

94
'KING OF THE CASTLE!'

The

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by
MARTIN
Clifford.



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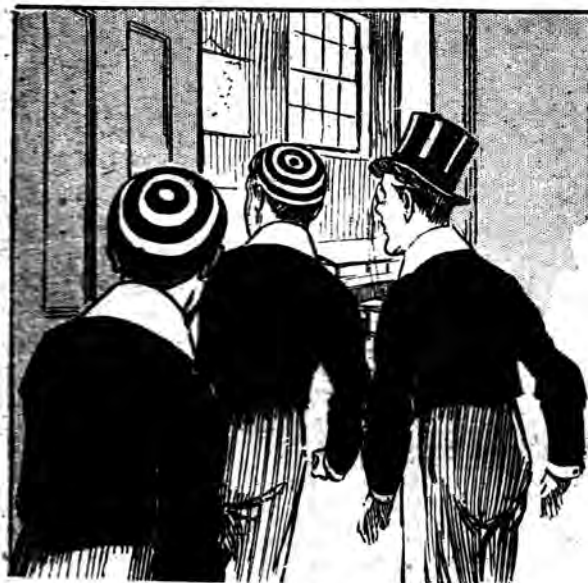
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KING OF THE CASTLE.

**A Grand, Extra Long, Complete
Tale of Tom Merry & Co**

By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

CHAPTER 1.

Arthur Augustus Compromises.

THERE'S the one and only !"

"Cheer-ho, Gussy !"

"How goes it, Gus ?"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, the swell of St. Jim's, started, pulling up abruptly in the middle of a hurried walk. He screwed his monocle rather hastily into his eye.

"Hallo, Tom Merry !"

"Hallo !"

There was a pause then, which Tom Merry and the two unusually solemn Shell fellows with him showed no signs of breaking. Arthur Augustus glanced from Tom Merry to Lowther and from Lowther to Manners. The Terrible Three looked as they looked in chapel on Sunday morning.

Arthur Augustus coughed nervously.

"Bai—bai Jove, there's a regulah snowstorm outside, deah boys !"

"Not inside ?"

"No, Lowthah—hah, hah, hah ! I considah that wathah funny !"

Arthur Augustus allowed his words to fade away rather than stop. The Terrible Three stared at him steadily. After a moment or two Arthur Augustus tried again.

"It—it must be nearly a foot deep, deah boys !"

"What must be nearly a foot deep ?"

"The snow, Mewwy."

"The snow merry," murmured Lowther. "He means the merry snow."

"Lie down !" said Manners ; then the three stared at Arthur Augustus again.

The swell of St. Jim's looked uncomfortable, but determined.

"Well, deah boys, I must be goin' now ; see you latah."

"Not before, Gussy ?"

"Weally, Lowthah—"

Tom Merry stepped forward and looked Arthur Augustus full in the eyes.

"Gussy, where are you going ?"

"Down—down the stairs, deah boy !"

"What for ?"

"To—to get to the bottom, Mewwy—hah, hah, hah !"

"Blake also went down the stairs five minutes ago."

"Did ho, bai Jove ; then I must huvwvy—"

"And Digby and Herries were with him."

"Yaas, wathah !"

"Why were they with him ?"

"In other words," put in Manners, "what have you kids got on this evening ?"

"Yes, that's it ; what's the giddy wheeze ?"

Arthur Augustus hesitated for a moment or two, then compromised.

"I must wequest you to excuse me, deah boys, but I weally must be goin'."

And he went, at a run. He did not even glance back to see whether the Terrible Three were still there, but at the head of the stairs he stopped.

"No, bai Jove ; I wathah think it would be bettah in the circs. to use the othah staircase," he decided. "It will thwow them off the scent. Weally, although I say it, I considah I showed great pweseness of mind and tact in wefusin' to stay any longah with the young wottahs."

Still running, Arthur Augustus made his way along the other corridor, not stopping until he had gained the second staircase. He had to stop here because Figgins & Co. of the New House were coming up the stairs three abreast.

"Do my old eyes deceive me, Kerr ? No ! 'Tis Gussy, the great Gussy !"

"So it is."

"Fall on his neck and weep, someone !"

"Weally, Figgay, pway don't be widiculous, and allow me to pass."

Figgins looked horror-stricken. He held out one hand with an imploring gesture.

"Gussy, you cannot mean it—you cannot mean to leave us so soon !"

A DOUBLE-LENGTH TALE OF TOM MERRY NEXT THURSDAY.

No. 99 (New Series.)

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"Don't wag, deah boy; pway let me pass; I have somethin' on."

"Yes, you have," grinned Kerr. "About a couple of ward-robes and an old clo' shop, I should say at a guess."

Figgins looked suspicious.

"Blake and the other young asses had something on as well, hadn't they, Gussy?"

Arthur Augustus compromised again.

"Pway excuse my leavin' you, deah boys; I twust I shall see you latah!"

And he continued his journey, endeavouring to appear unconcerned. At the foot of the stairs he ran into a group of Third-Formers, the leading spirit of which was D'Arcy minor. Arthur Augustus looked at his young brother with disapproval.

"Weally, Wally, I am gwieved to say there are some ink-stains on your collah."

"Are there, Gus?"

"Bai Jove, and your necktie is cwooked!"

"Is it, Gus?"

"Yaas, wathah; and—and you are wottenly untidy, bai Jove!"

"Am I, Gus?" said Wally, pleasantly. "But that's not the point. The point is, what are you old fogies of the Fourth up to? What's the little game?"

"Weally, Wally—"

"Oh, don't begin in that way, Gus; what's the wheeze?"

Arthur Augustus stared at his brother and re-screwed his monocle in his eye.

"Weally, Wally, I wegwet to say that at times you forget that I am youah eldah bwothah. I twust in futuah you will twy and wemembah that I wequire pwopah wespsect from my junioah. I must wufuse to stay heah any longah!"

Wally D'Arcy and his chums of the Third did not answer. They stood looking after the aristocratic form of Arthur Augustus receding in the distance for quite a minute in silence; then Jameson turned to the others.

"They've got something up their old sleeves," he said decidedly. "I knew it directly I saw Blake trying to look bored."

"What can it be, though?"

"Some jape up against the New House, perhaps?"

D'Arcy minor shook his head.

"No, I don't think it's that," he said. "I think it's got something to do with the snow, somehow. Blake has been tapping the barometer all day, and I saw Herries measuring the depth of the fall with a two-foot ruler myself. I'm jolly certain it has something to do with the snow."

The others looked puzzled. They could not quite see how Jack Blake and the chums of Study No. 6 could be any more concerned in the sudden snowstorm which was raging over the greater part of Sussex than other juniors.

D'Arcy minor could not see the connection himself, but he stuck to his guns.

"There is a connection," he declared doggedly, "and I'm going to find out what it is. Come and traek Gussy down."

The others grinned their consent. It was something to do, anyway, even if they were on the trail of a mare's nest.

CHAPTER 2.

The Toboggan Builders.

"HERE he comes!"

"It's blown in at last, then; shut the door, Gussy!"

"Yaas, wathah, Blake, deah boy!" panted Arthur Augustus, shutting the door of the splendidly-appointed carpenter's shop at St. Jim's. "Tom Mewwy and a lot of othah wottahs have been twying to find out where I was goin', bai Jove!"

"You didn't tell 'em, ass?"

Arthur Augustus looked at Digby, who had a mouth full of nails, loftily.

"Weally, Dig, youah question suwpwises me!"

"You didn't let it out, then?"

"No, deah boy; I wathah think I am the last fellow in the school to let anythin' out—I wapidly put them off the twack."

"Humph!" coughed Jack Blake doubtfully. "I hope you did, anyway, Gussy; we don't want a lot of burbling young asses in the shop to-day."

"No, wathah not. Dig, deah boy, is that my hammah you have?"

"Belongs to the school, kid."

"But is it the hammah I had befoah bwakfast? Yaas, Dig, it is, and I must wequest you to hand it ovah."

"Request away, my son," answered Digby cheerfully.

"Bother it, Blake; I can't get the thing rigid."

"Not so easy as it looks, is it?"

The three were on their knees on the floor hammering away at rather unsteady frameworks, sawing pieces off here and nailing pieces on there with an industry which spoke well for their zeal. Arthur Augustus joined them with even added enthusiasm.

"Pass me a scwow-dwivah, Hewwies!" he exclaimed. "I

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NEXT THURSDAY:

"KILDARE, OF ST. JIM'S."

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shall have to wemove one of the sides, bai Jove; w'etchel boah!"

"Yes, you are, kid!"

"Hallo!"

Jack Blake uttered the exclamation sharply, kneeling up-right, a hammer in one hand and a long nail in the other. The others also knelt up.

In the doorway stood Tom Merry, Lowther, and Manners. They sauntered into the room calmly.

"Not counting the snow and the wind, it's rather a pleasant evening, don't you think, Blake?" Tom Merry asked pleasantly.

"Not too warm, you know."

"What do you kids want here?"

"Eh?"

"What do you want in here?"

"Yes, clear out, Merry; we're busy!"

"Yaas, wathah; pway leave us, deah boys."

"My hat!" suddenly exclaimed Manners. "They're making toboggans—yes, they are!"

"My aunt!"

"There's the toboggan Digby's pater gave him on the table for the young rotters to copy!" exclaimed Lowther. "Ha, ha, ha! Aren't they making a hash of it, too?"

"Weally, Lowthah—"

"Making a hash of it, eh? I'd like to see you jolly well—"

Blake stopped speaking. Tom Merry was removing his coat and rolling up his shirt sleeves.

Blake watched him in silence for a moment or two.

"What do you think you're going to do, Merry?"

"Make a giddy toboggan, my son; not a thing like that. Where did you get the wood from?"

"There's a lot in the corner there," exclaimed Manners, also taking off his coat—"tons of it! Hallo!"

The door of the shop was open again, and this time it was Figgins & Co. who stood in the doorway. They were not long in taking in the situation.

"My hat, the rotters are trying to make toboggans!"

"Twying to make! I wathah think, Figgay, deah boy, that we are succeeding!"

"Jolly good wheeze!" exclaimed the leader of the New House juniors heartily, flinging off his coat. "Just the thing to pass the evening, and the Church Run will be simply great after this snow. Jolly good idea!"

"Yes, rather," agreed Kerr enthusiastically. "Plenty of wood, too. Wire in, Fatty!"

Wynn, the Falstaff of St. Jim's, nodded. He was stout and he was heavy, and if he had to use a toboggan at all, he would prefer to use one of his own making.

Arthur Augustus watched the other six hanging up their coats, then he rose to his feet with dignity.

"I wegwet to thwow cold wathah on any schemes you fellows wish to cawwy thwough," he said; "but there is no woom here for us all—"

"Clear out, then, Gussy!"

"Weally, Lowthah—"

"Well, don't cackle. We don't mind you being in here. But you know what to do if you don't think there's enough room."

Arthur Augustus regarded the humorist of the Shell with a withering glance. It had no effect upon Lowther, because he did not trouble to notice it.

Arthur Augustus spoke deliberately.

"Weally, deah boys, I must weguard these—these pwocceedings as in anythin' but the best taste!"

"What's Gussy cackling about now?"

"I am not cacklin', Kerr; I wathah think I am not in the habit of cacklin'—I was makin' a wemark."

"Thought you said it was a toboggan, Gussy."

"Weally, Lowthah, if that is intended to be funnay, I must say I fail to see the humouah—but as I was wemarkin': I considah these pwocceedings in anythin' but the best of taste, deah boys; I even considah they verge on wank bad form. You come into this woom," went on Arthur Augustus, with increased indignation, "you take our ideah about buildin' toboggans, and you wufuse to leave the woom when wequested to do so."

Tom Merry turned from the store of wood at the end of the workshop with a grin.

"What's that, Gussy? You didn't invent toboggans, did you?"

"They were invented befoah I was born—"

"In the good old days—yes. Well, who is sneaking your ideas, ass?"

"Mewwy, I think I have told you befoah that I wufuse to be chawactahwised as an ass."

"So you have; my mistake, you howling young duffer."

"Weally—"

"Yes, dummy, I forgot."

"Bai Jove—"

"Now dry up for a change," added Tom Merry. "Blake, I am hurt—I am more than hurt, that you should have meant to



Simpole blinked at the writhing junior. "Dear me, Herries! Did I strike you?"

leave us out in the cold about the toboggans. I consider it a bit beyond the limit, and if the same idea hadn't occurred to me——"

"And to me," said Figgins.

"To all of us, we should have been out of the fun to-morrow. I propose from the chair that a severe vote of censure be passed on Jack Blake."

"Or a thick ear."

"In fact, I think he and Gussy ought to be turned out of the room to make more room for us."

"Bai Jove! We were in heah long befoah you, deah boys."

"All the more reason why you ought to clear out now. Any one would think you owned the 'shop,' Gussy."

The look of indignant amazement on Arthur Augustus's face sent Jack Blake into a hearty laugh.

"Well, we'll let you kids stay in now you've come——"

"Thankz," said Kerr sarcastically. "You've relieved our minds of a big load."

"We'll let you stay in and we'll let you build toboggans or aeroplanes or what you like, but there is one thing——"

"Is there?" asked Tom Merry, looking about him. "Oh, you mean Gussy."

"There is one thing you'll have to bear in mind. In the Fourth infringement of patent rights means a thick ear for——"

"The infringer," suggested Lowther. "Still, we'll give you

a few hints if you get out of your depths. Herries is making a dog-kennel, isn't he?"

"It's a jolly sight better than anything you'll turn out, Lowther, and don't you forget it."

"I sha'n't, kid; I expect I shall dream of it. Which is the right way up. Hallo!"

"Bai Jove, here comes my youngah bwotah."

"And half a dozen infants from the fag Form. What do you want here, D'Arcy minor?"

"Nothing, Tom Merry!"

"Clear, then!"

D'Arcy minor had his hands in his pockets and was endeavouring to look bored. Then he caught sight of Digby's model toboggan, and a great change came over the face of the leading spirit of the Third Form.

"My hat, kids: they're making toboggans."

"So they are!"

"Tell the others——"

Arthur Augustus gasped loudly.

"Bai Jove, we shall have all the school in heah in a minute. Wally, you young wascal, leave this woom."

"I'm going to—I'm going to tell Curly Gibson."

"Wally, stop—remain where you are, you young wottah. I ordah you as your eldah bwotah to remain where you are."

"And I tell you as your younger brother to go and eat coko. Sha'n't be more than a couple of weeks, you chaps."

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NEXT
THURSDAY:

"KILDARE, OF ST. JIM'S."

CHAPTER 3.

Skimpole Gives Some Help.

D'ARCY minor gave a hasty glance round the room, then hung his coat up amongst the others.

"Look alive, you fellows; the old fogies have collared all the best of the wood. What is it now, Gus?"

"Wally, wetiah instantly, and request these young waga-muffs of the Third to wetiah with you."

"Oh, go and pick flowers!"

"Weally, Wally, as an eldah bwothah——"

"Go and eat coke then, Gus. I don't care an atom which you do so long as you don't start gassing. My hat, Tom Merry, you haven't half been walking in the wood."

"I ask you once again, Wally; will you or will you not wetiah?"

"The answer was understood to be in the negative," quoted D'Arcy minor.

"Then you have only yourselves to blame," exclaimed Arthur Augustus. "Turn the young wascals out, deah boys; throw them into the stewet—the passage, I mean."

Arthur Augustus was quite excited by now. He was hot, and not long before he had knelt on some nails, and all things considered, he was not in his usually dignified mood.

"Turn them out of the woom," he repeated quickly. "Throw the young wottahs through the deah."

D'Arcy minor looked round coolly.

"Tell us when you're going to begin, you chaps; don't take us by surprise, you know."

Tom Merry and Jack Blake also glanced round. The Third-Formers by far outnumbered the fellows from the other two Forms, and anything in the nature of an enforced eviction would necessarily mean a considerable amount of row.

"And that would bring the prefect alone, young Blake," muttered Tom Merry. "What's to be done?"

"Don't know, young Merry. Let them stay in, I suppose."

"That's the style, Blakey," sang out D'Arcy minor cheerily.

"Not a bad idea of yours to let us stay in, seeing you haven't an earthly chance of turning us out. Don't get excited, Gus; it's bad for old fogies."

"Weally, Wally, your conduct surprises—not to say astounds me. I considah——"

"That's all right, then. My hat, what's that Herries is making?"

Herries looked up. He was also hot and exasperated because the right hand side of his toboggan refused to coincide with the left side.

"Do you want a thick ear, Wally?"

"Not particularly. But what is it, old chap?"

"A monkey cage, of course," growled Herries, wiping his forehead, "but you can't have it yet——"

"A monkey cage, eh? Sorry, only I thought it was a book-case. Wire in, you chaps. Get out of the sunlight, Skimmy."

D'Arcy minor and his chums, Jameson and Curly Gibson, managed to gain possession of a portion of a bench, and more than once they cast admiring glances towards the work Jack Blake had in hand.

There were few juniors in the college who could handle carpenter's tools as the junior from the broad acres could, and not many who had his powers of invention when it came to making things. He could work quickly, too, and as the toboggan grew in his hands it was a very good object lesson of how a thing should be turned out.

Herries watched his chum at work, and ran his fingers through his hair.

How Jack Blake managed these things, Herries could never make out.

"Blest if even I can get the framework steady," he muttered.

"Wobbles like a jelly. Oh, do get out of the way, Skimmy."

"I am sorry, Herries; are you making a toboggan, too?"

"Of course I'm making a toboggan, ass."

"Dear me; did you think I was deaf, Herries——"

"Never mind what I think, and don't bother. Open the window, some one; it's as hot as a beastly oven. Gussy ought to be boiled in oil for bringing all these other kids in here——"

"Weally, Hewwies, I did nothin' of the kind; they did not ask my permish."

Herries growled something to himself and picked up a long nail. Then he turned to Skimpole, who was blinking at him keenly through his large glasses.

"Look here, Skimmy; if I hold this side like this, and the cross pieces and the nail like that—will you knock the nail in?"

"Certainly, Herries——"

"Go on, then, ass."

"But—but I haven't anything to knock it in with. Wait a moment."

Before Herries could answer Skimpole darted across the room and made for Fatty Wynn. The New House junior was seated on the floor, hammering away lustily, a packet of buns by his side in case hunger should overtake him, a by no means unlikely eventuality.

Skimpole crept cautiously towards the unsuspecting Welsh

Arthur Augustus turned to the others wearily. "Bai Jove, I wegard this as wotten in the extweme."

"So it is," growled Jack Blake. "What did you want to go babbling all over the college for, ass?"

"Weally, Blake, I considah you, are speaking widdleously."

"How did the kids know we were here, then? Gussy, you are a born cackler!"

"I wufuse to be stigmatised as a born cackler—I wufuse. Mannahs, please put my hammah down."

"Your hammer, kid?"

"And my scrow-dwivah, bai Jove!"

Arthur Augustus made a grab for the saw which he noticed Tom Merry had an eye upon, and he picked up the plane. Tom Merry grinned.

"Hard chesse. Done with this saw, Herries?"

"No, you rotter. No——"

"Then you shall have it back later on, kid."

"Put it down, ass——"

"Dear me; is anything the matter? Is any one hurt?"

"Some one will be before long," exclaimed Herries. "Oh, it's you, Skimmy, is it. Well, clear!"

Herbert Skimpole, the brainy man of the Shell, was the latest new-comer, and he stood blinking at the fellows through his enormous glasses.

Skimpole was a man of many parts, but through pretty nearly everything he did or said, there was an undercurrent of real good nature and unselfishness. He stepped briskly into the room now and attempted to straighten matters.

"Is it some dispute about this saw, Merry——"

"Yes, it jolly well is," cried Herries. "If he doesn't put that saw down he'll have a thick ear as well."

"Not to mention a sore head," murmured Lowther, but no one heard him.

Skimpole, the amateur Socialist, glanced from one disputant to the other.

"Cannot some working arrangement be arrived at, Merry?" he asked. "Some——"

"Of course it can, kid; I can use the saw as long as I want it, then Herries can have it back."

"Are you jolly well going to put it down, Merry? It's mine—I had it first——"

Skimpole waved his hand loftily.

"It does not matter in the least who owns the saw, Herries; surely you have grasped enough of the rudiments of Socialism to know that it is the private ownership of the means of existence which has made social life so intolerable. I will go further than that——"

"Yes, do, ass; go in the next street. Are you going to put that saw down, Merry?"

"When I've done with it, kid; don't be selfish—selfishness ought to be done away with, oughtn't it, Skimmy?"

"Yes, Merry, it ought——"

"There, you see Skimmy agrees that I ought to have the saw; you know as much about Socialism as you do about toboggans."

"You'll know a bit about a thick ear if you don't put that saw down."

Skimpole took off his glasses and began to polish them.

"Dear me, Herries; pray do not raise your voice so. I think I have the solution to the problem; you use the saw in turn, for five minutes or less each."

"Then I have first go——"

"Do you, Merry?"

"Yes, kid——"

Skimpole put up his hand again.

"And the first use of the instrument is decided by the spin of a coin—I mean, you toss up," he said.

Tom Merry and Herries looked at one another, then they both nodded.

"Right-ho!" said the Shell fellow, putting the saw down on the bench. "Heads or tails, Herries——"

"Look out!" yelled Herries. "All right, Figgy, you rotter. Merry——"

Figgins, the lengthy junior from the New House, was grinning pleasantly.

"Thanks, Merry," he said. "I was looking for a saw; might have told a fellow you had done with it."

Then the voice of Arthur Augustus rang out again, loudly and plaintively.

"Heah comes my young wascal of a bwothah again, and—bai Jove, he has half the coll. with him!"

The fellows turned hastily. The door of the workshop stood wide open now, and filing into the room was fag after fag.

Quite twenty juniors were entering the shop this time.

ANSWERS

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NEXT
THURSDAY:

"KILDARE, OF ST. JIM'S."

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junior. He waited until the hammer was poised in the air, then darted forward.

"Excuse me, Wynn, but I have need of this hammer," he said calmly and firmly, "and anything I have need of, as a Socialist, I have a right to. No, any argument you can have to bring forward against my contention must from its nature be fallacious. I have need of the hammer, that is sufficient."

That may have been sufficient in the eyes of Skimpole, but Wynn was not advanced enough in the tenets of the Socialists creed to appreciate his standpoint.

He rose hastily to his feet.

"You rotter, Skimmy! Collar him, Figgy!"

