuckle, the three juniors plotted the plot.

CHAPTER 4.

Who Shall be Skipper?

JACK BLAKE was in Study No. 6, in the Fourth Form passage, hard at work upon his prep, when Arthur Augustus came in. Herries and Digby were not there. They had finished their argument a short time before, and Herries had gone to a bath-room to bathe his nose, and Digby was scuttling up and down in search of a beefsteak to put on his left eye. Blake was at work, with a very virtuous feeling, as he was the only one at work in the study.

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"Blake, deah boy!"

Jack looked up, and made a sign for silence. He placed his finger on his lips in a most mysterious way.

"Hush!"

D'Arcy looked puzzled.

"What's the mattah, Blake?"

"Hush! Not a word!"

"Weally, deah boy——"

"Sh!"

Arthur Augustus adjusted his monocle, and looked at Blake, and then looked round the study. If there had been a sick man in the study Blake could not have been more impressive. But there was no sign of a sick man.

"Are you off your wockah, Blake?"

"No. Hush!"

"I wefuse to hush! Why should I hush? Is anybody ill?"

"No."

"What's the mattah, then?"

"I'm working," said Blake. "I've got to be very careful with my prep., to make sure of getting through all right to-morrow. I mustn't risk being detained in the morning. See? Go away quietly, on tiptoe."

He turned to the table again. Arthur Augustus gazed at him speechlessly. He had been told to hush in that mysterious way simply so that he should not interrupt Blake's prep. In spite of Blake's grave face, D'Arcy realised very clearly that his chum was solemnly pulling his leg.

"Blake," he said at last, "I wegard you as an uttah wottah. I wefuse to hush! I have come here to speak to you."

"Couldn't you go and speak to Herries instead?"

"Certainly not. I——"

"Well, there's Dig. I'm sure he would be pleased."

"I wefuse——"

"Then I'll tell you what. Go to Tom Merry's study and speak to him."

"I trust you will not exaspawate me, Blake. I should be sowwy to have to give you a feahful thwashin'," said Arthur Augustus. "I have come here to speak about the match for to-morrow aftahnoon. I wefuse to have it sewatched."

"But that's settled."

"I decline to wegard it as settled. I am willing to captain the side."

"So are Herries and Dig and Reilly and Kerruish and Haneock and Dixon, and the rest of the Fourth Form," said Blake. "Now, a team ought to be well led, I know, but eleven captains to one team are too many."

"The others would no doubt acknowledge my supowiah claims."

"Yes, I think I can see them doing it," grinned Blake. "But, look here—if the Fourth plays the Shell without me, the Fourth will get licked; unless we strengthen the team with some New House fellows."

"I fail to see it."

"It will be rotten to have the Shell crowing over us. Still, if the eleven thinks that the match ought to be played, and can decide on a skipper, I don't object. There, that's fair, I suppose. Go and get licked."

"Vewy good. I will hold a meetin' of the eleven here."

"That you jolly well won't. I'm doing my prep. here. Hold a meeting on the roof, if you like, or in Taggles' lodge."

"I will hold it in a class-room, then."

"Then go and hold it, old chap; and if you could manage to hold your jaw, too, I should take it as a personal favour."

"Weally, Blake——"

"Buzz off, Gussy; can't you see I'm busy?"

And Blake plunged into his work again. Arthur Augustus closed the door emphatically as he withdrew. Still, upon the whole he was satisfied. All that remained now was that he should prove to the rest of the eleven that he was the fellow to take the lead, and the matter would be settled.

It was possible that that would require some proving, however.

D'Arcy lost no time in calling the meeting. Having asked and obtained Mr. Railton's permission to hold a cricket committee meeting in a class-room, he proceeded to call together the members of the School House Fourth Form team.

More than thirty Fourth Form boys boarded in the School House, and as most of them played cricket, Blake had not had much difficulty in getting together a decent eleven, without calling upon the Fourth-Formers who boarded over the way in the New House.

The four chums of Study No. 6—Blake, Herries, Digby, and D'Arcy—were the backbone of the team. Reilly, the boy from Belfast, and Kerruish the Manxman, were very nearly on a level with them. Then there were Haneock, Dixon, Bright, Smith minor, and Yates, all respectable cricketers. Blake being left out, another fellow would be wanted; but D'Arcy left that to be settled later. He would have enough to do to convince nine fellows that he was the proper fellow for skipper.

The swell of St. Jim's met Herries coming from the bath-room. Herries looked very washed and wet about the roots

of the hair, and his collar was a little limp. His nose was decidedly swollen and very red.

"Bai Jove, Hewwies, what's the mattah, old chap?" asked D'Arcy, in surprise.

Herries grunted.

"That ass, Dig! We had an argument——"

"Bai Jove, here's Dig!"

Dig came along the passage. He had failed to discover a raw beefsteak anywhere within the walls of the School House, and his eye was turning from an art shade of blue to a deep and beautiful black.

"Bai Jove! Dig!"

"It's that dummy, Herries!" growled Dig. "He——"

"Look here, Dig!"

"Look here, Herries!"

"If you hadn't been such an ass——"

"If you hadn't been such a dummy——"

"I——"

"Pway hold on, deah boys!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus, pushing between them, as they began to look warlike again.

"Pway don't act the giddy ox, you know. It's all settled about the match to-morrow."

"Oh! Is Blake playing?"

"No; he's going to cut the match, and go wound with his avunculah welvative, but——"

"Then I'm to——"

"Then I'm to——"

"Pway allow me to finish, deah boys. It's settled that I'm to captain the side in the match with the Shell."

Herries and Digby ceased to stare at each other, and turned their stares upon the swell of the School House.

"Look here," said Herries, "this is no time for jokes."

"It isn't a joke," said Arthur Augustus indignantly. "I have settled it with Blake. We're holdin' a meetin' of the eleven in No. 2 Class-room, and I'm to be captain if the eleven agree. I——"

"Yes, they'll agree—I don't think!" grunted Herries. "Don't be an ass!"

"I wefuse to be called an ass."

"I wish you'd refuse to be one. Now, look here."

"I decline to look there. I trust you will not compel me to give you a feahful thwashin', Hewwies."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I see no cause for wibald laughtah. I——"

"Oh, ring off, Gussy!"

"I wefuse to wing off. I——"

"Rats!"

"Did you say wats to me, Hewwies?"

"Yes, I did. What about it?"

"Pway put up your hands, deah boy."

D'Arcy pushed back his cuffs.

The next moment the juniors were rolling on the floor. Digby gazed at them with a grin. Herries jumped up—and Arthur Augustus sat on the linoleum, gasping for breath and groping for his eyeglass.

"Bai Jove!"

"Come on, Dig," said Herries. "Let's get the fellows to the meeting. Gussy can sort himself out."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

And Herries and Digby went along the Fourth-Form passage, calling the members of the Fourth-Form eleven to the meeting. Arthur Augustus sat gasping still. The Terrible Three came along the passage, and stopped to stare at him.

"Curious place to choose to take a rest," Monty Lowther remarked.

"Ow! I'm not westin', you ass!"

"What's the game, then?"

"Pway lend me a hand, deah boys."

Tom Merry lent him a hand, and the swell of St. Jim's staggered up. He straightened out his collar, and dusted his trousers with his handkerchief.

"Bai Jove! The wuff ass!"

"What's the trouble?" asked Tom Merry curiously.

"We're playin' you to-morrow aftah all, Tom Mewwy. And we were just arguin' about the captaincy of the Fourth Form team——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Howevah, I cannot stay here talkin' to silly asses, I must get to the meetin'."

And Arthur Augustus scudded away. And the chums of the Shell roared.

CHAPTER 5.

An Excited Meeting.

"ORDER!"

"Shut up!"

"Silence!"

Tom Merry looked into the class-room. There were ten Fourth-Formers present, and they were making enough noise for twenty or thirty.

Ten men of Blake's eleven were there, Blake himself being

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A Grand Long Tale of Tom Merry & Co.

still at work in his study. Of the ten there was not one who was not fully convinced that he was the very chap that was required to fill the vacant captaincy, and that the others were prevented from recognising an evident fact by sheer obstinacy.

In the School House, the Fourth Form and the Shell ran a cricket club in conjunction, the Junior School House Cricket Club. When the Fourth and the Shell were divided, as on the present occasion, the members followed the lead of Blake, or Tom Merry, according to the form they belonged to. That was a simple arrangement, but Blake having scratched, chaos reigned among the Fourth-Form section—as in Israel of old, when there was no king, and every man did what was right in his own eyes. Every fellow being bent upon maintaining his own claims, there was plenty of noise, plenty of threatening and stamping, and no business done.

The chums of the Shell chuckled as they looked in.

"Jolly, isn't it?" remarked Lowther. "Let's watch 'em! This is as good as a comedy."

But hostile eyes were upon them already.

"Faith, and there's the Shell-fish grinnin' at the door!" exclaimed Reilly.

There was a roar.

"Kick them out!"

"Bai Jove! Follow me, deah boys!"

And Arthur Augustus rushed to the attack. The Fourth-Formers were excited, and they weren't inclined for any chipping from the Shell just then.

Tom Merry & Co. did not wait for the rush. They grinned and went on down the passage, and the Fourth-Formers hurled taunts and catcalls after them. Reilly slammed the door.

"Now, gentlemen——" began Arthur Augustus.

"Order!"

"I wufese to ordah—I mean——"

"Look here, you chaps——"

"Faith, and I——"

"Yah!"

"Rats!"

"Look here——"

"Sure I——"

"Br-r-r-r-r!"

Reilly and Hancock retired to a corner with their arms lovingly round one another's necks, to finish the argument. Bright and Dixon were already rolling on the floor. D'Arcy surveyed them through his eyeglass.

"I wegard this as a widiculous way of settlin' the mattah," he exclaimed. "It would be much simplah to select me as skippah."

"More rats!"

"If you say more wats to me, young Kewwuish——"

"And many of 'em!" said Kerruish.

"Then I shall have no wesource but to thwash you," said D'Arcy, slipping his eyeglass into his pocket. "Pway put up your hands, deah boy."

And Arthur Augustus and the Manx boy pranced round each other, hitting the air a great deal, and one another every now and then.

"Look here, you chumps," said Digby. "We shall never settle it by jawing, or by slogging one another. Why not toss up, odd man out?"

"Better elect me," said Herries. "That's quicker and simpler."

"Bosh!"

"Good, let's toss up!" exclaimed Dixon. "It's no good keeping on like this—and we shall have the prefects here soon. If Knox hears us, he'll come in with the cane—he's always looking for a chance to go for us."

"Ow! Bai Jove! Yow! Welease me, you wuffian!"

Kerruish had his arm round D'Arcy's neck, and was getting D'Arcy's head into chancery. The swell of the School House struggled violently.

"Welease me! I will let you off!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Kerruish, giving the swell of the Fourth a tap on the nose. "You'll let me off, will you?"

"Yaas, I won't thwash you."

"No, I don't think you will."

"Ow! Leggo! I make it pax!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Kerruish released the swell of the Fourth, laughing too much to hold him any longer. D'Arcy staggered to a desk and sat down. His collar was terribly rumpled, and his necktie hung out by one end.

"Bai Jove! Kewwuish, I wegard you as a wuffian."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Stop that row, all of you!" shouted Herries. "We're going to toss up, odd man out, for the skippership. Order!"

"Yaas, wathah, that's a good ideah! I nevah thought of that, you know."

Order was restored at last.

Odd man out was the best method of settling the dispute, for any amount of punching and pommelling would never

have convinced that team that it did not contain ten first-class cricket captains.

"Anybody got a penny?" asked Digby, feeling in his pockets.

"Will a half-sovereign do, deah boy?"

"Certainly. You don't mind if it's lost?"

"Weally, Dig——"

"Now, then, there's ten of us," said Digby, thoughtfully. "Look here! I'll chuck the half-sovereign on the floor——"

"Bai Jove!"

"And shove my foot on it. Then you can all guess in turn, head or tail, and those who are wrong walk out. Then the winners settle it. Now, then!"

Clink!

"Hullo, where did that go?"

"It rolled somewhere," said Herries.

"Faith, and so it did—but where?"

There was a general hunt for the half-sovereign.

But they hunted in vain. It was not to be found. It had rolled somewhere, under a desk or into a corner, and they failed to find it.

"Pity it wasn't a penny," remarked Digby. "Never mind, I've found a penny, and we'll toss up again."

"Weally, deah boys, my half-sovereign——"

"Never mind your half-sovereign now, Gussy. Here goes!"

"But weally——"

Clink!

The penny descended, and Digby put his foot on it.

Six fellows pronounced head, and four tail. It turned out to be tail. Arthur Augustus, Digby, Herries, and Dixon were the four who had named it correctly.

"Good!" said D'Arcy. "I don't think this need go any furthah. If you thwee fellows make up your minds to elect me——"

"Oh, ring off!"

Digby tossed up again, and this time Herries and himself failed to correctly name the coin. D'Arcy picked it up.

"Dixon, deah boy, shall we take the twouble to toss?"

"What-ho!" said Dixon; "unless you want to resign your chance to me?"

"Pway, don't be a widiculous aas, deah boy!"

"Go ahead!"

D'Arcy tossed the penny.

"Tail!" said Dixon.

"Head, deah boy."

"Oh, bother!"

Arthur Augustus looked round upon the assembly of disgusted juniors with a bland smile.

"It's all wight, deah boys."

"Is it?" growled Digby. "I call it all wrong."

"That is merely a silly pwejudice on your part, Dig. I am convinced that we shall beat the Shell hollow if you chaps back me up to-morrow. As captain of the side, I will select the eleventh man. By the way, where is that half-sovereign. Pway stay and help me look for it, deah boys."

But the dear boys declined to stay, now that the captaincy was decided. They marched out. When Tom Merry looked into the class-room ten minutes later, Arthur Augustus was still looking for his half-sovereign.

CHAPTER 6.

Blake is Asked Out to Tea.

FIGGINS came over towards the School House in the dusk. He affected not to hear several personal remarks from the School House juniors who caught sight of him. Some of them wanted to know how the New House chap had the cheek to show himself in a respectable place. Others affectionately inquired whether he had taken an over-dose of anti-fat for his calves. Some questioned as to where he had dug up his features. Some, again, asked him if he were wearing a Guy Fawkes mask; and others asked him why he wasn't. Figgins marched on with a lofty disregard of these personal observations, which excited considerable surprise.

"The boulder's got something on," said Monty Lowther. "Let's bump him."

And there was a rush for Figgins.

He skipped into the School House, and half a dozen juniors skipped in after him. They found Figgins speaking to Kildare of the Sixth, the captain of the school; and they looked sheepish and skipped out again.

Figgins grinned. He had stopped to speak to Kildare because he knew that the juniors wouldn't venture upon any japing in the presence of the high and mighty head of the Sixth Form.

Kildare laughed; he guessed what Figgins's object was, too. "What are you doing in the School House, Figgins?" he asked.

"Only going up to speak to Blake, Kildare. I can't see him in the quad, so I suppose he's in No. 6."

Kildare nodded, and Figgins went upstairs, unpursued. But in the upper passage several juniors caught sight of him, and there was another rush.

He scudded along to the door of No. 6, with Herries and Digby and D'Arcy hot on his track.

Figgins tore open the door and rushed in, and Blake jumped up with an exclamation. Blake had finished work, and was thinking about tea.

"Hallo, is that the wild man from Borneo?" he exclaimed. "It's me," said Figgins, breathlessly and ungrammatically.

"My dear chap, you should say it's I——"
"Yaas, wathah!" said D'Arcy. "We can't have any of your New House gwammah in this study, Figgins. You say it is I."

"But it isn't you," said Figgins. "It's I."
"Weally, Figgins——"

"We found this boulder prowling about," said Digby. "Got anything to say before you go out on your neck, Figgy?"

"Pax! I came to speak to Blake."
"That's all very well——"

"It's all right, Dig—I don't want to give you another eye to match that one," said Figgins. "I hear that Blake has an uncle or something of the sort coming to-morrow, and he's scratching the match with Tom Merry."

"The match will be played all the same, dear boy, and I shall skip," said D'Arcy.

"You will which?"
"Skip."

"Is it a game of skipping with the Shell?"
"Certainly not. I mean I shall be the skippah."

"Oh, I see. Well, if you haven't had tea, Blake——"
"I haven't," said Blake. "I've done my prep. first to make sure of it. Are you going to fill the kettle, Dig?"

"I've had tea in hall."
"Yaas, wathah!"

"Oh, rats! I want some, anyway. You're not going to do your prep on this table now," said Blake, indignantly. "Why can't you work hard as I do, and get it over early. Blessed if I'd be a slacker."

"I refuse to be called a slackah."
"Come and have tea with us, Blake," said Figgins, "that's really what I came over for, to ask you to come to tea. Wynn is cooking some special sausages."

Jack Blake looked at him.
"What's the game?" he asked bluntly.

"Game!" said Figgins, apparently not comprehending.
"Yes. What is it?"

"My dear chap, surely we can invite a pleasant, talkative fellow to tea without being suspected of any game," said Figgins, in an injured tone. "If you knew what an acquisition you were to any tea-party, you wouldn't talk about a game."

"No gammon," said Blake.
"Well, will you come? The sausages are ripping, and Fatty Wynn is turning out a new thing in table jellies."

"It's pax!"
"Certainly."

"Then I'll come with pleasure," said Blake, taking down his cap. "You kids can get your prep done while I'm gone."

"I refuse to be alluded to as a kid."
"Well, goat, then," said Blake, making a concession.
"I decline to be——"

But Blake was gone with Figgins. The door of the study slammed, and the three Fourth-Formers were left to their preparation. Jack Blake, still considerably puzzled, crossed the quadrangle with the New House junior in the dusk.

It was not unusual for the juniors of the rival Houses to have tea with one another at times when rows were off; still, Blake was puzzled. He could not help feeling that there was something behind this.

Figgins chatted away agreeably as they strolled over in the dusk. He praised Blake's cricket freely, and declared that it would be a terrible pity if Blake didn't play in the Form match on the morrow. Blake stared at him.

"Oh, get off," he said, with Yorkshire directness, "What's the game, I say? It's true that I play better cricket than you do, of course, but you know you jolly well don't think so, Figgy."

"Well, here we are," said Figgins, changing the subject. They went into the New House, and met Monteith, the head House prefect, in the hall. He called to Figgins.

"Figgins! I want you——"
"Oh, I say, Monteith! I'm engaged," said Figgins. "Young Pratt is looking for a chance to fag. Ain't you, Pratt?"

"Well I'm blessed!" said Pratt.
"Oh, Pratt will do," said Monteith, carelessly.

And Pratt, with a dazed stare at Figgins, followed the prefect and had the pleasure of fagging for him. Figgins was leader of the juniors, and Pratt guessed that he had something on, and loyally backed him up.

Figgins made haste to get to his study before he could be called upon by any other senior. A pleasant smell of cooking proceeded from the study when the junior opened the door.

There was a bright fire glowing in the grate, and Fatty Wynn was standing before it with an equally glowing face, attending to a frying-pan. Kerr was giving the finishing touches to laying the table.

"Just finished," said Fatty Wynn. "Glad to see you, Blake. Hope you've brought an appetite with you."

"What-ho," said Blake.
"Make the tea, Kerr, old chap."

"Right-ho—the kettle's just on the boil."
The tea was made—the sausages served. Blake sat down at the table, still in a state of considerable surprise. There was a big cake in the middle of the table, and jellies hardening in big moulds on the shelf. It was evident that Figgins and Co. meant to "do him down" well.

"Well, this is ripping!" Blake remarked.
"Glad you like it," said Figgins. "Fatty can cook sausages, I'll say that for him. I was thinking of making a fig pudding, but there wasn't time."

Blake felt very glad that there wasn't time, but he did not say so. He wired into the sausages, the ham, and the bread and butter.

"You've got an uncle coming," Figgins remarked casually.
"Yes, rather!"

"And you're scratching the match with the Shell in consequence, eh?"
"No—Gussy's taken my place," grinned Blake. "If my uncle comes, it will be something for him to see—Gussy skipping a cricket team."

