

"THE ST. JIM'S RINKERIES."

The

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VOL. 4.

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A Tale of the Terrible Three.

by
MARTIN
Clifford.



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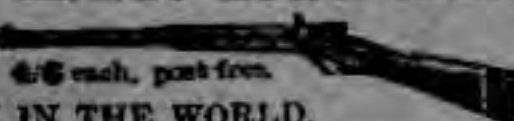
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By
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THE . . .

ST. JIM'S RINKERIES.

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

By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

CHAPTER 1. A Thaw.

"Oh, blow!"

Jack Blake of the Fourth Form at St. Jim's made that remark with great energy. He was looking out of the School House into the quad, with a quite ferocious expression upon his face.

"Oh, blow!"

The next moment he staggered out of the doorway as he received a hearty slap on the shoulder from behind. He swung round with a snort, to look into the genial countenance of Tom Merry, of the Shell.

"You utter ass! What—"

"Well, you asked for it," said Tom Merry, grinning.

"Eh!"

"You distinctly said 'Oh, blow!' so I gave you one," said Tom Merry cheerfully. "Of course, I thought you were using 'blow' as an active verb. It's the kind of grammar one would expect from you Fourth-Form kids. What's the matter, anyway?"

Blake rubbed his shoulder.

"Well, I've just been thumped by an idiot!"

Tom Merry laughed.

"What was the matter before you were thumped, then? Wherefore 'Oh, blow!'?"

"Look at the beastly weather!" growled Blake.

Tom Merry looked at the weather. The weather was unusually mild. It had been freezing hard in that part of Sussex for days, and now the weather had taken a milder turn. The trees were weeping with a thaw.

"Well, I don't see anything to complain of," said Tom, in astonishment. "It's been cold long enough, I think. The change is welcome."

"Oh, blow!" growled Blake. "What about the river? This means that the ice will break up. It means that the skating will have to finish."

"Ah, I forgot that!"

"Of course you did. When did any of you Shell-fish ever remember anything, except meal times?" said Blake aggressively. "As we've planned hockey on the ice for next Saturday afternoon, and were going to get some practice this afternoon, I think the weather is—well, what that Hindoo chap at Greyfriars would call swearful."

Tom Merry nodded.

"Yes, it's hard cheese, if the thaw continues. But I expect the ice will hold for this afternoon at least."

"Yaas, wathah, deah boys!"

"What do you know about it?" demanded Blake crossly, fixing an aggressive stare upon Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, his chum in the Fourth.

"Weally, Blake, I fancy myself as a weathah pwophet, you know. I wathah think that the ice will be all wight, and that it will tweeze again before Saturday."

"Oh, rats!"

"I assure you, deah boy, that the ice will hold, like—like anythin'," said D'Arcy. "I am goin' out to twy, anyway. Have you got your skates?"

"It's thawing."

"I twust you are not afwaid of the ice, Blake?"

Blake snorted.

"The prefects will jolly soon have us off the river if the ice looks rocky," he said. "I don't mind so much for to-day, but on Saturday we were going to play the New House at hockey on the ice. That's the rub."

"Yaas, that would be the wub, if there were weally a thaw; but I wathah think this change in the weathah is only tempowawy."

"Why?"

"Well, I wathah fancy myself as a——"

"Duffer?"

"Weally, Blake——"

"Well, let's go and try the ice, anyway," said Tom Merry, who had his skates slung over his arm. "If the prefects are

A DOUBLE-LENGTH TALE OF TOM MERRY NEXT THURSDAY.

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going to clear us off, the sooner we get some skating the better."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"There's something in that," agreed Blake. "Curious delusion these grown-ups have, that we can't look after ourselves. There's no curing them of it."

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy shook his head.

"Yaas, wathah! But as a mattah of fact, deah boy, you youngstahs are not to be twusted alone. You wemembah the time all you fellows got lost in London, and I was alone lookin' for you for quite a long time? But when I am with you, I weally think the pwefects might welax a little. But it's no good talkin' to them."

"Ready for the ice?" said Monty Lowther, coming up with Manners. "Are these kids coming?"

The two Fourth-Formers glared at the Shell fellows.

"Weally, Lowthah—" began D'Arcy.

"Exactly," said Lowther blandly. "I quite agree with you; but we'll have it afterwards, in case there's a thaw."

"You are intewwuptin' me—"

"We've only got four hours more daylight, so I am bound to interrupt you, if we're to get any skating before dark," explained Lowther.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Weally—"

But the Shell fellows walked down the steps of the School House without waiting for the swell of St. Jim's to finish his remarks. D'Arcy adjusted his eyeglass, and stared after them for a moment; and then, full of indignation at this cavalier treatment, ran after Lowther to remonstrate further. But it was not safe to run down the steps of the School House just then. D'Arcy's foot slipped, and he sat down with a bump, and gasped like air escaping from a punctured tube.

"Ow!"

Tom Merry and his chums looked round.

"What on earth are you sitting down there for?" demanded Tom Merry, in astonishment. "Don't you find the stone cold to sit on?"

Monty Lowther wagged his forefinger warningly at the swell of St. Jim's.

"Better get up," he said. "It will mean rheumatism, as sure as a gun."

"You'll feel it in your old age, if you don't feel it now," said Manners.

And the Terrible Three shook their heads solemnly, and walked on. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy slowly and painfully rose to his feet.

"Wottahs!" he said. "They were perfectly well aware that my beastly foot slipped on the beastly stone, and I had a beastly fall. I wegard it as unfwiendly of you to laugh, Blake. I can see nothin' whatevah to laugh at."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I wegard you as an ass!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I have soiled my twousahs."

"I expect you'll soil them some more on the ice," grinned Blake. "Never mind the bags. Where are Dig and Herries? Why don't they come?"

"Here we are," said Digby, as he came out with Herries, his skates clinking on his arm. "What's the matter with Gussy?"

"He's been catching rheumatism by sitting on the cold stone."

"Nothin' of the sort. I—"

"Yes, come on. Those Shell-fish have already gone."

"You are intewwuptin' me, Blake."

"Exactly. Get a move on."

"I wefuse—"

But Blake and Digby and Herries were already marching on towards the gates, and Arthur Augustus followed indignantly. A good many other juniors were going out to the river for the skating. Since there had been ice, it had been a favourite amusement with the fellows at St. Jim's. They had taken up roller-skating, but when they could get on the ice, they greatly preferred it to the rollers. D'Arcy especially was a great hand at ice-skating, and his performances there were wonderful; only, as the great poet observes, vaulting ambition sometimes o'er-leaps itself, and falls on t'other side; and so it was with Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. When he performed evolutions that were really too difficult, he came to grief, and he generally succeeded in bringing half a dozen other fellows to grief with him.

The crowd of School House fellows reached the river bank, and found Figgins & Co., of the New House, already there. Figgins and Kerr already had their skates on, and were gliding over the ice, and Wynn was finishing a bag of tarts before he started. Fatty Wynn had just had his dinner, but he had always room for more.

"Bai Jove! the ice looks all wight," said D'Arcy, as he sat down to put his skates on.

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NEXT THURSDAY: "THE ST. JIM'S FOOTBALLERS!" By

MARTIN CLIFFORD.

Blake looked at the shining surface of the river. The ice was good and firm, but he could see plain traces of the thaw, and what it might be like further up the Ryll, he did not know.

"It isn't all right, you ass!" he said. "It won't be safe to-morrow, if it is to-day."

"Wats! I mean, it looks all wight to an expewienced eye," explained D'Arcy. "Of course, you fellows don't weally know vewy much on the subject at all."

Jack Blake snorted, but made no more intelligible reply. When D'Arcy assumed his air of experience and fatherly wisdom, he was past arguing with.

CHAPTER 2.

Dangerous to Skaters.

Figgins came gliding towards the bank where the School House fellows were putting on their skates. Figgins's long legs swept over the ice in fine style. His nose was red, and his eyes sparkling, and a long scarf floated behind his neck. He grinned genially at his rivals of the School House.

"You want to be careful," he remarked, coming to a stop close to the bank. "The ice is all right here, but up towards Holmdale it is thin and cracking. I've had a run up there, and I felt it creaking under me."

"Oh, we shall be all wight, Figgins, deah boy. You see, you are a heavy weight, on account of your feet."

"I can't get near enough to tweak your nose at this moment, Gussy."

"I should uttably wefuse to have my nose tweaked."

"Well, look out for the ice that way, that's all," said Figgins.

"Thanks, old man," said Tom Merry. "We'll look out." And Figgins skated off.

"I am goin' to perform a new figah," Arthur Augustus D'Arcy remarked, as he stepped upon the ice. "You chaps can stand wound and watch me, if you like."

Blake grinned.

"Yes, I think I can see us doing that," he remarked. "It would be such a pleasant occupation, standing round and watching you."