"Dear me!" murmured Skimpole. "Wynn also appears to imagine I suffer from deafness. I am ready now, Herries."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"May I inquire why you are laughing, Herries?"

"Oh, nothing, kid! Ha, ha, ha! Fatty Wynn looks as if he intends having a fit."

"Dear me, do you really think so?"

"Or else he's going to give you one. There! You'll have to hit pretty hard, Skimmy, although whatever you do, don't split the wood. I'll tell you when."

"Skimpole! Where's Skimmy?"

"Hurry up, Herries!" murmured Skimpole. "I think Wynn wants me. Perhaps he's failed to understand my meaning in the explanation I gave him about the hammer."

"Ha, ha, ha! Steady! Now!"

Skimpole raised the hammer high in the air, looked intently at the nail for an instant, then brought the hammer down. That was all right as far as it went, only from Herries' point of view it went too far.

Skimpole blinked for a moment.

"Dear me, Herries! Did I strike you?"

Herries did not answer clearly. He was not even thinking clearly. All he knew was that Skimpole had missed the nail by a fraction of an inch, and had caught his, Herries', thumb.

Herries put his hand under his arm and jumped to his feet.

Skimpole gazed at him, hammer in hand.

Arthur Augustus looked from one to the other, and saw the humour of the thing long before Herries did.

"Hah, hah, hah! I am sowwy, not to say gwieved! Hah, hah, hah!"

"Dear me! Have I hurt you, Herries?"

"Oh, my hat! O-oh!"

"Do you think your thumb is broken?" asked Skimpole quickly. "It must be put in splints at once if it is. It is dangerous to leave a broken thumb out of splints."

"It's dangerous to leave you at large, you shrieking lunatic!" gasped Herries.

"Don't excite yourself. It is dangerous to excite yourself when in pain."

"You hopeless, utter duffer!"

"And don't jump about. It's dangerous to jump about with a broken limb."

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Jack Blake.

"I mean—"

Then Herries became irrelevant. He wandered from the point altogether.

"Lemme get at him! Only lemme get at him!"

Skimpole looked anxious.

"As he appears to be in pain," he said, "I think he had better be held."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"How can you be so heartless, Merry, as to laugh when a school fellow is in pain? Dear me!"

Herries was pushing the other juniors out of the way. There was a stern expression in his eyes, and the path he was taking led directly towards Skimpole.

The genius of St. Jim's was not exactly a cautious fellow, but caution is a natural part of everyone's character. He retreated hastily.

"Hold him, someone!" he exclaimed. "He is excited! hold him at once! Dear me, I think I shall go!"

And he went right to the other side of the room, and offered his services to Kerr. Kerr came from the land of the thistle. He was not foolhardy.

"Go away, Skimmy," he said firmly. "Go away, kid."

"But I have an original idea for the shape of the runners. I am certain—dear me, how very vindictive Herries is, to be sure."

Skimpole had to leave again because the Fourth-Former was hurrying towards him. He made for the door, but his way was barred.

Harry Noble, better known as Kangaroo, on account of his Australian birth; Bernard Glyn, the amateur inventor; and Clifton Dane, had just entered the room.

Herries saw them first.

"Stop him! Stop Skimmy!"

"Don't do anything so ridiculous, Glyn!" gasped Skimpole.

"Herries is excited."

"Ha, ha, ha! He looks it, kid."

"What's up, Herries?"

"What's up? What's—lemme get at him!"

"The whole thing was a mistake!" exclaimed Skimpole, edging towards the door. "In attempting to drive a nail in I—hit Herries on the thumb. Quite a slight accident—"

"Quite a slight—stop him! Stop him, Glyn!"

But Skimpole had gone, and Herries hesitated about following him from the workshop. He decided not to do so in the end.

"But wait until I do catch him," he said darkly. "There'll be a slump in Skimmies then. Look here, Glyn. We don't want any more in here. It's like a beastly sardine-box as it is."

"More like a monkey-house, I should say. What's that thing you're making, Herries?"

"A toboggan, ass!"

"I mean that thing there?"

"A toboggan, you duffer!"

Glyn opened his mouth, and glanced at Harry Noble.

"That's a toboggan, Kangaroo!"

"You don't say so, kid?"

Cornstalk & Co. stood and stared at the result of Herries' labour.

"Silly young asses!" muttered Herries, dropping down on his knees again. "A jolly fine toboggan any of you could make, I don't think."

Harry Noble grinned.

"No, I don't think, either. We shouldn't try, Herries."

"Toboggan-making is all right for youngsters," added Glyn.

"Keeps 'em out of mischief."

"Bit slow I should think, though."

And Clifton Dane yawned.

Herries and the others near Cornstalk & Co. stopped working, and looked round curiously. Of all the fellows who had entered the workshop that evening, Glyn and his chums were the only three who had not become wildly excited at the idea of building toboggans.

More than that, even, for Cornstalk & Co. looked distinctly bored.

"Coming, you chaps?" said Glyn, at last. "Stuffy in here, isn't it?"

"And slow as class."

"Shouldn't have thought this kid's game would have suited Tom Merry."

"Oh, I don't know, Noble!" said Glyn wearily. "He's not very old. I'd put a label on that—that toboggan, if I were you, Herries. Some ass will go and keep white mice in it, if you don't."

"Look here, Glyn—"

"And Gussy has about as much idea of making an enlarging lantern—"

"And as for Tom Merry's plate-rack—"

"What's that?" demanded Tom Merry, rising to his feet.

"What's that, Glyn?"

"Blest if I know, old chap. I thought it was a plate-rack; but, of course, it may be a dog-kennel after all. Sorry to leave you, but you bore us," and Cornstalk & Co. sauntered from the "shop" arm in arm.

Tom Merry and the others stared after them. It wasn't the least like Bernard Glyn to be out of anything in the inventing line. He was usually the leading spirit in enterprises of that nature.

Tom Merry glanced at Jack Blake and grinned.

"I twig," he said. "Glyn doesn't like us being before him. Ten to one he'll slip in here early to-morrow, and make a toboggan on the quiet."

"There won't be any wood, kid. Herries is using oceans of it."

"No I'm not. It's this beastly side. It keeps splitting."

"Hard cheese!"

"Wire in, you fellows! This is great!"

And for over an hour there was one continuous sound of hammering and sawing, toboggans in all stages of excellence gradually growing on the benches before the juniors.

Everyone was too busy to think of time.

CHAPTER 4.

A Matter of Time.

"GWEAT Scott!"

Arthur Augustus's voice rang out loudly across the large room. Everyone turned at his bench.

"What's up, Gussy?"

"What's the row?"

"Bai Jove! My only toppah! Gweat Scott!"

Tom Merry and Jack Blake stared at the swell of the School House in surprise. He was obviously in an advanced stage of excitement.

"What on earth is the matter, Gussy?"

"Finished the toboggan at last, kid!"

"No, wathah not!" gasped Arthur Augustus. "Bai Jove! Do you know what the time is, deah boys?"

Everyone started; then everyone who possessed a watch in

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 89.
A Grand Tale of Tom Merry
& Co. By Martin Clifford.

NEXT
THURSDAY:

"KILDARE. OF ST. JIM'S."

working order whipped it from his respective pocket. They all stared at their time-pieces open mouthed after that.

"My only aunt, Merry, I must be an hour fast!"

"So must I, Figgy."

Figgins was listening to the tick of his watch, an expression of horror on his face.

Allowing for the fact that his watch gained three minutes an hour in cold weather, the chief of the New House made the time exactly eight o'clock.

D'Arcy minor dropped his hammer with a crash. He made it eight o'clock also.

"And it is, too!" gasped Jack Blake. "It's as near eight as matters. My only aunt!"

Digby looked weary.

"Preparation started an hour ago, then, you fellows. That means we shall be gated for to-morrow afternoon, and after we've been fagging away at toboggans—"

"Prep. started an hour ago? An hour and a half ago for we Third-formers, you mean. Phew!"

For once in his life D'Arcy minor was not ready for the situation. As a rule, it took a very great deal to affect his composure, but it was affected this time, and he would have been the first to admit it.

He and his chums of the Third would arrive at the class-room for preparation exactly an hour and a half late.

Gibson ran his fingers through his curly hair in desperation.

"But there can't have been any preparation, Wally. All the kids are here."

"Then you can depend upon it all the Selby bird has been wandering about the coll. looking for us, kid."

"My hat!"

"And when he finds us."

Jameson shuddered. He did not like to think of the moment when Mr. Selby would find them.

Digby allowed himself to give way to pessimism.

"We shall all be gated, Blake. Probably for the rest of the term."

Jack Blake squared his shoulders.

"Hang it all, it's a mistake, you fellows. We didn't mean to cut prep."

"What about the bell?"

"Well, we never heard it."

"No, I don't suppose we would, right down here," put in Tom Merry. "And, besides, look what a row we've been making with the hammers. Come on, chaps."

"What's the wheeze?"

"Go and report ourselves, Blakey, my son," returned Tom Merry cheerily. "As you said, it's a mistake, and one can't help an occasional mistake. 'Tink goodness to-morrow is a half, so it is only a short prep."

"To-morrow isn't a half," said Digby sadly. "It was, but it isn't now; we shall be gated."

"Don't see that we ought to be; we didn't hear the bell."

Tom Merry spoke determinedly, slipping on his coat as he spoke. The others followed his example.

Then they crowded excitedly from the workshop.

Their ways divided as soon as the stairs were mounted, D'Arcy minor taking his contingent towards Mr. Selby's room, the Terrible Three hurrying towards the Shell quarters, and Figgins & Co. and Jack Blake making for the respective Fourth-Form rooms of their respective houses.

Arthur Augustus still looked the picture of amazement.

"Bai Jove, I wergad this as wotten in the extweme!" he gasped. "There will be a wegulah wow."

"I shall explain exactly how it happened."

"Yaas, wathah, but undah the circs. I considah you had bettah let me explain, Blake, deah boy."

"I don't think—"

"Weally, Blake—"

"Better let me do the gassing for once; this is a serious matter."

"You, Hewwies?"

"Yes, I, ass!"

"Bai Jove, that would be weckless."

"Leave it to me, then."

"To you, Dig?"

"Yes, to me, Blake; what is there to be surprised at in leaving it to me? I'd like to find a better fellow for a job like this."

"You have found one," said Blake simply.

"Yaas, wathah! I considah for tact there isn't anothah fellow in the coll. my equal, deah boys."

"There isn't another fellow your equal as a shrieking duffer, Gussy, if that's what you mean."

"Weally, Hewwies—"

"Yes, really! Here we are, you chaps."

"Yaas, wathah; heah we are, and undah the circs I'll agwee to let Hewwies' wudeness pass. Heah we are."

"Yes, here we are."

The chums of Study No. 6 stopped before the closed door of THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 99.

NEXT THURSDAY: "KILDARE, OF ST. JIM'S."

A Grand Tale of Tom Merry & Co. By Martin Clifford.

the Fourth-Form room. They stared at the forbidding panel in silence.

Arthur Augustus broke the pause in the end.

"Weally, Dig., deah boy, undah the circs I'm willin' to allow you to explain."

"My hat, I was just going to stand down in favour of you, old chap!"

"By Jove, that's just what I was thinking!"

"Weally, Hewwies, now I have considahed the mattah I think that pewhahs—"

"Oh, dry up, you kids!" exclaimed Jack Blake. "It was all a mistake; I'm going to explain."

And he tapped politely on the door. They waited with bated breath.

No response greeted their summons. Jack Blake tapped again a trifle louder. Still there was no invitation to enter.

Jack Blake looked puzzled.

"Bai Jove, I wathah think this looks wotten in the extweme."

Jack Blake squared his shoulders again, a way the Yorkshire junior had. He pushed open the door and stepped into the room.

The other three followed him, then they all stood staring into space. There was no one at all in the large gloomy class-room.

"Bai Jove!"

"My—my hat!"

"What can it mean, Blake?"

"Blest if I know. They can't have dismissed."

"No, wathah not; it's only ten minutes past eight, and there is anothah twentay minutes to wun, bai Jove."

"So there is."

"What on earth are we to do?"

Jack Blake was astounded. He could not make head nor tail of the affair.

"Anyway," he exclaimed at last; "we can't have prep. by ourselves, can we?"

"Bai Jove, wathah not!"

"But what are we to do?"

Jack Blake thought for a moment or two, then decided the question.

"Let's go to Railton's room; perhaps something happened at prep. to cut it short. Jolly funny, though!"

A steady march took the four to the House-master's room, and a polite tap on the door had exactly the same effect their knocks at the class-room had. There was no answer.

Jack Blake opened the door with a quick movement.

"My hat, the plot thickens. Railton has winged it, Dig."

"So he has."

"And his studday fiah is out, too," said Arthur Augustus. "He hasn't been in heah for a considahable time, I should say."

"Good for you, Gussy; you'll be a Sexton Blake or a Herbert Skimpole yet before you've finished. Perhaps there's been a raid, Jack, and Railton has been kidnapped."

"Perhaps you escaped, and it isn't known here, ass!"

"What's to be done, you chaps?"

"Don't keep saying that, Herries, you duffer; I don't know what's to be done."

"Anyway, deah boys, don't let's stay in heah," put in Arthur Augustus. "I wppose we wandah about the cowwidors."

"What for?"

Arthur Augustus did not know.

"Still, it is a wpposal, deah boy; I put it to the meetin'."

They turned out of the master's study in a group and stood with their hands in their pockets looking at one another.

This was something that had never happened at St. Jun's before.

"Weally a wemarkable ocuwrence and there's no gettin' away from it," muttered Arthur Augustus. "The School House appeahs deserted, bai Jove!"

"Let's go to the Third Form room and make inquiries."

"Right-ho!"

"Anything's better than standing here like dummies. Hallo!"

"Bai Jove, it's that young wascal, Wally."

"And all the other Third Form fags," exclaimed Jack Blake.

"My hat, what can they be wandering about for; dismissed, I suppose?"

"Look like lost sheep, don't they?" murmured Digby.

"Gated for the rest of the term, I expect."

"Cheer-ho, D'Arcy minor!"

D'Arcy minor started so violently that it was noticeable even from where the others stood. Then the Third-Former hurried up.

"Hallo, Blake; seen Selby anywhere?"

"Selby?"

"Are you weferrin' to your respected Form mastah, Wally?"

"Yes, I am, Gussy," answered D'Arcy minor in a perplexed voice. "Can't find the bird anywhere."

"Can't find Selby?"

Wally looked up almost irritably.

"That's what I said, Digby; he isn't in the Third Form



There was a yell from the St. Jim's juniors as they dashed round the curve. Right in the centre of the run was a string of juniors wearing Grammar School caps, toiling slowly up, dragging toboggans behind them

room, and he isn't in his study—I don't believe he's in the college even."

"Wot, Wally; he must be in the class-room."

"Don't be an ass; I tell you he isn't. What are you chaps wandering about for, Blake?"

"Oh, nothing much; we've mislaid Railton and are looking for him."

"My hat!"

The two sets of juniors stood staring at each other in astonishment. They recovered themselves at the sound of approaching footsteps and wheeled round in a body.

"Bai Jove, this will be Wailton, deah boys; I shouldn't wondah if there's a wow."

"Ass; it's Tom Merry and his cripples."

"No!"

"Yes, it is, Dig. My hat, what can they be wandering about, too, for?"

"Yass, wathah; I considah—"

Arthur Augustus was not given time to explain what it was he considered, for at the sight of the other juniors, the Terrible Three hurried up. There was not a suspicion of a smile on any of their faces.

Tom Merry, in fact, looked a trifle bewildered.

"I say, Blake, have you seen Linton anywhere, or any of the Shell fellows?"

"My hat!"

"I knew it," gasped Wally. "I knew what had happened; you've lost Linton, Merry?"

"Well, I don't know about lost him; he jolly well isn't in the class-room, nor are any of the fellows."

"And it's the same with Selby."

"My hat!"

"And with Railton!"

"Great Scott!" gasped Tom Merry. "Are they missing as well?"

"Yes, rather; not a sign of them anywhere."

With the exception of Lowther, who would have jested at the stake, the fellows took the matter very seriously. The humorist of the Shell was puzzled, but it was his nature to see the humorous in everything.

"Wonder if they've run away from school; or perhaps we stayed a couple of weeks in the shop, instead of a couple of hours, and the holidays have begun; or perhaps—"

"Oh, dry up, Monty!" exclaimed Tom Merry. "Blake, this is beyond me, and I don't mind admitting it."

"It's beyond me, too, kid."

"Bai Jove, and heah comes Figgay!"

"And Kerr and Fatty Wynn."

"My hat, yes!"

**NEXT
THURSDAY:**

"KILDARE, OF ST. JIM'S."

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 99.
A Grand Tale of Tom Merry
& Co. By Martin Clifford.

Tom Merry rammed his hands in his pockets. He knew what Figgins wanted in the School House.

"But we haven't got him, kid," he said wearily, the moment Figgins was within earshot; "we haven't got your respected House-master, Mr. Horace Ratcliff, and we haven't seen him."

"But we think he's run away from school with Selby, Railton and Linton."

"My only aunt, what on earth do you mean, Lowther?"

"Oh, nothing much, Figgy, my son, only we seem to have St. Jim's to ourselves; I've never run a school before, but—"

"Do dry up, ass," exclaimed Tom Merry. "Figgins, aren't there any of your fellows in your prep-room?"

"Not a shadow of one, and there isn't a fellow in the whole house; I don't believe there are any servants—none upstairs, anyway."

"Bai Jove!"

Tom Merry turned on his heel.

"Coming to interview the Old Man?" he asked. "There's something up here which is beyond me by about a couple of fathoms—buck up, you chaps!"

In solemn order the rival sections of juniors of the old school made their way along the corridor. They refused to take any notice whatever of Lowther when he pointed out that if the assistant masters had run away from school, there was no logical reason why Dr. Holmes should not have followed their examples and also taken French leave.

And even Lowther's humour gave out as they traversed corridor after corridor, each as completely deserted as the previous one.

The whole college seemed as silent as the grave.

CHAPTER 5.

The Missing Masters.

"I KNEW it!" exclaimed D'Arcy minor. "The doctor's vanished with the others! My only travelling cap, if this isn't the limit!"

"Yass, wathah! I considah it's the outside edge in things myself, bai Jove! Mewwy, deah boy, Dr. Holmes isn't heah!"

"I can see he isn't, ass!"

"Weally, Mewwy, I fail to see any cause for you to chawac-tahwise me in that wough and weady mannah."

"Oh, go and pick flowers!" exclaimed Tom Merry, walking from the doctor's private room. "I—"

He stopped dead. On the wall just outside the room the notice-board was fixed, and it was at this the hero of the Shell was staring.

The others began to stare too.

"Bai Jove!"

"Great Scott!"

"What a set of shrieking lunatics!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Lowther yelled with laughter. His sense of humour was to the rescue again, and he was laughing as heartily as if the joke were against someone else than himself.

Tom Merry, Jack Blake, and most of the others would laugh heartily enough in a few minutes, but their sense of humour was not as quick as Lowther's.

For the moment they could do nothing but read a notice which had recently been pinned upon the board, and which ran:

"As Dr. Jackson, once a pupil of this college, has so distinguished himself by his recent discoveries in the science of metaphysics, it has been decided to grant a holiday to-morrow—Saturday—to the whole school.

"In consequence of this there will be no preparation this evening, but a cinematograph lecture will be given by Dr. Holmes in Hall at nine-thirty."

That was all there was to read, but it was enough.

"Of all the hopeless, shrieking lunatics, we are the most hopeless!" gasped Tom Merry. "Blake, we ought to be in strong homes for the remainder of our lives!"

"We ought, kid."

"Well, hardly that, deah boys; though I will admit we ought to have made more wapid pprogress in solvin' the wotten mystewy, bai Jove!"

"We ought, ass! Oh, yes, we jolly well ought!"

D'Arcy minor read the notice through twice, then accepted the situation in his ready way.

"We were asses," he said briefly. "Silly asses and hopeless duffers, but three cheers for old Jackson, whoever he may be. A whole holiday to-morrow and the snow a foot deep. Three of the best for old Jackson!"

"Yass, wathah—'wah, 'wah, 'wah! For he's a jollay good fellow—shout up, deah boys!"

"Yes, good old Jackson. Wonder who he is?"

"That doesn't mattah in the least, Hewwies; he's a jollay good fellow!"

Tom Merry grinned and banged Jack Blake on the shoulder.

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 99.

"That'll do for Dr. Jackson, kid!" he exclaimed. "Now about ourselves. Of course all the fellows and masters are in Hall listening to one of the Old Man's ripping lectures. Ought we go in now?"

"Too late."

"Yes, that's what I thought. And these lectures are optional, you know; there's no need to attend them, though I for one wouldn't have missed it if I'd known."

"No, wathah not."

"Well, it's no good crying over spilt milk," went on Tom Merry, with another grin. "Seeing to-morrow is a holiday, that the snow will be absolutely ripping, I propose—"

"I propose—"

"I pwopose—"

"That we jolly well get down to the shop again and finish those toboggans!" exclaimed Jack Blake. "Hear, hear—and so say all of us!"

"Yass, wathah! I considah it quite a bwight ideah!"

"We shall have at least another hour," went on Tom Merry. "and if we can't get the toboggans done by that time I shall be surprised."

"I should say so!"

But none of the fellows moved. They were glancing at one another hesitatingly. The same thought was in the minds of nearly all.

"Weally, it has just occurred to me, deah boys—"

"I was thinking—oh, go on, then, Gussy!"

"No, you go on, Blake, deah boy!"

"Well, as a matter of fact—"

"As a matter of fact—"

Digby and Jack Blake looked at one another and both stopped. Tom Merry coughed.

"What do you fellows say—"

"As a matter of fact—"

"Oh, dry up, Dig!"

"Right-ho, old chap!"

There was another pause, then D'Arcy minor broke it.

"Cut the cackle!" he said briskly. "The fact of the matter is we've made prize asses of ourselves, and we don't want it to get about the college."

"Weally, Wally—"

"Oh, don't you begin, Gus! As I said, we want to keep this little affair dark. I propose, you chaps, that we don't breathe a giddy word. Those in favour?"

Arthur Augustus screwed his monocle in his eye and looked fixedly at his brother.

"Weally, Wally, I am swupwised at your pwoposin' a measure before your eldiah bwothah, but as the afcahsaid measure was the one I intended pwoposin', I will overlook your bweach of etiquette."

"Thank you for nothing, Gus. What do you other fellows say?"