"Ha, ha! It's a bit of a joke to see you School House chaps playing cricket any time," remarked Fatty Wynn, forgetting himself for a moment. Jack Blake glared.

"What's that?" he demanded.
Figgins gave Fatty a warning glance, and the fat Fourth-Former bolted a huge lump of hot sausage in his confusion, and nearly choked. Kerr patted him on the back, and Blake had risen to lend a hand, when Fatty recovered.

"Of course, we've heard about your uncle," Figgins remarked. "You called on him that time you were in America with Tom Merry."

Blake shook his head.
"Oh, no, this isn't my American uncle. It's another uncle. It's not the chap who sent me the redskin things from Wyoming. This uncle is my Uncle Harry. That was my Uncle James."

"Oh, I see. Has he been to St. Jim's before?"
"Of course he hasn't. He's been abroad for about six years. I haven't seen him since I was a kid."

"Then you won't remember him?"
"Oh, yes, I expect I shall know him. He's a jolly little beggar, you know—he wasn't much bigger when I saw him last than I am now, but he had a ginger-coloured beard, and he was forty years old. We're mostly big chaps in our family," Blake added, hastily. "My Uncle Harry is the smallest."

"I suppose you get it from him?" Fatty Wynn observed, unfortunately.

Blake began to glare again.
"If you've asked me here to be entertained by agonizing witticisms from Fatty Wynn, the sooner you say so the better," he exclaimed.

Figgins glared at the unfortunate Fatty.
"Fatty I'm surprised at you."

"Oh, hang it! I—I only meant——"
"Never mind what you meant," said Kerr, severely. "Shut up. Honour the stranger that is within thy gates."

"But I only meant——"
"Oh, ring off," said Figgins.

"I only meant that Blake was medium sized, and——"
"I'm jolly well taller than you are any way," said Blake; "I've got the start of Kerr. As for Figgins, we can't all be long-legged lamp-posts."

"Of course we can't," said Figgins, with unexpected cordiality; "Blake is just the exact size for—for splendid development—not too short and not too tall, in fact, he's got a really splendid physique."

"What the dickens are you getting at?" demanded Blake, ungratefully. "What's all this soft sawder for?"

"I was speaking about your uncle. You were saying that he had a ginger moustache——"

"A ginger beard, I said," said Blake. "His moustache was darker than his beard, I remember."

"Ginger eyebrows, I suppose?"
"Of course not, ass. His eyebrows were quite dark—dark as mine."

"Did you say he wore glasses?"
"No, I didn't."

"Oh, I—I thought——"
"Still, as a matter of fact he does wear glasses," said Blake, "He's the only short-sighted chap in our family."

"And he's only five feet four," said Figgins, casually. Blake looked unpleasant.

"I said he was my height," he replied.
"Oh!"

"I'm five feet four and three-quarters," said Blake.
At any other time, a battle would probably have been fought on the subject of the odd three-quarters of an inch. But just now Figgins & Co. had their own reasons for being specially agreeable.

"That's without your boots, of course," said Figgins, blandly; "five feet four and three-quarters in your socks, eh?"

"Well, in slippers," said Blake.

"Good. I'll bet you won't know your uncle when he arrives, though. He might have shaved off his beard, and given up his moustache. They're out of date now."

"I don't suppose Uncle Harry would change, though," said Blake, shaking his head. "He's an obstinate old chap. You know, I'm jolly firm myself, but the other members of my family are jolly obstinate, all of them. I've got a brother who's simply pigheaded—we always have rows in the holidays because he won't give in. But look here, it seems to me that you chaps are awfully interested in my uncle."

"We might help you to entertain him, if the other chaps are playing cricket," said Figgins.

"Well, that's decent of you, Figgins. These uncles are a bit of a bother to entertain, as a rule."

"Oh, as he's roughed it in India, he's bound to know how to look after himself," Kerr remarked, carelessly.

"He hasn't been in India, ass—he's home from South Africa."

"Oh, was it South Africa. He'll come back with a jolly dark complexion, I suppose—brown as a berry, you know."

"Yes, I shouldn't wonder."

"He's certain to come?"

"Oh, no; I may have a wire to-morrow to say he can't come, if he finds that he can't manage it in the time."

"Oh! Then you'll play in the Shell match, I suppose."

Jack chuckled.

"That's it—and Gussy will lose his skipper'ship."

"Ha, ha, ha! But then, he may wire that he can't come, and find time at the last moment and run down."

"Shouldn't wonder! He's a bit eccentric, if he's anything like he used to be," said Blake, carelessly. "Pass the sausages."

Figgins passed the sausages. That tea in Figgins's study was really enjoyable. Blake did most of the talking, and by skilful diplomacy, Figgins & Co. led him to relate stories of his Uncle Harry. When at last Blake took his leave, the chums of the New House were in a state of suppressed excitement and glee.

They walked over to the School House with Blake, and saw him safely in, and then they strolled to their own House again—chuckling.

"It was worth the tea!" Fatty Wynn remarked.

"My hat! Rather."

"If only Blake gets a wire to-morrow," said Kerr, with a grin,

"it will be the biggest, the most tremendous jape ever japed at St. Jim's."

And Figgins & Co. chuckled in chorus.

CHAPTER 7.

Blake Receives a Telegram.

"I SHALL call you chaps early in the mornin'," said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, in the Fourth-Form dormitory in the School House that night, "I want my team to turn out for early pwactice at the nets."

There was a general grunt from his team.

"I twust," said D'Arcy, looking round, "I twust that there are no slackahs in the eleven. I should uttally wufuse to have any slackin'."

"Oh, go to bed," said Kerruish.

"I am goin' to bed, Kewwuish. I shall be sowwy to thwash you before goin' to bed—"

"Now, then," said Knox, the prefect, looking into the dormitory; "can't you get to bed, you young sweeps? Do you want me to warm you?"

"I should decline to be warmed, Knox. I—"

Knox slammed the door, with a threat as to what he would do if the Fourth were not in bed when he came back in five minutes. Upon reflection, Arthur Augustus decided to be in bed when the prefect returned.

After lights out, the swell of St. Jim's spoke further on the subject. The Fourth Form seemed inclined to go to sleep, and perhaps D'Arcy's remarks made the inclination all the stronger.

"I have awwanged a pwactice match for to-morrow mornin' before bweakkah," said Arthur Augustus; "I shall call you at six in the mornin'. You hear me, Dig?"

Snore!

"I shall expect you all to turn out, deah boys! Did you speak, Hewwics?"

Snore!

"I am wewolved to keep my team up to the mark, and bwing you into a fit condish to give the Shell boundahs a lickin'. You hear me, Weilly?"

Snore!

"I weward you as a set of wottahs. I don't believe you are asleep, and I considah you are not tweatin' your ewicket captain with pwopah wewspect."

Chorus of snores!

And Arthur Augustus, with a sniff, turned his head over on his pillow, and went to sleep.

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NEXT

THURSDAY: "THE ST. JIM'S INVENTORS."

A Grand Long Tale of Tom Merry

& Co.

Arthur Augustus had fully intended to have his team out for early practice as soon as it was light. Unfortunately, he had not taken into account the great probability that he might not wake before rising-bell.

As a matter of fact, the first sound he heard after closing his eyes was the clang, clang, clang, by which Taggles awoke the sleepy youths of St. Jim's at seven o'clock.

Arthur Augustus opened his eyes.

Clang! clang! clang!

"Bai Jove! What's that, Blake, deah boy?"

Jack Blake sat up in bed and rubbed his eyes.

"Well, it might be a train-whistle, Gussy, or a steamer's syren, or a nightingale singing early in the morning," he replied.

"But it sounds to me more like a bell."

"Pway don't wot, deah boy! I knew it was a bell. But it can't be the wisin'-bell."

"I wish it weren't," grunted Digby, slowly rolling out of bed.

"By the way, how did you get on with the early morning practice, Gussy?"

"I am afwaid I did not wake up, if that is the wisin'-bell, I suppose you are sure it is the wisin'-bell?"

"Well, it's not a man with muffins and crumpets."

"I didn't suppose it was, Dig. I suppose, upon wewlection, that it is the wisin'-bell. I am sowwy I did not wake up. I intended to have all you lazy slackahs out to pwactice."

And Arthur Augustus turned out of bed.

"You ought to have a bit of a win this mornin', to get into form," he remarked, as he splashed through his morning bath. "I nevah did believe in slackin', you know. You see what comes of slackin'—look at that chap Mellish."

Mellish looked round with a snort.

"Pway weward him," said Arthur Augustus, with a lofty disregard of what Mellish might think on the subject. "It takes him less than a minute and a half to do all his washin'. I have no doubt that in time he will come to dwessin' himself entirely before he begins to wash."

"Look here, D'Arcy—"

"I am lookin', deah boy! If you were in my eleven, Mellish, I should insist upon your keepin' cleanah."

"You ass!"

"I decline to be called an ass, Mellish. Unless you with-draw that expwession I shall be compelled to stwike you—or wathah, upon the whole, I will let you off. Undah the cires, I do not care to touch you without the gloves on."

And the Fourth-Formers sniggered, and Mellish looked almost green. He did not do very much washing, as a rule, but it was an exaggeration to suppose that it would not be safe to touch him without the gloves on.

"Well, what about that win, deah boys?" said D'Arcy, as he finished his toilet—a little more rapidly than usual.

"Suppose you race us downstairs?" suggested Blake.

"You start ten seconds first, and if we don't overtake you, we'll admit you've won."

"Wight-ho—I'll show you what wunnin' is like."

And they crowded out of the dormitory.

The Fourth-Formers waited for Arthur Augustus to start. He drew a deep breath, and looked round to see if they were ready.

"Ten seconds, Blake, deah boy!"

"Right-ho!" said Blake, looking at his watch.

"Then I'm off!"

And Arthur Augustus dashed along the corridor at top speed. He passed Monty Lowther in the passage, bumping him over, and ran on with hardly a pause, only shouting back that he was "sowwy" to the dazed and astounded Shell fellow.

At the head of the stairs he ran into Binks, the School House boots. He laid Binks on the floor.

"Sowwy!" gasped D'Arcy. "Can't stop—I'm wunnin' a wace!"

He dashed on down the stairs. There was a yell, and Lefevre of the Fifth clutched the banisters with one hand and D'Arcy with the other.

"You young idiot—"

"I wufuse to be cal—"

"What are you bolting along like that for?" roared the Fifth-Former.

"Sowwy, deah boy—I'm wunnin' a wace!"

D'Arcy jerked himself away and dashed on.

Right down to the lower hall he went, breathless—to fall into the arms of Kildare, who gripped him with a grip of iron.

"D'Arcy! What are you tearing about for like that?"

"I've won!"

"What?"

"It's all wight, deah boy. I'm wunnin' a wace."

"You young ass—"

"Weally, Kildare—"

"And whom are you running a race with?" demanded Kildare, releasing the gasping swell of St. Jim's. "I can't see anybody."

D'Arcy looked back up the stairs. He adjusted his eyeglass and looked back again. There was no sign of the Fourth-Formers on the staircase.



By the time Blake and D'Arcy burst out of the School House, Kerr, alias Blake's Uncle, was racing across to his own House. "Stop him!" roared Blake, and put on a desperate spurt.

"Bai Jove!"

Kildare laughed.

"Well, where's the other fellow, D'Arcy?"

"I have been done, deah boy—the wottahs were only wottin'. I do not see anythin' to laugh at, Kildare. I have been tweeked with gwoss diswespect."

Kildare laughed and walked away. Down the stairs came the Fourth Form, with slow and regular tread. Arthur Augustus watched them speechlessly.

"Blake!" he ejaculated, when the juniors reached the bottom of the staircase.

"Hallo! You seemed in rather a hurry, D'Arcy."

"I was wunnin' a wace."

"Dear me!"

"You said you would start ten seconds after I did——"

"Rats! You're dreaming," said Blake. "I said that if you started ten seconds first, and we didn't overtake you, we'd admit that you'd won. Well, we admit it."

D'Arcy's face was a study. Blake turned to his companions solemnly.

"Gentlemen of the Fourth Form, D'Arcy has won the race. Having no competitors, he was in at the finish."

"Bravo, D'Arcy!"

"I veword you as a set of wottahs," said Arthur Augustus,

"and I have a jolly good mind to wesign my posish as cwicket captain, and leave you in the lurch."

"Good—then we shall have a chance against the Shell," said Digby, with much satisfaction.

To which remark D'Arcy replied only with a sniff; and he did not resign.

Although he had, as he said, been treated with scarcely the respect that was due to a cricket captain, D'Arcy looked very cheerful during breakfast. He was going to distinguish himself that afternoon, and show the School House what a junior cricket captain really ought to be like.

Blake was feeling rather anxious that morning, as his absent answers in the Form-room showed. Mr. Lathom kindly gave him a hundred lines, but that did not seem to improve matters.

Blake was wondering whether a telegram would come from his uncle. So were Figgins & Co. If a wire arrived, Blake would be playing in the Form-match after all, and D'Arcy would lose his skipperish. And if it arrived, too, Figgins & Co. had promised themselves, as we know, the most tremendous jape in the history of St. Jim's.

Would that telegram come?

Jack Blake was really eager to see his uncle again, after so long a separation, and upon the whole he would have preferred Uncle Harry to the telegram. But it was not for him to decide.

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NEXT
THURSDAY:

"THE ST. JIM'S INVENTORS."

A Grand Long Tale of Tom Merry
& Co.

The exigencies of Uncle Harry's business in London would determine whether he came to St. Jim's or not.

If the wire came, there was no telling exactly when it would come—whether during morning lessons or afterwards. If it did not come by half-past two, the Form-match would begin without Blake. But if the Fourth batted first, he might have last man's place left for him until, perhaps, half-past three.

Blake and Figgins waited in suspense.

The last lesson of the morning was half through when there was a tap on the door of the Form-room, and Binks came in with a familiar-looking buff-coloured envelope.

"Telegram, sir!"

"For me?" said little Lathom, blinking over his glasses at the page.

"For Master Blake, sir."

Figgins & Co. exchanged glances of glee.

"Ah, you may give it to Blake. Blake, you may peruse the telegram."

"Thank you, sir."

Blake took the envelope and slit it. He eagerly read the message within.

"Sorry shall not have time to come down after all. Shall try to manage it later. UNCLE HARRY."

Blake felt a keen feeling of disappointment.

But it could not be helped; and, after all, there was the Form-match.

"No answer, sir," he said.

"Very good. You may go, Binks."

And the Fourth-Formers all glanced curiously at Blake as lessons were resumed. It was rather a distinction to have a telegram delivered in the Form-room. Figgins leaned over towards Blake.

"No bad news, Blake?"

"Well, my uncle's not coming."

"Too bad!"

"Can't be helped, I suppose," said Blake. "It's all right; I'm sure to see him before he leaves England again, so it really doesn't matter. Gussy, old man, are you going to resign in my favour?"

"I shall regard it as practically givin' the match away to the Shell, Blake, but it would not be form to insist upon my rights. I shall be vewy pleased to let you skip."

"Dear me! I am sure somebody is talking," said Mr. Lathom, looking round.

And the matter dropped till lessons were over.

CHAPTER 8.

But the Uncle Arrives.

ARTHUR AUGUSTUS was considerably surprised, and a little indignant, to see how the Fourth Form eleven took it. The relief in every lock, when they found that Blake was to captain them after all, was not complimentary to the swell of St. Jim's.

"We shall have a chance now," Kerruish remarked.

And that was the general impression.

"Blake's playing after all," Tom Merry remarked to his team, after dinner. "You'll have to pull up your socks."

Immediately after dinner the rival cricketers repaired to the junior ground.

A great many of the juniors of both houses, and some of the seniors, followed them. All the cricket talent of the junior portion of the School House was there, and the play would probably be worth watching.

Blake looked over Tom Merry's eleven as they came down from the School House in spotless flannels.

There was no denying that they were a very fit team.

Tom Merry, Manners, and Lowther, and Harry Noble, the Australian, were the backbone of the team. But Clifton Dane and Bernard Glyn were very nearly as good. Finn, the American boy, was in the team. The rest were Macdonald, Whitehead, Williams, and Gore. The last-named was personally on the worst possible terms with Tom Merry; but he could play cricket when he chose, and Tom was willing to give him a chance.

The stumps had been pitched, and the big hand on the clock in the tower was drawing towards half-past two.

"Glad you're playing after all," said Tom Merry, as he met Blake. "Of course, it would have been a great pleasure to see Gussy skipping."

"Thank you vewy much, Tom Mewwy."

The two captains tossed for choice of innings.

The Fourth-Formers won, and Blake decided to go in first. Tom Merry led his men out to field.

Nearly all the Fourth and the Shell who were not playing were round the ropes. The New House fellows mustered strongly. Figgins was there, over-topping all but the seniors, and Fatty Wynn was standing beside him, munching chocolates. Kerr was not to be seen. But in the crowd the absence or the presence of one junior more or less was not likely to be noticed.

The School House cricketers were too much occupied with the business in hand to give the New House fellows a single thought.

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Tom Merry put Harry Noble on to bowl the first over, and the Cornstalk walked to the bowler's wicket. Jack Blake was facing the bowling, and he looked out for all he was worth. For, although Kangaroo was his very best at the wicket, he was extremely good as a bowler, and there were not many batsmen in the junior forms who could hold out long against him.

Jack Blake was on his guard; and he needed to be. Kangaroo sent the first ball down like a shell. The second was irritatingly slow. There was never any telling what a ball from Noble would be like—until it came!

But Blake was a good batsman. He stopped them all, even when he did not score; and the over gave him two.

Then Tom Merry bowled to Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

D'Arcy stood in his usually graceful attitude, and waited for the ball. Tom Merry sent down a very hot one.

Everybody expected D'Arcy's wicket to go down to it; but one never really could rely upon D'Arcy. He swiped the ball away with easy grace, and Blake was just starting to run when the swell of the School House waved him back.

"It's all wight, deah boy—it's a boundawy."

And a boundary it was.

The Fourth Form gave a shout.

"Bravo, Gussy!"

"Good old window-pane!"

And Arthur Augustus gracefully raised his Panama hat in acknowledgment. When the next ball came down, he swiped at it in the same way, but his bat swept only the empty air.

Clack!

"Bai Jove!"

Arthur Augustus looked down at his wicket. The middle stump was lying at full length on the ground.

"How's that?" yelled Tom Merry.

"Out!"

"Out!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

And Arthur Augustus carried out his bat with perfect nonchalance.

Reilly came in to take his place. He lived through the rest of the over, though the bowling was very trying. In the interest of that duel between batsman and bowler, the crowd did not think of looking towards the distant gates of St. Jim's, where a vehicle had just driven up.

The field changed over, and Blake had the bowling again.

Noble put in all he knew, but, for a time at least, Blake held his own against it.

Ball after ball Kangaroo sent down, and Blake stopped one and snicked another away through the slips for two, and swiped the third off the field for a boundary.

The crowd looked on keenly.

No one noticed a little old gentleman, with a reddish-hued beard and moustache, and a dark wrinkled face, almost the colour of mahogany, and a pair of rimless glasses perched on his nose, who was coming towards the cricket field.

He was a benevolent-looking old fellow, with thick, reddish hair tinged with white, and he wheezed considerably as if out of breath as he made his way towards the cricketers. He was very neatly and nicely dressed, and wore a silk hat and a big gold watch-chain. He carried an umbrella in his hand, though the day was one of the finest.

Clack!

Away went the ball again, and Blake and Reilly were running. The old gentleman stopped on the edge of the crowd, and regarded the cricketers through his rimless glasses.

He gave a little crow of satisfaction.

"Bravo, Jack! Well hit, my boy."

And he clapped his hands heartily, till the gloves threatened to split.

The fellows nearest him looked round, and regarded him with surprise.

"Hullo!" remarked Lefevre, of the Fifth. "Where did this spring from?"

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A Grand Long Tale of Tom Merry & Co.