"It will be worth seein', deah boys."

"Then I'm sorry I shall miss it."

And Blake slid out on the frozen surface of the Ryll.

The ice was not as hard and polished as it had been, but it was firm enough, and very pleasant. The juniors were soon all going, and all enjoying themselves. Blake took care to give D'Arcy a wide berth. D'Arcy was undoubtedly a good skater, but when he started practising new figures in a crowded space, it was just as well to give him as much rope as possible, so to speak.

Exactly what the new figure was, Blake could not see. It seemed to be a succession of 8's, tied up in a very confusing way. But before D'Arcy was half through it, he had dashed right into Reilly of the Fourth.

Reilly hadn't expected it. D'Arcy ought to have cleared him, but in making his new figure he had to make a certain sudden turn, which brought him right upon the Irish junior.

Reilly went spinning and lay down gracefully, and Arthur Augustus clattered wildly with his skates in the attempt to keep his feet.

"Bedad!" gasped Reilly, sitting up dazedly. "Sure, the ice's broke!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Blake. "It wasn't an ice-quake; it was Gussy!"

"Faith I—"

"You uttah ass!" exclaimed D'Arcy, getting his balance at last, and glaring down upon the upset skater. "What did you get in the way for?"

"You silly omadhaun, you ran me down!"

"You got in the way."

"You bumped into me."

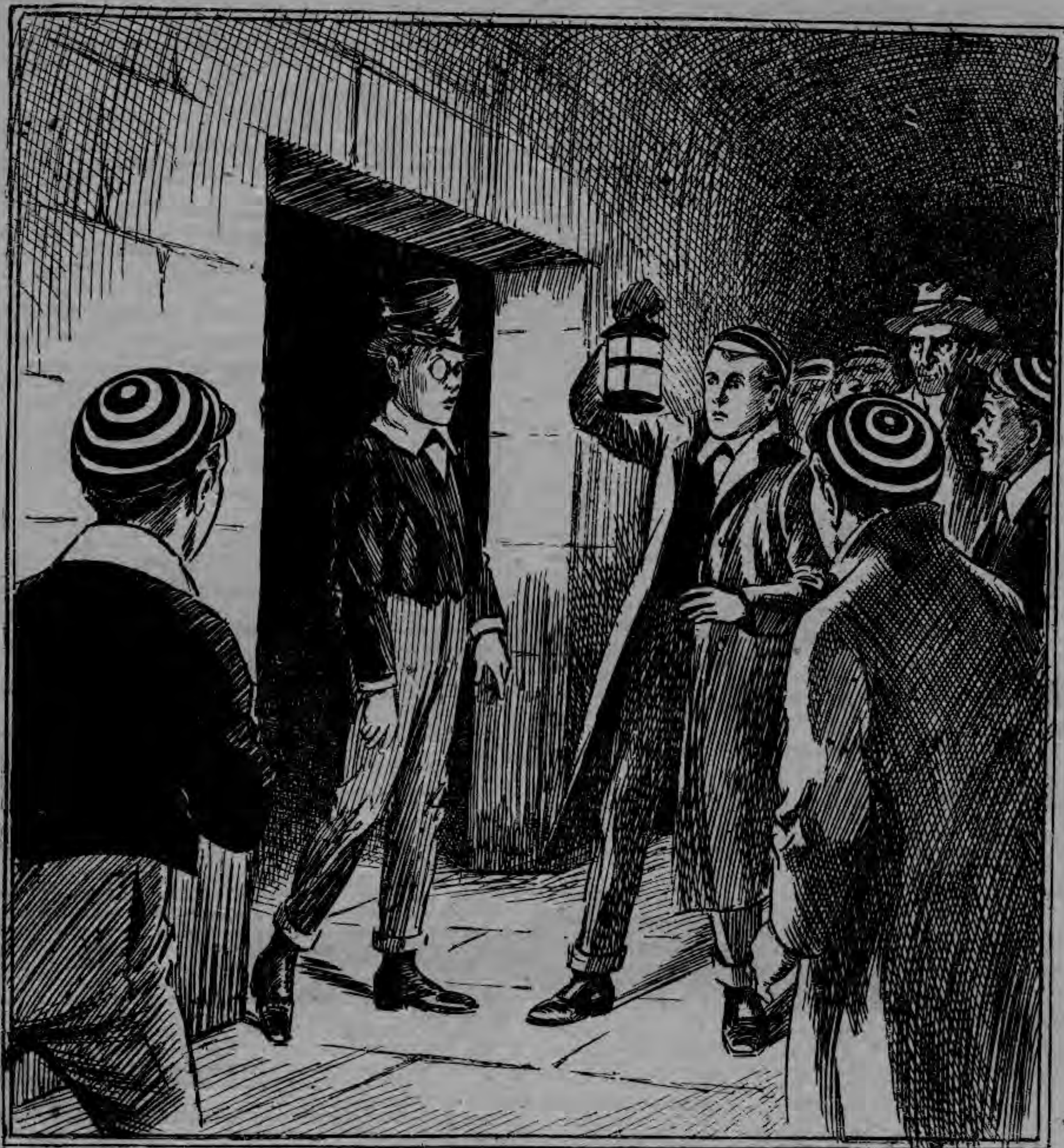
"I was bound to bump into you if you were in the way, you feahful duffah! I wegard you as an uttah ass! I shall have to begin again now."

"Begorra!" gasped Reilly. "Somebody help me up, so that I can massacre him!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

D'Arcy did not wait to be massacred. He slid off, while Reilly was wildly scrambling to his feet. As he had said, he had to begin over again, to get through that mysterious figure. But the ice was becoming more crowded every moment, and though the Ryll was wide, it was not easy to execute figures in such a crowd, especially as some of the skaters were only beginners, and stumbled clumsily into everybody's way.

Harry Noble of the Shell was the next victim. The Australian lad avoided being cannoned by a beginner with



Arthur Augustus D'Arcy came forth. His hat was a wreck, and his clothes showed plain traces of the slime of the old ruin. The juniors looked at him and yelled, "Ha, ha, ha!"

great skill, and the next moment was cannoned by Arthur Augustus, and sent spinning.

Noble was too good a skater to lose his feet, even from such an attack in the rear; but he went floundering on wildly, striving to recover his balance, and causing havoc wherever he went. He bumped into Figgins and Kerr, and sent them sprawling, and knocked Digby flying, and Digby, in his turn, knocked over Fatty Wynn. Then Kangaroo recovered himself, and looked round for the junior who had cannoned him.

"Where's that dangerous idiot?" he roared.

"Weally, Kangaroo—"

"By George, I'll scalp you!"

And Kangaroo dashed after D'Arcy, who, careless of the havoc he had wrought, was calmly proceeding to execute his figure. D'Arcy was going at a good speed now, and the other skaters were yelling to him and avoiding him. Kangaroo dashed on his track, and after Noble went the other fellows who had been upset, till there were seven or eight eager pursuers on the track.

On went D'Arcy, and as he made his curves and turned, he

added Blake and Herries and Pratt and Clifton Dane and Bernard Glyn and Skimpole and Gore, to his list of victims. He did not pause to look back. Like the motorist who did not stop to see if he had injured a certain pedestrian, because he knew he had, D'Arcy kept on his destructive course without a pause.

The destructive wrath of Achilles, of which the old poet sings, was a joke to the destructive skating of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

In a few minutes half the fellows on the ice were skating after D'Arcy, seeing red.

Quite unconscious of the pursuit, D'Arcy went through his evolutions, keeping well ahead, only pleased that the ice in front of him seemed to be getting clear.

"My only hat!" gasped Kangaroo. "I'll collar him, if I have to follow him for a dog's age!"

"What-ho!" said Figgins.

Monty Lowther cut across to intercept the elegant skater, and was biffed and overthrown.

"You ass!" called back D'Arcy.

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Lowther scrambled to his feet in the path of the pursuers. Kangaroo could not stop himself in time.

He stumbled over Lowther, and they went down together, and then five or six more stumbled over him, and rolled on the ice.

There was a chorus of yells and gasps, and a dozen fellows or more added themselves helplessly to the heap.

Meanwhile, Arthur Augustus, having finished his famous figure, came to a halt at last, and looked round triumphantly.

"I say, deah boys, bai Jove!"

He stared at the struggling heap on the ice in blank amazement.

Then he put up his eyeglass, and stared again.

"Bai Jove! What are all you fellows doin' down there?" he demanded. "Is it a new game?"

CHAPTER 3.

D'Arcy in Danger.

ARTHUR AUGUSTUS D'ARCY received no reply.

The skaters were too busy sorting themselves out.

With his monocle jammed into his eye, the swell of St. Jim's watched them in great curiosity and interest.