"Yes, that's the idea!" laughed Tom Merry. "No good talking. Hands up for those in favour of the suggestion! Carried!"

"Yass, wathah; cawwied nem con!"

"Good for you, Gussy. Now let's get down to the 'shop' again. Is it still snowing?"

They were passing a window in the passage now, and Figgins threw it open. Then they leant well out.

"The snow's stopped," he exclaimed, "but that doesn't matter an atom! It's freezing!"

"No, kid!"

"But it is, Tom Merry, my son; it's freezing quite steadily. Look!"

The leader of the New House juniors pointed to the rain gutter above him.

Quite respectable icicles were hanging from it.

Tom Merry grinned broadly.

"My hat, and it can't just be the cold caused by the snow"

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THURSDAY: "KILDARE, OF ST. JIM'S."

A Grand Tale of Tom Merry & Co. By Martin Clifford.

either!" he exclaimed. "There'd bound to be a little dampness if that were the case. Kids, it's freezing!"

"Then the snow will be simply AI for tobogganing!"

"Blake, my son, it will. Suppose the frost lasts for a day or two?"

"Then there'll be skating on the mere!" exclaimed Herries.

"Hooray, you fellows!"

"Yaas, wathah; skatin' on the mere will be gweat!"

D'Arcy minor suddenly broke in crisply:

"I say what's that, Merry?"

"Weally, Wally, I was makin' a wemark——"

"Oh, you dry up, Gus! That scraping sound!"

"Humph! I hear it all right—in that study, I should say."

D'Arcy minor nodded and stepped towards the room in question. The door was shut, and the Third-Former decided not to attempt to open it.

He turned to Tom Merry with a grin.

"It's Cornstalk & Co.'s room," he said, lowering his voice.

"You can guess what that sawing is?"

"Rather!"

"Glyn making a toboggan——"

"Bai Jove, I shouldn't wondah!"

"No, there's no need to, Gus. Swankers to pretend toboggan-making was kiddish, then to jolly well go and work like Trojans at them in their own room."

"Yaas, wathah! In the cires I have half a mind to wemonstare with them!"

"Well, use the other half, kid," said Jack Blake. "Cornstalk & Co. have a perfect right to make as many toboggans as they want to. Let us get back to our own washing."

"Well, yaas, pewhahs that is the bettah ideah, though I shall wemonstare with Cornstalk & Co. when we meet latah."

And so they left it at that, making their way back to the workshop with all haste. The fact that the weather indications promised a nice crisp depth of snow the following morning, had already added to their zeal.

Coats were off and hammers going again in no time.

CHAPTER 6.

On the Church Run.

"Bai Jove, although I say it myself, I weally considah I look wathah wippin'!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Arthur Augustus started and went pink. He coughed, and he gave his tie rather a violent tug.

Jack Blake grinned at Digby.

"Oh, he does!" said Digby. "He looks awfully ripping!"

"Like a tailor's dummy—like a tailor's show figure, I mean."

"Weally——"

"You said so yourself, Gussy; you wouldn't have us disagree with you, would you, kid?"

Arthur Augustus went pinker.

"As a mattah of fact——"

"What are those things round your legs, Gussy?"

"Puttees, deah boy—they always weah puttees for tobogganing in Switzerland, you know."

"Puttees, eh? Thought they were bandages to keep the calves from slipping."

"Weally, Blake——"

"But, of course, if you say they are puttees, they are puttees. My hat!"

Arthur Augustus coughed again. He had been under the impression he was talking to himself when his original remark escaped his lips, and it puzzled him now how to explain that remark away.

"You see, deah boys," he exclaimed, turning, "I weally——"

"My hat!"

"What is it——what is it?"

"Phew!"

Arthur Augustus certainly was wonderfully attired. He had on a brand new knickerbocker suit with a coat which boasted a belt of about a foot in length fastened at the back to give the coat a waist.

The cloth of the suit was distinctly striking—on anyone but Arthur Augustus it would have been loud, but, somehow, the swell of the School House always stopped short of that limit. He just knew how to tone things down when colours got a trifle out of hand.

But to-day, however, he was sailing very near the wind, for with a big cheek suit he was wearing a fancy waistcoat which ran to most hues of the rainbow, and the tie, which was the finishing touch, was one of those masterpieces which take ten minutes to tie.

The chums of Study No. 6 looked at him in silence.

Jack Blake was the first to speak.

"Hard cheese, Gussy!" he said feelingly. "You mean well, I suppose, and you are not to blame!"

"Bai Jove, deah boy, is anything w'ong?"

Jack Blake shuddered. Then Digby shuddered still more, and Herries covered up his eyes.

Arthur Augustus became thoroughly alarmed.

"Weally, Blake, as a fwiend I must wequest you to tell me whethah anythin' is w'ong!"

Digby covered up his eyes then. Arthur Augustus became even more alarmed.

"Pewhahs it is the tie, aftah all," he murmured. "I knew it was darin' to weah a tie of this shade with my wed waistcoat, still a contwast is allowable. Hewwies, deah boy, please tell me if anythin' is w'ong!"

"Come on, you chaps," said Jack Blake. "I—I feel faint."

"Weally——"

"Y—yes. Let's get away. I feel a bilious attack coming on already. Come on, Herries!"

"I'm ready, old man. Gussy, Gussy, whatever you do don't go near Tower! He is a quiet dog if you don't look at him, as a rule; but he is only a dog. I wouldn't go within half a mile of Tower to-day if I were you, old chap."

"I have no intention of goin' neah the vicious bwute; I considah he ought to be given away. But about this tie? As a fwiend, Digby——"

Jack Blake suddenly uttered a shout.

"Hooray! There goes the giddy bell at last. Now for it."

The bell, which told the Fourth Form fellows breakfast for the whole school had come to an end, and that all were at liberty to enjoy the whole holiday as they liked, was clanging loudly. Seldom was there such a stampede for the grounds as there was that Saturday morning.

Every Fourth-Former was out in the snow within a few minutes, then Tom Merry & Co. appeared, dragging their home-made toboggans with them. Tom Merry glanced round hastily.

"Good! We shall be the first on the Church Run. Buck up!"

"Right-ho!"

The Terrible Three pelted off across the grounds, their respective toboggans giving violent jumps in the air over the uneven snow.

Five minutes later they had gained the top of the steep, winding lane known as the Church Run, and were looking down it enthusiastically.

"My hat! Just about the right depth of snow!" exclaimed Tom Merry. "As dry as a bone, too."

"Yes, rather. I say, sha'n't we just be able to get the pace up?"

"My aunt—yes! The snow has been trampled down by the farm hands, too. That'll make it all the better. I'll take the lead."

With a jerk, Tom Merry got his toboggan into position, then seating himself hastily, he got ready for the run. The others were also ready in no time.

"Mind you, I'm not going to use my feet as brakes at all!" sang out Tom Merry. "So you can come down as fast as you like. So long!"

Away he went, gaining a terrific speed down the steep incline in a few yards. Manners and Lowther were after him.

Tom Merry's breath came in gasps, so rapidly was he careering through the frosty air.

A better toboggan run could not have been found for miles around, for Church Lane twisted a dozen times before an extra steep finish into a field brought it to an end, and not once during the whole run could one see more than a dozen or so yards ahead on account of the bends. At a pace which was increasing every yard, Tom Merry led the way, the others following in close order.

"My hat, this is great!" gasped Tom Merry. "Come on, you chaps! Don't we just dash round the curves!"

"By Jove, yes!"

"Let her rip!"

Another bend was approaching—a very acute bend this time, and occurring just where the run was steepest. Tom Merry gripped the front of his toboggan. They would take that turning like the wind.

"Hooray! Round we go!"

"My hat!"

Lowther and Manners saw Tom Merry sweep round, then he was out of sight. The next moment a terrific shout rang out.

"Look out, ass! My only aunt!"

Manners heard the cry quite distinctly, but before he had grasped the meaning of it, he too was round the bend. Then Lowther heard another shout.

"Great Scott! Asses! Idiots!"

Lowther dashed on, not half a dozen feet behind Manners, and he swept round the bend with a speed which took his breath away.

"Look out!"

"Get out of the way, asses! Phew!"

Tom Merry and Manners were yelling at the tops of their voices, and there was good cause for the shouts.

Right in the centre of the run was a string of juniors wearing Grammar School caps, and they were toiling slowly up the run, dragging toboggans behind them.

It was towards the foremost of these the Terrible Three were dashing.

The Grammar School fellows saw the danger when it was just too late.

Some crowded to one side of the lane, others to the opposite, but nearly all changed their minds at the last moment and tried to gain the opposite side. That was a fatal movement.

Tom Merry groaned and shut his eyes, then into the Grammarian contingent he dashed.

Frank Monk, the Grammar School captain, uttered a wild shout, then his legs were swept from under him, and he vanished head foremost into the deep snowdrift at the side. That left Tom Merry another victim, for Carboy was now the leading Grammarian.

Tom Merry appeared to be attempting to toboggan through his legs and failed. Carboy took a backward dive and bundled in the chest of his chum, Lane. What happened to Lane was not known. He followed Frank Monk into the snowdrift, and it was quite a long time before any more than wildly waving legs marked the spot where he had disappeared.

Then Manners and Lowther came upon the scene at a pace which was close upon fifteen miles an hour. The Grammarians saw them, and they saw that Manners was attempting to steer his toboggan through the struggling mass. They discovered a moment or two later that Manners was not succeeding.

All of the rivals he did not bowl over Lowther did, and in a few seconds after Tom Merry had rounded the bend there was scarcely a junior on his feet.

Tom Merry was on the ground flat on his back, and Carboy was sitting on his chest rubbing snow from between his collar and his neck. Lowther was moaning in the holly-hedge, whilst Manners had followed Lane's example in taking a header into the snowdrift.

It was quite a long time before anyone said anything.

Then Frank Monk's usually cheery face appeared through the snow.

"Howling lunatics!" he gasped. "It's Merry—you gasping idiot, Merry!"

"Oh!" groaned Tom Merry. "O-h!"

"Silly idiots. Throw 'em in the snow!" shouted Carboy. "Bury them alive!"

"Why didn't you get out of the way, asses?"

"Why didn't you shout, Lowther?"

"Bury 'em in the snow! Throw 'em in the snowdrift, Monkey!"

Carboy was harping upon one string. He knew it, and he did not care.

"Bury 'em in the snow! Freeze the lunatics!"

"Go for them, you fellows!"

"Silly asses, why didn't you get out of the way? You heard us shout!"

"Howling duffers!"

The Grammar School fellows were scrambling to their feet now, trying to clear themselves of adhering snow. They glared at the Terrible Three. The Terrible Three glared back.

Presently Tom Merry turned to Lowther.

"There are some people who ought to be in cages," he said reflectively, "and there are other people who ought never have been born. Did you say anything, Monkey?"

"No, I didn't," growled Frank Monk.

"Oh!" groaned Manners. "O-h!"

"Achtung—achtung!"

Very faintly the unfamiliar German word sounded through the frosty air, but the Terrible Three and their rivals from the Grammar School took no notice. They were too shaken and cold and wet to trouble about unfamiliar German words just then.

Manners was still groaning, and Lane had only just been dug out of the snowdrift, and they were beginning to sort out their respective toboggans when a terrific shout rang out.

"Achtung—achtung! You uttah duffahs! Bai Jove!"

"My only busby!"

"Achtung!"

Then four wildly careering juniors, on home-made toboggans, which objected to being steered, came dashing towards the Terrible Three and their Grammar School rivals.

"Bai Jove! Get out of the way, you duffahs! Get out of the wotten way!"

Tom Merry and Frank Monk wheeled round together, then they gasped.

Waving one arm wildly and dashing from side to side of the lane was a viry junior in a brand-new Norfolk suit, and a waistcoat which caught the eye at once. Tom Merry and Frank Monk both had time to notice that, then the new-comer dashed into them.

Frank Monk uttered a dismal shout, and went into the snowdrift again; Tom Merry gasped, then felt as if an earthquake must have taken place, and tobogganed gracefully some yards down the run on the small of his back.

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled Lowther. "Look at the asses, Manners! Ha, ha, ha!"

"Ho, ho, ho!"

The laughter died away in a flash.

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Another toboggan was coming round the bend again—a well-made one this time—carrying a broad-shouldered junior the Shell fellows recognised at once.

"Blake! Stop, Blake, you ass!"

"My only hat!"

Other toboggans were coming round the bend now—a whole string in a line. There must have been quite fifteen of them.

Manners rushed wildly to the left, Carboy dashed to the right, and they collided and staggered, then Jack Blake swept them off their feet. The School House junior cannoned vigorously to one side, then neatly tobogganed on to the top of Frank Monk just as that junior was struggling out of the drift for the second time.

What happened next happened so quickly that none of them successfully followed the sequence of events.

Horries tobogganed as hard as he could until he came to Lane, then he screwed round, and, to save himself, flung his arms round the Grammar School fellow's legs. It did not save Horries; it was merely the means of allowing Lane to use him as a toboggan for at least a dozen yards.

Then Digby and D'Arcy minor arrived on the scene, followed by a congested crowd of Third-Formers, and a spectacle such as Church Lane had never witnessed before was the result.

The snow was churned up into a whirlwind, and the greater portion of thirty juniors lay in a struggling heap on the ground. They struggled there for a minute or so, then, by mutual consent, began to scramble to their feet.

CHAPTER 7.

Frank Monk on Claim Jumping.

"WHERE'S Gussy?"

Manners did not answer, but he began to groan again.

Jack Blake glanced round, a dazed expression on his face. Then a portion of the snowdrift moved, and a head appeared in sight.

It was Arthur Augustus.

He scrambled free of the snow and stood a mass of white, his legs and arms far apart.

"Bai Jove!"

"My hat, Gussy! What a rumpus! Where's Monk? I've got something to say to Monk."

"Bai Jove!"

Then a loud voice broke in from the same snowdrift Arthur Augustus had just left, and Frank Monk gained his feet.

"Of all the howling idiots, Blake, you are the howlingist! What on earth did you want to run into us for?"

"I didn't want to run into you, ass!"

Arthur Augustus recovered himself at that moment and screwed his monocle into his eye.

"Weally, Monkey—weally, I must say you are talkin' like an uttah duffah!"

"Why didn't you stop, then?"

"Why didn't you get out of the way?"

"Yaas, wathah! Monkey, I considah you are a sillay ass! I considah—"

"Like your beastly cheek coming down the run at all when we had bagged it," growled Frank Monk. "We were here before you."

"Is it your run, Monkey?"

"That's not the point."

"No, wathah not; I considah that isn't the point myself. The point is why didn't you get out of the way when I said 'achtung'—that's what they all say in Switzahtland on the toboggan wuns."

"Oh, go in a home!"

"Yes, and clear off this run, too!"

"Eh, Lanc, what's that?"

"Clear off this run, Merry," repeated Lane. "We were here before you."

"Then it's about time you went—"

"What's that?"

"Throw the rotters off the run, Monk," cried Carboy. "Come on, you chaps!"

"Yes, come on, you fellows!" said Tom Merry; and the Grammar School chaps lined up to find themselves facing the college juniors.

If Frank Monk & Co. had not been present, Tom Merry would have had much to say to Jack Blake about the second accident, but personal differences were forgotten now common rivals had to be faced. Arthur Augustus's indignation knew no bounds.

"Look at my clothes, Monkey!" he cried. "Just look at my clothes—"

"Are you fellows going to clear off this run?"

"Of all the blessed cheek—"

"Are you going to clear off?"

Tom Merry faced Frank Monk with a grin.

"I don't think!" he said simply. "We all don't think!"

Frank Monk looked at them loftily, and glanced at his



"Fire!" The three St. Jim's juniors fired together, and Frank Monk disappeared. They had knocked the leader of the Grammarians off his own wall.

staunch lieutenants, Carboy and Lane. Both of them appeared determined enough, but neither particularly anxious to commence hostilities.

Monk, himself, was not anxious to run further risk of a third dive into the snowdrift. He caught hold of the cord of his toboggan.

"Come on, you chaps! Silly asses!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" laughed Lowther. "Going home, Monkey?"

"No, I'm not going home; and if you're in the way when we come down again, there'll be trouble, I can tell you."

"Yes, there will—if you run into us!"

"Doesn't Gussy look a freak?"

"Weally, Carboy—"

"Oh, I don't say you can help it, ass! Born like it, I suppose!"

And without another word the Grammar School contingent toiled up the lane, dragging their toboggans by the cords. Tom Merry stood looking after them, a puzzled expression in his eyes.

"Can't quite make it out, Blake, my son," he said thoughtfully.

"You mean about Monk being ratty?"

Tom Merry nodded.

"As a rule old Monkey doesn't get ratty over accidents,

and he can't jolly well think that was anything but an accident, Funny!"

D'Arcy minor grinned, and gained possession of his toboggan again.

"I think I know Monkey's little game, you chaps," he said. "He means to come down the run full speed, and send us flying like we sent them."

"Bai Jove!" gasped Arthur Augustus. "Do you weally think so, Wally?"

"Shouldn't wonder. He's got something up his blessed old sleeve, I know."

"Yes, I expect he has," muttered Lowther. "About a ton of snow, judging from myself. I say, we'd better get to the top, in case D'Arcy minor is right."

"Yaas, wathah! I considah that a wemarkably sensible ideah, bai Jove! I am all in a fluttah as it is."

Tom Merry looked doubtful.

"Yes, we may as well get to the top," he said, "but I don't think Wally has hit it. I believe old Monkey is ratty for once in his life."

"I am also watty, bai Jove!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus. "I considah I have good cause to feel watty, too. Weally, Tom Mewwy, I must say I wegard it as wemarkably sillay of you not to get out of the way when I said 'achtung.'"

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A Grand Tale of Tom Merry & Co. By Martin Clifford.

NEXT
THURSDAY:

"KILDARE. OF ST. JIM'S."

"Do you, kid?"

Wally looked over his shoulder.

"Hurry up, you old fogies!" he called back. "If Monk and his crew come down again, we shall be in the cart, and no mistake."

"Yaas, wathah! I also pwopose we hurwy up in case my younger bwothah is wight."

Tom Merry and Jack Blake still looked puzzled, for they did not think Frank Monk and his chums contemplated retaliation in the way suggested.

They knew from personal experiences how painful collisions were.

"Can't make it out," muttered Tom Merry. "The kid stalked off with his nose in the air."

They hurried up the steep lane, Wally leading the way, listening every now and then at the bends. But there was not a sound to be heard, nor did they catch sight of the Grammarians again until the last bend had been rounded.

Wally's voice rang out then.

"It's all right, kids; they aren't coming."

Arthur Augustus looked relieved.

"Weally, though, I nevah expected Monkey would be such an uttah duffah as to wisk another collision, deah boys; he would have been waving mad to have thought of it, bai Jove!"

"Don't cackle, Gussy. What are the asses doing?"

Jack Blake did not answer, but pressed on at Tom Merry's side. As far as he could see, Frank Monk and his chums were doing nothing at all.

They were merely seated on stationary toboggans looking down the run.

"Cheer-oh, Monkey! Got over your dives?"

D'Arcy minor's salutation remained unanswered. D'Arcy minor looked surprised.

He did not speak again until he was right up to the Grammarians.

"Fit again, Monkey?"

Frank Monk took not the slightest notice of the Third-Former. Wally gazed at him in surprise. The others came up in a string.

"Bai Jove, Monkey, deah boy, what a wotten collision we had—"

"What's the time, Lane?" asked Frank Monk, taking no more notice of Arthur Augustus than he had of Wally. "Must be getting on."

"Bai Jove, deah boy, has the wotten snow made you deaf? It does make you deaf sometimes I have wead somewhere."

"Eleven o'clock, Monk."

"Good! Plenty of time yet, then."

The college fellows looked at the Grammarians in amazement. The Grammarians occasionally glanced towards them, but it was with an irritating stare which seemed to regard the College juniors as insignificant objects in the foreground.

Tom Merry laughed in his hearty way.

"Cheer up, Monkey! You don't mean to say you are ratty just because we bowled you over, do you?"

Frank Monk turned his back on the Shell/fellow.

"Carboy, there's just one thing that has occurred to me," he said. "If a fellow discovers a beastly toboggan run, he oughtn't to have his claim jumped by other fellows, ought he?"

"I thought that was always understood."

Arthur Augustus gasped.

"Bai Jove, what uttah wot, deah boys!"

"What piffle! Every one in this part of Sussex knows about the Church Lane as a toboggan run—"

Tom Merry stopped speaking, because he saw he was not being listened to. Frank Monk had carefully turned his back on him again.

"May as well go down again, you fellows," said the Grammar School captain loftily. "It is hoped fellows who do not know how to toboggan will be more careful."

"My only hat! If that isn't the limit—"

Frank Monk turned slowly and stared at Figgins as though he were surprised at finding him there, and rather doubted that he was there. Figgins gritted his teeth.

"Look here, Monk, are you looking for trouble or anything?"

"Ready, Lane?" asked Frank Monk, turning away again.

"Shall I go first?"

"Right-ho, old chap!"

"Give a call as you round the bends."

Then down the run he went at a fine pace.

The college juniors stood looking on in amazement, which, in the case of Arthur Augustus, was not unmingled with indignation.

"Weally, Carboy, I must considah you fellows are behavin' wathah stwangely, not to say wudely. Monkey wufused to answah a wemark I made to him a few minutes ago, and— Carboy!"

"See you at the bottom, Lane," said Carboy, and away he dashed after Frank Monk.

Arthur Augustus turned to Lane, his face the picture of astonishment.

"Lane, deah boy, I made a wemark to— Bai Jove!"

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NEXT THURSDAY: "KILDARE, OF ST. JIM'S."

A Grand Tale of Tom Merry & Co. By Martin Clifford.

Lane had also started on his toboggan run. D'Arcy minor caught his brother by the arm.

"Don't worry about the silly asses, Gus—they are off their rockers!"

"It weally does appeah as if they were off their wockahs, bai Jove!"

"Oh, they are completely dotty! You can tell that by the shapes of their blessed heads."

More than one Grammar School fellow went red at that, but none of them glanced at the speaker. In dead silence they followed one another down the run.

Tom Merry shrugged his shoulders as the last of them disappeared round the bend.

"Oh, if that's their little game, you chaps, we'll play at it ourselves—jolly well pretend they don't exist when we meet them at the bottom."

"Yes, that's the idea."

"Sort of look through them like they looked through us—ignore the young asses!"

"Yaas, wathah! I considah we have no othah course open to us but to ignore them, in the cires; I considah they have behaved in a vewy wough and weady mannah!"