"Bravo, Jack!"

"Oh, he knows Blake!" Lefevre raised his cap to the old gentleman with great politeness. "Excuse me, sir. Are you a relation of Blake's?"

"Ah! My nephew."

"My hat!" exclaimed one of the cricketers. "It's Blake's uncle."

"Blake's uncle!"

The words ran through the crowd.

Most of the fellows knew that Blake had been expecting an uncle, and that he had had a wire to say that the expected visitor could not come.

It was evident that he had changed his mind, or found time after all—for here he was!

"Bai Jove!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "Did somebody say Blake's uncle?"

"Yes; there he is."

"Then he has come aftah all!"

"Looks like it," grinned Digby.

"Blake is engaged for the moment, and it is up to us, deah boys, to greet the old gentleman with pwopah wespect."

And the swell of St. Jim's hurried towards the newcomer.

Mr. Blake was clapping his hands as Blake made the last hit of the over. But as it happened there was nothing to clap for. For Blake had sent the ball clean into Clifton Dane's hand at point, and he was caught out.

"Excuse me, deah sir—"

Mr. Blake looked at the speaker.

"You are Blake's uncle, I pwesume?"

"I found I was able to run down," said Mr. Blake. "It will be a pleasant surprise for my nephew, I hope."

"Yaas, wathah, sir. It is vewy agweeable to all of us. Blake is my chum, sir, and I look aftah him. Pway, allow me to welcome you to St. Jim's, sir, in Blake's name."

"You are very good."

"Not at all, my deah sir. Any welative of my fwiend Blake is a fwiend of mine. Blake is just comin' off, sir. Blake, deah boy."

"Hallo, Gustavus!"

"Here is your uncle, Blake!"

"My hat!"

Blake dropped his bat and ran forward.

"Uncle! So you've come after all! I'm jolly glad to see you!"

And Mr. Blake and his nephew shook hands most affectionately.

CHAPTER 9.

Blake's Uncle.

JACK BLAKE looked with great interest at the affectionate relative he had not seen for so long.

Mr. Blake was not much bigger than the boy, as far as height went, but he was a great deal broader, of course; in fact, he was rather inclined to stoutness. His face looked as if it had been burnt brown by the tropical sun. His clothes, though good, had a cut that was not that of a London tailor. Everything about Mr. Blake seemed to tell of a returned traveller from an outlying part of the Empire.

"I'm jolly glad to see you, uncle," said Blake. "I didn't expect you after your wire, of course."

"I found I was able to run down after all," said Mr. Blake, in his curiously wheezy voice. "I couldn't miss an opportunity of seeing you, after being away for six or seven years."

"I'm glad you've come. It's a jolly surprise," said Blake.

"Dear me, how you've grown," said Mr. Blake, patting him on the head. "You must be nearly as tall as I am myself, Jack."

Jack concealed a grin.

"Yes, I suppose I'm shooting up," he remarked.

"You were such a pretty little fellow," said Mr. Blake. "Dear me, I can hardly believe that this is little Jacky."

The fellows round began to grin, and Jack turned a little red. He had often smiled broadly over the fuss Miss Priscilla Fawcett made of Tom Merry when that dear old lady visited St. Jim's. It looked as if he was going to have a little of the same himself, from his affectionate uncle.

"Bless his little heart," went on Mr. Blake. "Do you remember, Jackie, how you used to cry for some sugar when I used to dandle you on my knee?"

"No, I don't!" said Blake hurriedly. "You must be tired after your journey. Will you come in, and—"

"Not at all. I am not in the least fatigued. You were playing cricket?"

"Yes, but I'm just out, so that's all right."

"It is a long time since I have played cricket," Mr. Blake remarked, as he looked on at the game.

"I—I suppose so."

"One gets so few opportunities up country in South Africa, Jackie."

Mr. Blake watched the game.

Noble was bowling to Herries now, and Herries had all his work cut out to keep his wicket up.

"That is a good bowler, Jackie."

"Yes," said Blake, inwardly writhing at the word Jackie. "That's an Australian chap, you know—bowls like an angel."

"Ah! There goes the wicket."

Herries carried out his bat, and Digby went in.

Noble brought Digby's bails down with last ball of the over, and there was a general chuckle from the Shell.

"Dear me," said Mr. Blake. "Are you captaining the side, Jackie?"

"Yes, uncle."

"You have some more wickets?"

"Yes, we're only four down so far."

"Ah!" Mr. Blake rubbed his hands. "Jackie, my boy, it is a long time since I have played cricket."

"So you said, sir."

"Play me."

Jack Blake jumped.

"What?"

"Play me!"

"Eh?"

"I am sure one of the lads would not mind standing out, if you ask them in your pretty way, Jackie."

Herries crammed his cap into his mouth to keep back a yell.

"Oh, my word!" murmured Digby. "His pretty way! Jackie's pretty way! Oh, my only summer hat!"

"He hasn't seen Jack for a long time, you know," murmured Kerruish.

"Yaas, wathah! That accounts."

Jack Blake smiled a ghastly smile.

"Play me, Jackie."

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Blake, pretending to think that his uncle was joking. "Ha, ha, ha! Very good!"

Mr. Blake surveyed him with a stony look that speedily brought his merriment to a finish.

"What are you laughing at, Jackie?"

"Eh? Your—er—joke, uncle."

"I was not joking."

"Oh!"

"If you would rather not play me—"

"Oh, uncle!"

"Blake, deah boy, I insist upon your wespected uncle bein' gwetified in this mattah," said D'Arcy, who had had his innings.

"I am sure that Hancock would be vewy glad to waive his innin's in favah of Mr. Blake."

Hancock looked daggers at the generous junior, but he did not like to say anything. Mr. Blake turned his pince-nez towards Hancock.

"You are willing, my boy?"

"Oh, yes, sir," said Hancock, with a forced grin.

"Then send me in next, Jackie."

"C-c-c-certainly, uncle."

"I will make some preparations," said Mr. Blake, going towards the entrance of the tent. "I dare say you can lend me some pads."

"Yaas, wathah, my deah sir. Pewwaps mine would be too small for you. Kewwuish, deah boy, wun up to the School House and bowwow some of Mr. Wailton's pads."

"Go yourself," murmured Kerruish, under his breath.

"I think I can make these do," said Mr. Blake. "I am not a large man. The Blakes are all rather small."

Figgins grinned. Blake turned crimson as he caught that grin.

"Ill weeds grow apace, sir," remarked Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, with a disparaging glance at the long legs of Figgins.

"Rats!" said Figgins. "Good rye runs high."

"Wats, Figgins! I—"

"I dare say this bat will do," said Mr. Blake, picking up the beautiful bat which was the pride of D'Arcy's heart.

The swell of St. Jim's shivered.

"Pewwaps Blake's bat would suit you a little bettah, sir."

"Stuff!" said Blake; "that one will be ripping. I can recommend that bat, uncle. Gussy never lets anybody use it but himself, and it's a ripper."

"Will you lend it to me, my boy?"

"Yaas, wathah, sir," said Arthur Augustus unhappily.

"Thank you. I will retain the gloves I am wearing, I think. These would be too large for me," said Mr. Blake, glancing at the batting gloves D'Arcy was offering him.

D'Arcy turned pink, and there was a chuckle in the tent. D'Arcy thought very much of his small hands, but Mr. Blake seemed unconscious of having said anything amiss.

There was a shout from the field.

"Well bowled!"

"Hallo, there's Reilly's stumps down!"

Mr. Blake tucked the bat under his arm, giving Arthur Augustus D'Arcy a bump on the chest with the business end of it.

"Ow!" gasped D'Arcy, staggering back.

Mr. Blake swung round towards him, and the end of the bat clumped against Kerruish, and the Manx lad gave a roar.

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NEXT
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"THE ST. JIM'S INVENTORS."

"Dear me!" said Mr. Blake, turning round again, and catching Blake a crack with the bat. "I am sorry——"

"Better go down to the wicket, sir," grinned Digby, dodging the bat.

"Ah, yes, undoubtedly."

And Mr. Blake left the tent, to the great relief of everybody who was in it. Reilly was coming out, with a dozen runs to his credit.

Uncle Harry handed his silk hat to Herries to hold, and then went down to the wicket.

The sight of the old gentleman going on the pitch brought a buzz of amazement from the Shell fieldsmen.

"My only hat!" ejaculated Tom Merry. "What's that?"

"Ha, ha! That's Blake's uncle."

"Blake's uncle! Well, why the dickens doesn't Blake keep him on a chain?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Somebody tell Blake to come and collar him. What's he doing with that bat? My Aunt Selina Ann! he's going to the wicket!"

"Ha, ha! He's next man in!"

"Phew!"

Mr. Blake settled himself at the wicket. He stood with his legs crooked in a curious attitude, and his coat-tails flying in the breeze. He held the bat as if it were a woodman's axe, and blinked round through his glasses.

"Well, this is jolly," said Noble. "Blake always was a funny beggar, but fancy his digging up an uncle like this, and springing him on us in a cricket match! It's the last word in japes."

"Blake doesn't look as if he enjoyed it, though," grinned Glyn.

"Ha, ha! No."

"Here, go on and bowl, Gore," said Tom Merry, tossing the ball to the end of the Shell.

And Gore went on to bowl.

CHAPTER 10.

Uncle Harry Plays Cricket!

THE interest with which the crowd watched for that over was intense. Jack Blake looked somewhat unhappy, but the other juniors enjoyed the situation immensely. Uncle Harry waited for the ball to come down, standing in his original attitude at the wicket. Gore grinned as he prepared to deliver.

Gore had had no chance of being entrusted with the bowling until Uncle Harry appeared on the pitch. Gore was a very passable bowler, and, as a matter of fact, Tom Merry had put him on as the weakest bowler in the team. He did not expect Uncle Harry to stand against the worst bowling of the worst bowler for half an over. But as a sportsman he wanted to give the old gentleman a chance.

Gore ought really to have been grateful to Uncle Harry for getting him the chance to bowl; but Gore was only thinking of a jape. Gore disliked Blake very much, as much as he disliked Tom Merry. Anything up against Blake's uncle could be put down to the old score, and Gore didn't mind how cruel or brutal it was.

He sent down a careless ball, and, to the surprise of everybody, Gore included, Uncle Harry knocked it through the slips.

The fieldsmen, of course, were not expecting any trouble, and the ball ran its course, and gave the batsmen plenty of time to run.

Smith minor was at the other end of the pitch, and he was grinning too much to run. Uncle Harry started, and shouted to him:

"Run, you young beggar—run!"

And Smith, with a gasp, started.

There was a shout from the surprised crowd.

"Bravo!"

"Go it!"

"Bravo!"

The batsmen crossed the pitch, Mr. Blake moving with amazing speed for a gentleman of his age and stoutness. Twice across—and the bats were on the creases before the ball came in to the wicket-keeper.

Two runs! And from the first ball of the over.

It was not so bad, and Arthur Augustus clapped Blake on the back in an approving way, and nearly knocked him over the ropes.

"Your respected uncle can play ewicket, deah boy."

"Yes," grunted Blake.

"I wegard your avunculah wrelative as a vewy intewestin' old gentleman."

"Br-r-r!"

Gore had received the ball again, and he was looking cross. He had been expected to take the wicket easily first ball, and he felt that the laugh was against him to some extent.

But he had his own plans for turning it against Blake's uncle.

The next ball down did not go anywhere near the wicket. It was either a very wide ball, or it was a joke. It caught

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Mr. Blake upon the leg, and the leg was not before the wicket. The "thud" was distinctly heard as the ball crashed on Mr. Blake's leg, just above the top of the pads, and everybody expected to see the old gentleman doubled up with pain. Tom Merry's brows contracted.

"Gore, you cad——"

"My hat!" murmured Monty Lowther. "Look at him! He doesn't mind."

Mr. Blake had not turned a hair.

The ball had thudded on him like a hammer, but he only dusted his trousers with his hand, to knock off the few specks left there by the impact.

"My word!" said Digby. "What's he made of?"

Gore stood aghast. He had intended to double the old gentleman up, but he had not succeeded. The ball was fielded, and Gore bowled again. This time the leather rose with terrific force from the pitch and crashed on Mr. Blake's chest.

"Oh!" gasped a dozen fellows.

Uncle Harry calmly caught the ball, and threw it back.

"Try again, my boy!" he called out.

Tom Merry ran towards Gore.

"Any more of that, Gore, and I'll kick you off the field!"

"It was an accident!"

"Liar!"

Gore bit his lips. After that he did not jape again, and he sent the next ball down true for the wicket. It was an easy ball to play, and Uncle Harry played it—in a rather unexpected manner!

The bat flashed—the ball whizzed straight back to the bowler; but it was not a bowler's catch.

Crash went the round red ball upon Gore's ribs, and the astonished bowler, hardly knowing for the moment what had hit him, gave a gasp and tumbled over.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Blake.

"Bai Jove! A Woland for an Olivah!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Gore staggered up, black with rage.

The crowd were yelling with laughter; for it was pretty plain to all that Mr. Blake had deliberately repaid Gore's "accidents" with another "accident" of the same sort—which had hurt Gore considerably, for he did not possess that strange imperviousness to hurt which seemed to belong to Uncle Harry.

"Ow!" gasped Gore. "I—I'm winded! I shall have a bruise as big as an egg! The silly old fool!"

"Shut up!" said Tom Merry angrily. "Serve you jolly well right. Get off the pitch!"

"I've not finished the over."

"And you're not going to. Take the ball, Manners."

"Right-ho!"

"Look here, Tom Merry——" began Gore hotly.

"If you say another word, I'll order you off the field."

And Gore, without saying another word, strode sulkily away to long on.

Manners finished that over against the gentleman from South Africa.

The way Uncle Harry kept his end up was surprising. Smith minor was bowled in the next over, but Uncle Harry had taken eighteen runs by the time his wicket fell.

Blake's face was a little brighter as he greeted his uncle, coming off the field with D'Arcy's bat under his arm.

"Ripping, uncle!"

Mr. Blake fanned himself with a big handkerchief. He seemed to be very warm, more so than the other cricketers.

"It was not so bad, Jackie," said Mr. Blake. "The Blakes are all cricketers, eh? We're little but good, Jackie."

Blake caught a grin on Figgins's face, and blushed.

"Yes," he said, hurriedly. "But I say, you've had a long journey, uncle——"

"Yaas, wathah! I should think you were gettin' weedy for tea, sir?"

"Well, as a matter of fact, I should like some tea," said Mr. Blake.

"Come along, then, uncle," said Blake, quite willing to get his uncle off the cricket field. "We haven't made much in the way of preparations, as we didn't know you were coming, you know, but——"

"If you like, Blake, I'll drop in at Mrs. Taggles'!" said Digby.

"Thanks awfully, old chap."

Digby cut off towards the school shop. Although funds were low in No. 6—with the exception of D'Arcy, who was always flush of cash,—credit was good at the school-shop. Digby could be trusted to get in the necessary supplies for giving the African uncle a really good feed.

Mr. Blake walked with Blake, Herries, and D'Arcy towards the School House. Blake's chums manfully stuck to him. It was, in fact, an understood thing that they were to stand by one another on such occasions.

"Dear me," said Mr. Blake, turning his rimless glasses towards the big School House, "what a fine old place! Is that the New House?"

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Blake almost snorted.

"No, sir, that's the School House—our house! The cock-house at St. Jim's."

"Dear me! Surely you do not keep chickens in so fine a building?"

Herries and D'Arcy turned their faces away to grin. Blake laboriously explained.

"Oh no, sir! I didn't mean we kept chickens there. We call it the cock-house because we're cock of the walk, you know, and always lick the New House."

"Oh, I see."

"Here's the Head, uncle," added Blake, as the revered figure of Dr. Holmes was seen issuing from the house. "You will like to see him—I—I say—what—how—my only hat!"

Blake stood petrified with astonishment.

For, at sight of the Head, his uncle had suddenly scudded off among the elms, and was lost to sight in a moment.

Blake, Herries, and D'Arcy stood staring after him in blank bewilderment.

CHAPTER 11.

Hurried Preparations!

DR. HOLMES passed the lads with a kind nod as they mechanically raised their caps. Blake was rooted to the ground.

What was the matter with his uncle?

Why had Henry Blake bolted in that extraordinary manner at the sight of the Head?

It was inexplicable.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was the first to speak.

"Bai Jove!"

"My hat!" said Herries. "My only summer hat! Is your uncle off his giddy rocker, Blake?"

"I don't know," said Blake, faintly. "Perhaps it's sunstroke. They often get sunstroke in South Africa, I believe. It must be sunstroke."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Let's go and look for him."

"We had bettah, Blake, deah boy."

Blake nodded.

"Come on."

The three astounded juniors ran under the trees in search of Mr. Blake.

They found the old gentleman standing among the elms, vigorously fanning himself with his big coloured silk handkerchief.

He blinked at them through his glasses.

"Are you ill, uncle?" asked Blake, anxiously.

"Eh! Ill?" stammered Uncle Harry.

"Yes, I thought—"

"I—I am taken like that sometimes," said Uncle Harry. "You see—South Africa—sunstroke—ahem! I am sorry I startled you."

"Oh, pway don't mention it, my deah sir," said Arthur Augustus. "It's all wight."

Blake, considerably disturbed in his mind, led the way towards the School House again.

He remembered his uncle, as he had told Figgins, as an eccentric fellow; but he had never expected to be treated to eccentricity like this.

He began to think with some alarm about what further eccentricities the old gentleman might be guilty of during his stay at St. Jim's. The afternoon was yet young.

They entered the School House and, as luck would have it, met Mr. Railton, the House-master, almost face to face.

Uncle Harry showed, for a moment, symptoms of a return of his strange attack; but Blake slipped his arm through his uncle's, determined that he should not bolt again.

Mr. Railton glanced at them.

"My uncle, sir," said Blake, diffidently. "Uncle Harry, this is Mr. Railton, our House-master."

Uncle Harry raised his silk hat.

"I am very happy to make the acquaintance of Mr. Railton," he said, in his wheezy voice.

The House-master looked at him curiously.

There was something about Mr. Blake that arrested his attention, he did not quite know what it was.

But before he could speak, Uncle Harry went on hurriedly.

"I—I am feeling very faint, Jackie. I should like to sit down. The journey has over-tired me, I am afraid."

"Pray come into my study, sir," said Mr. Railton, in his courteous way, and he threw open the door.

"This way, uncle."

"I—I'd rather cut up to your study, Jackie," whispered Mr. Blake.

Blake turned red.

It was impossible to refuse Mr. Railton's kindness, and for the moment he was almost ashamed of Uncle Harry.

"Pray come in," said Mr. Railton.

"Better come in, uncle. Railton's awfully decent," whispered Blake.

And he almost ran his uncle into the House-master's room. Mr. Blake gave in.

He walked into the study; and Blake, at the door, muttered a word to D'Arcy and Herries.

"Cut up to the study, and make it decent."

"Yaas, wathah!"

And D'Arcy and Herries rushed upstairs. Mr. Blake sank into a deep arm-chair, with his back to the light, and blinked at the House-master. Mr. Railton was all kindness and hospitality.

"Pray rest as long as you wish, my dear sir," he said. "I did not know that Blake was expecting a relative to visit him to-day."

"It was really quite unexpected, sir," said Blake. "We're going to have tea in the study, sir. I'll go and see about it, uncle."

"Certainly, Jackie," said Mr. Blake, faintly.

And Blake left the study.

He was looking and feeling considerably puzzled as he mounted the stairs, and hurried along the Fourth Form passage.

Herries and D'Arcy were already in Study No. 6, carrying out Blake's instructions to "make it decent."

Herries was sweeping up the grate, which certainly wasn't in the tidiest condition, and D'Arcy had picked up a crumb brush, apparently with the idea of making himself useful, but he was doing nothing but carrying the brush to and fro in the study.

"Bai Jove, here's Blake!"

"Railton's got Uncle Harry for a bit," said Blake. "It couldn't have happened more rippingly. We shall have time to make a bit of a show."

"Yaas, wathah!"