The skaters struggled up, red and wrathful.

"Where is he?" gasped Blake.

"Where's the idiot?"

"Where is the frabjous ass?"

"Bai Jove!"

"There he is! Come on!"

"He ought to be labelled 'Dangerous to Skaters!'" growled Bernard Glyn. "Let's slay him, and then give him a thick ear!"

"Ha, ha! Come on!"

"Weally—"

"Seize the lunatic!"

"Collar him!"

"Bai Jove, they seem awfully excited about somethin'," murmured D'Arcy, skating backwards, and keeping up a good speed, and keeping his face to the enemy. "I wondah what has happened. I suppose they are wathah cwiss because they have tumbled ovah, but I weally do not see why they should blame me. I had bettah give them a wide berth at pwesent, I think."

"Stop!"

"Come back!"

"We're going to slay you!"

"I wefuse to be slain. I am goin' up the wivah to skate alone, as you insist upon bein' so extvemely disagweeable."

"Come back!"

"It's dangerous up there!"

"Not so dangewous as it is down here, deah boys, to judge by your looks," said D'Arcy; and, turning round, he skated up the river at lightning speed.

When D'Arcy chose to put forth the powers he really possessed, there were few he could not hold his own with. He darted away at a speed that left most of his pursuers hopelessly in the rear, and most of them tailed off after a hundred yards.

Figgins and Kerr and Blake and Tom Merry and Kangaroo stuck to the chase, however, and kept level—at least, at first.

They went up the river at a rushing speed.

Figgins yelled to D'Arcy as they swept on out of sight of St. Jim's.

"D'Arcy! Gussy! Stop! It's dangerous up there!"

"Wats!"

"Honour bright!"

"It's all wight, deah boy!" said D'Arcy, slackening a little, as he saw that the juniors had no chance of overtaking him, and speaking over his shoulder. "It's all wight. I have an expwienced eye, you know."

"You have a silly, fat head!"

"I wefuse to weply to that oppwobwious wemark, Figgins."

"I tell you the ice is not safe!"

"Wats!"

"Come back, Gussy!" shouted Tom Merry. "Come back, old chap, and we won't slay you!"

"More wats!"

"We'll let you off."

"And many of them, deah boy!"

"Better stop!" said Blake seriously. "He won't stop as long as we're after him, and I suppose it really is dangerous up there."

"I saw cracks in the ice," said Figgins. "You know the currents there are opposite the Holmdale estate, where the river narrows. The ice is simply a thin sheet, I believe."

"The ass!"

"Then he'll go through."

"Better stop."

The juniors came to a halt. D'Arcy looked round at them and smiled. He was within six yards now, but was ready to shoot off at top speed at any second.

"Fatigued, deah boys?" he called out.

"No, ass!"

"I wefuse to be called an ass. I—"

"Come back, Gussy, and we'll make it pax. The ice really isn't safe up the river," said Figgins persuasively.

"I think it's all wight, deah boy."

"Come back!"

"Wats!"

And Arthur Augustus skated on gaily. The juniors looked at one another.

"Perhaps he'll get over all right," said Blake.

"Perhaps the ice is safe, after all," suggested Kangaroo.

Figgins shook his head.

"I know it isn't."

They watched the swell of St. Jim's.

He skimmed lightly over the ice, shooting along, and circling round, with a grace that was all his own.

"The beast skates well, and has a light weight," said Blake. "I dare say it's all right."

Figgins gave a shout.

"Look!"

D'Arcy was at a distance now, but in the bright winter sunlight they could see every inch of the frozen surface of the Ryll.

There was a faint, cracking sound in the still, cold air, and a long crack ran across the ice just behind D'Arcy.

The swell of St. Jim's heard it, and started a little, and glanced back.

A thin edge of water welled up from the crack.

"Bai Jove!" ejaculated D'Arcy.

Jack Blake waved his hand frantically.

"Don't come back, Gussy! Make for the bank!"

"Head for the bank!" roared Kangaroo, in stentorian tones.

D'Arcy had already decided to do so. But near the bank the ice was thinner and more broken, and it cracked ominously under the weight of the skater, and a great sheet of it bobbed up suddenly before him.

Blake groaned.

"He's in!"

But he was not in!

With wonderful quickness and skill he circled round, cutting the gap so close that one skate hung over the water as he circled on the edge of the ice with the other. Had he remained there two seconds the ice edge would have broken off under him; but he was back towards the middle of the river in a flash.

And as he swept back, behind him the ice crumbled into the water.

Blake's teeth chattered.

"Oh, but he's done in! He can't get clear now!"

It seemed only too true! The juniors watched with white faces. For the ice, having once started to crack, was going now in all directions.

On the other bank appeared a huge rift, with black water welling forth, and D'Arcy had to circle again to escape it.

But the ice was cracking under his feet now, and if he had remained in one spot for a second he would have gone through.

He turned up the river again, but a yawning gap was before him, and he swept round once more, and came flying back towards the spot where the juniors stood, watching him with fascinated eyes.

Arthur Augustus, with unfailing nerve and courage, was dodging death, and he knew it, and they knew it. They could not help him, and they could not take their eyes off him. How was that terrible dodging to end?

There was only one chance for D'Arcy, and he came sweeping back down the river. Before his feet lay a crack in the ice, slowly widening. Water was welling up, and spreading over the ice.

Crack! Crack! Crack!

The junior swept on.

He reached the rift, and cleared it, and came skating on, and Blake gave a great gasp of relief!

"Saved! Thank Heaven!"

But he cried out too soon. Even as the words left his lips there was a sounding crack of the ice, jagged edges shot up all round D'Arcy, and he went through feet first. In the twinkling of an eye the swell of St. Jim's had disappeared from sight.

ANSWERS

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CHAPTER 4.

In Direst Peril.

TOM MERRY & CO. stood transfixed for a moment.

The gap in the ice, the water bubbling up over the ragged edges, only remained to tell where the swell of St. Jim's had been standing.

"Good heavens!" gasped Blake.

"Gussy! Oh, good heavens!"

"He's gone."

"If the current carries him under the ice——"

Their hearts stood still at the thought. If the current carried away the unfortunate junior under the hard, frozen surface, nothing could save him.

Had they looked their last upon Arthur Augustus D'Arcy—their last, till the frozen body should be taken out of the Ryll after the next thaw?

It was but a second or two, but it seemed ages before the head of the junior came up in the gap amid the whirling waters.

"There he is!" yelled Blake, in mad relief.

D'Arcy's face, streaming with water, looked at them over the edge of the ice.

"Bai Jove!" gasped Arthur Augustus. "It's cold!"

He caught at the edges of the ice. But the edges were rotten and brittle, and they broke in his hands. Sheet after sheet of the thin ice peeled off, and the swell of St. Jim's was still in the water.

"Bai Jove! This is wotten!"

The juniors came as near as they could venture. They had hastily taken off their skates. D'Arcy rested his hand on the ice, and kept afloat, but at every attempt to drag himself out it cracked in his grasp. And long cracks ran from the gap along the surface, making it decidedly perilous for the juniors to venture near.

"He can't get out!" gasped Blake. "Stick it, Gussy! We'll help you!"

"Bai Jove, I'm fweezin'!"

"Keep in motion!" called out Kangaroo.

"Yaas, wathah!"

D'Arcy kept in motion. His legs wagged in the water. But continual motion could not prevent the icy contact from chilling him to the bone.

Blake crept nearer over the ice, hoping to give a hand to his chum.

"Careful, for goodness' sake!" muttered Tom Merry.

Figgins had dashed away at top speed. The others gathered near as they dared, watching Blake with anxious eyes.

Closer and closer to the gap he went, and still the ice bore him. But there was suddenly a long, rending crack!

"Back!" shrieked Tom Merry.

Jack Blake made a spring back. But it was too late!

The ice broke up beneath him, and in a moment he was struggling in the water beside his chum, with fragments of ice floating round him.

"Bai Jove, I'm sowwy, deah boy!" exclaimed D'Arcy, as he grasped Blake and saved him from going quite under.

"It's wuff!"

"Oh!"

"You're all wight!"

"Rats!" growled Blake. "Nice balmy ass you are to get into this scrape!"

"I thought the ice was all wight."

"I told you it wasn't!"

"It's easy enough to say 'I told you so,'" said D'Arcy loftily.

Blake only snorted.

"Bai Jove! I feel decidedly uncomfy., and we shall be dwowned if we are not wescued," said D'Arcy. "We have spoiled our clothes alweady. Tom Mewwy, deah boy, pway wun and get a laddah, or a wope, or somethin'."

There was a shout down the river, and Figgins was seen speeding towards the spot again with Kerr, the two bearing a long ladder between them. A crowd of other juniors, having heard the alarm, were following them.

"Good old Figgins!" gasped Tom Merry.