"Oh, they have done all that, kid. Right away, Blake, my son!"

Just as the Grammarians had started their second toboggan run, the college fellows also began theirs. In close order they followed one another down the snow-covered land.

Arthur Augustus had one slight fall, but as he brought up the rear it did not matter much, and he was soon speeding after his chums again. As was to be expected, none of them caught sight of the Grammar School rivals until the field at the bottom of the lane was gained.

Here they found Frank Monk and the others waiting quietly.

Neither contingent took the slightest notice of the other.

"Weally, deah boys," drawled Arthur Augustus, turning to Tom Merry, "it is wathah wippin' havin' the run to ourselves. I considah; it would have been wotten if any of those Gwammah School cads had come ovah."

Tom Merry grinned.

"Not likely we should allow anyone else on your run, kid, is it?"

"No, wathah not!"

Frank Monk and his chums did not answer a word; they did not even glance towards their rivals, but they bit their lips. Their time would come!

For a good hour the rival juniors enjoyed to the full the toboggan runs, although many and painful were the accidents which occurred.

The lofty attitude both sides had taken eventually materialised into a refusal by all to give their rivals warning of their approach, and more than once friend had to dig friend out of the snow-drift.

At last Tom Merry glanced at his watch, and whistled.

"Phew! There isn't time for another run, you chaps."

"Bai Jove, you don't mean to say it is dianah time, deah boy?"

"Yes I do, though, kid!"

"And a jolly good job, too!" exclaimed Fatty Wynn.

"I'm almost famished—I felt positively faint coming up the lane."

"Yes, you look it, my son. All coming back here this afternoon?" added Tom Merry, raising his voice so that Frank Monk could hear.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"I should say so!"

"Good! We can be back by two o'clock sharp, if we look alive."

The college juniors sauntered away, dragging their toboggans behind them.

Frank Monk looked after them, then wheeled round to the others.

"Now for it, Lane!"

"My hat, yes—"

"We'll jolly well see whether the kids can jump our claim—run, I mean. We'll show the young asses!"

"Yes, that's the idea," agreed Carboy. "But I pwopose we have one more run down, in case they happen to come back, or any other college kid comes along. I mean, let's give them all good time to get to the college."

"Good for you, Carboy! Down you go!"

And the last the St. Jim's fellows saw of their rivals was Lane, bringing up the rear for another run.

CHAPTER 8.

King of the Castle.

"BEST if I can understand Monk's latest jape!" exclaimed Tom Merry, as the Terrible Three joined the chums of Study No. 6 directly dinner was over.

"He seemed really serious over it."

"Expect he got the needle a bit at first, and didn't like to climb down afterwards," laughed Blake.

"Yaas, wathah! I shouldn't wondah if that was the case, deah boy."

"Well, it's a lot of rot, anyway," declared Tom Merry. "If it comes to a point who ought to have the Church Lane, we've just as good a claim as they have. We all decided yesterday about it, didn't we, Blake?"

"Of course we did. But then everyone uses the Church Lane for toboggans. Monkey must have gone dotty in his old age."

"Yaas, wathah! I shouldn't wondah—"

Jack Blake brought his toboggan along after him through the snow with thoughtful sort of jerks.

"What gets over me is what he means by this blessed silent wheeze of his, Merry. I can't see any sense in that."

"There isn't any sense in it. I'll tackle him directly we get there. We've never had a real row with Monkey in our lives, and we aren't going to begin in our old age. We'll jolly well surround the young ass, and jump on him, if he won't be sensible."

"Yes, that's the wheeze."

"Yaas, wathah! I considah that is a whipping ideah in the circs, myself."

"Come on!"

They were out of the grounds by now, pausing for a moment or two in response to a hail. Figgins & Co. came up at a run, mufflers round their necks.

"Cheer-ho, kids! Now for it!"

"Yes, Figg; only we're going to jump on Frank Monk for being an ass."

"Good ideah; I was going to suggest it myself. We mustn't work up a row with Monkey, whatever we do. We'll roll the young duffer in the snow if he won't come off his perch."

"Something like that, anyway."

They hurried on across the snow, turning sharply at the cross road, to gain Church Lane.

The lane really started from the main road itself, but the toboggan run did not commence for about fifty yards along. This was on account of a level stretch which intervened between the first slope and the second steep incline. The toboggans would have slowed down had they started from the road.

Tom Merry turned to the others hastily.

"Surround Monkey the moment you can; chip him until he begins to grin."

"Yaas, wathah! And, in the circs, I considah it would be bettah if we ovahlook any wudeness he may be guilty of."

"Good for you, Gussy! Hallo!"

Jack Blake stopped speaking, and stared ahead. Tom Merry also stared ahead.

The others rubbed their eyes.

"What—what's that snow-covered building? It wasn't there when we went for dinner."

"Bai Jove! no, Mewwy, deah boy!"

"What is it?"

Jack Blake pressed forward.

"It isn't a snow-covered building, anyway!" he exclaimed.

"There wasn't a building there to be snow-covered, and it hasn't snowed since the night. My only hat!"

"It's a castle! It's a snow castle!"

"Yaas, wathah! I was about to describe it as a snow castle myself."

Tom Merry began to run, then he stopped dead, and stood staring ahead.

The building at the head of the Church Run most certainly was a snow castle, built in most careful fashion, and completely blocking the pathway. It had turned the lane into a cul-de-sac.

The castle was splendidly thrown together, too, and looked about as solid and strong as any snow castle could. But it was not at the castle itself Tom Merry was gazing.

"My hat! just read that!"

"Bai Jove! what uttah cheek, not to say—"

"It's a jape—it must be a jape!" gasped Jack Blake. "The young asses would never dare— Phew!"

Then he, too, caught sight of the home-made notice-board which was fastened to the fence on their left. A brief notice was pinned there, but its brevity did not prevent it being very much to the point.

"THE GRAMMAR SCHOOL RUN."

"Tobogganers daring to cross the line below will be severely dealt with."

"By Order."

That was all there was to read, and the line mentioned was a little ridge of snow which had been scraped together, and which ran right across the lane just in front of the college juniors. Tom Merry and Jack Blake looked down at it, then ahead at the snow walls of the silent castle.

The castle appeared to be as deserted as the run, to judge by the silence which reigned around them. But Tom Merry did not stop to think of that.

"Of all the blessed cheek! Come on, you chaps!"

"My hat! yes!"

"That's the ideah, bai Jove! W'ench the w'etched castle down! Waze it to the g'round!"

"At 'em!" yelled Wally. "At 'em!"

With a wild rush, the college fellows crossed the line; then the silence hanging over the huge snow castle was broken.

"Steady!" rang out a firm voice. "Fire!"

And instantly a whole host of well-known figures, wearing Grammar School caps, appeared above the ramparts. Fifteen arms were raised at one and the same time, and fifteen well-made snowballs hurtled through the air.

"Waze the castle to the g'round, deah boys! Waze—"

Then a snowball caught Arthur Augustus in the face, and his remark was never finished. Tom Merry set his teeth. He was covered with snow, his eyes were full of the same material, but he did not stop.

When Tom Merry made up his mind, a good deal of opposition was required to stop him.

"Come on, you chaps!" he shouted. "Charge!"

"At them, kids!" yelled Figgins. "We've got them now!"

But Figgins had spoken too soon. Certainly the first volley was over, and if that had been all they had had to face, the college juniors might just have gained the castle. But it was not all, by any means.

Frank Monk was a born leader, and organisation came to him naturally.

Just as the fifteen under his command had discharged the first volley, they dropped to their knees, and so vanished from sight as far as the college juniors were concerned. That was all right as far as it went; but it did not stop there, for the instant Frank Monk and his men disappeared, a second line of Grammarians sprang up behind them, commanded by Lane.

"Fire!"

Lane's voice rang out in a terrific shout; then fifteen more well-aimed snowballs were sent into the enemy.

"My hat!"

"Phew!"

"Bai Jove!"

The St. Jim's fellows faltered, then they stopped; for Lane and his section had disappeared, and Frank Monk & Co. were up again. That meant another volley.

Tom Merry and Jack Blake were a mass of snow; it was almost a physical impossibility to go in face of that raking fire.

Tom Merry wheeled round.

"Fall back!" he cried. "Steady!"

It was an order which was obeyed with wonderful promptitude. Had it not been given, the fellows would have struggled on; but it was hopeless, exasperating work to have to face such a fire without being able to return a single shot.

In confusion, the college juniors fell back over the line of demarcation, and instantly the fire ceased. The occupants of the castle also dropped down behind the walls, and there was silence once again.

"A council of war, chaps," said Tom Merry briskly.

"Yaas, wathah, deah boys! I considah this is a vewy important mattah, bai Jove!"

"Oh, we all do consider that, Gus," put in D'Arcy minor. "We shall get on a lot quicker if you'll stop cackling until it's all over. There's only one thing to be done, Merry, and that's rush their giddy castle."

"Yes; only we shall have to go about it properly—"

Tom Merry stopped speaking, to turn a surprised glance up the lane.

A curious-looking object was gliding down the snow towards them, a long-bodied affair, which appeared to boast of three heads in a line, tandem fashion.

"Bai Jove! toboggans tied together! A weah attack, deah boys!"

"Not it, kid."

"Yaas, weally; a weah attack."

"Silly juggins!" suddenly exclaimed Figgins. "It's Cornstalk & Co., on toboggans tied together."

Wally became excited.

"Wrong for you, Figg. It's Glyn and the others; but they aren't on toboggans at all; they are on a bob-sleigh."

"My hat! so they are!"

"And a jolly fine bob-sleigh at that, too," went on D'Arcy minor enthusiastically. "It's got a motor-wheel to steer it by, and all!"

Tom Merry nodded.

"So it has. I suppose that is what the young asses were making when we were in the 'shop.'"

"Yes, that's it. No wonder they looked bored at the idea of toboggan-making, if they had a bob-sleigh on hand. Here they come!"

The bob-sleigh, with its inventor, Bernard Glyn, at the "helm," was at the mouth of the lane by now, gliding gently down the incline. The college fellows stood on one side.

"Cheer-ho, Glyn!"

"Good wheeze, kids!"

Cornstalk & Co. glanced carelessly over their shoulders.

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 99.

A Grand Tale of Tom Merry & Co. By Martin Clifford.

NEXT
THURSDAY:

"KILDARE, OF ST. JIM'S."

"Who are these youngsters?" drawled Harry Noble, looking as bored as he could. "Oh, the toboggan builders! You don't mean to say Herries has dared to sit on his toboggan, do you?"

"Don't rag, you chaps. I tell you the Grammar——"
"And that's young Merry, isn't it?" murmured Glyn, bringing the bob-sleigh to a standstill. "Young Merry, of the Shell, who was making a white-mouse cage in the 'shop' yesterday."

"Don't rot, Glyn!"
"And that's Gussy—that in the waistcoat, I mean!" said Clifton Dane. "I don't like your tie, Gussy."

"Weally, deah boy, I think if you leave the mattah of choosin' a tie to me——"

"And those are toboggans," added Harry Noble. "I know they are toboggans, because they told me so."

"Look here, you chaps——"

"Oh, we can't stay here all the afternoon talking to a parcel of kids," said the inventor, with a grin. "We're out for a bob-sleigh run. See you later."

"Bai Jove! they are cussing the line!"

"Well, let them," whispered Herries. "If the silly asses won't listen to us—I'd like to see any of them make a toboggan, anyway."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Yes, let the kids go," grinned Jack Blake. "They've got swelled heads. Let's see what they will look like with thick ears as well."

The others chuckled in low voices, and stood watching Cornstalk & Co, getting their bob-sleigh in motion again with vigorous leg thrusts.

They had already crossed the line of demarcation.

CHAPTER 9. Storming the Castle.

WITH a beautiful even motion, the bob-sleigh began to glide ahead again slowly. Bernard Glyn and his chums behind him turned their heads and waved.

"So long, you kids; I'd keep out of our way on the run if I were you——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Tom Merry and the other juniors yelled with laughter, for the ramparts of the Grammar School castle were being manned again.

"They are coming for us in toboggans," shouted Frank Monk. "Mow them down, you fellows."

Bernard Glyn turned in amazement, and it was unfortunate for him that he should have chosen that moment for doing so. Frank Monk had just flung a particularly well-aimed snowball at the bob-sleigh.

"Oh!" yelled the young inventor. "O—oh!"

Then a shot from Lane caused Clifton Dane to fall off the sleigh altogether.

"Mow them down! Fire! Slam away, you chaps."

"Buck up, Grammar School. Hooray!"

It had all taken place in such a short time that the Grammar School fellows really thought, for the moment, that an attack was being made. They pelted the unfortunate Cornstalk and Co. until very little of them was to be seen.

"Retreat," yelled Bernard Glyn. "My only hat, we've run up against something this time."

"Oh, my beastly ear——"

"Who are the rotters? Oh!"

Frank Monk had ordered a parting volley to warn the retreating enemy what repeated attacks would mean, and that parting volley found more than one back of the neck.

Wildly Cornstalk & Co. fell back, dragging their sleigh with them.

Tom Merry and the others met them with roars of laughter. Arthur Augustus was nearly choking.

"Weally, I am awfully sowwy—hah, hah, hah—but you brought it on yourselves, deah boy——"

"Silly ass!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled Jack Blake. "This comes of swanking, Glyn, my son."

"Shrieking duffer——"

"We tried to warn you but you wouldn't listen," added Tom Merry. "You'd got such swelled heads about your bob-sleigh. Got some snow down your neck, Noble?"

Harry Noble did not answer. He considered Tom Merry had asked an absurd question, seeing that out of the last six snowballs thrown at least five had struck him between cap and coat collar.

Clifton Dane gasped and stared at the castle.

"Who—who built that—whose is it?"

"Frank Monk and his crew, of course. That was what I tried to tell you about, only you wouldn't listen."

Cornstalk & Co. blushed under their snow.

"Well, we're listening now," said Harry Noble hastily.

"What's it all mean?"

"Oh, nothing much," answered Jack Blake carelessly.

"Because the Grammar School kids happened to be on the run a few minutes before we were this morning, they think they have obtained a sort of ninety-nine year lease of it. Look at the notice."

"My hat, this is coming it a bit too strong."

"Yaas, wathah; and while we were away foah dinnah they built that wotten castle, bai Jove."

"To guard the pass—the run, I mean?"

"Yaas, wathah, Noble; I should say that was their ideah, deah boy."

"Good for them," murmured the Australian junior, casting a critical eye at the castle. "Monkey chose his ground well."

"Oh, the castle is all right, but the blessed cheek of it being there at all," objected Figgins. "Get on with the washing from the point when these asses came up on the bob-sleigh."

"Yes, you chaps," exclaimed Tom Merry. "That castle has got to be stormed, and the run taken."

"Heah, heah, bai Jove."

"Rather!"

"And the point is which is the best way to set about it?" went on Tom Merry. "I——"

"Hallo!"

"What's up, Blake?"

"See that, kid?"

Tom Merry looked across the field and gritted his teeth. Yes, he could see all right, and he understood.

"Twig, Figgy?"

"Some of the Grammar School kids are tobogganing——"

"Yes, about half of them," said Tom Merry crisply. "The other half are holding the lane and the castle. They'll change over when the tobogganing lot come up again."

"My hat, did you ever come across such rotten cheek?"

"Storn 'em," exclaimed D'Arcy minor. "That's my idea, rush them."

"Weally, Wally, in the pwesence of your eldahs I wathah think——"

"Oh, don't you begin, Gus. What do you old fogies say, Tom Merry?"

"That you'll get bumped in the snow if you don't dry up, kid. What do you say to rushing them, Blake?"

"May as well try that first—eh, Figgy?"

"Can have a go at them anyway. We shall stand a better chance if we are prepared."

"Yes, that's what I thought," returned Tom Merry.

"Manufacture some ammunition, you chaps; that castle has got to be taken somehow."

"Heah, heah, deah boy!"

For a minute or two there was silence in the attacking camp, as well as amongst the defenders, for snowballs were being made with desperate haste.

"As many as you can carry comfortably," said Tom Merry.

"And don't fire until we're pretty close. That's the idea, isn't it, Blake?"

"Yes, get almost up to the walls of the castle before we open fire at all."

"Yaas, wathah; I considah that a wemarkably bwaing ideah, but it has just occurred to me——"

"Oh, don't you begin, Gus."

"Weally, Wally, I must request you to show more respect to your eldah brothah. As I was sayin' it has just occurred to me——"

"Dry up, Gussy!"

"Weally, Digby, I must wufuse to dwy up; I have the honouah of the attackin' party to considah, deah boy. It has just occurred to me that it would be wathah a good plan to prettend to be walkin' away befoah we weally attack them, deah boys."

Tom Merry looked puzzled for a moment or two, then thumped the swell of the School House on the shoulder.

"Good for you, Gussy, old kid; they can't have seen us making snowballs, can they?"

"No, that is what I was thinkin', Newwy."

"Then cover the ammunition under coats as much as possible and follow Gussy and me, you fellows; we may get some yards nearer the castle before they open fire if we work this properly. Ready?"



Arthur Augustus D'Arcy scrambled free of the snow and stood up, a mass of white. "Bai Jove!" he gasped.

Together Tom Merry and Arthur Augustus stepped from the ditch where ammunition had been manufactured and they turned their backs on the castle. All the other juniors did the same.

Then they began to walk away slowly.

"Another yard or two," said Tom Merry. "Then wheel round like one o'clock and rush 'em."

"Yaas, wathah."

"Now!"

Round the college juniors spun, and with a wild rush dashed for the castle walls.

The plan worked admirably, for quite half the distance was covered before a snowball was thrown. Then Frank Monk & Co. recovered themselves.

Volley after volley they sent into the enemy, three snowballs taking Tom Merry in the face at once.

"My only hat—"

"Bai—Jove!"

Whether it was the fact that he was well to the front or whether his rather striking suit caught the eye of the defenders it was difficult to say, but Arthur Augustus of all the attackers seemed to suffer the most. He was hit all over the body at the first volley.

But there was a good lot of grit about Arthur Augustus.

"Wush them, deah boys—waze the castle to the ground—"

"Fire!"

Tom Merry, Jack Blake, and Figgins fired at one and the same time, and their aim was good. Frank Monk's face disappeared behind a mask of snow, then Frank Monk himself disappeared. They had knocked the leader of the Grammarians off his own wall.

"Hooray—ray—rush them."

"Nevah mind the wotten snowballs, deah boys—bai Jove!"

With a wild rush Arthur Augustus and Tom Merry managed to gain the castle wall, but it was a good seven feet high. They could not even see over.

"Clambah up, Mewwy. Nevah mind—"

"Come on, Blakey—"

"Hooray!"

Four or five of the leading St. Jim's juniors were making desperate efforts to scramble up the walls of the castle by now, and others were coming up, then they received a check.

Lane looked down at them from the top of the wall.

"Now!" he ordered briefly.

Arthur Augustus looked up.

"We have them, deah boys: we have them—"

Then it seemed to Arthur Augustus that the afternoon had suddenly become dark. He was conscious of the fact that a large board held by many hands was poised above his head, then that board was turned.

Something like half a hundred weight of snow descended upon Arthur Augustus and Tom Merry.

"Phew!"
 "Bai—Jove!"
 "Fire!"

Frank Monk's voice rang out again, and a tremendous volley responded to the order. Figgins stopped, gasping. It seemed a physical impossibility to go on against that storm of snowballs.

"Bai—Jove!"
 All there was to be seen of Arthur Augustus was his head, his feet and his hands. The rest of him was beneath the snow. Tom Merry was in almost as bad a plight, but he kept his head. A glance told him they would never take the castle with that rush, so he turned quickly.

"Fall back, you chaps; all right, Monkey, my son."
 Tom Merry's order was the signal to cease fire, and the Grammarians leaned over the ramparts of their castle, snowballs in hand, in great glee.

"Bai—Jove!"
 Tom Merry, Jack Blake and Figgins were digging Arthur Augustus out of the snow. Arthur Augustus was trying to collect himself, but he was not succeeding as yet.

Frank Monk chuckled loudly.
 "They'll have Gussy's arm off in a minute, Lane. Ha, ha, ha!"
 "My hat, just look at that young-ass."

"Ha, ha, ha!"
 Arthur Augustus was yanked to his feet gasping, and the Grammarians roared with laughter. Arthur Augustus stared at them.

"Weally, Monkey, I am gwieved to have to say it, but in future I shall no longah wegard you in the light of a fwien'd."

"Come along, Gussy."
 "No, Mewwy, deah boy, I must wofuse to come along until I have wemonstated with Monckay for his unsportsmanlike twick of pouvin' a lot of wotten snow on me."

"Ha, ha, ha!"
 "Weally, Lane, I should have thought our fwien'dship in the past—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"
 "Carboy, I considah you have behaved in a weckless not to say, wotten mannah—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"
 "Monckay, I look upon you as a wank outsidah and wottah of the first watah, bai Jove. I considah—"

"Give him a parting volley, chaps," sang out the Grammar School captain, winking at Lane. "A good reminder. One—two—three! Ha, ha, ha!"

Arthur Augustus had wheeled round and was racing back towards the line already recrossed by his chums.

The swell of the School House wanted to recover himself before he faced another Grammar School volley.

CHAPTER 10.

The Taking of the Castle.

"FUNNY they don't come for us again!"
 Frank Monk spoke doubtfully, peering through the skilfully-made look-out holes in the ramparts of his castle. Lane nodded.

"Not like Tom Merry and the others to sheer off at the sight of a snowball! Can't see them anywhere."

"Oh, they'll be in the ditch making snowballs, I expect."

"Y-es. Still, you'd think they would be making another attempt by now."

Carboy shrugged his shoulders.

"Anyway, they aren't, so what's it matter? I vote we get on with the tobogganing."

"Right-ho!"

"Whose turn is it to go down? Lane's lot, isn't it?"

Lane said it was, and refused to listen to any opposition on the point. He set off for the run with half a dozen other juniors behind him.

The run-holders stayed at their posts, endeavouring to catch sight of the enemy.

But whether Tom Merry had withdrawn his forces, or was merely lying in ambush, they could not tell.

Monk was thoroughly puzzled.

"Hope the young asses haven't cleared off!" he exclaimed after a time. "That'll spoil it all, if they have."

Carboy shook his head.

"Oh, they haven't cleared off; trust Tom Merry!"

"Well, where are they, then?"

"Don't know, kid; but I know they haven't sheered off."