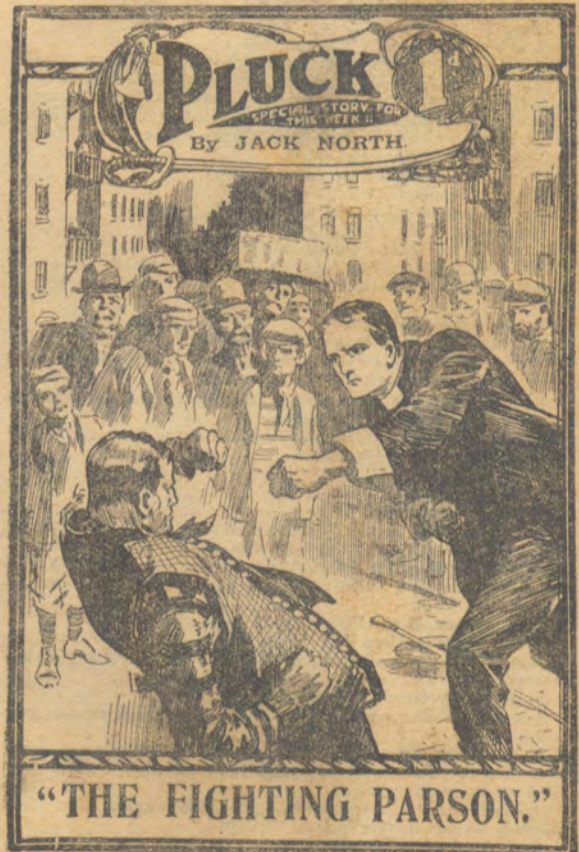
"Nice state this study's in, for a man's uncle to come and see it," said Blake, with a sniff. "Whose boots are those on the bookshelf, I'd like to know?"

"Why, they're your own, deah boy."

"By George, so they are. Get that grate a bit decent, Herries, for goodness' sake. It ought never to be allowed to go as long as this."

"It was your turn to tidy it," granted Herries.

OUT THIS WEEK!



NEXT
THURSDAY:

"THE ST. JIM'S INVENTORS."

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A Grand Long Tale of Tom Merry
& Co.

"Look here, don't you begin to argue, Herries, when we've only got a few minutes to get ready for a visitor. For goodness' sake do something, D'Arcy. Can't you give the looking-glass a rub? It looks rotten for a chap to see a looking-glass all splashed with ink."

"I'll give it a good clean, deah boy——"

"That's right; buckle to."

"I shall have to put on some old clothes first, and some old gloves, but it's all wight—I'll be back in a quarter of an hour."

Blake caught the swell of St. Jim's by the collar as he was making for the door, and slung him back into the study.

"You ass——"

"I wefuse to be called an ass. I decline uttably to be tweated in this wuff mannah. I wegard you as a wottah."

"If you start changing your clothes now, I'll begin changing your features," said Blake, darkly. "My blessed uncle may come toddling up any second now. Railton won't stand him long."

"Weally, Blake!"

"Rub that glass down!"

"I shall soil my hands——"

"I'll soil your face if you don't buck up!" roared Blake.

"I wefuse to——"

"Don't make such a muck with those ashes, Herries. What on earth are you going to do with that ashpan?"

"Take it away, of course."

"And very likely run into Uncle Harry with it in the passage. Shove it behind something."

"I decline to give my appwoval to this slovenliness, Blake! This ideah of shovin' untidy things out of sight is absolutely wotten and bad form."

"Oh, ring off."

"I wefuse to wing off. I——"

"Shove those ashes into Gussy's hat-box, Herries."

"Hewwies! Stop! If you appwoach my hat-box with those ashes I shall stwike you!"

"Look here——"

"I uttably decline to have my hat-box used as a weceptacle for ashes," said Arthur Augustus, standing on guard over his treasure. "I wegard the mere suggestion as uttably bwital."

"I tell you——"

"Weally, Blake——"

"Here, I'll empty the ashpan into the bookcase," said Herries. "The ashes won't be noticed there. There's nothing in the cupboard part."

"Stop, Hewwies——!"

"But it was too late!"

The bookcase in Study No. 6 had glass doors above, to the shelves, and wooden doors below, enclosing a cupboard, in which the juniors bestowed odds and ends. Arthur Augustus had lately taken possession of that cupboard as a receptacle for several fancy waistcoats, and it was upon these valuable garments that Herries shot the ashes.

"Hewwies, you uttah ass—oh!"

"What's the matter?"

"My waistcoats—they are ruined—oh, you ass!"

"Waistcoats!"

"I had thwee there—thwee waistcoats!"

"Blessed if that chap doesn't keep waistcoats in every blessed corner," grunted Herries. "Well, it can't be helped now."

"You uttah barbwian!"

"Oh, rats! I tell you it can't be helped."

And Herries closed the doors on the ashes and the waistcoats. Arthur Augustus ran towards the bookcase.

"Weally, Hewwies, you cannot imagine that I am goin' to leave them there like that, and——"

"Let it alone," said Blake. "There's no time to bother over your blessed waistcoats now."

"Weally, Blake——"

"Shut up!"

"I wefuse to shut up."

"Let that door alone!" roared Blake, as D'Arcy caught hold of the lower door of the bookcase, with the evident intention of opening it, and jerking out waistcoats and ashes. "You'll make the place in a fearful muck if you spill all that on the carpet."

"I am sowwy, Blake."

"Well, chuck it, then."

"But even for the sake of a visitah I cannot have my waistcoats ruined. You can sweep up the ashes."

"Stand away from the bookcase, ass!"

"I wefuse to do anythin' of the sort. Ow! Welease me, you wottah!"

Blake grabbed his elegant chum and whirled him away from the bookcase. They waltzed across the study.

D'Arcy began to struggle.

"Welease me!" he gasped. "I insist upon bein' immediately weleased, you feahul wuffian!"

"Will you let that bookcase alone?"

"Certainly not. I——"

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"Look here——"

"Weally, Blake——"

"I tell you——"

"You uttah outsiders!"

They whirled round the study again. D'Arcy caught his foot in a rent in the carpet, and went down with a bump, Blake sprawling across him.

The door opened at the same moment.

CHAPTER 12.

Mr. Railton is Surprised!

MR. RAILTON intended to be very polite to Blake's uncle. He thought that the old gentleman was tired after a long journey, and that a quiet rest in a quiet study was just what he wanted. But never, in all the course of his experience as a master at more than one school, had Mr. Railton received so singular a visitor as Jack Blake's uncle from South Africa.

Blake's uncle sat in the arm-chair, and seemed disposed to sit there for any length of time without speaking a word.

"You have just arrived, Mr. Blake, I believe," the House-master remarked.

"Yes, sir," said Mr. Blake.

"Did I see you on the cricket-field?" pursued the House-master curiously. "I think I saw you from my study window."

"Yes, sir."

"Ah, you play cricket!"

"Yes, I play cricket. I am very fond of the game," said Uncle Harry, seeming to recover himself a little.

"Ah, I play cricket myself," said Mr. Railton. "There is nothing like it for keeping a man fit."

"I quite agree with you," said Uncle Harry.

"You come from America, I believe?" said Mr. Railton, who had heard of Jack Blake's uncle in the States.

"Oh, no!" said Mr. Blake. "I have a—er—brother there. I have lately returned from—er—South Africa."

"Ah! You get a great deal of cricket there, I suppose?"

"Yes, certainly—or rather, no," said Mr. Blake, somewhat confusedly.

Mr. Railton was a little surprised. He hardly knew what to make of his visitor. And he had made a curious discovery, too. Few things escaped his keen eyes. Mr. Blake was wearing a wig.

The House-master was sure of it.

Of course, there was no barn in an old gentleman wearing a wig, if he had no hair of his own. The House-master, after the glance which had acquainted him with the fact, was careful not to glance in that direction again. He did not want the old gentleman to guess that his little infirmity was observed.

"You would like a little refreshment after your journey?" Mr. Railton suggested. "If you will allow me——"

"Thank you, I am going to have tea with Jackie in his study," said Mr. Blake. "I will not trouble you."

"A glass of wine——"

"Not at all, thank you," said Mr. Blake, with a perceptible tremor. "I—I am a strict too-teetaler—I—I mean, tee-totaler!"

Mr. Railton nodded.

"Have you been long in England?" he asked politely.

"Oh, yes; ever since I came to St. Jim's!" said his visitor.

"Eh? I understood——"

"I—I mean, I—ever since I came to see my nephew—that is to say, ever since I—I returned from abroad," explained Mr. Blake.

Mr. Railton thought that it hardly needed mentioning that the old gentleman had been in England ever since he returned from abroad. That was somewhat obvious. He was more and more surprised by Blake's uncle.

"You find the Old Country looking its best, sir," said Mr. Railton, with a glance out of the window at the sunny quad, and the green old elms.

"Yes, indeed; it is—is very pleasant, after the weather we've been having."

"Ah! You have had bad weather in Africa?"

"In—in Africa? Ah—yes—no—that is to say—ahem!"

Mr. Railton began to wonder whether Blake's uncle was quite sound in his intellect.

A few moments later Binks brought in a message to Mr. Railton, and the House-master rose.

"Pray excuse me," he said. "I am called away for a few moments."

"With pleasure, sir—I—I mean, certainly!" stammered Uncle Harry.

The House-master left the study.

He was away only three minutes; but when he came back, Uncle Harry was gone.

Mr. Railton glanced at the empty chair, and round the room in surprise. It was rather unceremonious of Mr. Blake.

"Dear me!" said the House-master, "what an exceedingly



Blake's uncle went through some remarkable contortions, and the ball went down. Harry Noble played it carelessly enough, but his bat somehow did not touch the leather—and there was a clack! "How's that?" roared the whole field. Kangaroo was out!

curious old gentleman. I really begin to doubt whether he is quite right in his head."

However, he was gone now, and Mr. Railton was done with him. He was not displeased. Uncle Harry, meanwhile, had made his way upstairs, and arrived at Study No. 6 without a stop, or having to inquire the way—just as if he knew his way perfectly well about the School House.

He tapped at the door and opened it. There was a sound of loud bumping within.

"Bless my soul!" said Uncle Harry.

His nephew and Arthur Augustus D'Arcy were sprawling on the carpet in mortal combat. He stood looking at them.

"Bai Jove!" gasped D'Arcy.

"Oh, my Aunt Maria!" murmured Blake, in dismay.

They scrambled to their feet at once, very dusty and dishevelled. Mr. Blake looked at them through his rimless glasses.

"Jackie!"

"Oh, uncle, I——"

"Weally, my dear sir——"

"I am shocked," said Mr. Blake. "You were fighting!"

"N-n-not exactly fightin', deah sir; only—only a little scwap, you know."

"That's all, uncle," said Blake. "I was pointing out something to Gussy, really, that's all."

But Mr. Blake looked deeply shocked. Several juniors in the passage, who had stopped to look in, grinned, and looked on with great interest. Blake would willingly have slammed the door, but his uncle stood in the way. The uncle from Africa did not seem to have any objection to an audience.

"I am sorry, Jackie, to see this dreadful custom of fighting obtains in the school," he said, in portentous tones. "Jackie, Jackie, I am shocked!"

"Oh, my hat!" murmured Mellish, in the passage. "Jackie, Jackie, how could you!"

Jack Blake turned crimson.

"Really, uncle——"

"Alas!" said Uncle Harry. "This is terrible! It is harrowing! Jackie, Jackie! Think of the time when you were a rosy-fingered baby, and your hand had never been raised in anger against a fellow-creature!"

"Bai Jove!"

"Let dogs delight," said Mr. Blake, "to bark and bite. It is their nature to. Let bears and bulldogs growl and fight. They've nothing else to do."

"My word!" giggled Mellish.

"But, Jackie, you should never let such angry passions rise," said Mr. Blake, with a solemn shake of the head. "Your little knuckles were not meant to dot a fellow's eyes."

"Oh, uncle!" said Blake feebly.

"Those touching lines of Shakespeare's, Jackie—" "Shakespeare's!" murmured the juniors in the passage. "This is rich!" "Gorgeous!" said Mellish. "Exactly describe the case, Jackie. Never, never, never raise your hand against the nasal organ of a fellow-creature. Now, I insist upon both of you immediately making it up."

"Oh!" "Shake hands immediately." "It's all right, sir!" groaned Blake. "It was only a scrap. We're the best of friends. Let me close the door, uncle."

"Shake hands at once!" "It's all wight, weally, sir." "Unless you shake hands, Jackie, I shall leave the school." Blake, as a matter of fact, would have been greatly relieved and pleased if his uncle had carried out that threat. But that would not have done, of course. He gingerly extended his hand to Arthur Augustus.

Arthur Augustus took it as gingerly. They shook hands, to the great delight of the juniors at the doorway. Mellish, affecting to weep, shook hands with Reilly, who had just come in, and Reilly appeared to be overcome with emotion. Blake was furious, and he looked daggers at them.

Mr. Blake turned to the boys outside with a benevolent smile. "Let this be a lesson to you, my boys," he said. "Let dogs delight to bark and bite. But never, never allow your angry passions to rise."

"Oh, never, sir," said Mellish; "or hardly ever." "Now you may close the door, Jackie." Jack slammed it.

CHAPTER 13.

Uncle Harry Does Some Cooking.

DIGBY came in with the supplies from the tuckshop. The supplies were ample enough, and some wanted cooking, and some were already cooked. Blake's suggestion was a cold collation, but Mr. Blake appeared to have heard of study feeds, and to be rather keen on the idea.

"Not at all," he said. "I am not in a hurry, I am sure, and I would not interfere with your usual customs for anything."

"It's all wight, sir—" "Not at all. We are going to cook for tea," said Mr. Blake, with a beaming smile. "I will show you some of the cooking I have learned on the—the veldt. You shall entrust me with the frying-pan."

"We could not think of troubling you, sir."

"Not at all. It will be a pleasure."

"But, uncle—"

"Come, Jackie, I want to be useful."

Politeness forbade Jack Blake to state that his uncle would be most useful sitting in the armchair in the corner out of the way.

"Just as you like, uncle," he said, with resignation as cheerful as he could make it.

Hancock put his head in at the door.

"I say, Blake! The innings is out."

"Oh, is it?" said Blake.

"Yes; we're all down for fifty."

"Fifty! Good!"

"Well, I suppose you're going to turn up when the Shell go in!" exclaimed Hancock. "I suppose we're playing out the match?"

"Oh, buzz off, old chap!"

"Look here—"

"Oh, get away!"

"Aren't you going—"

"No, you're going!"

And Blake pushed Hancock out, and closed the door. Mr. Blake was busy getting the frying-pan in order, and he did not seem to have heard the dialogue at the door.

"I shall want some grease," he remarked.

"Yaas, wathah! I say, Blake," whispered D'Arcy, "ain't we to finish the match?"

"Haven't we got a visitor?"

"Yaas, but—"

"Shut up, then!"

"Weally, Blake—"

"Butter will do," said Uncle Harry.

"Here's the butter, my dear sir."

Uncle Harry jammed half a pound of butter into the frying-pan, and jammed the pan on the glowing coals. The juniors watched him in dismay, and looked at one another hopelessly; but they did not like to speak.

"Now the sausages," said Mr. Blake, flourishing a fork.

"Here they are, sir."

The door opened, and Reilly came in.

"Sure, Blake, Tom Merry wants to know when ye'll be ready for the Shell innings to begin!" he exclaimed.

"Tell Tom Merry to go and eat coke."

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"But faith—"

"Go and tell him, and don't come back."

"But the second innings—"

"Be off!"

"Faith, and I—"

"Bunk!"

Blake picked up a jampot from the table, and he looked so excited that Reilly promptly placed himself on the outside of the door.

Jack was, as a matter of fact, growing excitable. The strange proceedings of his amazing uncle were getting on his nerves, and, keen cricketer as he usually was, he could not be worried with cricket just them.

Herries, Dig, and D'Arcy thought differently about the matter. They wanted to do the polite thing by Mr. Blake, but they wanted to finish the match with the Shell. Dig whispered to Blake that it was hardly the thing for a cricket captain to absent himself from a match. Blake snorted.

"Can I go and leave my uncle here without his tea, fathead?"

"No, but—"

"Well, shut up!"

"I'll go and captain the team, if you like."

"All right; buzz off!"

"Soon done."

And Digby skipped out of the study. Their remarks had been exchanged in whispers, and Mr. Blake seemed unconscious of them; but Arthur Augustus D'Arcy guessed what it meant when Dig hurried out. He came over to Blake with a very determined expression upon his aristocratic features.

"Blake, dear boy—"

"Is the kettle boiling?"

"Weally, Blake—"

"Shove it a bit nearer the fire, then."

"I was not speakin' about the kettle. If you are not goin' back to the cricket field, I think I ought to go there and captain the side."

"Dig's gone."

"I refuse to allow Dig to take my place. I gwacefully wetwated to allow you to wesume the skippahship, but I decline to wesign my wights to Dig."

"Oh, go and eat coke!"

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

"Look here, Gus: stand by me, old chap, and help me stand this," murmured Blake. "Don't be a pig."

D'Arcy's heart was melted at once.

"Certainly, dear boy, if you put it like that."

And he said no more about going to the cricket field. Herries was dubious in his mind; but Herries never could come to a decision, and he remained undecided as to what he had better do.

"It's all wight, Hewwies," said D'Arcy. "Tom Mewwy will allow Dig to play a substitute for you and one for Blake and one for me." To which Herries replied with a grunt.

But all attention was now bestowed upon Mr. Blake and his remarkable cooking. Whether Mr. Blake could cook or not in South Africa, he certainly didn't seem to make much of a success of it in Study No. 6 at St. Jim's. The half pound of butter melted in the pan and slopped over into the fire, and there was such a sizzling and a sputtering as had never before been heard in the study.

Blake, Herries, and D'Arcy looked dismayed, but it was impossible to interfere. The laws of hospitality and respect for elders restrained them.

Into the simmering mass of melted butter Mr. Blake plunged the sausages. They swam about in grease, and splashed a great deal more of it over the fire, and there was a roar of flame up the chimney.

"My hat!" muttered the unhappy Blake. "We shall have it on fire soon."

"Did you speak?" asked Uncle Harry, turning round suddenly.

Herries gave a yell.

"Look out!"

But it was too late. The frying-pan, neglected for the moment, had slipped on the fire, and the whole of the contents were shot into the heart of the flames.

There was a rush and a roar of blaze that made Uncle Harry jump back from the fire like an indiarubber man, and the juniors uttered exclamations of dismay.

CHAPTER 14.

Uncle Harry Bowls.

"BLES my soul!" gasped Uncle Harry.

"My hat!"

"Bai Jove!"

The grate was a mass of flame, and the juniors dared not go near it. Blake remembered with thankfulness that the chimney had been recently swept. Perhaps it would not catch fire! Mr. Blake gazed at the flames.

"This is unfortunate!" he remarked.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"It is making the study quite smoky."
 "Go hon!" murmured Herries.
 "The blacks are settling all over the place."
 "Yaas, wathah! That was weally to be expected, undah the cires, my deah sir."
 "Jackie, you really should not have taken my attention off the frying-pan at that moment," said Mr. Blake, severely.
 Blake almost staggered.
 "I, uncle?"
 "Yes, you sir!"
 "Oh!"

The fire died down at last. From the window Blake caught sight of a great many faces upturned towards the roof of the School House, and he knew that showers of sparks and smoke must be pouring from the chimney. It was fortunate that it did not catch fire. Blake would not have been surprised to hear an alarm at any moment.

The study was in a most unpleasant state. Smoke lingered in every corner, and made the juniors sniff and gasp, and thick blacks were settling upon everything. Uncle Harry seemed to be very cheerful, however.

"Perhaps, after all, we had better have the cold collation," he remarked.

Blake felt greatly relieved. He had a feeling that even his duty as a nephew would not hold out against further attempts at cooking on the part of Uncle Harry. Willingly enough the juniors assented, and the cold collation was spread on the table. It was early yet for tea for the juniors, but they ate to keep the distinguished visitor company.