The New House chums dashed up.

The ladder was laid flat on the ice, and slowly pushed out towards the gap. It was not easy, for the ice was simply rotten, and threatening cracks were heard even under the weight of the ladder.

The end of the long ladder came over the edge of the gap, and passed across to the other side, and rested on firm ice again.

"Now, then, one at a time!" called out Tom Merry.

"Buck up!"

"Yaas, wathah, deah boys! You first, Blake."

"You first—you've been in the water the longer of the two."

"Wats! I ordah you to go!"

"Are you looking for a thick ear, as well as a wetting, Gussy?"

"That is a fwivolous question at a moment when we are in dangah of our lives, and our clothes are uttably wuined," said D'Arcy severely. "Pway go first on the laddah."

"You uttah ass——"

"I wefuse to be called an ass. If you do not go first, I shall give you a feahful thwashin'. I wegard you as a dummay."

"Will you go first, you fearful idiot?"

"Certainly not."

Blake grunted, and crawled upon the ladder. He crawled along it towards the juniors, and the ice was cracking underneath all the time.

Crash!

"Look out!"

The ice gave in, and the ladder went through. But Blake was now near enough for Tom Merry to grasp him. The hero of the Shell seized him with both hands, and dragged him sliding to safety, while the ladder plunged into the water.

Kangaroo and Figgins had the end of it, fortunately.

"Bai Jove!" said D'Arcy, in dismay. His face was blue with cold now, and his struggles in the water to keep himself warm were growing very feeble.

The gap was enlarged to more than twice its original size, and the ice on the edges looked more cracked and dangerous than ever.

Tom Merry knitted his brows.

"Hang it! The ladder won't go across the gap now."

"What the dickens——"

"I've got an idea!" exclaimed Figgins. "Look here, we can smash the ice through with the ladder, and make a channel to a place where it's strong enough to bear Gussy's weight!"

"Good!"

"Jolly good idea!" exclaimed Kangaroo. "I say, Blake, you buzz off! You'll catch your death of cold if you hang about with your clothes wet!"

"I'm going to see Gussy out first."

"Don't be an ass! Cut off!"

"Rats!"

And Blake remained. But he stood apart, and began to go through violent exercises with imaginary dumb-bells to keep his blood in circulation.

Figgins's suggestion was promptly carried out. The ladder was raised and allowed to crash down upon the ice, forming a narrow channel where it broke through.

This was carried on for a distance of thirty yards or more, till the narrow channel ended where the ice was firm.

Arthur Augustus swam along in the track of the ladder, and came within reach of the juniors standing round the edge, and they reached down and grasped him.

The swell of St. Jim's, very far gone indeed, was dragged out of the water, numbed and blue with cold.

"Bai Jove!" he gasped. "This is wotten! I feel fwozen!"

"Come on, quick!" said Tom Merry. "If you stand still you'll freeze! Run for it!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

Lowther dragged off D'Arcy's skates, and he was rushed to the bank, and the juniors took the shortest cut back to the school.

D'Arcy was not in much condition for running; but, with Tom Merry holding one side, and Kangaroo holding the other, he was rushed on at top speed. Jack Blake kept pace, and the others followed.

"Bai Jove!" gasped Arthur Augustus. "I—I weally can't wun like this, you know! Pway slacken down a bit, deah boys!"

"We'll take your weight," said Tom Merry. "Just keep moving, that's all."

"Yaas, but——"

"Buck up!"

They rushed the swell of St. Jim's up to the school-gates. There a curious crowd stared at him, and there were some chuckles at his appearance.

D'Arcy struggled in the grasp of his conductors.

"Pway welease me, deah boys!" he gasped. "I weally wefuse to entah the school in this widiculous mannah! It looks so extwemely undignified!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I fail to see any cause for laughtah. Welease me, an' I will wun like anythin'. But I wefuse to be made to look a silly ass, you know."

"Come on!"

"I wefuse——"

"You can refuse as much as you like," grinned Tom Merry, "but you are coming all the same."

"Weally, Tom Mewwy——"

"Bring him on."

"I—I—I wefuse——"

"Faster!"

"Weally——"

"Put it on!"

And Arthur Augustus was rushed fairly off his feet across the quadrangle, and up the steps, and into the School House. Skimpole of the Shell was standing in the doorway, with a pencil and notebook in his hand, and he was too busily occupied in deep calculations to observe the juniors coming.

D'Arcy was rushed right into him, and Skimpole folded up like a pocket-knife, and sat down on the mat, and remained there in a dazed state for some minutes; while Tom Merry and Kangaroo rushed the swell of St. Jim's up to the dormitory, and, with dire threats, forced him to undress at lightning speed.

In about twenty seconds D'Arcy was stripped and bundled into bed. Blake rubbed himself down with a rough towel till he was glowing like fire from head to foot, and then proceeded to get into dry clothes. His ducking had not been nearly so severe as Arthur Augustus's, of course, and the rub-down made him all right again. But D'Arcy had been many minutes in the water, and the juniors were anxious about him. But it was not only their anxiety that made them so extremely thorough in looking after him.

D'Arcy had brought the catastrophe about by his obstinacy, and now that the danger was over, they meant to let him see that it would not do to cause them so much anxiety for nothing.

Vainly protesting, Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was stripped and bundled into bed gasping for breath, and a crowd of juniors stood round him, ready to jam him down again if he ventured to rise.

"You uttah asses!" shrieked D'Arcy. "I insist——"

"What is the matter, boys?"

Mr. Railton, the master of the School House, put his head in at the door.

CHAPTER 5

Gussy is Put to Bed.

TOM MERRY turned round quickly. Digby jammed a pillow on D'Arcy's head, and squashed him into momentary silence.

"D'Arcy has been through the ice, sir," said Tom Merry.

"Dear me! I did not know it was dangerous. None of you must go upon the river again till I have examined it, and made sure that it is safe."

A dozen faces fell.

"It's safe enough in some places, sir," ventured Herries.

"You heard what I said. I cannot allow you to run risks. Is D'Arcy very bad?"

"Oh, no, sir, only wet and cold. We're doing our best for him."

"Give him a good rub down, and something hot to drink," said Mr. Railton. "I will speak at once to the House-dame, and ask her to send up a basin of hot milk."

"Thank you, sir."

"D'Arcy may stay in bed for the afternoon if he wishes."

"Weally, sir——" gasped D'Arcy, getting his head out.

But Mr. Railton was gone.

"I say, deah boys——"

"We're to give him a rub down," said Tom Merry, grinning. "Get the roughest towels you can find, and we'll all lend a hand."

"Good!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I wefuse——"

"Here you are! Rub him down!"

"I decline——"

"Now, then, ready!"

"I pwotest——"

"Rub away!"

Half a dozen willing juniors, grasping rough towels, rubbed away at the person of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. The swell of St. Jim's struggled and wriggled, and yelled and protested. But it was in vain.

His skin was glowing crimson from head to foot, his head felt as if the scalp had been rubbed off, his nose and his ears were burning, when the juniors finally decided that he had been rubbed down sufficiently.

Then he was jammed back into bed, and the bedclothes laid over him. Tom Merry held them in their place as D'Arcy, who was glowing with heat now, tried to kick them off.

"More blankets!" he exclaimed. "He must be kept warm."

"What-ho!"

"I am warm enough, you wottahs! I am awfully hot. I don't want to stay in bed. I wefuse to wemah here anothah minute."

"More blankets—quick!"

"I uttably decline——"

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"Pile 'em on! More!"

"Bai Jove! Beasts! I dwop the acquaintance of every fellow pwesent."

"Ha, ha, ha! Pile 'em on!"

The blankets from the other beds were piled on. Nine or ten blankets rose in a thick pile over the perspiring swell of St. Jim's.

He struggled under the heap.

"Pway welease me, deah boys!"

"You're to stay in bed——"

"I won't!"

"And be kept warm."

"Wats!"

"More blankets!"

"Ha, ha, ha! Here you are!"

They were piled on. D'Arcy subsided at last in sheer exhaustion. Tom Merry wagged a warning finger at him.

"Now you lie still, Gussy."

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

"You're an invalid."

"I am not an invalid. I decline to be wegarded as anythin' of the sort. I have nevah been ill in my life, and I hate invalids."

"Keep still!"

"You uttah wottahs! Blake is dwessin' himself, and he's been in the watah too," shrieked D'Arcy. "Why don't you put Blake to bed?"

"That's different."

"What-ho!" said Blake emphatically. "I've only had a wetting, and you've been a long time in the water. Besides, you caused all the trouble."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You uttah wottahs!"

"Keep still!"

"I wefuse. I will not wemah in bed."

"Now, look here, Gussy, we can't stay here and watch you," said Kangaroo, "but you're not to get up. You understand that?"