"Anyway, it's to be hoped they haven't," put in someone else. "We shall have built this blessed castle for nothing, if they have. Hallo, here comes Lane again!"

"Good! My turn now, Monk!"

"What's that, Carboy?"

"So it is!"

"I don't think!"

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 99.

NEXT THURSDAY:

"KILDARE. OF ST. JIM'S."

A Grand Tale of Tom Merry & Co. By Martin Clifford.

Lane came panting up the snow steps leading to the castle; then gasped in amazement.

"Of all the howling asses—you hopeless lunatic, Monk!"

"What's up now?"

"Look!" gasped Lane. "Look, you duffers!"

Frank Monk, Carboy, and a whole crowd of other juniors wheeled round. Then they gasped with Lane.

There was just one thing the Grammarians had overlooked in choosing the site for their castle, and that was that there was a large gap in the hedge on their right side, and from that gap a snow-covered field sloped up at a steep incline to the upper road.

At the time of building, Frank Monk had called attention to the field; but the fact that it was on an incline had relieved his anxiety. There seemed to be little risk of a surprise attack with not the slightest trace of cover in a thirty-acre field.

None of them had thought about toboggans being used as transports.

"But that's what they are doing," exclaimed Lane. "They are loading the toboggans up with snowballs, and are getting into line."

"So—so they are!"

"My only hat, Monk; you must have been asleep, not to have noticed them before!"

"They weren't there before, ass! They've been getting ready in the upper road, and can only just have come through the hedge. My aunt, this is going to be exciting!"

"We must beat them off, whatever happens."

"Yes, rather! Ammunition, you fellows—tons of it!"

"And keep your heads," said Lane. "I say, ripping idea of the coll. kids, Monkey!"

Frank Monk nodded. He was ready to admit sound tactics, whoever was responsible for them; and that was why he was so liked on the football field in that part of Sussex.

As snowballs were manufactured at record speed, the spirits of the Grammarians rose. Carboy looked up the field hopefully.

"I believe they are only using the toboggans for ammunition, Monk. No, they are not, though!"

"Not much!" answered the captain grimly. "They are mounting already."

"Aren't they taking a time about it, too?"

In dead silence the Grammar School fellows stood waiting for the foe. They saw the college juniors seat themselves carefully on their respective toboggans, a bob-sleigh in the centre of the line.

Then they watched one of the fellows walk along in front of the line.

"Tom Merry seeing all's right," muttered Monk.

Lane nodded.

"Yes, that's about it. Here they come!"

The whole line of toboggans had commenced to move, although they were too far away as yet for the Grammarians to recognise the various fellows. But that was a minor point. What was really important was that the toboggans were gaining speed every second.

Frank Monk looked more anxious than ever.

"My hat, they'll want some stopping this time, and no mistake!" he muttered. "Reserve your fire, you chaps."

"Right-ho!"

"And try not to waste a single shot. We've got to knock them off their toboggans somehow before they get up to the castle walls."

"Yes, that's it!" exclaimed Carboy. "My hat, aren't they just coming, too!"

At a terrific rush the attacking party were making for the castle, led by the heavy bob-sleigh, which Clifton Dane was braking in order not to get too far ahead.

Frank Monk gritted his teeth.

"Now for it!"

Almost before the words were out of his mouth a loud cheer went up.

"Get weady to fiah, deah boys. Hoorah, bai Jove!"

"Steady!"

"Yaas, wathah, steady, deah boys, and fiah the moment I give the ordah—bai Jove!"

The first shot of the present engagement had been fired—and by Carboy—with great deliberation. The snowball flattened painfully on Arthur Augustus' left ear.

It was then that the swell of the School House saw, for the first time, that there was a drawback to the use of toboggans. There was no possibility of avoiding the snowballs.

"But what mattah," gasped Arthur Augustus. "What mattah, deah boys? Fiah!"

"Don't be an ass, Gussy," gasped Jack Blake. "How can we fire, you duffer, sitting down and going at this pace?"

"Bai Jove, I nevah thought of that!"

"My aunt!"

A regular volley was pouring upon the attackers now, but it had no effect as far as stopping them went. They had set their hands to the plough, and they could not have stopped if they had wanted to.

They were coming down that field at something over fifteen miles an hour.

From the point of view of the castle defenders, the spectacle was rather awe-inspiring. Time after time they got home with snowballs, but the college fellows did not appear to mind that.

Frank Monk began to get desperate.

"Fire! Slam away!"

"Come on!" yelled Bernard Glyn. "Never mind the brake, Dane! Hooray!"

With a rush the bob-sleigh dashed ahead of the lighter toboggans, and caused some confusion. About three-quarters of the Grammarians directed their fire at it. That was unfortunate for Cornstalk & Co., but it was good for their side.

"Now we have them!" cried Tom Merry. "St. Jim's—Jim's!"

The Shell fellow did not attempt to stop himself with his feet; he just allowed the toboggan to run into the snow wall of the castle. Jack Blake and some of the others did the same, while a good many stopped a few yards out.

That had all been arranged, as Frank Monk saw when it was too late to profit by the knowledge. His order came too late to prevent his fire being divided unevenly.

He did his best, but it was no good.

"Take a man each—one each!"

"My hat!"

Lane uttered a shout. Arthur Augustus was actually clambering up the side of the castle.

Carboy dashed for him, and promptly sent Arthur Augustus into the snow again. But the swell of St. Jim's was only checked; he was not stopped.

"All wight, Carboy, you wottah! Waze the castle to the g'round, deah boys; waze it to the g'round!"

"At 'em!" yelled Wally. "At 'em, you old fogies!"

"Hooray!"

The college fellows were swarming over the ramparts now on all sides. Valiantly Monk and his chums struggled to push them down again, but their successes were only of a momentary nature.

As soon as one collegian was pushed from the walls, another appeared a few feet away.

Presently Tom Merry's voice rang out again.

"Altogether, chaps; now's the time!"

"At them!" yelled Monk.

"Altogether!"

"Bai Jove!"

Both sides made a desperate last rally, and splendidly as Monk and his side stood their ground, a single glance told Tom Merry the day was theirs.

He, Jack Blake, and Figgins were over the castle ramparts in a flash.

Arthur Augustus followed at his third attempt; then D'Arcy minor brought a whole string of Third-Formers over in a bunch, and the castle was won.

"Into the snow with them!" cried Digby. "Bundle the Grammar cads out of it!"

"Hooray! Come on, kids!"

The Grammarians retreated, because the college rush almost carried them off their feet; then the work of clearing the castle of its builders began.

First Lane went, taking a beautiful dive into the snow-filled ditch. Carboy was the next, helped in his dive by the willing hands of Arthur Augustus.

"Ha, ha, ha! Bai Jove, I considah this we-markably funnay, deah boys! Waze the castle to the g'round!"

"Don't be an ass, Gussy," exclaimed Tom Merry. "We want this castle, I can tell you."

"Wight-ho, deah boy! Don't waze the castle to the g'round, you chaps; th'row the wottahs into the snow instead! Hah, hah, hah!"

"Over you go, my son!"

"All right, Blake; you rotter!"

"I know it's all right."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Three minutes of strenuous work brought the end in sight, and within four minutes there was not a Grammarian within the castle walls.

Figgins glanced round quickly.

"Give them a last volley with their own snowballs, kids!" he shouted. "Just to remind them St. Jim's can go one better than the Grammar School any day of the week."

"Rats, Figgins!"

"Is that old Monkey yapping over there? Good-bye, Monkey!"

And Figgins sent a well-aimed shot at the rival captain, which hit him on the top of his head and covered his face with snow.

Frank Monk withdrew hastily, and the others followed; while the college juniors gave vent to a far-reaching cheer from the castle ramparts.

Arthur Augustus sat down at last, gasping,

"Weally, you know, deah boys, I am all in a fluttah! I wathah think my clothes are wuined, too!"

"Oh, it was a glorious wheeze, Tom Merry!"

"The toboggan idea? My hat, yes; fairly squashed them up!" laughed the Shell fellow pleasantly. "What's to be done now, though?"

"Go on the wun with our toboggans, deah boy."

"Yes, I know. But about Monkey's gang?"

"Weally, I nevah thought about that. Bai Jove, you know, it would be wotten to keep them out of the fun."

"Oh, of course!"

"They meant to keep us," exclaimed Dudley of the Third.

"I don't see—"

"Rot, Dud!" exclaimed D'Arcy minor crisply. "That was only part of the rag. They would have let us come on all right if we hadn't been able to take the castle. I know Monk."

"Yes, of course; old Monkey is one of the best," said Figgins. "I suppose his silence rag of this morning was to make us think they'd really got up on their hind legs about the run. It strengthened the castle dodge of holding the lane."

Tom Merry nodded.

"Yes, that was it, of course; but we are not much further on with the other biz. What's to be done now?"

"Weally, Mewwy—bai Jove!"

"What's the matter?"

"Off your rocker, Gussy?"

"No, deah boy; no, wathah not. Bai Jove, I have the vewy ideah!"

"Oh, we've had some of your ideas before, Gus!"

"Yaas, wathah, Wally, and wattling good ideas!"

"I don't think!"

"Weally, Wally—but I ovahlook your wudeness undah the circe. Gathah wound, deah boys: I wathah think my ideah will staggah you—gathah wound!"

The fellows did not gather round, but stood looking doubtfully at Arthur Augustus. As Wally had said, most of them had listened to Arthur Augustus' ideas before.

CHAPTER 11.

The Surprise Attack.

"WELL, if this isn't the limit, I never want to run up against one!"

Lane sat down wearily on the snow-covered gate. Carboy kicked the same gate and caused the snow to fall from its five bars in frozen lumps.

"It's freezing, anyway; and that means skating before long."

"Bother skating; it was a beastly wash out, Monk."

"Wasn't my fault, kid."

"I never said it was," grumbled Lane. "It was rotten bad luck, that was what it was. We ought to have been able to hold the castle easily enough."

Frank Monk grinned.

"Only we didn't," he added. "The thing now is how to retake it."

"Eh?"

"How to turn the tables," went on the Grammar School captain. "You fellows don't mean to say you are going to sit down and not try to take the castle back, do you?"

"N-no!"

"Of course not; but—"

"Then what are you grousing about? Never met such a pack of grouzers in my life."

Lane, Carboy, and the others did not answer. It had not occurred to them to attempt to win back the castle until Monk had suggested it, and they were not very proud of that fact.

"Of course, we must capture the run again," went on Frank Monk crisply. "I'd like to see the Grammar School knuckle under to college kids, I don't think. The thing is, how can it best be done."

"Yes, that's the question."

"I don't believe it can be done."

"Oh, can't it, Lane? They took the castle from us; I should have thought it was possible for us to take the castle from them seeing that we are bigger, taking the Coll. Third-Formers into the average."

"Y-yes, there is that, I suppose."

"Of course there is that. Now the thing is to plan it out."

"Yes, rather!"

"My hat! If once we win back the castle, they'll want a lot of luck to capture it again."

"More luck than they are likely to meet with in a couple of lifetimes," declared Frank Monk. "It's no good working the attack by the toboggan wheeze again."

"It was a rattling idea!"

"Yes, only it's a back number now; we want something that will take them by surprise. I propose an attack from all possible points at once."

The others looked interested. Spirits were rising again now, and the fellows listened eagerly.

"What I suggest is this," said Frank Monk. "I take one—"

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 99.

A Grand Tale of Tom Merry & Co. By Martin Cliford.

NEXT
THURSDAY:

"KILDARE, OF ST. JIM'S."

third of you fellows, Lane another third, and Carboy the rest. Then we take a leaf out of Tom Merry's book and vanish as far as they are concerned."

"That's easily done; we've only to get out on the road."

"Exactly!"

"But how are we going to attack them, Monkey?"

"At three points at once, kid. Lane gets into the field which they tobogganed down, Carboy comes back here, and executes a frontal attack, and I slip into that field on the left."

"On the left—what for?"

"To get on the run itself," returned Frank Monk. "It's a wonder to me Tom Merry never thought of that. There's no wall to the castle on the run side."

"Great Scott, no!"

"Good for you, Monkey."

"Yes, rather."

"Yes, it ought to work," said Monk thoughtfully. "You see, there's plenty of snow for ammunition, and they'll feel awfully sick when they see us come rampaging up the lane."

"By Jove, yes!"

Lane was becoming enthusiastic.

"We can first draw their attention with some long range firing, Monkey," he exclaimed. "Then, the moment you are ready you can give us a call, and we'll jolly well get back that castle or freeze!"

"That's the talk!"

"We shall have to be jolly careful we aren't seen getting ready, though."

"Oh, that can be worked, and the sooner the better!" said Frank Monk. "You fellows know the divisions, so we needn't waste any time selecting."

"Let's get to the road at once."

Carboy caught Monk by the arm.

"I say, how would it be to slang them a bit, old chap?"

"What for?"

"To let them think we're fed up and are going home."

"Good egg!"

"Come on!"

They moved out into the centre of the lane, and, after a moment's hesitation, Carboy raised his voice.

"College rotters!"

On nine occasions out of ten that cry brought forth others from the enemy, but this must have been the tenth occasion, for there was not an answering sound.

"College cads!"

"Just you wait until we meet you at footer!"

"Or on the ice!"

The Grammarians raised their voices in unison, but not a word was sent back in answer. Nor could a St. Jim's fellow be seen.

Frank Monk turned on his heel.

"Playing us at our own game," he grinned. "Ignoring us, and keeping below the ramparts making snowballs for all they are worth."

"Which is about tuppence," growled Carboy.

The Grammar School captain laughed.

"Never mind, kid; your idea was a good one, and it has worked, I expect. Because the kids didn't answer us doesn't say they didn't hear. They think we are clearing off all right."

Once the main road was gained, the fellows quickly broke up into the three divisions.

At a run Lane took his contingent to the upper road, Carboy & Co. sat down until they judged it would be time to take to the lane again, while Frank Monk and the fellows under his command hastily slipped into the field by crossing which they would be able to scramble through the hedge at the other side, and so gain the run.

The minutes slipped by, and at last Carboy gave the word.

"Now for it!"

Cautiously the Grammarians crept towards the attack, a scout peering through the hedge and just managing to catch sight of Lane leading his men across the field.

Another scout brought back word that Frank Monk had already gained the toboggan run.

"Good!" muttered Carboy. "Now for it! Ready?"

"Rather!"

"Fire!"

A volley of snowballs was sent over the castle walls before a single college fellow had been seen, and almost at the same instant, Lane opened fire. Then a shout rang out.

"Charge!"

It was Frank Monk's voice, and Carboy and Lane answered loyally by deeds. They charged wildly towards the castle. Volley after volley they sent over the walls, but not a solitary snowball was thrown in return.

In their excitement the Grammarians failed to notice this for a moment, or, if they noticed it, accounted for it by the probability that Tom Merry & Co. were reserving their fire.

"At them, you fellows!"

"Down with the college rotters!"

"Hooray!"

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 99.

NEXT THURSDAY: "KILDARE, OF ST. JIM'S."

A Grand Tale of Tom Merry & Co. By Martin Clifford.

With one wild, combined rush the three divisions of the Grammarians gained the castle walls, and in less time than it takes to tell were swarming over the ramparts.

"Hooray!"

"Grammar School! Grammar——"

The cheers died away in a series of dismal notes. There was no one but themselves within the castle walls.

They had recaptured the castle, but from no one, as far as they could see.

"My—my hat!"

"Great Scott!"

They stood looking blankly at one another. No one had passed Carboy at the head of the lane, he was certain of that. Then where could the enemy be?

Frank Monk suddenly gasped.

"Look—look at that!"

The others stared at a piece of paper which had been pinned to a home-made notice-board very much the same size and shape as the one they had manufactured to warn the college fellows they were not to cross the line in the lane.

Like their own notice, too, the collegians had worded their message briefly:

"St. Jim's Toboggan Run. As an act of kindness and charity Grammarians will be allowed to use the run, it being understood that the word 'achtung' (English—Beware) be used to warn others of an approach.—BY ORDER."

Frank Monk and the others stood looking at that notice for quite a long time without any of them speaking. Still, it was not the notice which troubled them so much. It was their taking the castle when there had been no one to take it from.

The idea of such carefully carried out plans of a three-sided attack being simply wasted time upset the Grammarians.

Monk wetted his lips.

"Can't—can't we carry it off somehow, chaps?"

"How?"

"I—I don't quite know, but——"

Carboy tried to brighten up.

"Couldn't we bluff a bit—pretend we weren't surprised; I mean, say nothing about—about attempting to rush the beastly castle."

Almost as the words left his lips he knew they could not, for some loud chuckles sounded behind him.

"Hah, hah, hah! Bai Jove! Hah, hah, hah!"

They all wheeled round instantly.

Tom Merry, Jack Blake, Figgins and Arthur Augustus were a few yards down the run, in the act of dragging their toboggans from the ditch where they had evidently been concealed.

It upset Frank Monk a great deal to think that he and his division must have crept cautiously past the ambushed enemy as they came up the lane.

Tom Merry grinned broadly.

"Nice day for—wheezes," he said, apparently addressing the air. "You want to keep your eyes open for that game though."

"Yaas, wathah; you want to be weady and prepared for anythin', bai Jove."

"Still, they're young."

"Hah, hah, hah!"

And without another word the college juniors tobogganed down the run. Frank Monk watched, hands in pockets.

"All right, Merry," he muttered. "We'll see, my son. You think you've scored this time."

"He has," muttered Carboy. "He's scored jolly well—about six up before half-time, I should say."

"Yes; but there's a second half," exclaimed Frank Monk, speaking in simile for once in his life. "You never know what's going to happen after the breather. Ignore the young rotters for a start."

"What's the good of that?"

"It puzzles them, and besides, it may help us to get even with them later. I suppose they've been tobogganing all the time we—we were bringing off the attack."

"Of course they have," growled Carboy. "Only using half the run so that we couldn't see them, I suppose. Monk, it's up against us to pull them off their perch, and if we don't do it we'll slay you."

Frank Monk gritted his teeth.

"There'll be no need to slay me," he said tensely. "Even if you could," he added. "But you'll see."

And they, too, joined in the toboggan runs, taking part in one of the most enjoyable Saturday afternoons spent for a long time.

They stuck to their guns in the matter of ignoring the college juniors, although Carboy more than once wanted to throw the idea overboard. The continuous chuckles of the enemy whenever a fellow wearing a Grammar School cap approached, made him wish to say things.

CHAPTER 12.

Two Letters.

"BAI Jove, deah boys, I considah we have had a wippin' day!"

"Oh, we have, kids!" yawned Jack Blake, stretching himself, while Tom Merry, a guest at Study No. 6, poked the fire into a blaze. "A right down rattling day. I sha'n't forget old Monkey's face when he found the castle they'd retaken hadn't anybody to defend it. He looked as if he had got very near the outside edge in things."

"Yaas, wathah."

"Oh, it was great!" agreed Tom Merry. "Gussy, it was a rattling idea of yours—AI."

Arthur Augustus went pink with unaccustomed praise. He was a man of many ideas, but as a rule only a few of them succeeded in the end. His idea about leaving the castle undefended had succeeded, though, and the others were ready enough to congratulate him.

"Yes, Gussy, you surpassed yourself," said Figgins, lazily stretching his long legs half across the mat. "You ought to surpass yourself more frequently."

"Yaas, wathah! though as a wule you won't listen to my ideahs, deah boys. I considah you make a gweat mistake in not listening to my ideahs, and in future——"

"Don't get a swelled head, kid."

"Weally, Figgay, I wathah think I am not in the wotten habit of gettin' a swelled head."

"I was only advising you for your good, Gussy," said Figgins solemnly.

"Yaas, wathah; and I suppose I ought to thank you, but in the circs. I wathah considah you were off your horse, deah boy."

"Yes; but I'm on those nuts Herries is sneaking at a good bit over the speed limit."

"They are for Towser, Figg; Towser likes nuts."

"Does he, bai Jove!"

"Blake, Herries is sneaking the nuts for Towser."

"Herries can go in a home," answered the chief of the School House juniors firmly. "Think I'm going to buy chestnuts for a mongrel bull-terrier half-bred wolfhound of cat eating——"

"You leave Towser alone, Blake."

"Bai Jove, I wathah think he isn't touchin' the vicious bwute. I considah my fwiend Blake has more sense than to go neah Towzah, let alone touch him."

"You always were a silly ass, Gussy."

"Yaas, wathah—I mean, I must request you not to chawactahwise me in that widiculous mannah, deah boy. Bai Jove, I'm worn out."

The others laughed, and conversation went on in that pleasant, desultory manner a big fire, chestnuts steaming on the bars, and bodily fatigue engender.

Though not exactly "worn out," they were all particularly tired after their first day's winter sports, and now preparation for the following Monday was over, they had an hour to themselves in the study, with no other light than the blazing wood fire gave.

"Poor old Monkey!" grinned Tom Merry again. "He must have felt fed!"

"Ha, ha, ha! You bet he did!"

"We fairly turned the tables on him. I expect he's squirming a bit just now."

"And Carboy and Lane."

"Yaas, wathah; all the w'etched crowd of them."

"Serve the cocky young kids right!" laughed Blake. "Do 'em no end of good. Hallo! Come in!"

"Many happy returns of the day, Taggles!"

"Yaas, Taggles, deah boy; pway accept my best wishes and greetings."

"Dear old Taggles—if only it weren't for his face!"

"There's more face than Taggles, really."

"Poor old Taggles!"

Taggles, the school porter, came into the room and snuffed. His red face was redder than usual, and there was a trifle more pungent odour of gin and water about him than customary, which is not saying a little.

He looked at them sadly.

"When you grow up, which it will be a mercy if you don't, you'll know better than to insult a honest, 'ardworking man. Which if you don't, I'm that sorry for you I can't find words to express myself in. Which is surprising in me——"

"It is, Taggles."

"He's leaving us—Taggles is leaving us!"

"Which I am, and main glad to get out o' sight of your cheeky young faces!" snapped the porter. "Two letters for you."

"Hooray!" cheered Jack Blake. "Come here, Dig, not so much of it. One for you, Gussy!"

"Foah me, deah boy; wippin'—it's fwiend Cousin Ethel."

"Hooray—the other's for young Merry!"

"It is, young Blake!" exclaimed Tom Merry for himself.

"Hand it over, then—Hallo!"

"What's up?"

"Seem to know the writing. My—my hat!"

"What's the rag?"

"Out with it, Merry!"