Mr. Blake apparently had very little appetite, even after his long journey. The tea was not what the juniors regarded as a success.

Mr. Blake looked out of the window when he rose from the tea-table.

"Ah, they are still playing!" he observed.

"Yes, it's the Shell innings now, uncle."

"Shall we go and watch them?"

"Certainly, uncle. But are you sure you've had enough tea?"

"Yes, thank you, Jackie. If I feel peckish in the open air we will pay a visit to the tuckshop."

"Yaas wathah!"

And Blake and his uncle left the study. D'Arcy glanced round it as he followed more slowly with Herries.

"I say, Hewwies, old man," he whispered, "what would you do if you had an uncle like that?"

"Drown him!" said Herries.

"I should think his family must find him wathah twyin'." D'Arcy remarked thoughtfully. "I am wathah glad that he is not my avunculah relative."

Fellows looked at Blake and his uncle from all sides as they left the School House.

"Jackie! Jackie! How could you?" murmured Mellish, as he passed. And Blake had to repress the desire that rose within him to slay Mellish.

The Shell innings was proceeding merrily when they arrived on the ground. A buzz greeted the appearance of Uncle Harry. The crowd wondered whether he was going to bowl. Jack wondered, and feared; and Mr. Blake soon put all his doubts to rest, in the way he dreaded.

Tom Merry and Kangaroo were at the wickets, and Reilly was bowling to the latter. Reilly was unable to touch the Cornstalk's wicket, and Noble was hitting away in fine style.

Mr. Blake watched for some minutes in silence, and then blinked at his nephew.

"I think you had better put me on to bowl, Jackie."

Blake's heart sank.

"I'm not captain now, sir," he faltered.

"Ah! Who is captaining the side?"

"Digby."

"Very good. We must proceed in order. I will speak to Digby."

And when the field crossed after the over, Mr. Blake called to Digby in a loud voice that was heard all over the field.

"Digby, my dear boy, Jackie wishes you to put me on to bowl the next over."

There was a giggle round the field. Figgins and Fatty Wynn fell into one another's arms, and gasped.

"Certainly, sir," said Digby, with a wry face.

Mr. Blake handed his silk hat to his nephew, and accepted the ball, and strode off to the bowler's wicket with a very business-like air.

"Go it."

"Hurrah!"

Everybody was grinning. Noble had taken an odd run at the finish of the over, and so he still had the bowling. He grinned as he faced it.

Mr. Blake went through some remarkable contortions, and the ball went down.

Kangaroo played it carelessly enough—but his bat somehow did not touch the leather—and there was a clack!

Then the whole field roared.

"How's that?"

And there was a yell of laughter.

Kangaroo's face was a study as he looked down at his wicket. He was out!

The middle stump was on its back, the bails down.

"How's that?" shrieked a score of voices.

And the umpire chuckled.

"Out!"

"My only hat!" murmured Kangaroo. "This is a giddy miracle."

And he walked away to the tent.

Monty Lowther took his place at the wicket.

"Look out," said Kangaroo, as he passed Lowther coming in and Lowther nodded, but carelessly.

But he was wideawake enough soon!

Uncle Harry bowled again—and Lowther swiped for the ball—where he could have sworn it was—but his bat struck nothing but the air.

Clack!

The bails were down!

"Phew!"

"Great Scott!"

Blake was grinning with delight now. His uncle was a remarkable person in many respects, but there was no doubt that in spite of his advanced age, he could play cricket.

"Hurrah!" yelled Blake. "Bravo!"

"Yaas, wathah! Huwway, deah boys."

Clifton Dane went down to the wicket. The Canadian junior was keenly on the watch, but that did not save his stumps.

The ball came down with a break on it that he wasn't looking for—and his off stump reined on the ground in a second.

Then the shouts were tremendous.

"The hat trick! Hurrah!"

"Bravo, Blake's uncle!"

"Good old Ginger."

The last appellation was not, perhaps, very respectful, but Mr. Blake did not seem to mind. He nodded and smiled serenely.

"Bai Jove, Blake," said D'Arcy, clapping his chum on the back. "Your uncle is a wathah ecentwic old merchant, in some respects, but he can bowl."

"What-ho," said Blake, "Hurrah!"

Bernard Glyn came in next, and he carefully blocked the balls for the rest of the over, but did not score. Mr. Blake came off, much to the relief of the Shell fieldsmen.

"Pwray allow me to congratulate you, my deah sir," said Arthur Augustus. "The pwceedings are wathah iwregulah, but Tom Mewwy does not waise any objection, so it is all wight."

"Will you bowl again, sir?" asked Digby, with a grin, "I'll play you instead of Blake's substitute, sir."

Mr. Blake shook his head.

"No, perhaps it would not be fair to the Shell," he remarked.

"Well, you've given us a leg up," said Dig. "Much obliged."

And indeed that over had made a great difference. Mr. Blake stood looking on, with Blake, Herries, and D'Arcy, who were now out of the game. Dig had been allowed to play substitutes for them, and it would have been asking too much to change back again.

Figgins and Fatty Wynn exchanged a wink, and strolled over to the spot where the old gentleman stood. Figgins gave Blake a nudge.

Jack looked round inquiringly.

"Introduce me to your uncle, old chap," said Figgins.

CHAPTER 15.

Something Like a Feast!

FIGGINS was introduced to Mr. Blake, who was very polite to him. They immediately began to chat, and Mr. Blake showed a great knowledge of St. Jim's, though he had—to the School House view—got most of it wrong.

"Ah, you are Figgins," he said, "You belong to the New House. You are the head of the juniors, I believe."

"Yes, sir," said Figgins.

"Rats!" said Blake, warmly, "That's quite a mistake, uncle. I'm the head of the juniors—the New House doesn't count at all."

"More rats!" said Figgins, "Mr. Blake seems to be very accurately informed. We're the cock-house at St. Jim's, Mr. Blake."

"Weally, Figgins—"

"And you put the best junior team into the field?" said Mr. Blake.

"Yes, rather, Blake will admit that."

"Rats!" said Blake.

"And you have the greatest record for swimming, running, walking, cycling, football—"

"Look here, uncle, you've got it all wrong," said Blake,

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heatedly: "we hold the record for everything except swelled head. Figgins holds that."

"Look here, Blake—"

"Look here, Figgins—"

"Jackie! Jackie!" said Mr. Blake, chidingly; "let dogs delight to bark and fight, it is their nature to do these unruly things."

"Well, I'm not stopping them," growled Blake, under his breath.

"We're awfully glad to see you at St. Jim's, sir," said Fatty Wynn. "It's a pleasure to see Blake's uncle, sir. We're all so fond of Blake."

"People are always fond of dear little Jackie!" said Uncle Harry. "You have no idea what a sweet little fellow he was when I saw him last. You should have heard him cry for sugar candy."

"Ha, ha, ha!" gurgled Monty Lowther, "I—I mean, how interesting."

Blake was scarlet.

"It's ripping to see you here, sir," went on Fatty Wynn, who had a purpose in view. "If you should feel at all peckish, sir, I'd show you the way to the tuckshop."

"Good old Fatty!" murmured Manners.

"As a matter of fact, I am a little hungry," said Mr. Blake. "Suppose we pay a visit to the school shop. I believe it is a custom here for a boy's relatives to stand treat when they visit the school."

The juniors grinned. It was not exactly a custom, though it was frequently done. But they were willing to make it a custom on the spot.

"Exactly, sir," said Fatty Wynn. "Shall I show you the way?"

"Thank you. Come on, my boys. I shall be glad if all of you will join my nephew and myself in the tuckshop."

"Hear, hear!" ejaculated Monty Lowther, "I'm on in this scene."

"What-ho," said Manners, "count me in."

And a considerable crowd followed Mr. Blake to the little shop kept within the precincts of St. Jim's, by Dame Taggles, the porter's wife.

Blake and his friends, and all the Shell cricketers whose wickets had fallen, led the way, and after them came a crowd of juniors of both Houses and all Forms. Even the Third Form had the "cheek," as Blake regarded it, to join in the treat. Wally, the younger brother of Arthur Augustus, came along with Jameson and Gibson and a crew of ink-fingered fags.

The little shop was crammed.

Mr. Blake, his nephew, D'Arcy, Herries, Figgins, and Wynn filled up the length of the little counter, and all the rest of the available space was speedily taken up. And then there were a great many fellows outside who couldn't possibly find room.

"Now, what will you have, my boys?" said Mr. Blake, hospitably. "Order anything you like. There is no limit."

"Bravo, Blake's uncle!"

And the juniors did not stand upon the order of their ordering, so to speak, but ordered all at once.

Never had Dame Taggles had such a rush of orders.

Ginger beer and lemonade flowed in abundance, and jam tarts and cream puffs, jellies and cakes and pies, passed on all sides.

Good-natured fellows who found room in the shop passed out good things of all sorts to the fellows outside, so that they shouldn't lose their share of the treat.

All was mirth and enjoyment.

It was getting near tea-time, and most of the juniors were peckish; but as a rule a healthy boy can dispose of a pleasant meal at any time. And the juniors now distinguished themselves.

Fatty Wynn, of course, made the greatest exertions in the common cause.

He sat on a high stool at the counter, and started on everything that was within his reach.

He soon cleared that part of the counter of eatables, and then he began to give orders.

Dame Taggles was not given a moment's rest.

It was almost impossible to keep count of the various items that were disposed of, and so Dame Taggles was content with a rough idea of the amount—a rough idea which did not err on the side of being too moderate.

The account had already run up to a large figure, and the guests of Blake's uncle were far from satisfied.

Most of the fellows in the shop were New House boys, and it really looked as if the New House had had some idea that something of the sort was about to happen, and had placed themselves on the spot ready.

But the School House boys fared pretty well, too.

Mr. Blake was the most generous of hosts. He pressed the fellows continually to have more and more.

"I am sure you could eat some of these cream puffs, D'Arcy."

"Thank you vewy much, sir."

"Try some cheese cakes, Wynn."

"Certainly, Mr. Blake."

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NEXT THURSDAY; "THE ST. JIM'S INVENTORS."

"Lowther, you will like these tarts."

"Thank you, sir."

"Ginger-beer, please—ginger-beer for Figgins."

"Don't he pick up the names quickly, too?" murmured Lowther. "He seems to know the blessed lot of us by name, and he's never seen any of us before to-day."

Mr. Blake was immensely popular, now.

There wasn't a fellow who didn't envy Blake the possession of such an uncle, and Blake himself was feeling very satisfied with him.

After all, with all his eccentricities, he was a jolly good fellow. This feed would run into pounds, and it wasn't every fellow's uncle who would stand it.

The best of things come to an end at last, and so did that gorgeous feed. The orders slackened, and dropped off, and the shop cleared a little.

Mr. Blake beamed upon those who remained, through his rimless glasses.

"Come, help yourselves," he exclaimed. "Surely you are not finished yet, Wynn."

"Well, I could do with some more cake, sir."

"Certainly."

"And a few more tarts."

"Help yourself."

And Fatty Wynn helped himself—generously.

"It is a great pleasure to me," said Mr. Blake, "to see so many happy faces round me. It is very pleasant to see that my nephew Jackie has so many friends."

"Hear, hear!"

"Good old Jacko!"

"It is also gratifying to me, as an uncle, to know that he is so careful with his money, as to be able to save up for a feast like this," pursued Mr. Blake.

Jack Blake's jaw dropped.

"I have partaken of his hospitality with great pleasure, and I trust you have all done the same," said Uncle Harry affably. "Jackie, my dear boy, don't hurry yourself. When you have settled with Mrs. Taggles, join me on the cricket-field."

And Mr. Blake walked out of the shop.

The fellows looked at one another, and at Blake, and at one another again, and with suppressed whistles, they followed in the footsteps of Mr. Blake.

Blake, D'Arcy, and Herries remained alone, and a dreadful silence fell upon them.

CHAPTER 16.

Trapped!

D'ARCY was the first to speak.

"Bai Jove!"

That was all he had to say, but it expressed his feelings. Herries stared after Uncle Harry, then he stared at Blake. Then he bestowed a stare upon Mrs. Taggles. Finally he stared at his boots. He seemed to be particularly interested in his boots, for his glance remained upon them.

Blake turned red, then pale, then pink!

"My hat!" he said, at last.

"Three pounds fifteen shillings and sixpence," said Dame Taggles, looking up from a paper upon which she had been making laborious calculations with the aid of a stump of pencil.

"My word!"

"Three pounds fifteen—"

"Great Scott!"

"Deary me! The gentleman is gone."

"Bai Jove!"

"It's all right, Dame Taggles," said Blake, desperately. "You can put that down to my account."

"I thought the gentleman—"

"Never mind what you thought; put it down to my account."

Dame Taggles bestowed a freezing look upon Blake. The sublime coolness of a junior in requesting that three pounds fifteen shillings and sixpence should be put down to his account astounded her.

"Master Blake!"

"Did you speak, Mrs. Taggles?" asked Blake feebly.

"Yes, I did speak, Master Blake," said the dame, with asperity.

"I—I'm in rather a hurry now, Mrs. Taggles. I'll look in presently—"

"Three pounds fifteen shillings and sixpence—"

"Thank you, Mrs. Taggles—I know the sum exactly."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Master Blake—"

"It's all wight, Mrs. Taggles. I'm goin' to wiah to my govannah for a fivah, and it will be all wight. This is my account as well as Blake's."

"Oh, very well," said Dame Taggles.

And the juniors left the shop.

"My hat!" murmured Blake. "Mad, of course."

"Must have had the sunstroke in Africa," said Herries.

"Yaas, wathah! It's wathah awkward, you know, but I

A Grand Long Tale of Tom Merry & Co



"You were such a pretty little fellow," said Mr. Blake. "Dear me, I can hardly believe that this is little Jackie!"
The fellows round began to grin, and Jack Blake turned red.

suppose it's weally only absent-mindedness, Blake, deah boy. He's wathah ecentwic."

"My hat—he is."

They strolled down to the cricket-field. Blake was over-come. He didn't want to be inhospitable or undutiful. But really Uncle Harry seemed to be bent upon placing him in continual awkward positions.

Uncle Harry was watching the finish of the Shell innings, and clapping his hands warmly.

He leamed at Blake through his rimless glasses as the junior came up.

"Last man in, Jackie," he said. "Your innings soon."

"I'm not in it now, uncle."

"Ah, no, I forgot. Let me see, I must not forget about my train," said Mr. Blake, thoughtfully, and he glanced at his watch.

"Pway don't think of goin' yet, deah sir," said Arthur Augustus.

"Oh, no, uncle, not yet."

"Dear me! My watch has stopped. Can you tell me the time, D'Arcy?"

"Yass, wathah, sir," said Arthur Augustus, pulling out his famous twenty-five guinea gold timekeeper. "Just five, sir."

"Ahem! You may lend me your watch," said Mr. Blake. "I will return it to you when my own is going."

Arthur Augustus gasped a little. He didn't like lending his watch to anybody, naturally enough, and Mr. Harry Blake was so very eccentric that there was no telling what might happen to it in his care. But politeness came before every other consideration.

D'Arcy unhooked the watch from the chain and handed it to Mr. Blake. Jack Blake watched the transaction speechlessly.

Mr. Blake slipped the watch into his pocket.

"Thank you very much," he said.

"You are very welcome, my deah sir," said D'Arcy, and for once, perhaps, courtesy led Arthur Augustus from the strict line of veracity.

Mr. Blake glanced round the wide, green quad.

"I should like to have a look round the school," he remarked.

"Certainly, uncle, let us show you round," said Blake.

They strolled away from the playing-fields. The Fourth Form second innings was beginning, under Dig's lead, but Blake was too worried to think anything about cricket.

The school library, the Form rooms, the studies, the chapel, were all suggested in vain, and Mr. Blake decided that what he really wanted to see was the ruins of the abbey.

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"THE ST. JIM'S INVENTORS."

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These relics of the ancient buildings of St. Jim's were enclosed by a fence, entered by a little gate, and they lay in a secluded part of the grounds.

Uncle Harry was guided thither by his dutiful nephew, but Herrie dropped behind to watch the cricket. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, however, stuck to Jack Blake like a Briton.

"That's the crypt, uncle," said Blake, pointing to a thick, oaken door that stood open at the head of a narrow flight of stone steps.

Mr. Blake blinked at it through his glasses.

"I should like to see in it."

"Jolly dark in there, sir."

"Go down first, my boys, and strike a match."

"Certainly, uncle."

Blake and D'Arcy descended the steps. They went into the crypt, and Uncle Harry stood close by the door on the steps.

Blake struck a match. As the light flickered out into the gloom of the crypt, there was the sudden sound of a shutting door.

The two juniors jumped.

"My hat! He's shut us in!"

Blake dashed up the steps.

The door was closed at the top. The door was made to open outwards, but it did not open now. Blake guessed that a stone or a chip of wood had been thrust under it on the outside.

"My hat!" he murmured dazedly.

"Bai Jove, Blake!"

Jack Blake struck another match, and in its flickering light the two juniors looked at one another.

"He's shut us in!" faltered Blake.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"He must be mad!"

"Wight off his beastly wockah, deah boy."

"It must be sunstroke."

"Yaas, wathah!"

The match burned out.

With the door closed the crypt was in pitchy darkness.

"Put your shoulder to it, and shove, Gussy," muttered Blake.

"Wight!"

They shoved on the door. But it was firmly fixed, and quite immovable. They exerted themselves in vain; it did not even creak.

They desisted at last in utter dismay.

D'Arcy carefully dusted with his hand the shoulder of his jacket where it had been pressed against the wood.

"I say, Blake, deah boy, this is alarmin'," he remarked.

"We are absolutely shut up here, you know."

"It's rotten!"

"Wotten isn't the word. I weally wish your uncle were a twife less eccentwic, old chap."

"Oh, it's sunstroke," groaned Blake. "I—I never expected this, though—though I might have been prepared for anything, after that affair in the tuckshop."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"The fellows will let us out soon; we shall have to wait for that. But"—Blake hushed his breath—"what may he be doing while we're shut up here?"

"Phew!"

"If he's mad enough to play tricks like this—"

"Bai Jove, deah boy, it's a doocid awkward posish! Let's have anothah twy at that beastly door," said Arthur Augustus, anxiously.

They tried—and tried again!

But it was in vain—they were hopeless prisoners in the crypt. Meanwhile, what of the amazing uncle?

CHAPTER 17.

An Astounding Discovery!

JACK BLAKE leaned against the oaken door, in a cold perspiration. He could only attribute his uncle's action to sudden insanity. It was evident that this was the outcome of some sunstroke in South Africa. But what was to be done? If Uncle Harry were not responsible for his actions, what wild doings might be going on at that very moment. Perhaps he had purposely shut up his nephew in the vault while he carried out some insane scheme!

At the thought Blake hammered savagely on the door. He could not move it, but someone might hear.

Bow-wow-wow!

"Hark!"

"It was a dog, Blake."

"Pongo!" exclaimed Blake, joyfully. "Where Pongo is, young Wally isn't far off."

"Bai Jove, yaas!"

Blake hammered on the oaken door again. Arthur Augustus seconded him manfully with fist and boot.

The crypt rang with echo.

A tap came on the door from outside.

"Hallo, there!"

"Open the door, Wallay, deah boy!"

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"My only Aunt Jane! Is that you, Gus?"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Unfasten the door, you young sweep!" roared Blake.

"Hallo! You too, Brutus!" chuckled Wally.

"Will you let us out?"

"I don't know," said Wally, coolly, through the door. "I'm not the chap to spoil a jape. How did you come to shut yourselves up here?"

"Weally, Wally—"

"We were shut up!" growled Blake.

"Who shut you up? Figgins?"

"No; my—my uncle."

"My only Aunt Jane!"

"Will you open the door, Wally?"

"Certainly, cocky."

And the door swung open. Wally had only to kick away a wooden wedge that had been thrust under it.