"I shall not wemah in bed. I shall dwess myself the moment you have left the dormitow, you feahful wottahs. I shall wefuse to acknowledge you as fwiends in the future."

"You won't have any future if you don't behave yourself," said Blake darkly. "You will be found dead, you know, one of these days, and if that ever happens, you'll know what it was for."

"Pway don't be an ass!"

"Lie down!" said Tom Merry severely. "I think you might be satisfied with all the worry you've caused your elders already. Take away his clothes, kids; he won't come down without them."

"You uttah beast!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The juniors took away the clothes. They opened D'Arcy's box, and took out everything that was wearable, and crowded out of the dormitory with the articles.

With loud laughter they left the swell of St. Jim's to himself, and closed the door of the Fourth Form dormitory.

"That will be a lesson to Gussy," grinned Blake. "He won't be so jolly clever next time he's on thin ice."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Hallo! Look there!"

The juniors looked back along the passage. The dormitory door was open, and a head was sticking out.

"I say, you wottahs, bwing me back my clothes!"

"Get back to bed!" roared Tom Merry.

"I wefuse."

"We'll come and warm you."

"You uttah outsidah!"

Tom Merry & Co. rushed back along the passage. D'Arcy popped back into the dormitory, and they rushed in and collared him. Vainly struggling, the swell of St. Jim's was bumped into bed again, and the blankets piled on him.

"Now you lie down, you young ass!" said Blake. "Do you think we're going to take all this trouble for nothing, and have you die on our hands after all? You're just going to keep alive. I hate funerals."

"You wottah!"

The juniors streamed out again. This time the door remained closed as they had left it, and they chuckled as they went downstairs.

"Gussy can stay in bed for the rest of the afternoon," grinned Blake. "It will be a lesson he has wanted for a long time."

"What-ho!"

"He's mucked up the skating for us till it freezes again," growled Figgins. "He ought to be squashed, as well as put to bed."

And the disappointed skaters cordially agreed that the swell of St. Jim's ought to be squashed.

CHAPTER 6.

The Awful Man.

ARTHUR AUGUSTUS sat up in bed, red with wrath. As a matter of fact, he was suffering very little more than Blake from his immersion, and he had a very strong suspicion that the care that was being taken of him was dictated more by a sense of humour than by necessity.

"Bai Jove," murmured D'Arcy, "I shall cut them all in the future! I shall refuse to play hockey with Tom Mewwy's team on Saturday. I shall tweet them all as stwangs. And I will not wemain in bed."

And he jumped out.

He searched through his box, and found a set of undergarments, which he promptly donned. But these, though sufficient to prevent him from catching cold, were hardly enough to go downstairs in.

What was he to do?

He was determined not to stay in bed, and it was equally distasteful to remain in the dormitory in his underclothes.

He wrapped a blanket round him, and put on a pair of slippers, and considered.

His clothes were gone, and the other boxes were carefully locked, so there was no getting any attire, except the blanket, in the Fourth Form dormitory.

"I shall have to get to one of the othah dormitowies," muttered D'Arcy desperately. "If I meet anybody, it will be Tom Mewwy's fault."

He opened the dormitory door cautiously and peeped out. Tom Merry & Co. had disappeared downstairs, doubtless thinking him safely disposed of in bed for the afternoon.

The coast was clear.

D'Arcy listened intently.

It would be too dreadful if he should run against Mrs. Mimms, the House-dame, or the maids in the passage, in that extremely light and airy attire.

But the risk had to be run.

D'Arcy listened a full minute, and then he stepped out of the dormitory, and closed the door silently behind him.

He stole down the passage in the direction of the Shell dormitory.

He was within ten paces of the door, and his heart was beating high with hope, when the door he was making for opened, and a housemaid came out with a duster in her hand.

D'Arcy had just time to spring into an alcove in the wall, from which a window looked out into the gardens.

Trembling in every limb, the swell of St. Jim's squeezed himself behind the curtains, which were of a thick and solid description, and hung to the floor.

There he waited with beating heart, while the steps of the housemaid came along the passage.

"Bai Jove!" murmured D'Arcy, turning hot and cold in turns all over. "My only hat! This is simply awful! I cannot allow one of the gentle sex to see me like this. It would be most ungentlemanly. It's howwid! I twust that she will pass on."

He listened with feverish intentness to the footsteps.

They came down the passage, and stopped at the window alcove. D'Arcy was concealed in the thick curtains, and could not see the housemaid, but he knew that she had stopped. He heard a gasp, as of affright, and then rapidly pattering feet. The girl was running quickly down the passage.

"Thank goodness!" gasped D'Arcy.

What had frightened the maid he did not know, but she was gone, and that was the great thing.

He was venturing out from behind the curtains, and was about to make a dash for the Shell dormitory, when voices sounding in the passage warned him that the coast was not clear. He could hear the House-dame's voice, and the maid's in frightened tones.

"Nonsense, Jane!"

"It's true, ma'am."

"Nonsense, I say!"

"Oh, ma'am, it gave me quite a turn. I sha'n't never forget it. It's a man, and he's hiding behind the curtains at the window, he is."

"Stuff!"

"It's a man, ma'am!"

"Oh, nonsense!"

"Don't go, ma'am! Call Mr. Taggles first, then, or some of the young gentlemen. Don't go; he may have a knife."

"Don't be silly, Jane. I am sure there is no one there."

"Oh, ma'am; I saw him hiding behind the curtains—"

"Stuff! If he was hiding behind the curtains, how could you see him?"

"The curtains was bulging out, ma'am."

"Nonsense!" said Mrs. Mimms, with asperity.

And the stout House-dame marched on boldly to the alcove,

followed more slowly by Jane, who was trembling, and prepared to go into hysterics at the shortest notice.

"Oh, ma'am—"

"Don't be silly, girl! There is no one there."

"Look!" shrieked Jane. "Look! Oh, we shall all be murdered in our beds! Help!"

Mrs. Mimms looked, and saw the outline of a form through the curtain, and she turned a little pale. There had lately been a burglary at St. Jim's and the remembrance of it was fresh in the House-dame's mind. She stepped quickly back into the corridor, feeling, as she told Mrs. Taggles afterwards, that faint that she thought she would drop.

Jane, shrieking at the top of her voice, sped along the corridor, and ran into Tom Merry's arms at the end. Tom Merry had come up to see what the row was about, and Manners and Lowther were with him.

"Oh, Master Merry!" gasped Jane, throwing her arms round his neck, and her whole weight on his chest. "Oh, Master Merry! Save me!"

"Eh?"

"Save me!"

"Certainly," said Tom, in amazement. "I'll save anybody you like, only don't squash me, and give me just a hint of what I'm to save you from."

"Help!"

"What's the matter?"

"That awful man!"

"My only hat!" said Lowther. "It can't be a burglar in broad daylight. What on earth has happened, Jane?"

"The awful man!" sobbed Jane, still clinging hysterically to Tom Merry. "He's hiding behind the curtains, and I think he has murdered Mrs. Mimms."

"What!"

"I am sure I saw the glitter of a knife."

"Here, let's see what's the matter!" said Tom, and planting Jane against the wall to have her hysterics alone, he ran down the passage, with Lowther and Manners at his heels.

Mrs. Mimms came hurrying towards the juniors. Her face was very pale.

"What's the matter, Mrs. Mimms?" asked Tom Merry, stopping.

"There's a dreadful man in the alcove, hiding behind the curtains," gasped the House-dame. "I—I was so frightened. I think it is that burglar—the Portuguese man again. Oh, dear!"

"He's in prison."

"He may have broken out, and come back to murder us all in our beds."

"He could hardly expect to find us in our beds at three in the afternoon," grinned Lowther. "More likely it's a jape."

"Much more likely," said Tom Merry. "Come on!"

"Oh, please be careful, Master Merry—please be careful! You—"

"Oh, that's all right!"

The Terrible Three ran on to the alcove. They looked in, and exchanged glances as they saw distinctly the outlines of a hidden form behind the curtains at the window.

"My only hat!" murmured Manners. "There is someone there."

"Right," said Tom Merry, in a loud voice. "You fellows stand clear, while I drive this carving-knife through the curtains."

His chums looked at him in astonishment, for he had no carving-knife. But Tom Merry was talking "at" the individual hidden behind the curtains. There was a gasp there, and a quavering voice followed.

"Pway don't be a beast, Tom Mewwy."

The Terrible Three jumped.

"Gussy!"

D'Arcy put his head out round the curtain.

"Are they gone, deah boys?"

"Are they gone?"

"The ladies," said D'Arcy. "I bunked in here so that they should not see me. I am wearin' a blanket at the present moment."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"It is no subject for wibald laughtah. I have had a most unpleasant time. I wegard it as absolutely howwid."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I was goin' to the Shell dorm for some clothes—"

"Look out—here's Mrs. Mimms!"