"Yes, but—it's from Frank Monk, you fellows!" said the hero of the Shell hastily. "Only a short note. The Grammar School challenge us to play them at hockey on the ice if the Mere holds by Monday afternoon."

"My hat! But we've never played hockey on the ice!"

"None of us, I should say."

"No; that's the point," exclaimed Tom Merry. "They have played—quite a lot last winter, while we were home for the holidays. They became rather dukes at the game."

"Yes; I remember hearing about them. How does the challenge run?"

Tom Merry handed the letter across to Jack Blake, and the School House Fourth-Former read it aloud.

"Dear Sir,—It has occurred to me that should the ice be holding by Monday afternoon—I understand you are free after three o'clock!—that a match between the Grammar School and St. Jim's at hockey on the ice might help on the cause of sport in the county."

"I am aware, of course, that the game will be quite new to you, but I have no objection to your including seniors in your ranks. An early reply will oblige."

"Yours truly,

"(Signed) FRANK MONK."

Jack Blake banged the letter down on the table.

"Of all the blessed cheek!"

"About including seniors in the team, you mean?"

"Of course, Merry; as if we couldn't massacre anything the Grammar School can put out at any game under the sun. My hat, this is the limit!"

"Yaas, wathah! I considah it weckless of Fwank Monk to write a lettah like that. He is winning a gwave wisk——"

"Of getting as many thick ears as he could take," finished Figgins. "You know what brought this challenge, kids?"

"The rumpos about the toboggan run to-day."

"Yes; that's it."

"But what's to be done?" asked Herries. "We can't ignore it, although it would serve them right for ignoring us."

"Yes, it would serve the kids right; but we couldn't do it," said Tom Merry thoughtfully.

"What are we to do, then?"

"Play them, of course."

"Y-yes; but they'll whack us—I mean——"

They all stared at Herries, Arthur Augustus screwing his monocle deep into his eye.

"Weally, Hewwies, your remark wequires some explanation, deah boy."

"Oh, go and eat coke!"

"Weally, Hewwies, you bewildah me."

"Well, don't be an ass, then. I mean, they've played dozens of times, and we haven't played at all. We could scarcely expect to whack them."

Arthur Augustus stared at him again.

"Weally, deah boys," he exclaimed at last, turning to the others. "I am afraid Towzah has contwacted wabies and has bitten my fwiend Hewwies."

"Oh, don't cackle, you two!" cut in Tom Merry quickly.

"Of course we must play them, and of course we must whack them. Here, don't talk to me for a minute. I'll see if I can't stir up old Monkey's blood for him."

There was silence in the room for a moment or two, during which Tom Merry wrote, and Arthur Augustus read his letter from Cousin Ethel. Figgins watched the swell of the School House.

There was not a keener sportsman in St. Jim's than Figgins, the staunch New House fellow; but somehow he was not thinking of the challenge at that moment. Although he was scarcely aware of it, his mind dwelt more on Arthur Augustus reading his cousin's letter; but it may have only been the glow from the smouldering log on the fire which deepened the colour on his face. Whatever was the cause, no one noticed, perhaps not even Figgins himself.

Presently Tom Merry flung down his pen.

"There!" he exclaimed. "Listen to this:

"Dear Sir,—Letter to hand. Shall be pleased to play you at hockey on the ice at three-fifteen Monday, if the ice is holding."

"We do not quite understand your remark about the inclusion of seniors in the side to represent St. Jim's—possibly this is humour, but more probably it is a hint that you would like to bring some old boys or masters into your team yourself. If that is the case, you have our permission to include half a dozen players from Prince's in town, or the greater portion of a crack Swiss hotel team if you wish to."

"(Signed) TOM MERRY."

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 99.

A Grand Tale of Tom Merry & Co. By Martin Clifford.

NEXT THURSDAY:

"KILDARE, OF ST. JIM'S."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Think it will do?"

"Yes, rippingly; fairly stir old Monkey up!" laughed Jack Blake. "Couldn't have worded it better myself."

"No," said Tom Merry simply; "you couldn't. I'll see that this goes off by to-night's post."

"Yaas, wathah; I considah it a wemarkably good lettah, deah boy. This othah lettah is fwom Cousin Ethel."

"So you said, Gussy; how—how is she?"

Arthur Augustus glanced from the letter to Figgins and back again.

"She doesn't say; but I expect she is quite well, because she says I am to wish to her on Monday mornin' if the mere is holdin'. She means to come ovah with her bwotahh for the skatin'!"

"Hoojollyray! This is ripping news."

"Yaas, Tom Mewwy; I considah it wipping news myself, deah boy. Cousin Ethel wishes to be wemembahed to you, Blake."

"Good!"

"And to Tom Mewwy—Hah, hah, hah!—with a note saying she twusts he won't catch cold now the coldah weathah is heah."

"Wait until I see Cousin Ethel!" grinned Tom Merry.

"Then she wishes to be wemembahed to all the othahs—Digbay, Hewwies—all of them."

"Any—any other news?"

It was Figgins who was speaking, a world of carelessness in his voice.

"No, nothin' particulah about anythin' else. Oh, Cousin Ethel wants to be wemembahed to you as well, Figgay, and thanks you for that book you lent her, and which she says is wipin'! She is goin' to bring it back on Monday."

"Oh, there's no hurry!" said Figgins, and it may have been the fire glow again, but the Now House junior's face certainly went a deep red this time.

All the pleasant laziness which had been so noticeable before in Study No. 6 had gone now.

Once again the great rivals of St. Jim's and the Grammar School would meet, and at a new sport, and once again they would all meet their girl-chum, Cousin Ethel. That is if only the frost would last.

"Bai Jove, what a wegulah sell it will be if a wotten thaw sets in! I weally considah it is warnah now than it was this aftahnnoon, deah boys!"

"Ass! You were rolling in snow this afternoon, and you are in front of a fire now."

"Bai Jove, I nevah thought of that! Where are you goin', Figgay, deah boy?"

"To see if it's freezing, kid," answered the New House junior, flinging up the window. "My hat, yes!"

"It is?"

"Rather, Merry. Hooray, we shall have skating on Monday, you see if we don't!"

"Bai Jove, won't it be wipin'!"

And that was the opinion of all the others, but they did not express it.

Work had to be done before they retired to bed that Saturday night: the fellows had to be told about the hockey, and skates had to be unseathed from the bottom of boxes and cleaned.

The chums and rivals of Study No. 6 worked right up to the minute the dormitory bell sounded.

CHAPTER 13.

Hockey on the Ice.

THE frost which had commenced somewhere in the middle of the Friday night gradually became keener all through the quiet St. Jim's Sunday, and directly the fellows opened their eyes on the following morning they knew there would be skating on the Mere.

Tom Merry flung up his window.

"Freezing like the poles, you fellows!" he exclaimed.

"Absolutely not a sign of a thawing wind!"

"Good hearing!"

"And it'll be good skating, too," went on Tom Merry. "Jolly lucky it didn't start to freeze before the snow had done falling. We should have had a rotten surface then."

"It'll be good enough now, anyway!" exclaimed Manners. "I say, no playing about in class to-day or some of us will get gated."

"My hat, we mustn't forget that!"

They dressed hurriedly and made their way downstairs. The Terrible Three were anxious about the letters that morning. Would there be one from Monk, of the Grammar School?

In the hall they stopped Taggles.

"No, Master Merry, there isn't a letter for you, but there's a postcard."

"Hand it over, then!"

"Which I shall do nothing of the sort, seeing you aren't supposed to have your letters until breakfast is over."

"Try the magic effect of sixpence, someone," said Lowther.

"It has been known to work even on Taggles."

THE GEM-LIBRARY.—No. 99.

NEXT
THURSDAY:

"KILDARE, OF ST. JIM'S."

A Grand Tale of Tom Merry
& Co. By Martin Clifford.

"You, Manners; I haven't anything smaller than a bob."

"That would do as well," grinned Lowther. "You ask Taggles."

Tom Merry did nothing of the sort, but sixpence changed hands, and a moment later so did a postcard. Tom Merry took one glance at the few words scrawled across the back.

"It's all right, kids; Monk will have his cripples on the ice at three-fifteen."

"Good!"

"What team are you playing, Tommy?"

"Oh, the usual footer men!" answered the Shell fellow quickly. "Most of them are fair hockeyites, and we can all skate. I don't see any sort of use going to the others."

"No, rather not."

"Of course we shall have to experiment as to places—but we'll decide that later. Let's go and see if Blake and his rabbits are out of their sleeping compartments yet."

"Right-ho!"

They scudded along the corridor and found the chums of Study No. 6 entering that famous room. Frank Monk's postcard was greeted with enthusiasm.

"Ripping!" was the general verdict.

"Yaas, wathah!" added Arthur Augustus. "I considah we shall have a wipin' afternoon altogethah; the only thin' that's worryin' me is that we shall be in hockey things, and so can't vewy well take Cousin Ethel wound the wing of skatahs aftahwards."

"Humph! Never thought of that!"

"Well, I did," exclaimed Jack Blake. "I propose we just play in ordinary knickerbockers."

"Yes, we can do that, of course," said Tom Merry doubtfully. "But won't it give Monk's cripples an advantage if they are in hockey things?"

"Don't see it; we aren't likely to suffer from the heat with ten degrees or so of frost, kid!"

"Bai Jove, no! I nevah thought of that. I pwopose that Jack Blake's ideah be accepted, and that it is voted a wattlin' suggestion."

"Right-ho! It will be a bit of a blow for Monk if we could manage to beat them dressed in ordinary things. Look well for St. Jim's, anyway."

"Bai Jove, I nevah thought of that eithah!"

"Good for Blake," said Manners. "I'll take my camera down to the ice and get some ripping snapshots—I say, it's going to be great."

Gradually the enthusiasm was worked up as the hours slipped by, and the desperate efforts the juniors made to keep it within bounds in class must have amused the more observant of the masters. There were one or two rather narrow escapes, but when the dismissal bell sounded at three o'clock no one was in detention.

A general rush for the mere was at once initiated.

Tom Merry led the way, skates under one arm and hockey stick under the other.

"Monkey is already on the ice—doing the outside edge there!" he exclaimed. "My hat, look at their swaggor blazers!"

"And new caps, too; they've all got new caps!"

"So they have, Figgay. Come on!"

The seats round the mere were pretty full by now, but the St. Jim's juniors did not mean to wait their turn. They dropped down on the snow and fastened on their skates with furious haste.

They could see from where they were sitting that Frank Monk, as the home captain, had "marked" out the ground by sweeping thrice with a stiff broom, and had fixed the goal posts, two short sticks with flat pieces of wood nailed at the bottom. Arthur Augustus looked anxiously across the ice.

"What's that they are knockin' about, deah boys?"

"The ball, ass!"

"Weally, Hewwies, pway don't be widiculous! They are knockin' a small square of wood about, deah boy!"

"Well, that is the ball, duffer!"

"Pway don't wag; I don't feel in the humouah for wagging."

"Ha, ha, ha! Jolly fine ice hockeyman you are to think they play with a ball! I say, Tommy, they can stick up on their feet some!"

Tom Merry nodded. The Grammar School fellows certainly were standing up well as they knocked the "ball" from one to another, and they were hitting well, too.

Tom Merry could skate, and so could all the others, and they could knock a hockey ball or a piece of wood about just as well as the Grammarians, but whether they would be as successful when combining the two, remained to be seen.

Presently Tom Merry jumped up.

"Oh, we shall be all right, kids; you know your places! Look sharp!"

He clambered down to the ice and dashed away, and an instant later Figgins was after him.

Coming across the Mere was Cousin Ethel with her brother,

Captain Cleveland. The captain caught sight of the juniors first.

"There's young Merry, begad, Ethel, and Figgins! How d'you do, lads, how d'you do?"

The juniors shook hands with Cousin Ethel, then the captain seized them by the hands.

Cousin Ethel laughed as Arthur Augustus and all the others came up at a furious pace.

"How do you do, Arthur—and all of you?" she laughed, her pretty eyes showing the pleasure she felt at seeing her St. Jim's chums again. "I can't remember all your names."

"Oh!"

"Cousin Ethel!"

"Well, I am not going to say them all if I can remember. Isn't this ice splendid?"

"Yaas, wathah! I considah skatin' much bettah than winkin', don't you, Ethel?"

"Better than—"

"Begad—ha, ha, ha! Rinking, yes rather! Jove! There's someone trying to attract your attention, Merry."

"Oh, old Monkey! We must go. We've got to play the Grammar School at hockey."

"That's the style. Come on, Ethel, we must see this, begad!"

The juniors skated away, greeting Frank Monk cheerily.

"Built any more snow castles, kid?"

"Kept any more poor, innocent people off toboggan runs?"

"Got over it?"

Frank Monk grinned.

"Yes, I've got over it," he said. "You'll have something to get over, too, when this match is finished."

"We shall get over the Grammar School all right, Monkey," said Lowther. "Don't you trouble about that."

"I don't think!"

A Grammar School master was to take charge of the game, and he called the fellows to their places. The great rivals, Tom Merry and Frank Monk, went to the centre for the bully-off.

Three times they struck their sticks together, then the square of wood shot away towards the Grammar School goal.

But Lane was ready, and, with a quick turn on one skate, he stopped it.

Tom Merry came on at a tremendous pace, cutting long scratches in the ice as he saw Lane working round to the left. But Lane knew just how long to wait, and sent the "ball" on to Monk at the right moment.

Round on the outside edge skated the captain, then he darted straight ahead for goal.

Herries skated after him, and Digby came on to meet him, but Frank Monk had played hockey on the ice before. He waited before parting with the "ball" until both players were upon him, then he passed out to Carboy.

Taking it on the run, Carboy skated round Manners before Manners had grasped what was happening, and Arthur Augustus was amazed to find that he was beaten.

Carboy had coolly pushed the "ball" over the goal line.

"Bai Jove," gasped the St. Jim's goal-keeper, "this is wotten in the extreme! One up in three minutes, bai Jove!"

"Buck up!" growled Tom Merry. "This won't do!"

He was beaten at the bully-off this time, and the Grammar School forward line swept across the ice, skating beautifully.

Their hockey, of course, was full of faults, but the few games they had played the previous year gave them a wonderful advantage. From the line it looked as if they were simply all over the college juniors.

"Buck up, St. Jim's!"

"Don't go to sleep, there!"

"Oh, do play up!"

The cries were loud and many, but they did no good. The college team were all at sea, and Tom Merry was ready to admit it.

They could not combine skating with hockey at a moment's notice, and their attempt to do so was proving disastrous.

Within another five minutes Monk had scored again, and almost from the bully-off Carboy got through and gave his side a further lead, then he repeated the performance.

Cousin Ethel looked disappointed.

"We shall lose fearfully," she said to her brother. "They are not playing up at all well."

"They're improving, begad!"

"Yes, but—there goes another goal!"

"Humph! Five nothing, begad, at half time. It's not much of a score for hockey on the ice, you know, Ethel. I've seen a team beat another twelve-eleven in Switzerland, begad!"

"Oh, I do hope they play better in the second half."

She watched the teams change ends, anxiety showing on her pretty face.

CHAPTER 14.

Rivals to the Rescue.

"WE'VE got six to get!" Tom Merry spoke grimly as he skated over the ice with Figgins and Jack Blake.

"Shall we do it?"

"Figg, old son, we must do it. Six to get to win, kids."

"Yaas, wathah! I twust you will all play up, deah boys; and mark Monkey, Hewwies, whatevah you do."

"Yes, look after old Monk; he's a demon at ice hockey. Places!"

The St. Jim's fellows dropped back to their respective positions, grim determination on their faces.

If the Grammar School were to have the victory they would have to play hard for it, even with their five goals lead.

Crack!

Tom Merry and Frank Monk, the great rivals, were taking part in the bully-off again, watching each other like suspicious terriers. For the third time their sticks met, then Tom Merry whipped the "ball" ahead.

He had beaten the Grammar School captain by a fraction of an inch.

"Come on, Blakey!"

But there was no need for Tom Merry to urge on the Fourth-Former. Jack Blake was skating towards the Grammar School goal with every inch of pace he was capable of.

Lane came to the rescue and stopped the "ball" neatly, but he could not stop himself quickly enough. There was a loud scraping sound as he gave the ice his skate broadside. Then Jack Blake swept round in a curve.

He took the ball neatly from Lane's stick, and was away again with a swerve in exactly a opposite direction.

Captain Cleveland became enthusiastic.

"What did I tell you, Ethel? They are coming on. Jack's as good as his master now—and better, begad! Well passed, Blake."

The Fourth-Former had almost gained the striking circle now, and a good many fellows in his position would have attempted to go on. He had quite a good chance of beating the back, travelling at the pace he was.

But Jack Blake saw that Tom Merry was unmarked, that he was dead in front of goal, and that was enough for the chief of Study No. 8.

Swerving to the right he drew the back still further away from the centre, then, with a quick screw pass, pushed the ball in front of Tom Merry.

The Shell fellow went on, and the next moment St. Jim's had secured their first goal at ice hockey.

"Hooray!"

"St. Jim's!"

"Good old Tommy!"

"Good old Blake, the asses mean," grinned Tom Merry, skating back with Jack Blake. "It was your goal all the way, old chap."

"Not it! Buck up, you fellows—we're all out now."

"My hat, yes!"

"They are tiring, too."

"I think it's we're getting better," said Tom Merry. "Honest Injun, I do. They had us on the hop during the first half, but if we play up we'll whack them yet."

Frank Monk gained the advantage at the bully-off this time, and he and Carboy beat the halves well.

The backs defended strenuously, but they could not clear, and Monk found himself in the striking centre with a clear opening.

With a terrific hit he shot for goal.

"Bai Jove!" gasped Arthur Augustus, and he dashed along the line on one skate.

"Begad, splendid—splendid! Well saved, Arthur! What do you think of that, Ethel, begad?"

"He just managed to stop it," said Cousin Ethel calmly. But there was a sparkle in her eyes which showed she was not really as calm as she pretended to be.

Arthur Augustus really had saved well, and what was almost as good, he had cleared.

Figgins had possession now, and with terrific strides the long-legged New House junior skated over the ice.

The half came for him, and Figgins passed, Tom Merry taking up the running.

"Go through, Tommy!"

"On your own, Tom!"

But Tom Merry knew better. He passed to Jack Blake, and Jack Blake passed back again. That was the means of beating another defender.

But the left-back had yet to be rounded, and Tom Merry went on till he was almost upon him, then he gave Figgins his chance.

Figgins took the pass well, caught for a moment the glimpse of Cousin Ethel, her muff held to her face in excitement, then with a thrill the New House fellow dashed on.

He was in the striking circle, a back was coming for him.

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A Grand Tale of Tom Merry & Co. By Martin Clifford.

and he could not see where Tom Merry was. Figgins hesitated for a moment, then stopped almost dead as the back swerved for him.

The back went by, striking vigorously at the ball. But Figgins' stick held it, and Figgins saw the goal. With a good shot he made the score five-two. "Begad, they'll win!" exclaimed Captain Cleveland. "I'm going to the other side, Ethel."

He skated away from his sister, and Cousin Ethel did not think of following. She scarcely noticed that her brother had gone, so exciting had the game become.

There are few sports as fast and full of incident as ice hockey, and with the rivalry as keen as it was between the Grammar School and St. Jim's, play did not slacken for a single instant.

Up and down the ice the fellows skated, making desperate efforts to score, and at last Tom Merry got through again.

Five-three!

The cheering was of a deafening nature. Every St. Jim's fellow on the ground lent his voice to swell the roar.

But there was more to follow, for scarcely had the cheers died away when Jack Blake suddenly dribbled right through the defence, and brought the College score to within a goal of their rivals' tally.

Five-four!

Would they do it?

Captain Cleveland glanced at his watch. "Begad, no! It must be almost time. Well played, Herries—well played, indeed, begad!"

Herries had robbed Frank Monk neatly, and had sent on to Tom Merry. Captain Cleveland stood motionless, watch in hand. There was just time to make a draw of it—anyway, there was if Tom Merry did not waste the precious seconds.

And the Shell fellow did not waste the precious seconds. He was away like a flash, the other forwards following him up grandly. A good pass well taken put Jack Blake within a yard or two of the striking circle.

But he was fearfully hampered, and he was half falling. He would never be able to get round and send a shot in. "Merry!" he gasped. "Tommy!"

"Right-ho, kid!"

A quick movement, and Jack Blake had passed to Tom Merry, then the Shell fellow screwed round on one skate.

"Well scored!"

"Good old Merry!"

"Three of the best for Tommy!"

For, although Tom Merry had gone down with a thud to the ice, he had just managed to get the ball past the Grammar School custodian, and the game was five all.

Five all it would remain, too, for the match was over. There was not even time for the bully-off.

In excitement which bordered on wildness, the spectators skated up to Tom Merry, crowding round him closely.

"Well played, Tommy!"

"Your hand, kid!"

Suddenly a loud, hollow sort of crack rang out. All who have skated much have heard it some time or other, and most remember it because there are few sounds like it, and it can only mean one thing.

The ice was splitting beneath them, and it was small wonder, for there must have been close upon fifty skaters round the hockey players.

"Scatter, scatter, begad!"

It was Captain Cleveland's voice which gave the advice. The only thing to do was for everyone to get away from everyone else as quickly as possible, in order to relieve the ice of their weight.

Wildly the skaters struck out in all directions. Another crack sounded, then one or two more in quick succession, and after that a splash.

"Someone has gone through!"

It was Tom Merry's voice which uttered the words.

The skaters wheeled round, and saw for the first time what they had so narrowly escaped.

There was a large, jagged hole in the ice, through which their own weight was causing the water to wash as though it were tidal.

"But someone has gone through—I tell you I heard the splash!"

Then Figgins uttered a wild shout. "It's Cousin Ethel! That's her muff!"

He dashed wildly forward—too wildly, as it happened, for he slipped on the ice and came down heavily. Tom Merry's face went deathly white.

He skated for the hole in the ice as he had never skated in his life before.

Someone was coming on behind him, but he could not see him. Tom Merry did not trouble to think about that. If it were Cousin Ethel who had fallen through the ice!

Tom Merry was not thinking very clearly at all just then. He only knew he was going into that dark patch of water, and

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that he wasn't coming out again until he had proved Figgins words one way or the other.

"Merry, let me go!"

It was Frank Monk who spoke, his face as white as the St. Jim's juniors.

"I'm in hockey things, man, and you aren't. Don't be an idiot—let me go!"

Tom Merry glanced at his great rival for an instant, but there was enough answer in that single glance for Frank Monk.