The juniors burst out into the sunlight again, with great gasps of relief. D'Arcy minor stared at them in amazement. He was holding Pongo by the collar. He had chased the truant Pongo into the ruins, with no expectation of being called upon to release two prisoners from the crypt.

"Do you mean to say your uncle played a jape like that on you, Blake?" he demanded, half incredulously.

"He's off his rocker, I think—sunstroke."

"Oh!"

"Have you seen him? Do you know where he is?"

"Yes, I saw him going towards the School House, while I was chasing Pongo here," said Wally. "Fancy his being off his onion. I suppose it's in the family. I've noticed signs of it about you a lot of times."

Blake made no reply to that remark. He dashed off in the direction of the School House, with D'Arcy at his heels.

Both the juniors were extremely anxious as to what the supposed lunatic might do. There was no telling!

They ran into the School House, and Binks the page met Blake in the hall.

"This letter just come for you, Master Blake," he said.

Blake took the letter mechanically, without looking at it.

"Have you seen my uncle, Binks?"

"Yea, Master Blake. He's gone up to your study."

"Thanks."

Blake and D'Arcy dashed upstairs. As they ran down the Fourth Form passage they heard strange sounds proceeding from No. 6.

Bump! Crash!

D'Arcy turned quite pale.

"He—he's smashin' up the furniture, Blake."

"Come on!" panted Blake.

They ran on to the study. The door was ajar, and they paused and looked in before entering.

Blake's uncle was there!

He evidently did not expect to be interrupted or observed. The house was quite empty, owing to the half-holiday and the fine weather; and the gentleman from South Africa naturally imagined that both Blake and D'Arcy were safe in the crypt till he chose to let them out.

The juniors gasped as they saw how Blake's astounding uncle was occupied. He had turned the table upside down in the centre of the room, and had emptied the ashpan from the grate there.

He had piled all the crockery and tinware and fire-irons in the ashes, and poured jam and marmalade and treacle over them ad lib.

He had opened D'Arcy's famous hat-box, and taken out the hats, and stuck them in a prominent position on the shelf with the label on them, "Shop Soiled, 6d. each."

He was now engaged in scribbling a note, and chuckling over it with great glee as he scribbled.

Blake and D'Arcy drew back into the passage.

"Mad as a hatter!" muttered D'Arcy.

Blake nodded.

"He's wrecked the study. He ought to be secured. We can't allow him to leave the school in this state," said Blake in a whisper.

"Wathah not, deah boy."

"What can he be writing in that note?"

D'Arcy peered into the study again, and drew back.

"He's stickin' it on the lookin'-glass," he whispered. "It's a note to us, I suppose. This is weally most surpwis'in!" The swell of St. Jim's looked quickly at Blake. "What's the mattah with you, Blake?"

Blake was staring at the letter in his hand.

"Look! This is from my uncle."

ANSWERS

"Eh?"

"I can't understand it. He never mentioned anything about having written, yet this letter has just been delivered."

"Bai Jove!"

Blake tore open the letter. As he read the contents, his face was a study.

"Read it!" he muttered.

Arthur Augustus glanced over the letter. It ran as follows:

"Dear Jack,—I am sorry I had to wire to you that I could not come down to St. Jim's. I am so pressed by business to-day that it is impossible, but I hope to run down in the evening just to have half an hour's chat with you. You may expect me by the seven train at Rylcombe. If the Doctor will allow it, I should like you to meet the train."

"Your affectionate uncle,

"HENRY BLAKE."

"Bai Jove!"

"He says he's coming to Rylcombe by the seven train—"

"Amazin'!"

"Yet he's come—"

"Bai Jove!"

Blake rubbed his forehead feverishly.

"I can't understand it. Why hasn't he mentioned this letter?"

"Because he's off his wookah, deah boy."

"I—I suppose that's it," Blake gave a sudden start. "I—I say, it isn't possible that there's any trick about it, is it?"

"Twick!"

"I haven't seen my uncle for years. I—I— My hat! That chap collared your gold watch, and then shut us up in the crypt!"

"Gwest Scott!"

"He's nothing like what I expected my uncle to be, except in appearance, and I remember precious little except the glasses and the ginger beard. I'm jolly well going to see about it before he leaves the school."

"Yaas, wathah!" said D'Arcy, growing excited as the possibility of an imposture dawned on his mind. "Let's wush in, and I'll guard the door while you talk to him and make him explain."

"Good!"

There was a chuckle in the study. Something seemed very familiar to Blake's ears about that chuckle somehow. They wasted no more time.

Together they ran into the study, and D'Arcy slammed the door and put his back to it. Mr. Blake gave a sudden jump.

"D-d-d-dear me!" he stammered. "You st-st-startled me."

"I've just had your letter, uncle," said Blake, watching him narrowly and making no reference to the affair of the crypt.

"M-m-my letter! Oh, ye-es!"

"You changed your mind and came earlier?"

"Exactly, my dear boy," said Mr. Blake, recovering himself, and edging towards the door. "You—you must excuse that little joke at the crypt, you know—a little—er—jape. And—"

"Wait a minute, uncle."

"I—I think—"

Blake took down the note which had been stuck on the looking-glass. Uncle Harry made a bound to the door.

"Stop!"

"Pway hold on, deah sir."

Uncle Harry did not reply. He dragged D'Arcy away from the door and tore it open.

Arthur Augustus made a wild grab at him and dragged him back into the study. The little man wrenched himself away; D'Arcy's grip was on his hair, and, to D'Arcy's horror, the hair came off in his hand.

"Gwest Scott!"

A head of dark hair was disclosed under the wig. Stranger still, along with the wig the beard and moustaches came away.

In spite of the artificial sunburn on the face, in spite of all that "spoof" wrinkles could do, the face was recognisable then, with the beard and wig and moustaches gone, and the glasses off. D'Arcy and Blake gave one wild shout.

"Kerr!"

And in his blank amazement D'Arcy let go.

In a second the impostor whipped out of the study and ran.

CHAPTER 18.

Spoofed!

"KERR!"

"My hat! Kerr!"

"Kerr! Bai Jove!"

D'Arcy's mouth was wide open, and Blake staggered in his astonishment. He had expected anything—but this!

It was not Blake's uncle at all!

The wire and the letter explained everything. Blake's uncle had not come! But the New House juniors, knowing all about the matter, had worked off this daring jape on the unsuspecting School House juniors.

Blake remembered only too clearly that tea-party in Figgins's study, and how cunningly Figgins & Co. had extracted from him

a description of the personal appearance of his uncle, as far as he knew it.

"Kerr! My only hat! Kerr!"

He glanced at the note Kerr had written and left there on the looking-glass for him. He understood now why Uncle Harry had bolted so desperately when he saw Blake take the note.

For the note ran thus:

"Dear Jackie,—This is to certify that you and the other School House asses have been completely diddled, dished, and done! Thanks very much for the feed, and for the amusement you have afforded me—most of it unconscious on your part!

"Your affectionate Uncle,

"KERR (of the New House)."

"Bai Jove!"

Blake crumpled the note in his hand.

"After him!" he yelled. "He sha'n't get away! I'll—I'll make him squirm! I'll snatch him bald-headed! After him!"

Blake tore out of the study, with D'Arcy at his heels.

But Kerr had a good start.

He was already in the quadrangle, and by the time Blake and D'Arcy burst out of the School House, Kerr was racing across to his own house.

A curious sight he looked, with a boy's face and the clothes of a man upon his figure, padded to the stoutness of middle age.

"Stop him!" roared Blake.

He put on a desperate spurt. Figgins & Co. were racing up, and a crowd of amazed juniors followed them.

Kerr, encumbered with his paddings, ran fast, but not so fast as Blake. The hand of the avenger was on his shoulder, and he would have been called to a dire account the next moment, but Figgins came tearing up.

Figgins tackled Blake like a Rugby three-quarter, and Blake reeled in a graceful attitude on the ground, and Figgins, Kerr, and Wynn disappeared into the New House.

Arthur Augustus came tearing up, and rolled right over Blake, and sat in the quad, gasping for breath.

"Ow! Blake, you are an ass!"

"You duffer!"

"I wefuse to be called a duffah!"

"What did you sprawl over me for?"

"Weally, Blake, I wegard it as wepwehensible of you to lie about on the gground and twip people up!"

"Br-r-r-r!"

Blake staggered to his feet.

The pseudo Uncle Harry was gone. But in a minute or so he was looking out of the window of Figgins's study, waving his hand to the incensed School House juniors.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Figgins. "Who's done this time?"

"Blake & Co.!" chorled Kerr and Wynn.

"Thanks for the feed!" sang out Figgins.

And the Co. simply yelled.

And in the quadrangle the juniors yelled too. The discovery had spread like wildfire—the sight of Kerr careering across the quad in Uncle Harry's clothes had explained everything.

Even the School House boys were shrieking over it. The very cricketers forgot that they were playing cricket, in the excitement of the moment.

"It was an awfully good feed," said Figgins.

Fatty Wynn smacked his lips.

"Ripping!" he said.

"Of course, we're going to pay the bill," went on Figgins. "We'll settle with Dame Taggles. But the joke—ha, ha, ha!—it's up against you duffers!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Blake shook his fists, and said things. But the laugh was against him—the whole crowd roared over the joke. Jack Blake thrust his hands deep into his trousers' pockets and strode away.

But the yells of laughter and the jubilant catcalls of Figgins & Co. followed him all the way to the School House.

All St. Jim's shrieked over the "jape" of Figgins & Co. It had to be agreed that the New House had scored this time, with a vengeance. Even Mr. Raitlon laughed over the story, when it at last reached his ears, and he understood the cause of Mr. Blake's strange behaviour in his study.

Blake was a little sore at first, but he was relieved to find that he had not really an uncle who was "off his rocker." And as his real uncle was coming that evening, he had no time for rows with Figgins & Co. over the matter. He had to prepare for the real individual. And his chums, when they had finished laughing themselves hoarse over the jape, helped him. And Figgins & Co. joined in, too, and Blake forgave them. And when the real Uncle Harry came—and a jolly gentleman he proved to be—all the juniors vied with one another in entertaining him, and the story of Kerr's escapade was related to him over supper. And Uncle Harry laughed as heartily as anyone at the history of the amazing uncle.

THE END.

(Another splendid long complete tale of Tom Merry & Co. next week. Order your copy of the "Gem" Library in advance. Price One Penny.

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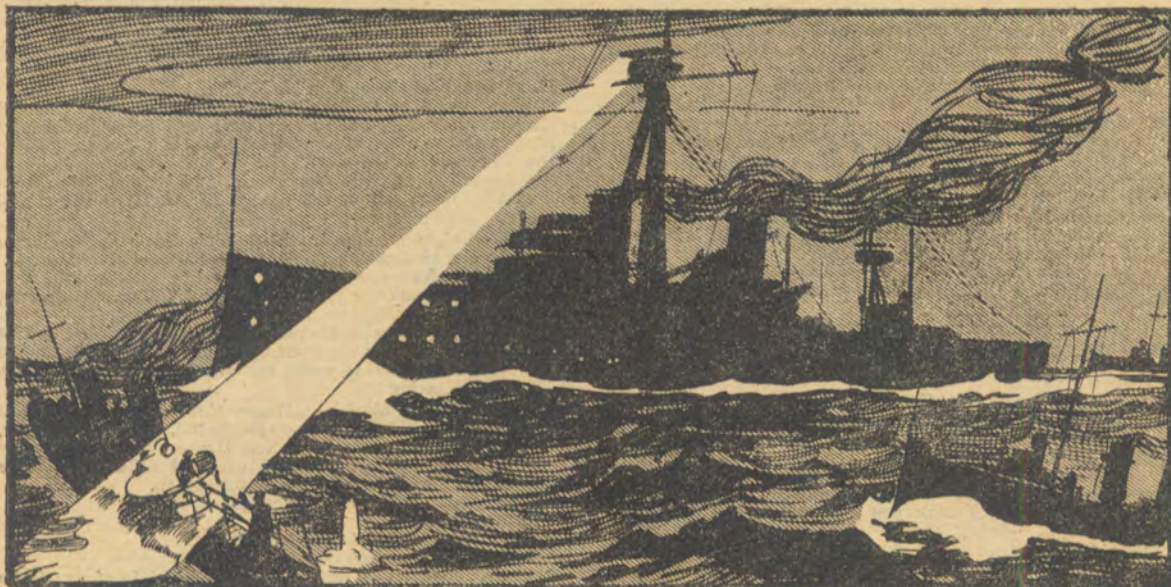
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NEXT
THURSDAY:

"THE ST. JIM'S INVENTORS."

Please tell your Friends about this Story.

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, Sam and Stephen are in charge of their father's yacht, the "Vanity." On board are Mrs. Villiers and her two daughters, with a cargo of small children whom they intend to rescue from the misery of London. The "Vanity," in an attempt to reach Newhaven by sea, was only rescued from the hands of the Germans by the prompt measures of Lieutenant Cavendish, who lost his torpedo-boat in the engagement. He is brought into Sheerness with his crew by the "Vanity," and offers to arrange for Mrs. Villiers and her infants to go to Newhaven by train.

(Now go on with the Story.)

Cavendish's New Command.

Mrs. Villiers was delighted with the offer, and Cavendish went ashore at once to arrange it, and give his report. The commanding officer at Sheerness owed Cavendish too much to refuse him anything. There was no reason against the arrangement, and instructions were telegraphed to Chatham. In another hour the Vanity was steaming up the river on the flood tide, and Cavendish and the boys escorted Mrs. Villiers and her party to the station, and, after the infantile cargo had been safely stowed, saw them off. There were warm farewells between the Villiers' family, nor was Cavendish left out of them by any means, and the train moved out. Cavendish looked rather pensive.

"Uncommon pretty girl your sister," he said, as they returned to the yacht.

"Which one?" said Sam.

"Madge," replied Cavendish, who had spent most of his time with her on the way up river—"or Daisy, rather," he added, after a moment's thought. "In fact, Madge—or perhaps Daisy—"

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"THE ST. JIM'S INVENTORS."

"Good old Navy!" grinned Stephen, winking at his brother. "Wonderful you chaps can never make up your minds, ain't it?"

"Don't rot—it's serious!" grunted Cavendish. "When a fellow meets a perfectly charmin' girl like Daisy—I mean Madge—you shouldn't—"

"Never mind, old chap," said Sam; "it'll be Lucy when you get to Dover, an' Arabella after you've been a day at Portsmouth, to say nothing of Dorothea at Southampton. I s'pose they're sprinkled round between all the ports between here and—"

"If you can't talk sense, I shall walk by myself!" said Cavendish, in a huff.

But they each took one of his arms and marched down to the river, singing "Let us be sweethearts again," giving Cavendish no chance to assert himself. He had forgotten the incident by the time they had reached the Vanity, and discovered that the yacht was not to take them down to Sheerness.

"I arranged with the mate to have her laid up here again," said Sam; "they won't allow any private vessels to lie at Sheerness these times. But there's a rippin' good petrol launch belongin' to my father that we can go down the river in, an' she'll hold all your crew, provided Mac knows how to run her engines."

"Ay, I've some experience in petrol engines," said Mac. "They're not as sweet as steam, but there's more power for the size."

"She's three times the Vanity's speed. She'll take us. Let's get her out."

They took a dinghy and went to inspect the launch, which lay at moorings above the Admiralty wharf. She was a big, beamy, seaworthy-looking craft, with very powerful engines, and Mac, after a close examination, professed himself very satisfied with her.

"Wonder the Germans haven't pinched her," said Stephen. "They know a good thing when they see it."

"They've never held Chatham, you chump!" replied his brother. "Sheerness is the only place they had south of the Thames. It's more of a wonder our authorities haven't commandeered her. We'll add her to the British Navy, and as there's a full supply of petrol aboard, we may as well start. Bob, my buck, will you constitute yourself

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& Co.

admiral of the fast and furious vessel H.M.S. Puffing Peter? The less time we waste here the better."

Cavendish, though rather scornful of the new craft, took his crew aboard, and it was not long before they started. He soon altered his opinion of her when fairly under way, for the launch went at a rare pace, and was very handy to steer. They left Upnor and Gillingham behind in a very short time, and soon afterwards Sheerness and the open sea beyond the Nore came into view.

"She's a ripper!" said Cavendish. "Pity she's so noisy, though, for she could never steal into a harbour at night on the quiet, if wanted. You aren't in a hurry, are you? I'd like to run her outside for a bit an' see how she behaves in a sea-way."

"All right," said Sam. "And, in the meantime, Steve and I have got to decide what we're goin' to do next."

"Do next?" echoed Cavendish, as the launch ran out into the choppy water to seaward. "Why, stay with me an' see what turns up!"

"I don't know that we can. There's more work to do up-country," said Sam, "an' I think we'll have to get Mac to run us two up-river. Then he can come back to you with the launch. You see, this new League of Britons I told you about—"

"Oh, skittles!" said Cavendish. "That ain't ripe yet! And what good will it do till the Germans are wiped off the sea? Of course, Sheerness is dead empty just now, but—"

He broke off, and stared fixedly to the eastward, suddenly noticing a strange-looking pair of vessels coming up Oaze Deep towards Sheerness.

"Empty, is it?" echoed Stephen. "Here's something coming to help fill it, anyhow."

All hands watched the homeward-bounds with strong interest, for both were men-o'-war. The foremost of the two vessels was a bulky, turreted, ancient-looking battleship of the old "second-class," like a small iron fort on the water. She was moving very slowly, towing behind her a bigger vessel—a protected cruiser, which was heavily down by the bows, and all out of trim.

As they came nearer it was seen that the towed cruiser was shot all to pieces, and was little better than a wreck. It was as much as the small battleship could do to pull her along. Both ships flew the white ensign.

"Why, it's the old Challenge!" exclaimed Cavendish. "Good old creak! Been a good 'un in her time, but she ought to be in a museum now. Had to use her now, I s'pose."

"Which is the Challenge?" said Stephen.

"Why, the battleship, you ass! That's a German cruiser she's towin' in—a prize!"

"What, has the Challenge whipped her?"

"Great Scott, no, not likely! I'd be sorry to meet a big modern warship like that cruiser with an old relic like the Challenge. Ours is a coast-defence ship now. Probably she came on the scene after the German ship was whacked, up north, an' was ordered to tow her into port. Here, let's whisk this snortin' sandwich-tin back to harbour; we shall get some news from the fleet now, an' perhaps there'll be a job."

Cavendish was all eagerness to get back, and so were the others. No news had been received from the squadrons in the North Sea for some time. Though the launch had gone a long way out, she was back in harbour before the warships. No sooner had the Challenge anchored than the prize was made fast alongside her, and Cavendish ran the launch abreast the battleship, and was asked to board. He went up the gangway with Sam and Stephen.

To their complete surprise they were received by a sub-lieutenant and a warrant-officer. The former was known to Cavendish.

"Hallo!" exclaimed the latter. "What on earth is this? Are you in command, Elcombe?"

"Yes," said the young officer, who looked hardly more than a boy. "Rum go, isn't it? Our commander was only a full lieutenant when we had him, but he was killed by a splinter of shell, an' we buried him at sea, poor chap! I've had to bring the ship in, and the warrant-officers have backed me up. My first voyage."

"Well done! But what's happened at sea, an' where did you find that cruiser?"

"There was a pretty big fight between Frankie's squadron and six German ships off Walton this mornin', and he gave 'em socks. We were on guard off the Blackwater's mouth with this old creak, an' should have been wiped out before we could get into shelter if Frankie hadn't turned up. That was when my chief got knocked out."

"Has Frankie gone north, then?"

"Yes; an' had this fight on the way. He sunk two of their ships, three got away, an' this one was crippled, an' surrendered. Her crew was nearly wiped out. Frankie ordered us to take her in tow an' bring her in here. I've

got instructions to hand her to the chief in command, but where the deuce is he?"

"If you want the Port Admiral," said Cavendish, grinning, "I should say his nearest equivalent is Colonel Blake, or else the Dockyard Stores Commissioner. There's no seagoin' chap here of any big rank, since all the ships were called out so urgently. Colonel Blake commands ashore, an' here's his staff-officer comin' out, in answer to your signals, I suppose."