D'Arcy popped back behind the curtain in the twinkling of an eye. Mrs. Mimms, reassured by the laughter of the Terrible Three, was coming back.

"What is it, Master Merry? What is there?"

"No sight for you, Mrs. Mimms," said Tom gravely.

"You had better go away, and we'll see to the matter."

"Yaas, wathah!" murmured Arthur Augustus faintly.

"But what is it?" asked Mrs. Mimms, her curiosity rising

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as her alarm subsided. "Is it some animal, Master Merry?"

"Yes, it's a queer sort of animal."

"You insultin' beast!" murmured Arthur Augustus, sotto voce.

"Oh, dear! Perhaps I had better call up one of the dogs," exclaimed the House-dame.

"Bai Jove!"

"Yes, that's a good idea," said Tom Merry. "Find Herries, and tell him to bring his bulldog."

"Certainly, Master Merry."

And Mrs. Mimms hurried away. D'Arcy put his head out of the curtain again.

"You uttah beast, Tom Mewwy—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Is the coast cleah now, deah boys?"

"Mrs. Mimms is gone."

Arthur Augustus came out from behind the curtain.

"But Jane is looking this way."

Back popped Arthur Augustus again.

"Tom Mewwy, I appeal to you as a gentleman to give me a chance to get cleah," he said, through the curtain. "Make that gal go away."

"Rats!"

"I shall wefuse to wegard you as a fwiend if you wefuse."

"Will you go back to the Fourth-Form dorm?"

"Certainly not."

"Then I'll tell Jane to watch this alcove till Herries comes with his bulldog."

"You uttah wottah!"

"Good-bye!"

"Pway stop a minute. Upon second thoughts, I will return immediately to the Fourth-Form dormitory if you wish."

"Good! And you'll go to bed."

"No, I will not go to bed. I absolutely wefuse to go to bed."

"Good-bye!"

"Pway do not hawwy away. I will go to bed."

"And stop there till I call you?"

"No—yes. I will do anythin', only get me out of this fix," wailed D'Arcy. "I wegard you as a set of wotten beasts, but I will stay in bed till you call me."

"Good!"

Tom Merry called down the passage to Jane.

"Better cut off, Jane. He's coming out."

Jane was undecided for a moment between having a fit of hysterics on the floor, and flying downstairs. She decided for the stairs, reflecting that it was just as easy to go into hysterics in the kitchen, and that it would be safer there. So she flew. In a few seconds she had vanished.

"Is she gone, deah boys?"

"Ha, ha! Yes."

Arthur Augustus came out in his blanket. He fixed a glance of the most sweeping scorn upon the Terrible Three, who were almost in hysterics themselves.

"You uttah wottahs!" said Arthur Augustus, in measured tones. "You feahful beasts! I wegard you with uttah contempt!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I shall go back to the dorm. and go to bed, as a gentleman's word is his beastly bond; but before I go I shall give you a feahful thwashin'."

"Hallo, here comes Herries with Towser!"

"Towsah, bai Jove!"

Gr-r-r-r!

It was the gentle voice of Towser on the stairs.

D'Arcy did not wait to hear it twice. He flew along to the Fourth-Form dormitory, rushed in, and slammed the door behind him. Herries came along the passage with Towser on a chain. He looked inquiringly at the Terrible Three, who were yelling with laughter. Herries seemed to be puzzled.

"I hear you want Towser here, to tackle some animal that's got into the house," he said. "Where's the animal?"

"It's gone now," gasped Tom Merry.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I don't see where the cackle comes in," said Herries crossly. "What kind of an animal was it?"

"A Fourth Former," said Tom Merry.

Herries glared at him. He was a Fourth-Former himself. "I suppose this is a jape," he remarked.

"Well, something in that line," grinned Monty Lowther. "You've brought Towser here. Now you can take him back again. It will be a run for Towser."

"It will be a run for somebody else," said Herries grimly. "Seize 'em, Towser!"

"Here, look out—"

"Seize 'em!"

Towser opened his jaws, and the Terrible Three ran.

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CHAPTER 7.

Skimpole the Comforter.

"B AI Jove! This is absolutely wotten!" Arthur Augustus D'Arcy made that remark as he lay in bed, and stared at the bright winter sunlight on the dormitory windows.

He wasn't feeling at all ill, and he didn't want to lie there in idleness, without even a book to read. But he had given his word, and D'Arcy's word was his bond. He had promised to remain in bed till Tom Merry called him. And until Tom Merry called him, there he would remain.

And he was fearfully bored. He didn't feel in the least inclined for sleep, and his eyes simply refused to close. He thought of the last number of "Pluck" lying on the table in Study No. 6. It wouldn't have been so bad if he had had something to read—or if a fellow had come in to talk to him. But he was quite alone.

The juniors were punishing him for having caused all the trouble, he knew, and his wrath rose higher and higher every moment as he lay in bed chafing.

The door of the Fourth-Form dormitory opened suddenly.

D'Arcy looked round eagerly, with the thought that it was Tom Merry, come to release him. It was not Tom Merry, but Skimpole, of the Shell. As a rule, Skimpole was a dreaded visitor. Skimpole was a Determinist, and several other kinds of an "ist," and like many individuals who go in for "isms," he was not to be stopped when once he got upon a favourite topic. He would strain anybody's politeness to breaking-point.

Skimpole had a philanthropic smile upon his face now, and a big book under his arm. He blinked round in search of D'Arcy. D'Arcy gave a sniff; but he was glad to see anybody just then, even Skimpole, and he nodded.

"Hallo, Skimmay."

"Ah! You are here, D'Arcy," said Skimpole, coming towards the bed. "I heard that you were ill, and confined to the dormitory—"

"I am not ill, deah boy."

"You have had an accident."

"Nothin' to speak of."

"Well—well; you are staying in bed, and I thought you would be lonely, so I have come to keep you company," said Skimpole, blinking at the swell of St. Jim's through his big spectacles.

"Bai Jove! That's awfully decent of you, deah boy!"

"Not at all, D'Arcy. I am, on the contrary, very pleased, and I shall do my best to open your mind by enlightening conversation."

"Bai Jove!"

"From this time of affliction, probably, may date your conversion to the great truths of Determinism," said Skimpole, beaming.

"Look here, Skimpole, if you want to talk to me—"

"I am doing this for your sake, D'Arcy."

"Vewy good. I am awfully gwateful. But if you would fetch up a set of chess, and have a game with me—"

"I am afraid I could hardly bring my mind down to chess. Besides, this is an opportunity not to be lost."

"I would not mind playin' snap—"

"I have never heard of it. If it is gambling with cards—"

"You uttah ass—"

"In any case, time is far too precious to be lost in playing clap—"

"Snap!"

"Ah, yes, snap. This present opportunity must be taken. I have here Professor Loosetop's luminous disquisition upon the subject of Determinism."

"Chuck it out of the window."

"My dear D'Arcy—"

"I am afraid that I cannot stand Determinism, Skimmay, deah boy, I would wathah have 'Pluck.' Pway go and fetch it fwoin my studay."

Skimpole shook his head.

"I cannot forego this opportunity of improving your mind," he said. "As a representative of a decayed and degenerate aristocracy, you are peculiarly in need of enlightenment."

"Gweat Scott!"

"In the first place, I will explain what Determinism is."

"My deah Skimmay—" protested D'Arcy feebly.

"It is the science which enlightens us—"

"Pway get out."

"And clears away innumerable misconceptions which have haunted the human mind during ages," said Skimpole.

"Man is man—"

"Go hon."

"That statement contains in a nutshell the whole case for Determinism. Man is the creature of heredity and environment."

"Pway cleah out, deah boy!"

By

MARTIN CLIFFORD.



The juniors watched from the bank with white faces. But Gussy did not lose his nerve. With wonderful quickness and skill he circled round the gap in the ice, with one skate hanging over the water.

"His personal and physical qualities are the outcome of his heredity—"

"Chuck it!"

"Acting under the influence of his outward circumstances, which are called his environment, because—"

"Because it is a long word?" asked D'Arcy.

"Well, no, that is not the reason. Heredity and environment combined produce man as he is. Now, how can a man commit a crime?"

Skimpole glared at D'Arcy through his spectacles, as he propounded this question, as if it were a conundrum. D'Arcy stared in puzzled perplexity.

"There are lots of ways," he said. "He can wob a bank, or knock a chap on the head with a chopper, or come talkin' piffle to a fellow who can't help himself."

"You misunderstand, D'Arcy. The Determinist holds that a man cannot commit a crime. For observe," said Skimpole, wagging a bony forefinger, and opening his book—"observe! Listen! Say you commit a murder—"

"I wefuse to say anythin' of the sort."