"Right-ho!" he gasped. "Together, then!"

That was all they said, and a moment later they deliberately skated into the water.

Many fellows would have hesitated about taking that plunge when the brink was near, but the two rivals never thought about it. It was not that they had more courage than many other juniors, but that they were thinking of something else. It was the fact that Cousin Ethel was under the ice which filled their minds; there wasn't room there for any other thought.

The water was icy cold, almost numbing them for the moment, but that was soon over. Then began an experience which was not forgotten for many a long day, although it could only have lasted a few seconds.

Swimming vigorously hand in hand so as to cover as much space as possible, the pair struggled about under the ice. Keeping their heads as well as possible, they did their best to swim round in a circle.

The seconds slipped by, they were beginning to feel the want of air, when suddenly Frank Monk felt his rival start violently. Tom Merry had grasped someone in front of him.

Frank Monk's eyes were wide open, for he was good in the water, and he was making desperate efforts to locate the break in the ice again.

For an instant he thought he could distinguish a patch to the left which was of different colour from the rest of their ice roof, and he struck out for it, dragging Tom Merry with him.

A few more seconds of suspense, then a loud cheer from voices which seemed miles away.

Frank Monk's head had appeared above the surface of the water!

A moment later Tom Merry came up, and then—Cousin Ethel! Figgins had been right; it was their girl-chum who had fallen through the ice.

It was only to be expected that the wildest confusion followed. Dr. Holmes, the kindly Head-master of St. Jim's, and Mrs. Holmes, came hurrying across the ice in snow-boots, and a way was made for them through the crowd of white-faced skaters.

"Don't keep together, begad!" cried Captain Cleveland suddenly, his face ashen. "Someone else will be through if you do. Is—she all right?"

Then Cousin Ethel answered for herself, for she jumped to her feet with the aid of Figgins.

"Of course I am all right," she said to her brother, and she laughed—but it was rather a shaky laugh.

Mrs. Holmes took charge of the proceedings at once.

"You are to come back to the college house with me instantly, Ethel," she said, for the girl was a great favourite of hers. "How fortunate it is you are to stay with me, and that this is not merely a day visit. Come at once, please!"

Cousin Ethel glanced at Tom Merry and Frank Monk, and both of them looked solemnly down at the ice.

They did not want to be thanked, and they did not mean to be thanked if it could be helped. But, determined as they were, Cousin Ethel looked still more determined.

"I shall be on the ice again within half an hour," she said, laughing quite easily this time, "and I shall expect Tom Merry and Frank Monk to take me round the big ring the moment they see me."

"D-delighted!" murmured Tom Merry.

"R-rather!" muttered Frank Monk, and they fixed their eyes on the ice again.

Then a heavy hand fell on their respective shoulders, and Captain Cleveland's voice broke in quietly:

"I sha'n't forget this, my lads," was all he said. "I sha'n't forget this as long as I live, begad!"

And he skated away after his sister.

Tom Merry and Frank Monk exchanged glances. The St. Jim's junior grinned.

"What-ho!" he said. "Come to the coll. and change, Monkey, and have something warm to drink. We can be back here in ten minutes."

"Thanks awfully, old man."

And the two staunch rivals gained the edge of the Mere, slipped off their skates, and pelted for the college as hard as they could run.

THE END.

[Another splendid tale of St. Jim's next Thursday, entitled "Kildare of St. Jim's," by Martin Clifford. Order your copy of the "Gem" Library in advance. Price One Penny.]

NEXT
THURSDAY:

"KILDARE, OF ST. JIM'S."

A Grand Tale of Tom Merry
& Co. By Martin Clifford.

Please tell your Friends about this Story.

A Powerful War Story—By JOHN TREGELLIS.



BRITAIN'S REVENGE

THE PRINCIPAL CHARACTERS ARE:

AUBREY VILLIERS, nicknamed Sam Slick. A lad who has performed wondrous service for his country in her time of need, during the terrible invasion by the Germans.

STEPHEN VILLIERS, his brother. He is Sam's companion in all his exploits.

The two boys are on their way to Luneville, in France, in a wonderful airship, the Condor, invented by John Carfax, a friend of theirs. The combined British and French forces are cornered at Luneville by the Germans, and there are rumours of a great disaster to the allies.

The Condor sets out to see if she can be of any assistance, and is employed to fetch up two heavy guns from the battle-ships in Dunkirk Roads.

(Now go on with the story.)

Bringing up the Guns.

When Stephen looked at the two huge guns, he could not bring himself to believe the Condor, wonderful machine though he knew her to be, could lift them. Carfax went to his post on the bridge, looking grave and silent.

Very gently the mechanism was started, and the fans began to whirl. It increased till the airship was using her utmost power, and the vibration of the engines was tremendous. Still she did not move.

Then, very slowly and slightly, she began to lift. A cheer rang through the dockyard. Foot by foot the Condor mounted, alighting gently. She put out every jot of her mighty strength, but instead of the usual lightning-like rush into the upper air, she was crawling up as slowly as if somebody were hauling her by hand. Her whole fabric groaned and quivered.

"She rises!" cried the French captain. "Bravo! Give them the Navy's greeting at Luneville, Monsieur Carfax! You will soon see the Prussians' backs!"

Carfax waved his hand, but did not answer. His face was very rigid, and rather pale, as though he were feeling the pangs his airship seemed to suffer. Would she succeed?

The aeronaut did not mean to waste her power by mounting any higher than he need. He kept her going till he knew she was far up enough to clear the Ardennes, which would have to be crossed on the way.

"She's rising steadily!" said Sam, in delight. "It's like a miracle!"

"Yes, but if she can go no faster than this, the journey'll take her a week," said his brother.

As soon as the aeroplane was high enough, however, Stephen saw he was wrong. It was the rising skywards that was so difficult. Once well up, she could travel along parallel with the earth at a good pace, and she began to do so. Soon, with her engines at full power, she was going nearly half as fast as her old free pace.

"She'll do it!" cried Stephen joyfully. "Du Plessay will get his guns, and we're safe!"

"At a price," replied Carfax grimly; but he would say no more.

It was a laborious journey enough, and all were dead-tired. The Condor seemed to feel it as much as any of them; she was like a living thing. The guns filled up the alleys, and were terribly in the way; the deck-houses were packed with shells, so that to rest was impossible, and the night wore slowly on. But still the gallant airship drove her way steadily onwards.

"The day's breaking!" said Hugh, pointing to the lightening eastern sky ahead.

"We're late, then. Where are we now?" said Sam wearily.

The light grew fast, and the cold winter dawn lit up the scene. The fields were powdered with a light covering of snow, and right ahead lay Metz once more.

The Condor steered to the south, meaning to take no risks from the new range-finders in the German army till she had got rid of her load. The light grew better after Metz was left behind, and presently the sound of heavy firing was heard in front.

"Von Ritter's big guns are at it already!" said Stephen.

"See, the two armies are coming in sight!"

"Are those the Germans?" exclaimed one of the French naval gunners, who had been sleeping as he lay on the barrel of his beloved weapon. "Peste! Let us at them! Pierre, wake up! Yonder's the enemy's fleet!"

The rival army corps were engaged in a furious artillery duel, which had started with the first blink of daylight, and from aloft it was easy to see that, unless help arrived quickly, the fate of the French and British defenders was

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NEXT
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sealed. The big field-guns on Von Ritter's side, out of reach of any of the French artillery, were doing deadly work. The Condor, however, put fresh heart into the allies as she came slowly circling round their rear.

Kenneth came out of the engine-room with a grave face, and Carfax turned anxiously towards him, seeing he had bad news.

"She'll just about reach the ground, and that's all," said Kenneth gloomily. "Engines have cracked up, and the whole fabric of her is giving under the strain. You won't know her for the Condor when she's cleared of this freight."

The boys saw Carfax turn pale—almost the only emotion they had ever seen him show. He bit his lip till the blood came.

"Well," he said, with a sigh, "I have kept my promise to Du Plessay, and we must hope for the best. They are signalling to us yonder."

Right at the back, on a shrubby ridge, far behind the rearmost part of the French position, a signaller was waving his flags to the Condor. She veered towards him, and the engineer and artillery staff were seen gathered beside two great emplacements and mountings, which had been prepared for the naval guns.

"What, right back here!" exclaimed Stephen. "We're a quarter of a mile behind our army!"

"Yes, out of reach of any gun the Germans have, and we'll soon see them shift out of that," said Carfax grimly. "Down with her, there!"

Never was the Condor brought to the ground so slowly. Only her commander knew how badly she was damaged. She groaned like a human being when once she was on the ground and the strain released, and a great cheer went up as the engineers and staff saw the guns.

"What, you've got them, then!" cried the brigadier, galloping up on a lathered horse. "Carfax, you're the most wonderful man in the world! I greet you as the saviour of my brigade. The cursed Germans are wiping us out, and we could not touch them; but now—"

"Now the boat is on the other leg," said Carfax. "Quick as you can with those lifts!"

Two immense pairs of lifting "shears"—tripods with pulley tackle at their heads—had been made ready by the side of the emplacements, to lift the guns. The first one was brought slowly up, and in ten minutes it was in its place, with a dozen skilled men working at lightning speed to get it properly fixed and mounted for action.

The other gun soon followed, and a fatigue-party were hastily unstacking the shells from the Condor's deck-houses, and placing them handy. The two naval gunners superintended the work, knowing exactly how the great weapons should be laid, and all hands worked with feverish haste.

"There's more help coming!" cried Stephen, pointing far back to the southward, where two great columns of mounted men, thousands strong, could be seen coming rapidly towards the French position.

"Those are the cavalry and mounted infantry levies," said Du Plessay. "But for these guns, they would have been little use, for the cavalry can only break a wavering foe, and not win a battle unaided. But now you shall see Von Ritter brought to a reckoning!"

Long before the reinforcements arrived, the two naval guns were at work. It was high time, for the havoc done already by the German long-range guns was dreadful. Two of Du Plessay's field batteries were annihilated utterly, and shrapnel was being hurled at the British and French trenches with deadly effect. It was easy to see how completely the German batteries were masters of the situation, so far.

"My poor fellows!" groaned Du Plessay, as he saw the slaughter among his lines. "Quick, men, with those guns!"

The first of the two great naval weapons was ready. The long shell was in the breech, and the gunner, smart and alert in his blue naval uniform, was laying his range-finder coolly and quickly.

The position of the chief German long-range battery was known to a foot. Du Plessay and his staff were watching it eagerly through their glasses, when the seaman-gunner fired the first shot.

Boom! roared the huge gun. Zoo-oo-oo-oo-wop! sang the 300-pound shell, as it sped across the valley. Then came a violent puff of deep yellow smoke at the point where the German battery was, as the great shell struck.

"Wiped out!" cried Sam. "Guns and men are down!"

The seaman, with his staff of artillery helpers, reloaded quickly and coolly. He had scored with the very first shot. To one used to naval gunnery and distances, shooting on land is easy work. The German battery that had dealt such havoc was now a pile of steel wreckage and dead men.

Hardly had the fumes risen, when the second gun spoke. It took two shots to reach the next of Von Ritter's two-gun batteries; but that, too, shared the fate of the first. In

two minutes more the last of the three, which was better masked than the others, was also a thing of the past, and its artillerymen lay dead.

Such a sudden change was amazing to both sides. Those two huge 9.2 guns were far more superior to all Von Ritter's together, as his own long-range batteries had been to Du Plessay's field-guns.

Once the larger German weapons were silenced, Von Ritter's field-batteries were an easy prey, for the closely-placed German guns were wiped out five and six at a time by the devastating 300-pound naval shells. Shift and gallop as they would, the batteries were coolly and quietly picked out, and destroyed utterly.

Meanwhile, Du Plessay's field-guns, being free from attack, galloped closer in, and began to rake the German infantry lines from end to end with tremendous effect. The 9.2's as well, now that there were no more batteries to destroy, loaded with shrapnel, and dealt appalling destruction among the Prussian trenches and reserves. Manœuvre as Von Ritter might, he could not hold out against the attack. His forces were becoming rapidly demolished, and their losses were terrible.

"They're breaking! See where they fall back!" cried Stephen, wild with excitement.

"Look! All our mounted infantry has worked round on their right flank, and are raking them with a cross-fire!" exclaimed Sam. "The time's nearly due!"

"What time?"

"To fling that cavalry brigade right into Von Ritter's breaking army, split it in two, and win the day!"

Du Plessay, who had sent many gallopers out with messages, and was watching with keen excitement, heard the words.

"Yes," he said, "the time is at hand!"

"A cavalry charge right across the plain!" cried Stephen. "Can't we go, too, sir? I'd give my head to ride with the squadrons!"

Du Plessay spared him a quick glance, and laughed.

"I can refuse you nothing," he said. "You will find remounts by the waggons yonder. Take your choice of a brace of them, and mount; but you will have to make haste!"

Sam and Stephen, mad with excitement, rushed out across the open, and took the first mounts that came to hand, while the bugles, ringing clear above the roar of the guns, called the great brigade of cavalry to ride to death or victory.

Victory.

Sam and Stephen scrambled into their saddles just as the French Cuirassiers were spurring ahead. There was no time to lose. Sam's horse was a tall bay, and Stephen's a powerful dun, with a great bull-like head and immense shoulders. It had belonged to a Dragoon officer who had been shot by Prussian snipers.

Neither of the boys attempted to choose their horses—they took the first available, and by luck the choice was good. Sam snatched the heavy Dragoon sabre from the orderly, and Stephen, jerking his mount round, dashed out with no weapon except the revolver in his side-holster, and his carbine, now useless, slung across his back.

"Let's get alongside 'em! They're going to charge!" he cried, spurring out towards the cavalry brigade.

"They've got to get round the flank of the batteries first!" called Sam, galloping after him. "Stick close to my left, and I'll cover you all I can. Will you have my sabre?"

"No; I can't use the thing!" Stephen replied. "I'll guard myself with the carbine—don't you bother about me!"

"You'll find it hotter stuff than you think when the fun begins," said Sam. "Come up, you brute! We're in for it!"

"I don't care if it's our finish. I mean to ride with the brigade!" said Stephen, who was mad with excitement at the turn events had taken. "It was our guns that broke Von Ritter, an' now we'll be in at the death at any cost! Come on!"

Sam needed no urging. The brigade wheeled, and as its leading troop swung past at a gallop, the boys cut across the rough ground and ranged up alongside it, dashing away level with the front ranks. The nearest Cuirassiers, seeing them, gave a cheer.

"Vivent les anglais! Come along, my young scouts, we'll show you a new trick!"

"Ventre Saint Gris," exclaimed the grizzled old colonel of the leading regiment, glancing at Sam and Stephen, "the youngsters can ride!"

At a hand-gallop the brigade swept away to the right, two thousand hoofs drumming sharply on the turf, while in

front the guns were still spouting away at Von Ritter's forces.

Not a single piece of field-artillery was left to the Germans, their batteries were all silenced, and the shrapnel fire of Du Plessay's guns was pouring into their infantry lines without cease.

The Germans were demoralised, and were breaking fast. The moment had arrived to use the French cavalry, and it wheeled right round in a wide circle to pass at the back of the big mounted infantry force, whose men were lying behind the long ridges to the right and pouring a devastating cross-fire into the Germans, while their horses were being held below the ridge out of harm's way, a man from each section holding his comrades' horses while they themselves were in the firing-line.

"Aren't we going straight at 'em?" cried Stephen to his brother.

"Directly we're clear of our own side they'll send us at Von Ritter," said Sam; "we're at him now, for that matter. Look, the riflemen have done their work—the guns are ceasing, too!"

The two great naval 9.2's were dumb. The truth was, they had fired their last round. Only a limited number of shells had the Condor been able to bring, and well was their work done; but now they were used up.

Had Von Ritter known that, he might have replaced his forces, and possibly swamped the French yet. But he had no means of knowing; and it looked as if the guns were ceasing fire because the cavalry were coming between them and the Germans. Du Plessay's field-batteries followed suit, holding their fire, and the final raking volleys of the mounted infantry threw the Germans into still greater confusion. Now that the brigade was nearer, the enemy's loss was seen to be tremendous—far greater than anyone had supposed. The moment had come!

"Charge!" rang the bugles, clear and loud, amid the hiss and spatter of the bullets.

Sam and his brother shook out loose reins and struck home their spurs. With a roar of beating hoofs the brigade swept out across the open plain.

It was a magnificent charge, deftly delivered, and exactly at the right time. The French light cavalry are world-famous, and never did they charge more brilliantly. They flew over the ground, strewn with shell-fragments, lumpers, and dead men, in perfect order, as if at review—two flying columns of fine-bred horses, flashing sabres, and light blue-and-silver uniforms, for the French were wearing no khaki Service kit, as our men do.

The wind whistled in the ears of the boys as they sped onwards, and their light weights enabled them to keep station at the front with the foremost flyers. A sharp but ragged fire met them from the Germans, and trooper after trooper bit the dust; but there were neither batteries nor machine-guns to mow them down wholesale, and the brigade came on relentlessly.

So far round on the German flank had it come before charging, that it had no great distance to go. The great body of light horse seemed to eat up the ground as it rolled towards the Germans, who were rapidly forming up to meet it.

The French were upon them before the demoralised enemy could properly form squares, and the shock of the collision was tremendous. Sam and Stephen, riding knee to knee, hardly knew how they got through. There was a wild shouting, a crash of steel, and Sam laid about him madly with the sabre, while Stephen emptied the first four chambers of his revolver in as many seconds.

It was a battalion of Prussian riflemen that they encountered first, and the enemy's front crumpled like paper. A bayonet thrust upwards passed under Sam's arm, ploughing the skin, and next moment he had ridden over the man who used it, missing him completely with the sabre. He had just time to turn aside another bayonet-thrust, and his blade took the next man full in the apple of the throat. Stephen, on his right, was untouched.

Of what was happening, the boys could see little. The great brigade, however, tore clean through the German force, splitting it in two, as Du Plessay meant they should. Then each half of the brigade turned separate ways, branching off like forked lightning, and went through the broken battalions like fire through stubble.

Much of the German force had already been in retreat to seek a position further back, and it was badly caught. Von Ritter found his army torn from its place as a plant is torn up from the roots, and scattered far and wide by the terrible light Cuirassiers, which have no equal in Germany.

After the first rush through, Sam found himself within a sword's length of his brother, and riding straight at a huge Prussian Grenadier, who had come scatheless through the charge of the troopers ahead, and had felled two of them. His bayonet was broken off short at the locking-ring, and he wielded his rifle over his head like a club and faced Sam

with a roar of rage. The bay-horse swerved, and reared right up on end as the rifle-butt missed Sam by a hair's breadth and came across its withers with a rousing thud.

Sam's fierce return stroke with the sabre was caught just in time on the lock of the rifle, and before he could raise it again a second Grenadier just behind was in the act of thrusting, when the last shot from Stephen's revolver brought him down, singeing Sam's face, but saving him from being spitted like a grouse. A wrecked battery lay just ahead, with half a score of Prussian artillerymen lying dead among its ruins, and Sam's bay, leaping a dismantled gun in its stride, carried him, with the rest of the foremost troop, right into the thick of a corps of Bavarian riflemen, who were rallying in the attempt to make a last stand with the bayonet. There was one final, furious melee, and the Bavarians were flying like leaves before a storm, leaving half their number on the ground. Von Ritter's army, broken and split up, with a front of over a mile, was in full retreat, and beyond all hope of rallying.

As to what followed—the chase by the cavalry squadrons, the cutting-off of the rearmost corps of Germans, the thunder of Du Plessay's guns, which opened fire again and hastened the retreating columns with a storm of shrapnel and drove them pell-mell over the hills as the cavalry drew aside—Sam and Stephen could have told little. It was not only a defeat, but an utter rout, such as they had not seen since Lord Ripley's great victory over the Germans outside London, many weeks before.

"That was the ride of a lifetime!" said Stephen, as he and his brother trotted back at last with the leading troop. "It'd been worth while even if it'd been our last! How have you come through, Sam?"

"Got my arm well scored up by a bayonet," was the reply, "but it's not much more than a graze, and you can tie it up yourself for me when we get back. The surgeons have got their hands full among the infantry corps. The Cuirassiers came off lightly—they've lost very few men, considering."

"They were all over the Germans like a flash of lightning," said Stephen. "Honours are easy. Did you see how splendidly the Gordons took that knoll which the Prussian Fusiliers were trying to hold, just as we charged? Well, it was a cavalry job to-day, and I'd nearly as soon ride with these chaps as with our own Lancers at home, and that's saying something. Look, half of 'em are bein' sent on to harry the retreatin' Germans! But I think we've done our share, an' our mounts are pretty well pumped. Yonder's Du Plessay, sittin' his horse as if it was the day of his life. Should think it was, too!"

Half an hour later, when the French force had bivouacked after the fight—save the mounted infantry, who, being fresh, were sent on to keep Von Ritter on the run—the brigadier rode up and greeted the boys warmly.

"My lads," he said, "a general doesn't admit that a victory's due to anything but his own skill. But I'm going to own up that if it had not been for you and the Condor's guns, the day would not have ended like this, nor should we be the victors. As for you, I saw you ride out with the Cuirassiers, and it was a pretty finish to your day's work."

"We have done nothing worth mentioning, sir," said Sam; "but your men and Stuart-Ogilvie's have seen the German backs, and that's the main thing, of course. I'll bet the Kaiser wishes he had such cavalry as your Cuirassiers! What will happen to Von Ritter now, sir—will he make a stand further back?"

"Not he," replied the brigadier, with a grim smile; "he has had his salad, as we say in France. His force is making for the main German army behind Metz as fast as it can, and his hope of pushing into France by himself is gone."

"And you, sir?" asked Stephen diffidently.

"I, too, shall march to join my own main army, under Marshal Sainte Croix, which is hammering the Germans at Metz. But yonder is your chief, Monsieur Carfax; you will want to rejoin him. I must thank him, and then get 'ahead with my staff. He is not too content, I fear."

The Condor Pays the Penalty.

Carfax was standing near his aeroplane, just ending a consultation with Kenneth and Hugh. He looked grim and gloomy enough, despite the great victory that had just been gained, and Sam had never seen him show so much emotion.

He returned the brigadier's salute, however, and Du Plessay thanked him in a warm and rather florid manner for the part he had taken in gaining them the victory.

"I am only too glad to be of use," said Carfax, "and I congratulate you, brigadier, on your skill and success. Forgive me if I'm rather downcast myself, for this airship is everything to me, and I'm bound up in her. She is disabled, and very badly at that. I thought she would just get the guns here, and no more, and I was right."