There was a short conference between the young sub-lieutenant and the staff-officer, and very out of place did Cavendish think it that an Army man should have any finger in a naval pie. But the way in which Sheerness had been stripped of its ships and men for the great struggle farther north, and the terrible shortage of officers in the Navy since the recent fighting, brought this about.

Cavendish took no part in the interview, it being apparently none of his business, and stood aloof. In less than a minute, however, the sub-lieutenant, looking very surprised about something, asked Cavendish to come forward.

"I am told you are the senior naval officer in the port, Mr. Cavendish," he said.

"I suppose I am," replied Cavendish pensively, "as I'm the only one, except yourself."

"My orders were to hand over my command to the senior officer, who is to refit the Challenge from this prize, and take her out to guard the Dover Straits, which are at present without any patrol."

Cavendish's surprise turned into joy.

"By Jove!" he exclaimed, casting one eye over the majestic battleship, and then controlling himself. "Well, Mr. Elcombe," he said formally, though bubbling over inwardly with delight, "I suppose they hardly expected a lieutenant to be commander; but as there's nobody else, there's no doubt I must at once obey instructions, and take over the Challenge. I'm sorry to supersede you in the command."

"Don't mention it, sir; it's a lot above my weight," said the young officer. "Only just got my step from a midgy; but I hope you'll let me stay as your Number One."

"Of course! Muster the crew, please, Mr. Elcombe, and let us get to work at once."

The staff-officer departed, and Cavendish made a rapid examination of the ship.

"Very poor guns," he said to Elcombe. "Nothing but the old-fashioned type of 12-inch, but plenty of small quick-firers. What's her speed?"

"Supposed to be 14, but 12½ knots is about it."

Cavendish whistled.

"You seem to have a huge crew, though."

"Yes; we've the crews of a second-class cruiser and two gunboats, all of which were sunk in action. We're strong in men, an' that's all. There's more room than work for 'em," added Elcombe, grinning. "The officers we saved were drafted into the Fleet again. They're fearfully short of officers; so many have been killed, an' there's no reserve of 'em, as you know."

"How are things going up the coast?" said Cavendish quickly.

"There's been a lot o' dodgin' an' skirmishin', for the Germans have seemed precious shy of meetin' us properly. But it's drawin' very near to the final great scrappin' match now. Everything depends on that, an' that's why Frankie's squadron has been called up north to help, an' you've got to keep the door of the Straits with the Challenge, in case of raiders. Only Heaven help her if she meets with any modern German warships!" added Elcombe piously.

Cavendish turned to his chums.

"You've heard what's on," he said. "This is the biggest chance yet. She's an old barge, an' that's a fact. Her guns ought to be in a museum, an' she ain't much faster than a County Council mud-hopper; but there's fight in her yet. We shall be right on the edge of the big scrap. Will you come with me?"

The boys glanced at each other. They were under no orders, and felt they could not miss it. They were burning to go.

"Is there anything we can do?" said Sam. "We can't come to loaf while you an' your men fight."

"Job's sure to turn up for you," said Cavendish, "an' you can have the first that comes."

"Then we're with you!"

"Hurry, an' strip that prize of everything that's useful to us!" ordered Cavendish, turning to his staff. "Her guns are done for, but get all her coal into our bunkers, an' ship her provisions. Mr. Elcombe, take charge here while I board her."

The men worked as only Navy crews can, and at nightfall the battleship had emptied the German cruiser, filled her

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"THE ST. JIM'S INVENTORS."

bunkers, provisioned herself fully, and done a dozen other things as well.

It was past midnight when the antique and grim-looking H.M.S. Challenge, packed as full of men as an ant-hill, steamed sluggishly out past Garrison Point and turned her blunt nose to the open sea. Down Ooze Deepes she went, and the distant dark line of shipping and the Kentish coast slid past as she headed for Dover Straits.

"What they expect us to do chiefly," said Cavendish to Sam and Stephen, who were with him in the chart-house, "is to keep off any of the Mary Anns—those armed steamer pirates, you know—who might take advantage of Frankie bein' away to come and worry Dover and Ramsgate again. We could settle those all right. An' we could beat off a torpedo-boat attack, with these quick-firers, if it wasn't too formidable. A rush by full-powered destroyers might do for us, though."

"And a German cruiser or battleship?" queried Stephen.

"If we meet with one," said Cavendish, smiling grimly, "you can say your prayers. This old saucepan 'd have as much chance as a tin match-box under a steam-hammer. She'd never have been sent outside a harbour at all except that not a decent ship that we've got can be spared out of the big fight. But those transport-steamers with some Colonial troops are expected, you know, so the ports can't be left quite unprotected."

"Hope we shan't get wiped out by some thundering big German, without a run for our money," said Stephen.

"We aren't very likely to meet with one. Still, you never know. There's the Foreland opening up."

The Challenge rounded the headland, and turned into the mouth of the Channel, where she slowly steamed out past the Goodwins, towards the French coast, and back, throwing the great rays of her searchlights ahead as she went.

Not a vessel was seen—the narrow seas were deserted. It seemed as though all traffic had been scared away by the deadly struggle about to take place between the two giant Powers for the final mastery of the sea. All night the Challenge kept at her work, the gun-crews sleeping by their guns.

The day dawned rather thick and misty, the white cliffs of the North Foreland showing through the haze. The warship was steaming on her northward beat, when the sound of firing was suddenly heard round the headland.

"Full speed there!" cried Cavendish; and the heavy old ship wallowed ahead at her best pace, steering so as to round the Foreland. "All gun-crews ready! Wonder what we're in for?" he added, in an undertone. "There's a row goin' on, about off Margate."

In a very few minutes the headland was passed, and the northern Kentish coast was in full view. At nearly extreme range for the Challenge's old guns, a large, long-bodied steamer was seen lying off Margate. She not only had guns, but was using them, as the flashes seen through the morning mist and the sharp reports plainly showed.

"Open with every gun that can reach her!" ordered Cavendish. "Give us every ounce of power you can in the engine-room!"

"She's off!" cried Stephen.

The German ship had turned and fled the instant the Challenge came in sight. The old battleship's larger guns began to thunder after her as Cavendish went in chase, the enemy flying to the northward.

"At their old games!" said Cavendish. "One of the German armed steamers, takin' advantage of Frankie's absence to hold up Margate. We were only just in time. The deuce take those old blunderbusses of ours—they're no earthly! That got her, though—an' that!" he added.

Through the glasses it could be seen that a couple of shots struck the flying steamer, and damaged her severely. But neither hit her in a vital place, nor affected her speed, and immediately afterwards the Challenge's shots began to fall short, for the foe was drawing away at a great pace. The Challenge's guns, though large, were of the old, short-range pattern.

"She's got the legs of us," said Cavendish impatiently; "but I've spoilt her beauty for her, an' I'll see her off the premises. Send—"

"Destroyers moving out from the shore, sir!" sang out Elcombe.

Cavendish whipped round, and at once saw his danger. While in pursuit of the armed steamer, and never dreaming any other vessels were near, the Challenge had travelled on a long slant past Margate.

Suddenly two lean, black German destroyers dashed out from the further side of the pier, where they had lain hidden under shelter of the little stone harbour, and hurled themselves at full speed towards the Challenge.

Instantly the battleship's quick-firers opened with a heavy rattle, and the boys gripped the bridge-rail in keen excitement, as they watched the deadly contest. They remembered

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what their commander had said in case of an attack by destroyers. The unwieldy battleship, slow and undergunned, looked as easy a prey as a sleeping whale.

"They've got us," muttered Cavendish, "unless we stop 'em in time!"

Crash! The foremost of the destroyers reeled, and doubled up like a clasp-knife, as the British guns rained their shells at both.

But at the same instant there was a dull, heavy shock, that made the ironclad lurch and quiver. A great pillar of water leaped into the air close to her bows, and the destroyer that had despatched the torpedo swerved, to send in a second of the deadly missiles.

The Escape of the Raider.

The shock from the first torpedo almost shook the boys off their feet, and with breathless anxiety they watched for the discharge of the next. They guessed the battleship must already be crippled, and a second shock driven home would send her to her doom.

But even as the German destroyer swerved, and before her deadly missile left its tube, the Challenge's quick-firers hurled their shells into her, sweeping her decks and tearing her to pieces, as four guns concentrated their fire. In a few moments she was left a shattered, twisted mass of iron upon the water, exuding a grey cloud of steam, and sinking swiftly. A reel, a stagger, and she was gone.

"That's all right," said Cavendish, drawing a breath of relief. "Mr. Elcombe, log the gunners of the after-turret for special mention and reward. Let me know at once if she's strained forrard."

"My word, aren't we done for?" exclaimed Stephen. "That torpedo hit us—"

"It got her on the ram," said Cavendish coolly. "We'd a solid ten-foot ram stickin' out like a snipe's beak under water, an' I should say there's precious little of it left. That torpedo got it on the tip. Didn't you see the water spout up just ahead of us? But it's not likely her hull's taken any damage, so to speak, though she may be a bit awkward to steer."

At once the message came to say that the ram was partly sheered off from its place, but the hull was sound, and the Challenge was making no water. Cavendish rang his engines on at full speed again, and headed shoreward.

"Knocked 'em both out," said Stephen, dancing with delight. "Full-blooded destroyers, too! When they came out at such short range I thought we were goners!"

"Yes, if that second boat had got in another torpedo at us amidships there'd have been an end of this old barge," said Cavendish. "I never thought we'd get 'em both, nor that we'd got such handy gunners aboard us. It's a thousand pities we haven't some first-class big guns for 'em to handle. On deck there! Have you got those Berthon boats ready? Stand by to lower away, an' station men with lifelines!"

"What now?" said Sam.

"Some of those poor beggars are afloat. We must pick 'em up if we can. The pirate's out of sight; it's no use chasin' her."

All were now bent on rescuing the survivors of the defeated enemy, who had been almost forgotten in the moment when the fate of the Challenge was still uncertain. Cavendish had had them in mind, however, and the moment he was reassured of his vessel's safety he drove her at full speed to the place where the two destroyers had gone down.

"There are three hands swimmin' together yonder," cried Stephen, "an' two more beyond."

The first destroyer's crew had vanished utterly, but part of the second was afloat still; and it was not long before the folding Berthon boats—which were the only sort the Challenge now carried, and had been hastily put together—were bringing in five of the German crew. Two were officers, one a stoker, and the other two torpedo-gunners, and all were uninjured. Those who had been struck had gone down at once.

"Hoist 'em in an' give 'em the best of everything," said Cavendish; "it isn't long since I was in their plight myself—eh, Sam? Hallo, two officers—lieutenant and sub!" he added, and received the pair with much sympathy as they came up the side, dripping and disconsolate.

"Not hurt, I hope, gentlemen?" he said.

"No," replied the German lieutenant, who had commanded the second destroyer, speaking in very good English. "Thank you for pulling us out of the water. We are your prisoners," he added gloomily. "I was in command, and perforce I surrender to you."

"The fortune of war," said Cavendish sympathetically. "Beastly sorry for you, but it's only give-and-take, you know. Only yesterday your side sank my torpedo-boat."

My steward will fit you out with dry duds and all you need. Mr. Elcombe, will you see our guests below and ensure they receive every attention?"

The German officers seemed greatly gratified by the young commander's courtesy, and were taken below as visitors rather than prisoners. The gunners and stoker were made welcome on the lower deck, and given hot drinks and dry clothes, and there being no longer anything to stay for, Cavendish exchanged some signals with the shore, and stood out again for the Straits.

"Lucky we arrived in time," he said thoughtfully. "That steamer was goin' to smash Margate up, after demanding an indemnity an' being told to go to blazes. She'd only fired a shot or two when we turned up, though, an' smashed in a house on the Victoria Terrace. Rotten game! Those destroyers were her escort, an' their job was more decent, I must say. Mr. Elcombe, you can send word that I shall be glad of our guests' company on deck if they will honour me so far. No need for 'em to be under arrest, unless we go into action. They'll give parole, of course."

Cavendish, hearing a vessel reported away to the northward, went up into the fighting-top to investigate for himself, and there, of course, the German prisoners, or guests, as Cavendish preferred to call them, were debarr'd from going. But Sam and Stephen fell in with the destroyer's lieutenant as he came on deck, after a bestowal of dry kit and a hot meal.

"Your commander is a very prince of good fellows," he said to Sam; "it seems we have fallen into excellent hands. But how very young he is! Is it possible he commands this ironclad?"

"Oh, yes!" said Sam. "He's not very ancient, is he? But he commands her pretty well, don't you think?"

"It is wonderful! I assure you we never dreamed of losing the game when we attacked. His gunners must be of the first excellence, too."

"They are, I think," said Stephen. "You made a jolly plucky attack, though. You've shaved off our ram for us as clean as a carrot."

The German looked over the Challenge with growing wonder. His eyes took in her antique ironwork, her lumbering gait, and slow speed, her out-of-date upper works, and general air of having been brought out of a scrap-heap. But when the boys showed him round, and he saw her old fixed turrets and venerable guns, his surprise was so great that the brothers nearly roared with laughter.

"But is it possible your Admiralty sends such—er—ships as this to sea nowadays?" he said wonderingly. "She's a death-trap!"

"No, they wouldn't as a rule," said Stephen, grinning. "She's one of the has-beens, you see. We're on duty here while they're gettin' ready for the big fight on the east coast. You know all about that."

"Ah, that big fight," said the German, shaking his head. "I fear you will get the worst of it, my young friends. You rely on your Fleet, but we have beaten it once."

"Only the Home Squadron," said Sam. "You'll find it a rather bigger order this time."

"You little know our resources," replied the torpedo lieutenant. "Besides, we have built so fast these last few years, that we are nearly abreast of you in the biggest ships, and that is the most important. Our Lachsen class more than equals your Dreadnoughts, in the power of each, as your Home Squadron found. But what is the use of it all, even if you win? You young gentlemen," he added, looking at the brothers, "belong to the land Service, if anything, I suppose?"

"Yes, ours is a shore-goin' corps," said Sam, not willing to say anything about the Greyfriars Cadets. "We've been at sea a little, too; but we don't count, anyway."

"But why is it that this bloodshed continues?" said the German officer earnestly, leaning forward. "What is the use of it?"

"Well, I should have thought your people could answer that best," said Sam.

"No, it is not so," cried the German; "it is your people's fault! See, Britain has been beaten now a long time. Even if you should get command of the sea again, of what use is it? Our armies hold England in their power, your own Army is all but destroyed. English trade is ruined, and the German Commander-in-Chief holds London, which is now under the Kaiser's rule. You do not deny it?"

"No; that's all right enough," said Stephen.

"Well then, why does the war not stop? Three weeks ago London fell, your Parliament fled, and the Kaiser then told your Government he was ready for peace. He wishes for peace. He sent in his terms. But what answer? None at all. He does not even get a reply. So all the misery goes on, and I say your country is to blame for it."

"Quite right," said Sam; "that's just it. I don't

wonder at your bein' angry about it. Napoleon complained about the very same thing a hundred years ago. You've given us an awful whacking. Only we're such fools, we don't know when we're beaten."

Stephen grinned.

"I remember something of the kind in those fooling history-books at school," he said. "There was a French johnnie in the Peninsular War who got in an awful bait over it. His troops had beaten ours an' fairly done for 'em, an' then what was left of ours—although they ought to have known they were licked—turned round an' wiped the floor with his men, after all. No wonder it upset him. I've heard we're very pig-headed."

"An' you're only just findin' it out," added Sam. "Of course, it's Germany's first row with us. She can't be expected to understand what a lot of chumps we are all at once."

The torpedo-lieutenant looked bewildered, and shook his head.

"In fact, some of you are finding there's a bite or two in the old Lion yet," added Stephen. "However, it isn't worth while makin' guesses, we shall know pretty soon what the result is. Dover Straits look pretty empty, don't they, Herr Lieutenant? It's a fact this war does stop trade. Hallo, here comes the owner. Lookin' pretty sick, too; it's not often you see a frown on his azure brow."

The Maori Transports.

Cavendish was looking distinctly annoyed as he came up from below, where he had made a journey.

"It's enough to make one want to yard-arm somebody!" he said sourly. "The engine oil we shipped from that German prize, as we thought, turns out to be nothing of the kind, through some silly blunder. Our own stock of cylinder oil is nearly used up, an' there's nothing for it but to put into Dover for more. We must go at once."

"I noticed her course was altered," said Sam. "What a beastly nuisance."

"Oil is as necessary to a battleship as coal, an' we can't go on without it."

"Well, it won't take long to get there," said Stephen. "We shall have it aboard in a jiffy, skipper. I suppose you'll take the opportunity of sendin' those—er—guests of yours ashore."

"Yes, they may as well go. I don't want them here while we're on service," said Cavendish.

The Germans were not sorry to go, for their part, when the Challenge had run down the Gulf Stream and turned into the huge new Admiralty harbour, passing between the breakwaters.

"I'm not going to make fast along any quay," said Cavendish; "we shall catch on to one of the outer buoys, and be ready to slip and steam out instantly, if we're needed. The oil will have to be brought out by tender, an' if those Germans are to be put ashore, you'll have to go with 'em as guard. I can't spare any of my staff, for we should have to sail without 'em if there was an alarm. You must take your chance of that."

"Is it likely to happen?" asked Stephen.

"No, not a bit, I should say. But I'm warning you. The two officers have given parole. Hand 'em all over to the senior officer you'll meet ashore. I've signalled him already, an' you'll find him waitin' for you. Of course, I can send the lot ashore in the first launch that comes off; but I'd be glad if you'd see them safe for me. We shall be here quite half an hour, barrin' calls."

"Of course, we'll do it," said Sam. "An' you needn't ask us to do things, either. We ship under your orders, and you're in command. We won't be treated as guests."

"Right," nodded Cavendish. "Here's a launch coming off now; run 'em off as soon as you can. And if you can get any news of the fightin' up north, while you're ashore, I shall be glad."

Sam and Stephen bundled their charges into the launch as she came alongside, and the torpedo-lieutenant breathed a sigh of relief as she sped shorewards.

"I don't mind confessing I'm glad to get off that ship of yours," he said. "If she should fall in with one of our battleships or large cruisers, she'll be the coffin of every man on board; and it would be poor fun for me to be killed by the guns of my own Kaiser. Of course," he added slyly, "it wouldn't make much difference to you, since you don't know when you're beaten."

"It'd make more difference than you'd think," chuckled Sam. "I've no use for myself as a dead man, an' I own I'm not exactly anxious to meet one of your up-to-date slaughterers in that old kettle of ours. We'd rather she did something useful. But it ain't likely, for I fancy your big ships are just as busy as ours. I've got orders to introduce you to one of the garrison officers here, Herr Lieutenant. You won't have a bad time of it at Dover."

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"Except that perhaps rations may be a trifle short," said Stephen, grinning; "but you can't object to that, lieutenant, as your army and navy has made the food rather scarce. The worse grub you get, the more you'll know your side is prospectin'. But they'll give you as good as they've got for themselves."

The launch was met by a garrison artillery captain and a guard. Sam explained to him and introduced the German officers, who were received with all civility, and parted on very good terms with the boys, who then went to the Naval bureau to see if any information would be given there about the Fleet.

There was very little to be learned, however. The British admiral was keeping his movements entirely dark, and if those in charge at Dover knew anything, they would not tell it. There were no further orders for the Challenge.

"That gives us a free hand anyhow, in the Straits," said Sam. "Hallo, what's this?"

He stopped before a poster on one of the quay walls. It was headed, "League of Britons," and contained a stirring call upon all able-bodied men to enrol themselves in the great band that was forming all over the country. At the next street-corner was a large gathering, at which the boys halted for a little while and heard an impassioned speech by one of the agents of the league. Already, he said, they were half a million strong. In a week they would be five millions. The people heard with the greatest enthusiasm, and dozens were pressing to join. The boys wished they had time to stay and learn how things were going, but they had to return to the harbour.