"Well, say you rob Blake of his watch—"

"I distinctly wefuse."

"Say that you rob Blake of his watch," repeated Skim-

pole, unheeding. "Do you commit the crime? Certainly not!"

"I should certainly decline to do so."

"I mean, you do not commit the crime. You take the watch, and stealing a watch is the crime. But do you commit it? No, my dear friends, no," said Skimpole, waving his hand to an imaginary audience. "Certainly not! Hereditary influences are at work within you—your environment—your training—are having their effect. One or the other causes you to take that watch, hence you are not to blame. Therefore, there cannot be a criminal, because crime cannot exist, nobody being to blame for anything. You steal a watch because you are driven to it by forces beyond your control. You are, therefore, not doing wrong. If you are punished, the police are wrong—they are punishing you for being the helpless victim of heredity and environment."

D'Arcy rubbed his nose thoughtfully.

"But the police couldn't be doing wrong, if there is no wrong," he remarked. "They would be driven to lock up a thief by forces beyond their control."

Skimpole started a little.

"Dear me, I had not thought of that. Professor Loosetop seems to have overlooked that point in his volume."

"I wegawd you as a silly ass, and your silly pwofessah as

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another," said Arthur Augustus. "I should be obliged if you would clear out."

"I shall soon clear up that point. Of course, there are difficulties in Determinism, as in everything else. A certain amount of faith is required. Take this luminous statement of Professor Locsetop. Man being what he is, it is evident that he cannot be anything but what he is, hence all that is is, and is not otherwise; this being a clear and convincing proof of the principle of Determinism, that things exist exactly as they exist, and in no other way. What could be clearer than that?"

"Ass!"

"Really, D'Arcy—"

"If you do not twavel off with your silly nonsense, I shall stwike you with this pillow," said D'Arcy, sitting up in bed. "I would wathah have mathematics or geogwaphy than your silly wotten Determinism. It is all humbug, and I suspect that it was invented by a pwactical jokah to take in silly duffahs like you."

"My dear D'Arcy, you are simply showing your ignorance in making that suggestion. I will read you out the whole preface to this book, a closely-reasoned treatise covering thirty pages of close print—"

"Bai Jove! You don't do anythin' of the sort—"

"In the first place, man is the creature of his inward and outward circumstances, and acts as he does because of his own personality," began Skimpole.

"Bai Jove!" said D'Arcy sarcastically. "Is that a new discovawy?"

"It is the greatest discovery of the century."

"And did anybody ever imagine that man acted as he did because of somebody else's personality?"

Skimpole scratched his head.

"Well, no, not exactly. You see—"

"I see a silly duffah!" said D'Arcy, grasping his pillow in a business-like way. "I give you ten seconds to get away with that wotten book."

"Really, D'Arcy—"

"Are you gcin'?"

"Certainly not! You see—"

Biff!

The pillow swept through the air, and smote Herbert Skimpole upon the chest. He rolled sideways off his chair, and the huge volume of Professor Loosetop crashed upon the floor, and Skimpole crashed after it.

"Oh!" gasped the Determinist.

"Get out!"

"I consider you a beast!" said Skimpole, sitting up and putting his spectacles straight, and blinking at D'Arcy. "I consider your action brutal."

"Wats! It was the result of my hewedity, or else my enviwonment," grinned Arthur Augustus. "I was enviwoned at the moment by a silly ass, so I suppose it was the enviwonment."

"It is almost a hopeless task to try to improve your intellect."

"Pway buzz off, Skimmay!"

"I shall not depart," said Skimpole, sitting on the next bed, out of reach, and opening his big book again. "This is too good an opportunity to be lost. If I convert you to Determinism, you can carry the good news among your friends, in the circles of the idle rich, where I am not likely to go, as my people are in business. I will now read you the first chapter—"

Biff!

D'Arcy hurled the pillow, and Skimpole was swept backwards over the bed.

"Now twavel along, you ass!"

"Ow!"

"If I had not pwomised Tom Mewwy not to leave this bed, I would get up and give you a feahful thwashin'," said D'Arcy. "I wegard you as a wottah! Get out!"

Skimpole slowly picked himself up, and retreated to a distance with his book. There he opened it again, and began to read aloud, every now and then blinking up at D'Arcy to see whether the exasperated swell of St. Jim's was hurling another missile. The genius of the Shell could be very obstinate.

"You uttah ass! Get out!" shrieked D'Arcy.

"Man being the creature of heredity and environment—"

The dormitory door opened.

"Bai Jove!" gasped D'Arcy, in relief, as Tom Merry came in. "Pway turn that uttah ass out, Tom Mewwy!"

Tom Merry laughed.

"I heard that Skimpole had come up to keep your company, so—"

"He has been bowin' me to death."

"I have been trying to improve D'Arcy's mind, Tom Merry—"

"Ha, ha, ha! That's why I came to the rescue," laughed THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 101.

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Tom Merry. "You can get up now, Gussy. You've had half an hour of it, and that's enough."

"Yaas, wathah! Bai Jove!"

D'Arcy bounded out of bed.

"Heredity and environment," went on Skimpole. "It follows that when we say— Ow!"

D'Arcy rushed at him and smote him, hence the unintentional end of Skimpole's sentence. The book crashed on the floor, and Skimpole sat down. D'Arcy grasped him by the collar, yanked him to the door, and rolled him out into the passage.

Skimpole sat up, gasping. As he did so, his book came flying out after him, and smote him on the chest, and rolled him over again.

Then the dormitory door slammed.

Arthur Augustus turned towards Tom Merry with a look of satisfaction. He appeared to be greatly relieved in his feelings. The hero of the Shell was roaring with laughter.

"Bai Jove!" said D'Arcy. "It was time that fwabjous ass had a lesson, you know. I have suffahed feahfully. I wegard you as a wottah, Tom Mewwy!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Tom Merry left the dormitory, leaving Arthur Augustus to dress and follow at his leisure. Skimpole was picking himself up in the passage, and he started as he saw Tom Merry, but was reassured when a second blink showed him that it was not D'Arcy. He touched Tom Merry on the arm, and, lowering his voice mysteriously, murmured:

"Tom Merry. Is D'Arcy mad?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"He has acted in the most unaccountable way. He rushed at me like a maniac, and used me with unjustifiable violence."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Do you think his brain is giving way?"

"No," grinned Tom Merry. "It was his patience that gave way, Skimmay. The best thing you can do is to throw that book in the river, and—jump in after it."

And Tom Merry walked on, leaving the genius of the Shell wondering over his last remark, and whether he was serious or not.

CHAPTER 8.

Sympathetic Chums!

IT was getting dark—the early winter dusk—and the fellows were coming in ruddy and jolly from football practice, when Arthur Augustus came down. His clothes had been brought to him, and the swell of St. Jim's was dressed with his usual elegance. But there was a cloud upon his aristocratic brow, a cloud that was not dispelled by the cheery affability of his friends. They seemed to be quite unconscious that anything was amiss, and that was adding insult to injury, from D'Arcy's point of view.

"Good game," said Digby, as he flung a football down into a corner of No 6 Study. "You ought to have been there, Gussy."

Arthur Augustus turned his eyeglass witheringly upon his chum.

"I fail to see how I could have been there, Dig, when I was in that beastly dormitoway in bed all the time."

"Oh, yes, I forgot; you were ill, weren't you?"

"I was not ill."

"Malingering, then?"

"I was put to bed by force in the most wuffianly way."

"Well, it was a good game," yawned Dig. "Wasn't it, Blake?"

"Yes, very good. I'm sorry Gussy preferred to miss it."

"I did not pwefer—"

"I'm jolly hungry," went on Blake. "Let's get tea, for

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goodness' sake! Nothing like footer in cold weather to give you an appetite."

"I was sayin' that I did not pwefer—"

"You don't prefer to have tea now? Oh, I suppose you haven't much of an appetite, sticking in bed all the afternoon."

"I was goin' to say that I did not pwefer—"

"Look here, you fill the kettle, D'Arcy, and I'll light the fire. All hands to the mill, you know. You've had an easy time this afternoon, too."

"I wegard you as—"

"Got a match?"

"Yaas, wathah, but—"

"Well, hand us the match. You can talk at tea-time."

Arthur Augustus relapsed into scornful silence. The chums of Study No. 6 did not appear to notice that there was anything the matter with him. They busied themselves in getting tea, and D'Arcy filled the kettle at the tap at the end of the passage, brought it majestically into the study, and jammed it on the fire.

"Careful, Gussy," said Blake. "Don't make a smother."

"Weally, Blake—"

"Tom Merry is coming to tea, with Manners and Lowther. Cut down to the tuckshop, Gussy, and get some tommy, will you?"

"Weally—"

"Cut off, there's a good chap!"