"Do you mean the Condor's done for, sir?" cried Sam.

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A Grand Tale of Tom Merry & Co. By Martin Clifford.

NEXT THURSDAY:

"KILDARE, OF ST. JIM'S."

"For the time, at any rate. It is hard to say yet. The weight of those guns, and the great strain on her mechanism and engines, has torn the heart out of her, so to speak."

Du Plessay was profuse in his sorrow and concern, for he saw how much Carfax took it to heart, and apparently the Condor might have made her last voyage. The brigadier hardly realised what that meant, but the boys did.

"Can nothing be done with her, sir?" exclaimed Sam, in consternation. "In England, at your home?"

"She cannot reach England. She is as lame as a winged duck," said Carfax. "She is like a man who has fallen down four flights of stairs, and it is doubtful if she can travel fifty miles without breaking down for good and all."

"My only chance is to take her to Tournay, where are the best electrical workshops and engineering plant in France, and I've no doubt the Government will give me a free hand to take and use what I need."

"You may depend on that!" cried Du Plessay.

"Then, I shall summon from Hampshire her sister airship, the Eaglet, which is not ready for service, but will be able to make the journey over, and bring me the things I want," said Carfax. "At the most hopeful estimate it will take ten days before the Condor is fit for the active life again—and if any fresh mishap occurs before I get back, she will be ruined for ever. But we shall do our best."

"You'll pull her through somehow, sir," said Sam eagerly. "Who doubts it? What a calamity it would be if her services were lost for good! Why, it doesn't bear thinking about! Can Stephen and I do anything?"

"It will be useless your coming with me to Tournay," said Carfax, "you can give no help in reconstructing her, and you would be bored to death there, with nothing to do. Besides, every pound will tell now she is broken down, and the lighter we go the better. Don't think I'm shunting you off, lads," said Carfax earnestly, laying a hand on Sam's shoulder; "you know well how valuable you are to me, and the very hour the Condor's right again, I shall need you to sail with her, and we'll make up for lost time with a vengeance."

"Won't we just!" exclaimed Stephen.

"In the meantime, take a rest, or, if that doesn't suit you, go on to Metz with the brigadier, who, I'm sure, will attach you to his corps for the time. And, now, excuse me, for I must get aboard and to work."

The boys felt almost as gloomy as Carfax for the moment, for it was dismal to think of the Condor being laid by, even for a week. However, there was plenty of work for them in a dozen other directions, and they decided to make the most of it.

"We don't want any rest, sir, work at the front suits us better," said Sam to Du Plessay. "If you think we're worth giving a job to—"

"Morbieu! I believe you are worthy of pretty well any position in my command," said Du Plessay, "and I should be right glad to have you with me. But consider a minute, mes braves. If you go to Metz with me, it will be dull, from your point of view. We shall have very many men engaged, and hosts of cannon and cavalry, it is true. But you do not see much of what is going on, in such work as that."

"We shall sit down in front of each other, and manœuvre, and plan, and fight. Then we shall sit down again, and then fight again, and gradually one will beat the other, perhaps. And always we shall be cannonading each other at four miles' range. That is not exciting, unless one is killed by a piece of shell."

The boys know it well enough. The striving of two great armies, day after day, is a weary business for those who are one of the crowd, and the bigger the operations of war, the less there is to be seen of it.

"Now, you," continued Du Plessay, "like much better the alarms and perils of special expeditions, and scouting, and so on."

"We always get detailed for that when we can, sir," said Stephen; "that's our line!"

"So I have seen," said the brigadier. "Now, I have a job of difficulty and danger for you, and one on which much depends. You will carry your lives in your hands, if you take it—I should warn you."

"It's our business, sir," said Sam, pricking his ears.

"Very well. You see the Vosges Mountains, yonder?" He pointed to the range of craggy blue hills, many reaching to a great height, that bordered the Alsatian frontier, in the eastern distance. "It is a wild country, and peopled by some of the roughest in France. At present, it is under the sway of the Germans."

"What, again, sir?" cried Sam.

"Not as this place was, by a whole army. It's quite another matter. But irregular corps of Germans, with a great many of the Uhlan lancers and scouts, have poured into it and taken possession. We cannot spare a force now to turn them out, but they are holding the countryside in

terror, and riding rough-shod over the mountaineers and peasantry."

"Are they, though?" said Stephen. "I've heard the Vosges mountaineers are hard folk to cross."

"That is so, and there's a great deal of trouble. It's guerilla warfare—you know what that means. The Germans are holding the district with a small force, and making ready against the coming of their herds when the right time comes."

Sam nodded.

"They hold St. Dio, which is in our territory, and at the foot of the mountains. The head of the German patrols is one Colonel Hunde—the Black Hound, as the Vosges men call him—Le Chien Noir. He is trying to grind down the spirit of the brave mountaineers, he and, his Uhlans—you know what Uhlans are!" added Du Plessay grimly.

"Only too well!" growled Sam; "yes, sir, what then?"

"What I want you to do—if you are willing—is to ride into that country, and make yourselves acquainted with all that is going on—outwit the Uhlans. Let me know how strong the Black Hound is, what he is doing, and what force will be needed to march against him and wipe him out, Uhlans and all."

"We'll do that for you, sir!" said Sam eagerly. "Eh, Steve? You shall have the report in two days, or less."

"When I have it, a corps either of mine—or, better, of Stuart-Ogilvie's gallant Highlanders, who are the very men for the job up yonder, will be sent against the Germans there, and you will supply all intelligence work, and act as guides."

"We'll ride for the mountains in half an hour, sir," said Stephen; "and, thank you, brigadier, for it's a job that will suit us down to the ground!"

"Then go, and good luck to you!" said Du Plessay. "There are no others of your age, or anything like it, that I could send on such a mission, but I know there are none who can achieve a piece of dangerous scouting-work like you. Only, beware of the Black Hound's teeth, for he is a man without pity or mercy, and he has a free hand in the Vosges."

"We'll slip through his teeth, and let you know how they should be drawn," said Sam, smiling grimly; "we'll be in the Vosges by nightfall, sir. Perhaps we can join one of the messes for some grub?"

There was not a mess in the whole army corps that would not have been proud to have the two young scouts as guests, and, wishing to waste no time, the boys accepted the invitation of the nearest. They messed with the gunners, the young French artillery officers complimenting Sam profusely on his handling of the galloping Maxam. After a rough, but satisfying meal, eaten in the open as best it could be, and a short rest, the bugles blew the "Assembly," and the army, leaving its wounded with the field-hospitals, prepared to march.

Carfax had done all he could to the Condor, and was on the point of starting for Tournay. He heard the mission the boys were bound upon, and pursed up his thin lips.

"Humph!" he grunted. "I can foresee that, unless you have unusual luck, I shall have no more of your services on the Condor when she's repaired."

"Why, sir?" said Stephen.

"The business you're embarking on now is about the most ticklish you've ever attempted. I wish it were something less perilous, for I should be uncommonly sorry to lose you from my crew. Colonel Hunde and his Uhlans, I can see, are more likely to end your careers than you think for. Well, if you pull through, report to me at Tournay by wire on the 30th. If you don't, I shall know the Black Hound has hanged you."

With which rather grim farewell, but a warm shake of the hand, Carfax took leave of the boys, and a couple of minutes later the Condor, slowly and stiffly, rose from the ground, and crawled on her way to Tournay, like some huge, crippled bird of prey. The boys watched her go in silence.

The French army, with the regiments under General Stuart-Ogilvie, was already on its way. With bands playing, and the stirring lilt of the Gordons' pipes sounding loud at the head, it filed away in columns, and at last disappeared at a sharp quick-step round the slopes to the eastward.

Sam and Stephen, standing by their horses, saw the French rearguard pass out of sight, and then swung themselves rather thoughtfully into their saddles, and set out on their ride to the Vosges Mountains.

"Wonder if we shall see the Condor again?" said Stephen reflectively. "Rather a bird of ill-omen, the chief was today."

"He's very sick at the breaking down, that's why," returned Sam; "but there's some queer work ahead of us,

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NEXT THURSDAY: "KILDARE, OF ST. JIM'S."

A Grand Tale of Tom Merry & Co. By Martin Clifford.

that's sure. It's work I like, all the same, and they say Hundo's Uhlands are extra smart."

"They'll have to be, if they're going to get the better of the Greyfriars Scouts. I'll put my fate in your hands pretty cheerfully, old boy," Stephen answered.

"I know nothing of that Vosges country. We shall have to look extra slippy," said his brother, "our kits are just the thing for scouting, but at close quarters we should cause a dickens of a lot of talk among the French peasants, let alone German soldiers. British cadet uniforms are about as common as Chinese ones in this country. Better shove that great camel of yours into a trot, we've a long way to go, and we must reach the foothills before dark."

The equipment of the boys for the expedition was scanty enough. They each had their next meal—bully beef and biscuit—with them, a water-bottle, and a tin of emergency rations apiece, from the French transport waggons.—Stephen had his never-forsaken carbine and a fresh beltful of cartridges, and Sam his six-shooter and prism field-glasses. It was enough—in fact, they had taken the field with less many a time. The time was not much after noon, and for several hours they rode at an easy pace.

"We shall probably get decently treated by the peasants an' mountaineers," said Stephen. "We can depend on them for grub; but, of course, it won't do to bring trouble into their happy homes. We're gettin' near the range now. By gum, but they're very sizeable mountains when you get close to 'em—eh? How wild the country looks!"

The tall domes and peaks of the Vosges were now right in front. All the afternoon the boys had avoided habitations of all sorts, and chosen the loneliest routes, seeing scarcely a soul; for many peasant families of the lowlands had fled southwards, fearing the German approach, and most of the able-bodied men were serving with the colours, having been called out weeks since.

Now, however, the pastoral districts gave way to a rough and hilly country, as the foothills were reached. The great slopes of the Vosges, clothed with dark pines, and scarred with boulders and tracts of rocky ground, seemed to reach right away towards the skies. Sam now paid much more attention to the journey, taking precautions to avoid being seen by any possible patrols of the enemy.

"We're gettin' into the fringe of the district now," he said, "and we sha'n't be able to stick to these horses much longer. It won't be horse work, but regular Red Indian belly crawling, and we shall have to stable the beasts somewhere against our return. This bay of mine isn't much of an animal, anyhow, and he was certainly never in a cavalry charge before to-day."

"He carried you well enough," said Stephen, who knew his own big dun gelding was the better of the two.

"Yes; but he's had no training, and—Hullo, hallo!"

The Vosges Simpero.

Sam did not raise his voice, but made the exclamation quite quietly. It was caused by the crack of a firearm a few hundred yards away, and the "whisp" of a bullet that passed right between the boys.

Nothing was to be seen of any enemy, and whoever had fired the shot remained concealed.

Stephen's hand flew to his carbine, and he glanced at his brother inquiringly, but Sam gave no sign. He did not even glance round, but rode on at an even pace, as if nothing had happened. No second shot was fired.

"By Jove, you were right!" said Stephen. "We're gettin' into the enemy's district. What are you goin' to do?"

"It seems to me that was no enemy's shot," said Sam coolly. "For one thing, the Germans are supposed to be cooks of the walk here, so they wouldn't hide up an' snipe at us like that; they'd ride at us for a capture. That shot wasn't from a military rifle, either; it sounded like some mountaineer's old gun with a lead ball, and, if so, I wonder at its goin' as close to us as it did. Looks as if somebody mistook us for Germans."

"Then we've more to fear from friends than foes, if they're such fools as that," said Stephen, tightening his rein.

"Don't know. These Vosges mountaineers are a pretty tough lot, I've heard; an' we look more like Germans than British in this rig, I suppose. Come up, will you? What's up with that bush?"

Sam's horse cocked its ears forward and swerved aside from the thick tangle of brushwood beside the bridle-path.

"Dead horse there," said Stephen, whose sharp eye caught sight of an upturned hoof through an opening in the bramble-leaves. "Should have thought your beast was used enough to them not to mind 'em, after to-day. Not trained to the cavalry, as you say. Come on!"

"Half a minute. Let's look into this," said Sam, and,

taking a keen glance round, he dismounted and went to the spot, pulling the briars back. "By George, look there!"

Stephen uttered an exclamation as he followed his brother's lead, and looked beyond the bushes.

Not only a horse lay there, but a dead man beside it—a big Uhlan, his lance close by, and the signs of an ugly wound between the shoulder-blades, that had evidently been his death-blow.

"This is one of Colonel Hundo's men plain enough," said Sam, in a low voice, "and he met his death from behind."

"Yes," said Stephen; "the horse has been hamstringing, too. Doesn't look like a fight."

"No. Somebody must have been lying in wait as the Uhlan rode through the brushwood, houghed his horse, and struck him in the back as he came down."

"Ugly work!" muttered Stephen. "One of these peasant chaps did it, of course! Perhaps the same one that shot at us. They must be a rum lot."

"I don't know. They're wild folk, and there's no saying what cause they've had to start this game. As Du Plessy said, you know what Uhlands are."

"Somebody'll suffer for this. It'll be red ruin for all the district, I should think, when the Black Hound finds what's happening to him."

"The less we meddle with this poor beggar the better," said Sam, striding away and remounting. "I hope, for the sake of the peasants round about, that he won't be found. Let's plug along a bit faster—it's getting dusk."

They rode for over a mile from the scene of the tragedy, and the scenery grew wilder and grimmer all the way. The brothers pulled up just on the edge of a fir-wood on a knoll that gave a good view over the foothills, and breathed their horses.

"That's St. Dio," said Sam, pointing to a small town a couple of miles away, at the foot of the range, "Hundo's headquarters now. Look! There goes a troop of Uhlands, down the high-road—you can just see 'em. They're making for the town—back from a patrol."

The German riders were a very long way off, and little could be seen of them in the twilight. The place where the boys halted was lonely in the extreme, and Stephen looked across the two next valleys towards a grim-looking building on the crest of a bare spur of the hills. It was a spired and turreted edifice, with a tall, battlemented tower flanking each side.

"What's that?" said Stephen, pointing to it.

"Looks like somebody's old baronial castle," answered Sam. "Strong place once, I should think. Empty now, most likely, or in the hands of the Germans as a look-out. I say, we'd better find quarters for the night, and a place to stable the horses, before we're seen and followed. There's no saying where the Black Hound's pickets an' sentries may be. Queer thing we haven't run across any of 'em, except that we've been extra careful."

Both the boys were dead tired, and the horses, too, had had more than enough of it. At the worst they might have to turn their beasts adrift and bivouac themselves wherever they could; but Sam was anxious to reach one of the mountain cottages he had avoided so far, in order that he might get some information from the inmates, and learn how the land lay.

Quietly they rode down from the knoll, Sam leading the way and making the descent cautiously, circling back through the trees, and not showing himself even for a moment without a dark background behind him from any point of view. The boys reached the lower ground, still keeping in the shadow of the fir woods, when Sam, turning in his saddle and looking back, reined up short, and whispered sharply to his brother to halt.

Stephen followed Sam's glance, and gave a silent whistle. On the high, craggy knoll they had just left—now some three hundred yards away, and high above them—the forms of two Uhlan horsemen could be seen, outlined in black against the afterglow of the sunset.

They were clear of the woods behind them, and sat motionless on their horses, like two statues, their lance-butts resting on their boot-tops.

"Whew!" said Stephen, under his breath. "That's a near one! They spotted us, an' they've been following us."

"I'd a notion somebody was after us," said Sam; "that's why we came down so carefully. It's thrown 'em off, and they're looking to see which way we can have gone."

"What fools they are to show themselves against the sky like that!" said Stephen. "It seems to me the Black Hound's scouts are not so smart as—"

His words were interrupted by the distant crack of a rifle, a tiny tongue of flame spat from the darkness in the edge of the pine-wood above the boys, and one of the Uhlands threw up his arms with a convulsive jerk, toppling out of the saddle.

"Sniped, by George!" exclaimed Stephen.

The remaining Uhlan, with a violent start, wheeled round.

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 99.

A Grand Tale of Tom Merry & Co. By Martin Clifford.

NEXT
THURSDAY:

"KILDARE, OF ST. JIM'S."

The boys were well in the shadow; but, looking up, they saw a figure in a loose, blouse-like coat, stealing through the tree-trunks beyond them.

The Uhlan on the knoll saw it, too, and, with a harsh cry, he set spurs to his horse, and galloped down the steep, grassy slope, straight towards the place where he had seen the dark shape.

"It was one of the Vosges mountaineers!" muttered Sam, reining right back among the trees. "Keep out of sight, Steve; we don't want the Black Hound's men to know we're in his district yet. That fellow who fired the shot—"

"There he goes!" exclaimed Stephen. "By gum, the Uhlan's got him! Why didn't he keep to the forest, the idiot?"

The dark figure came running out from among the trees, a gun in his hand, and tried to dash across the open for the woods on the other side of the little valley; but the Uhlan saw him and came flying in pursuit as fast as he could spur his horse.

"Schellum! I've got you now!" cried the German harshly. "I'll spit you like a lark!"

The mountaineer was a wonderful runner, but the swift horse overhauled him hand over fist. The man cast a despairing glance over his shoulder, and saw his pursuer close upon him, and the lance couched to strike.

"I'll take a hand in this!" muttered Stephen.

He rapidly unslung his rifle and threw the stock to his shoulder. Pursuer and pursued were a full three hundred yards away, and the light was bad. But at the crack of the young scout's unerring carbine the Uhlan lurched out of his saddle and rolled head over heels upon the turf like a shot rabbit.

The mountaineer waved his gun above his head, and gave an eldritch screech of triumph. He darted back to the dead Uhlan, and stooped over him. What he was doing the boys could not see; but the next moment he sprang up again and came running towards them like a hare.

Pere Le Vandois.

"Pretty shot, Steve," said Sam coolly, "especially considering the bad light."

"I don't know that I was very keen to do it," replied his brother, resigning his carbine; "it's ugly work these peasants are after, and he shot the Uhlan's comrade, after all, and like a murderer, not like a soldier."

"War is war," said Sam, "and the French are our allies."

"Well, I couldn't see the fellow stuck like a pig, so I kept my bullet for the German. But what's the man comin' here for? He saw us all the time, that's plain."

The Frenchman had covered the few hundred yards that separated them as quickly as a deer, and he darted right up to the boys. He was a tough, wiry man; in mountaineer's dress, and a loose, blue slop-jacket, and his face was dark and fierce.

"My thanks to you, camarades!" he cried quickly, in the rough Vosges dialect. "The blessings of the Saints on who fired that shot! The German pig is dead. Draw back farther into these trees."

Stephen looked at the man in disfavour, though his appearance, grim as it was, was not unpleasant.

"You owe us no thanks, man," he said, in the best French he could muster. "Take your path, and we will take ours."

"Where are you journeying?" said the mountaineer.

"I would tell you if I knew," said Sam; "but it seems to me that this is a good place to get away from, after what has happened."

"Peste, you are right!" was the reply, as the man rapidly recharged his old muzzle-loading gun with a large charge and a lead ball; "but if you are strange to the neighbourhood, you had best let me guide you, for there will

be one of the Black Hound's patrols by shortly, and a hue and cry."

"What of the Uhlan's horse?" said Sam, glancing back. "Let it find its way back to St. Dio, as many others have done," said the Frenchman grimly. "This way, messieurs!"

He led them through the pine forest, by tortuous bridle-paths, at a rapid pace, presently abandoning the paths altogether, and striking out across the wood. From his knowledge of scouting, Sam could tell that the guide was taking them by a route that would throw any pursuers off the track. At last they came to a forest lane, by the side of which were the ruins of a burned cottage, and there the mountaineer halted.

"I must make some return for the service you have rendered me, messieurs," he said, and he glanced at Stephen's slung carbine. "It was you who fired the shot of a surety, young sir!"

"And it was you who killed the first of the two Uhlans from your ambush?" inquired Stephen, looking at him askance.

"Mais si!" said the mountaineer proudly. "A good enough shot for my old smooth bore, eh? But yours was far better, for the lancer was in full gallop close behind me. The blessings of—"

"I don't think you want to take any names in your mouth over this affair," said Stephen shortly, "nor am I sure that I ought to have fired the shot at all. I am a soldier, and draw the difference between war and soldier murder."

The mountaineer's face flushed hotly, and his fingers grasped the gun.

"Monsieur means to insult me!" he said. "He takes an unfair advantage of the obligation I am under. Else—"

"Don't talk rot, Steve!" said Sam, in English.

"Potting fellows from behind a bush is not in my life," said Stephen, flushing in his turn. "Those chaps are civilians."

"Well, many of the Germans say you and I are civilians, too," Sam said drily, "as we may find to our cost. Does your cadet uniform excuse you the various Germans you've picked off in your time?"

"Monsieur is very young," said the mountaineer, with a shrug. "He will learn better. I thank him once again. By the way, you came rather near being shot yourselves when first you rode on to the knoll."

Sam smiled grimly, and winked at Stephen. Neither of them had known that the ambushed gunner had been covering them for a full minute before the Uhlans turned up.

"When I saw the two pigs of Germans turn up following your tracks, however, I took a longer look, and knew you must be friends, and not foes," concluded the Frenchman. "You are British, of course, from the force of the allies? I would offer you my hospitality, messieurs," he added, with a wave of his hand towards the burnt hovel, "but my hearth, as you see, is a little bare."

"Was that your home?" exclaimed Stephen, looking at the blackened ruins; beyond them lay the body of an old farm horse, half picked by crows. The scene looked horribly desolate and wretched. "What a vile shame! Who did it—the Germans?"

"That is the work of the Black Hound," said the mountaineer, his grim face growing grimmer still. "One of his Uhlans was shot at up the hill—I do not know by whom. The next patrol took vengeance on my house because it was the nearest. I was away at the time, on the Doche Mountain. They burned my cottage, drove off my cow and goats to St. Dio, and shot my old horse. They left my mother, who was sick, to crawl into the woods for what shelter she could find. Pere le Vandois took her into his house and cared for her, like the good fellow he is. As for me, I live now in the open, and exact what vengeance I may from the Uhlans of the Black Hound."

(Another instalment next week.)

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.

'KILDARE OF ST. JIM'S.'

The Captain of the old college plays a very prominent part in our next long, complete tale, and the Terrible Three Jack Blake & Co. and the others, back up the popular senior for all they are worth.

There is no suggestion of a split in the camp of the assembled Co's, when it comes to standing up for the honour of St. Jim's.

The Editor.

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