"Mulholland's spreadin' himself," said Stephen; "it's well on its legs already. Gum, it'll be a great thing as soon as it's ripe, and that'll be in mighty quick time, too! The question will be, whether any number of half-armed chaps, however much they swarm an' however desperate, can stand against a great trained army. Well, there'll be blood enough shed to satisfy the world for a century or two, I should say. What—"

"Look! Something up!" exclaimed Sam, running down towards the harbour.

Many people were already hastening that way, and a great shouting was heard.

"What is it?" asked Stephen, of a man who came hurrying down with them.

"The New Zealand transports are in sight!" cried the man. "Three o' 'em, bringing ten thousand Colonial troops! They're goin' to land here!"

"At last!" cried Sam exultingly, as he jumped up on a bollard and made out three steamers in line, just in sight, coming up Channel from the westward. "The old Lion's whelps are comin' into the fight!"

"There's a big brood of them to arrive yet!" exclaimed Stephen. "But they say the Canadians have already landed at Plymouth, though it's almost sure death to cross the Atlantic while the Germans still hold the sea. Yes, those'll be the Maoris."

Suddenly Sam uttered an exclamation, and leaping off the bollard, ran down towards the quay stairs, where they had landed, as hard as he could go, his brother close behind him.

"What is it?" cried Stephen.

"The Challenge is off!" exclaimed his brother.

It was true. The battleship had already slipped her moorings, and was heading for the breakwater. One glance to seaward showed the reason only too plainly.

A big ironclad was steaming in from the north-east, suddenly appearing through the anchorage of the misty Downs. She was yet far away, but boom after boom from her guns began to be heard. A cry of consternation arose from the crowd.

"It's a German warship!"

"She's firing on the steamers that are bringing the troops! She's racing up to sink them!"

As in the Days of Old.

"Here," shouted Sam, springing into a launch that lay at the stairs, "put us aboard the Challenge, quick! Catch her before she gets out, for Heaven's sake!"

"We shall be left behind!" groaned Stephen. "She's off!"

The launch dashed away at full speed. Ashore, the commotion was immense. Already they could see the on-coming enemy firing upon the transports at extreme range.

The three steamers, having no escort, were helpless and without means of defence. They had taken the alarm, and were steaming furiously for the harbour with every ounce of power they could muster.

Aboard the launch the brothers were in a fever of anxiety. That the Challenge would wait for them was not to be dreamed of. She was heading straight out with all possible

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speed, and already was nearly clear of the harbour, steaming to meet the foe. But the old ship, slow at the best, would not leap into her stride all at once, and the swift launch came up with her hand-over fist, and ranged alongside in the foam of her wash.

"You'll have to jump for it!" shouted a voice aboard her, and a rope came swinging over the side and flicked over the launch. It was a perilous jump, but the boys did not hesitate a moment. Sam seized the rope with a spring, Stephen catching it below him, and both of them bumped heavily against the ship's side as the launch sheered off. They clung on, and finally were hoisted on to the lower deck of the Challenge, without more damage than barked knuckles and knees and a few bruises.

"Thank goodness!" gasped Stephen, as they reached the upper deck.

"You've little enough to give thanks for, I think," said Cavendish drily, without turning to look at them, for his gaze was fixed ahead. "Plucky of you to come off, for this is pretty safe to be your last cruise. Two points more, quartermaster!"

There was a tremendous rousing cheer from the shore as the British battleship bore outwards through the west entrance to meet the German. The three transports, one of which was already hit forward by a shell, were tearing towards the harbour with flame and smoke pouring from their funnels. Immediately the Challenge was clear, her two big fore-turret guns spoke with a roar.

"That's to call the beggar off," said Cavendish quietly. "We can't reach him with these weapons."

The German ship turned at once. The Challenge placed herself right in the line between her and the transports, and kept so, her bulk offering some guard to the helpless steamers as they ran for shelter. Straight as a bull charging, and twice as slowly, the old battleship went out towards her enemy.

Shell after shell began to whistle round her, but those on board saw that the German was drawing off to seaward, and had ceased her fire in the transports to reply to the Challenge as she did so.

"Can't make us out yet," said Cavendish, with a sour smile. "Don't wonder at it! Not sure whether she should fight or run. If we were one of the first battle line she'd be off quick enough, for I expect her admiral needs her. As it is, she'll satisfy herself in another second or two what sort of craft this is of ours that's got loose in the Channel."

"An' then?" said Stephen.

"And then she'll just wade in," returned Cavendish, with a shrug of his shoulders. "Ah, here she comes! Now her batteries open! Here she's at us at last!"

Stephen and Sam watched the distant man-o'-war turn rapidly to face her foe, and for the first time realised what the Challenge was in for, as the stranger's large bulk, great speed, and up-to-date appearance were visible.

"Why, she's one of their big 'uns!" cried Stephen.

"Yes," said Cavendish grimly—"a modern first-class armoured cruiser; and this old barge is as surely doomed as if we'd spiked her on a rock."

"The troopships are in!" shouted Sam. "They've passed the breakwater."

"Good luck to 'em!" rejoined Cavendish. "We've saved ten thousand good Colonial fightin' men, an' given 'em a chance to show what they're made of ashore. And now, my hearties, we've got to pay the bill with our ship and lives."

A ringing cheer was raised, despite the Challenge's peril, as the rushing transport vessels were seen to enter the now distant harbour, and place themselves in safety. When that was done, the lame old battleship was left alone upon the sea, facing her mighty antagonist.

Already the German cruiser's guns were in full play, and the shells were screaming and bursting around thickly. Two crashed into the foredeck, and another struck the after-turret. The Challenge's heavy guns replied slowly.

"You chaps had better get into the citadel," said Cavendish. "There's less chance of being smashed up there."

"We'll stay with you, unless you order us to go," replied Sam quietly. "Is there no hope for the old ship at all?"

"My dear chaps they can't possibly fail to sink us within an hour," said Cavendish coolly—"probably much less. You'll observe we can't run away, even if it were any use, for she has twice our speed; and we can't skulk into Dover an' take refuge there, or she'll follow us up an' plug the troopships while they're gettin' into dock. The Dover forts are short of guns good enough to reach her, since the first disasters of the war. That was a near one!" he added, as a shell crashed through the lower bridge, and almost immediately another killed six men in the fore-barbette. "Hark at our old blunderbusses answerin' hers," he said,

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with a bitter laugh. "But, by gum, they're sockin' her, though!"

Through his glasses he saw that the big twelve-inch shells were creating havoc aboard the German. Already part of her bridge was wrecked, and the steam windlass and cat-heads were blown away, while a party of men who were hastily repairing a casemate, were completely shattered.

"It's telling on her! We shall cripple her yet!" exclaimed Sam.

"Yes, by George!" cried Stephen. "Look, she's bolting again! She's running for it! The beggar's beat!"

So it seemed for a moment to the boys, but Cavendish, better versed in naval warfare, laughed sarcastically.

"She's discovered by now what sort our guns are. Those old shells have told her. She knows she need only draw off for another half-mile, an' then she can pound us to pieces without our being able to touch her."

He rang on every ounce of steam the engines could carry, and the old ship shook and trembled as she pounded along after her rival. The twelve-inch guns were handled as rapidly as the smartest gun-crews could load and fire them to inflict all possible damage on the enemy before she drew out of range. But it was as Cavendish had said. Those superannuated pieces of ordnance were slow as well as weak, and they could not do much more harm.

Already the British shells were beginning to drop into the sea astern of the fleeing German, unable to reach her as the distance increased. The cruiser was doing a good nineteen knots to the Challenge's twelve, and while running she did not fire, except from her after-casemates. Presently, however, when well outside the range of the Challenge's guns, the German turned to starboard and opened with every weapon that would bear. A deadly cannonade began to converge on the Challenge, and soon she was steaming in the midst of a cloud of yellow smoke from the shells, and white vapour from her own larger quick-firers' discharges. These latter, however, though able to reach the German, were not powerful enough to do her hull any damage. The Challenge soon became a mere moving target for the German gunners.

"Now we have it," said Cavendish grimly. "She's found her level, an' she's got us cooked. Move forward, or move back, there's no escape. It's the old Challenge's last cruise."

Then and then only did the boys realise how sure was the battleship's fate, and how helpless is an old ship against a new one. It was a cruel situation. The German, untroubled by any return fire that would hurt her, poured the whole weight of her batteries into the hapless Challenge.

"We've saved the troopers, anyhow," said Sam, between his teeth. "We'll go now without grumbling."

"Don't you think you were a pretty pair of fools not to stay ashore?" said Cavendish, with a slight smile.

Neither of the boys answered.

Through it all the young commander remained cool as if at a review.

"Gun-crews, down from the tops!" he ordered. "Mr. Elcombe, muster the bulk of the crew in the citadel, and dispose them as I instructed you."

The young second-in-command had the orders carried out at once, as the Challenge reeled on her way through the inferno of smoke. A report came from below that she was taking in water rapidly. The water-line was pierced in more than one place, and the free-board at the bows was shattered.

"She stands it longer than I thought," muttered Sam.

"Her guns are not large," returned Cavendish, "though plenty big enough to make a sieve of us; but they take longer to do it than a battleship's modern eleven-inch guns would. A little patience, that's all we need. She's settling down now," he concluded.

Like some grim old bulldog, too crippled to bite, but still facing its enemy, the Challenge bore always onwards towards the German, which kept her distance and fought a running fight.

Already the battleship moved far slower, for she rode lower in the water. Her ironwork and sides were riddled like a sieve, and before the men were ensconced in the citadel, those whose duties took them out on the unprotected parts had been struck down pitilessly by the German shrapnel, so that her decks and lower plates were reddened with blood and strewn with bodies.

The wounded were taken below at great risk, but Cavendish did not allow the dead to be moved.

"Good men all!" he said grimly. "They've done their work, and if any of them are looking down on this fight, they'll know soon that their earthly remains are still doing good service for the colours."

The German ship was now steaming rapidly to and fro in a wide half-circle, raking the battleship from every forward point.

It could not last. Slowly the Challenge slid to a standstill,

helpless and riddled, and lay sullenly on the waters an iron wreck.

"The old ship's got her death-blow," said Cavendish quietly; and then, with a glance at the brothers, he added: "You chaps haven't got your sidearms on. Come into the citadel chart-house, and I'll lend you a pair."

Both the boys stared at him in wonder. During his command of the Challenge, Cavendish—as the commander should—had worn the spruce kit of full uniform and the naval sword at his side. Neither of the brothers wore any such weapon, nor had done so for many a day.

Sam wondered greatly that Cavendish should show himself such a stickler for form as to wish even his guests to meet their end girt with the weapon of an officer.

Stephen, no less surprised, concluded Cavendish meant it as a last respect to the Service he belonged to.

Yet they followed him to the chart-house, where he gave them each a sword and belt.

"You know how to wear them and how they're handled?" he said.

"We were both pretty useful at sword-play in the corps," said Sam drily, "and we know how to put them on, too; but is this a time for—"

"On with them!" said Cavendish curtly, and strode out.

The brothers strapped on the belts and followed him. Somehow, the feel of the swords at their hips gave them a certain comfort, strange as it sounds, though Stephen would have protested.

"Don't worry him," said Sam, under his breath; "it's pretty bad for all of us, but it's awful for Bob, losin' his vessel an' crew."

"I should think he wishes he'd fewer men with him now," said Stephen gloomily, looking at the packed ranks of blue-jackets who had been ordered into the shelter of the citadel, the one part of the ship sufficiently protected to defy the German shells.

"So do I," returned Sam, with a sigh. "We've more than the old tub needed, anyhow—two full crews aboard—an' it'll be just a slaughter-house for them or drownin' in heaps. This is ghastly!"

They were there much against their will, most of them, though there was little use in exposing themselves.

Orders were being given rapidly, and something was happening among them, though the boys could not stay to see what it was.

They joined Cavendish on the bridge.

The German was still pounding away mercilessly; but presently, seeing the British ship was out of action, and doomed, he stopped.

Then a signal flew out in the breeze.

Cavendish smiled grimly as he read it. What it meant, neither of the brothers could tell.

There was no answer from the Challenge, and the German began to steam in towards the doomed ship.

A sudden thought leaped into Sam's brain. Could they ram her? No. He knew the battleship's ram had been stripped by the torpedo from the destroyer, nor could such a slow and clumsy vessel possibly ram a fast cruiser.

That hope was gone, and the Challenge was slowly sinking.

"Are those irons ready, Mr. Elcombe?" asked Cavendish.

"Yes, sir. The men are prepared, both at bows and stern."

"Let them keep out of sight there as much as possible. Shelter behind the torn deckplates and scuttle."

"They are doing so, sir."

"Warn the rest for orders."

"I say," whispered Stephen, to his brother, after a momentary visit to the citadel, "the entire blessed crew—both crews—have had cutlasses served out to 'em!"

Sam stared at him, and then whistled in sheer surprise. Both turned their eyes on the German, who was steaming straight towards them.

She was signalling still. There was no response from the Challenge, and the German quick-firers suddenly opened fiercely and swept her with a storm of small shells.

But in thirty seconds the firing ceased. It seemed of little use to waste ammunition on a ship obviously out of control and sinking.

The German came right up to her boldly, for the water-logged Challenge, with her dismantled guns, smashed turrets, and apparently the bulk of her crew lying dead on the reddened decks, looked beyond inflicting hurt.

The German hove to close alongside, and an officer, spick and span in gold lace and blue broadcloth, hailed her sharply from the quarter-deck bridge.

Cavendish stood on the bridge, erect and cool as ever, nor did he make any reply to the hail.

The German waited, and the two ships, drawn together by the pull of the sea, neared each other slowly till their bridges were close.

Then came the hail again in rasping German-English:

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NEXT
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"THE ST. JIM'S INVENTORS."

"You are our prize! I demand that the British captain send his sword in surrender of himself and ship!"

Cavendish's hand tightened on the bridge-telegraph. With one last effort the crippled engines of the Challenge slid her quietly the last few yards till her side grated against the big cruiser's. One glide, and it was done. At the same instant Cavendish's voice rang out from end to end of the ship:

"Grapple her, fore and aft! They've asked for the steel, let them have it! Boarders, away there! Follow lads!"

And as the grappling-irons were hove on to the enemy's ship, there arose a shout that rent the air, and the brawny bluejackets burst out of their iron prison and streamed on to the German's decks in one swift, irresistible rush, cutlass in hand, their young commander at their head.

Sam sprang forward to the attack. A wild tumult shot through him as he realised what Cavendish's last bid for victory meant. Crippled and sinking though she was, the British ship was still unbeaten. She had no guns, but she had men in abundance—the old, strong-armed breed that had always held Britain mistress on the seas.

The change came about in the twinkling of an eye. One moment the Challenge lay silent and sullen, a hecatomb of dead men on her decks, the proud conqueror standing over her. The next, the grappling-irons were flung aboard her enemy, and the two ships were fast locked.

Sam saw the sudden alarm aboard the German, and her men running forward to fling the irons back. But a party of Marines who had been sent into the fighting top of the Challenge suddenly opened a rifle-fire that made it impossible to reach the grapplings for the moment, and by then the boarding-party was in full career. It all passed swiftly as thought.

"For Britain and the colours!" cried Cavendish. "On and take her!"

The young scout's sword leaped out, and he found himself beside Cavendish, making a desperate spring over the cruiser's steel rail. Stephen was close on the other side, weapon in hand; and at their backs, cheering with leathern lungs, came the host of bluejackets.

Up came the Germans, swarming to meet the rush, with fierce cries of rage and surprise. So sudden had been the shock of seeing the wrecked battleship thus spring to life again, and so nimble the first rush of the boarders, that the foremost of the British were on the cruiser's decks before her crew met them. A score of German sailors and a squad of Marines dashed forward to the defence, and the foes met with a shock.

A German lieutenant whipped his revolver from its place as he ran forward, but before it was levelled a lightning stroke from Cavendish's sword laid him on the deck. A rifle exploded almost in Sam's face, burning his cheek, just as he was cutting at another man, and a cutlass licked over his shoulder from behind, and took the rifle's owner in the apple of the throat. Then came a wild, fierce, confused melee of hand-to-hand fighting, with fresh crowds swarming up on either side, and every man struck for himself and cut his way onwards.

"Shoulder to shoulder!" panted Sam, as a glance showed him his young brother striving desperately a yard to his left. "Keep your guard high, and give 'em the edge, not the point! Cut, cut, cut!"

Sam himself was nearly levelled to the deck as he said the words, for the Germans at that moment had arrived in greater force. A sheering blow from a musket-butt glanced off his shoulder, almost paralysing his arm, but Cavendish's sword flashed swiftly under the striker's chin, and he struck no more.

Sam recovered himself, and dashed afresh into the fight. The Germans pressed onwards so desperately and in such numbers that for the moment the boarders were held in check.

"Into them, men!" roared the German voices hoarsely. "Drive the Britishers over the side!"

It was beyond the Germans' power. The boarders had gained a footing, the bulldogs had their grip, and there was no turning that fierce rush back again. From the first attack not thirty seconds had passed; and now, as the bluejackets swarmed aboard all the length of the rail, Cavendish and his vanguard cut clean through the opposition and gained the upper-deck.

With the first alarm the cruiser had let loose her quick-firers with a fierce rattle, directed at the Challenge's decks. Some slight execution was done, but the two ships were too close for the fire to have much effect. The Challenge was low in the water, right alongside, and the German small guns could not be pointed downwards sufficiently to bear on the crowd of cutlass-armed sailors that poured from her citadel. The surprise was complete, for not an officer aboard the enemy's ship had dreamed that such a mass of fighting-men were packed aboard the old battleship, which could have been worked with a quarter of them.

Directly the ruse was discovered, and the grappling-irons thrown aboard, the German navigating officer rang on the utmost speed of his ship, to try and tear her away from the embrace of the crippled Challenge. The grappling-chains were stout, and fresh ones were instantly fastened to back them in several places.

The strain was immense as the German forged ahead with all the force of her powerful engines, but the Challenge dragged on her like a log, and the chains held. There was a good chance, however, of their giving way or being cut adrift, and once the German got free again there would be little hope. Cavendish saw the danger, and met it at once.

"Forward to her bridge!" he cried. "Follow on here. Cut your way through and stop her! This way, Villiers!"

The German sailors were armed chiefly with rifles, and at such close quarters could only use the butts of them—a deadly armenough. Now a large squad came up with cutlasses, hastily served out to them by the quartermasters, and hurled themselves at the boarders.

But the Germans were never masters of that weapon as the British are. The descendants of those who fought at Trafalgar showed what they were made of.

Straight through the opposing mass of Germans the little British band cut its way. All through the ship the battle raged, but the bridge-deck was the very fiercest of the fight, where the young commander and the two scouts led a score of the picked bluejackets.

Stout was the resistance and great the rage of the Germans at finding themselves driven back. The brawny, bare-armed seamen of the Challenge, gripping their cutlasses well to hand, bore down their enemies, and hacked their path to the rail of the bridge stairs, where the defenders made a last stand, shouting for assistance. But before aid could arrive, Cavendish's little band had bounded up on to the bridge's sacred flanking.

The German commander, running to the ladder-head, fired his revolver rapidly in Cavendish's face. The first bullet glanced off the young officer's sword, and went swinging away over the sea; the second ploughed his cheek, and drilled the skull of the Challenge's quartermaster just behind, and Cavendish's blade ran the commander through the body almost at the same moment. One fierce rush, and the attacking party were in possession of the bridge.

Cavendish dashed to the engine-room telegraph and jammed the hand to a dead stop. Her powerful cruiser was ploughing along, and threatening every moment to break the chains that held the Challenge, which dragged heavily beside her. In obedience to the signal the engines stopped at once, and that danger was over.



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.

"THE ST. JIM'S INVENTOR."

The chums of the old College are seldom at a loss for anything in the way of a diversion, but the rivalry of two junior inventors provides ample scope for unlimited fun.

"Pluck" brings Luck.

The Editor

(Another long instalment of this stirring serial next week.)