D'Arcy turned his eyeglass upon Blake, but Blake was cutting bread-and-butter, and did not seem to see the withering look. The swell of St. Jim's left the study with a stately tread. A chuckle followed him. He swung round in the doorway, and looked into the study again. But the three faces there were quite grave and solemn.

D'Arcy went down the passage with his nose high in the air.

When he came back, ten minutes later, with a well-filled parcel of tuck, the Terrible Three were in the study. They nodded affably to Arthur Augustus.

"Hope you enjoyed your nap, Gussy," said Manners.

"Always best to lay up when you feel bad," remarked Lowther. "It may be a bore at the time, but Gussy was quite right."

"Yes," agreed Tom Merry heartily. "I must say I consider that Gussy was right this time."

D'Arcy gave the Terrible Three a withering look.

"I wegard you—"

"What have you got there?" asked Monty Lowther.

"You are intewwuptin' me, Lowthah."

"Is it tuck?"

"Yaas, wathah, it is tuck! I was goin' to say—"

"Shove it out," said Blake. "We're hungry."

"If you will allow me to finish—"

"You see, we're late for tea already. Good! I like these cheese-cakes, and pork-pies! Gussy, you're a prince!"

"Weally, Blake—"

"Tea's ready!"

And the chums of the Fourth and their guests sat down round the table to tea. It was rather a squeeze for seven juniors to get round the study table, but they managed it. They had managed harder squeezes than that.

The scent of the tea and the poached eggs insensibly helped to clear the clouded brow of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. His face relaxed. After the first cup of tea an expression of geniality returned to his features.

"Feeling better?" asked Lowther sympathetically.

"I have not been feelin' bad, Lowthah."

"Nothing like a good rest," said the humorist of the Shell. "I've often thought that your tenor solos would be better for a long rest now and then."

"Weally, Lowthah—"

"What about the skating?" said Herries.

"I'm not discussing skating—"

"No, but I am," said Herries. "There will be a moon to-night, and I think it will be bright enough. What price a skating practice by moonlight?"

"Jollay good, deah boy!"

Tom Merry shook his head.

"Can't be did!"

"Why not?"

"Railton has put his hoof down. It's all through Gussy. The ice is not safe."

"It's safe enough near the school," growled Herries.

"It's only further up the river that it's weak, where that ass Gussy went."

"Weally, Hewwies—"

"I don't know," said Tom Merry, shaking his head.

"There's certainly a thaw; and there's no doubt that Gussy had a narrow escape to-day, and so did you, Blake. If we hadn't been so prompt and heroic—"

"Oh, cheese it! Look here, somebody ought to put it straight to Railton," said Blake. "It could be explained to

him that we should leave Gussy here, chained up, and that nobody else would be ass enough to go into danger."

"I wefuse—"

"Gussy ought to go and explain to Railton," said Lowther. "He's the cause of all this."

"I should have no objection to explainin' to Wailton," said Arthur Augustus. "I wegard it as absurd to pwohibit us fwom skatin' on the wivah at all, because the ice is thin in a certain spot. We want pwactice for the hockey-match on Saturday, too."

"If the thaw continues we sha'n't get the match," said Tom Merry.

"Pwobably it will fweeze again. Anyway, we want some pwactice. I shall certainly put it stwaight to Wailton."

"My dear ass—"

"I will go at once," said Arthur Augustus, and he finished his cup of tea and rose to his feet. Tom Merry caught him by the sleeve.

"Sit down, Gussy!"

"I decline to sit down."

"Lowther was only rotting. It wouldn't do any good to go to Railton; he's not likely to change his mind."

"If I put it to him stwaight, he is bound to change his mind, as a weasonable man. At all events, I shall certainly put it stwaight to him."

"Look here—"

D'Arcy went to the door.

"Come back, you duffer!"

The swell of St. Jim's did not reply. He left the study, and closed the door behind him. The juniors stared at one another in astonishment for a moment. Then Tom Merry sprang to his feet.

"The ass! Railton will cane him!"

"Ha, ha!"

"Let's go and stop him—or pick up the pieces, anyway," grinned Manners.

"We'll stop him," said Tom Merry.

And the juniors hastily left the study to recapture Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

CHAPTER 9.

D'Arcy Puts It Straight to Mr. Railton.

D'ARCY looked back as he went downstairs. He heard the pattering of pursuing feet. Tom Merry & Co. appeared on the landing behind him.

"Come back, Gussy!" called out Tom Merry.

"Wats!"

"Collar him!"

The juniors bounded down the stairs. D'Arcy broke into a run, and went down three at a time. Lowther saved time by sliding down the banisters. Unfortunately his long legs got in the way of Tom Merry and Manners, and both of them rolled down the stairs. Manners caught at Lowther, grasped his leg, and yanked him off the banisters, and Lowther bumped on the stairs with a grunt.

"For goodness' sake, get out of the way!" exclaimed Blake. "This isn't a time to be sitting about like a lot of hens."

"It was that ass Lowther—"

"It was that dummy Manners—"

"It was that frabjous idiot—"

"It was that dangerous lunatic—"

"Oh, get away!"

Blake dodged the sprawling Shell fellows and dashed on. But the delay had given the swell of the School House a good start. He was on the second lap now, as it were, running for Mr. Railton's study.

Blake dashed after him, the others at his heels.

He had his outstretched fingers within a foot of D'Arcy's collar when the elegant junior reached the door of Mr. Railton's study.

D'Arcy tapped, and entered immediately, and Blake recoiled with a gasp as the door closed in his face.

"By George! He's done it now!"

"The duffer! What will Railton say?"

"Things!" said Blake, with a grin. "Wait here; he'll come out on his neck."

And the juniors waited.

Arthur Augustus, in the House-master's study, closed the door a little breathlessly. Mr. Railton was writing at the table, and he looked up in some amazement at this sudden and unceremonious invasion.

"D'Arcy! What do you want?"

"I should like to speak to you, sir."

"Pray be brief, then. I am busy."

"It will not take me many minutes, sir. I should be vewy sowwy indeed to waste your valuable time, Mr. Wailton."

"Well—well, go on."

"I will be as bwief as poss., sir. I want to explain—"

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"Come to the point," said Mr. Railton sharply.
 "Certainly, sir. It's about the skatin'," said D'Arcy, coming to the point. "I hear that the wivah is barred to us now, sir."

"Exactly!"

"Owin' to my unfortunate accident——"

"Yes, and to the dangerous state of the ice."

"Weally, sir, I wish to point out to you that the ice near the school is quite safe, and if the fellows don't go too far afield——"

"I have stated my decision, D'Arcy."

"Besides, sir, I shall be there to look after them."

"D'Arcy!"

"Yes, sir. As soon as I heard that skatin' on the Wyll was pwohibited, sir, I decided to come and put the facts stwaight before you, so that you could see them in a weasonable light, sir."

"You may go, D'Arcy."

"But I have not finished yet, sir. Will you allow me to explain——"

"Certainly not. You may go."

"Yes, sir. The ice bein' safe near the coll——"

"Go!" exclaimed Mr. Railton angrily.

"Yes, sir. As I have pointed out that the ice is quite safe near the school, I suppose I may take it that we are allowed there, sir, so long as I keep my eye on the youngstahs."

"Leave my study!"

"Yes, sir, but——"

Mr. Railton rose to his feet, and took down a cane. D'Arcy eyed that proceeding with some uneasiness, and backed a little towards the door.

"If you please, sir——"

"Hold out your hand, D'Arcy."

"Weally, sir——"

"Hold out your hand!" thundered Mr. Railton.

The swell of St. Jim's reluctantly obeyed. He received a sharp cut, and gave a little yelp.

"The other hand, D'Arcy."

"Weally, sir——"

"The other hand immediately."

"Bai Jove! Ow!"

D'Arcy received a second cut. Then Mr. Railton pointed with the cane towards the door.

"You may go, D'Arcy! Not another word, or I shall cane you again."

Arthur Augustus looked at the House-master, and read his determination in his eyes. He turned to the door, and opened it without another word.

Mr. Railton smiled slightly, and sat down at his writing table again. D'Arcy closed the door behind him, and looked a little sheepishly at the juniors who were waiting for him in the passage.

Tom Merry & Co. gazed upon him.

"Well, did you put it straight to Railton?" asked Tom Merry.

"Ya-a-as, wathah."

"What did he say?" asked Blake.

"Nothin' of any importance."

"Are we allowed to go on the ice?"

"Appawently not."

"What's the matter with your hands?" asked Manners.

"Are you rubbing them because the weather is cold?"

"Well, the weather is cold, isn't it?" said Arthur Augustus evasively.

"Ha, ha! Is that why you're rubbing your hands?"

"Well, no, deah boy; as a mattah of fact, it isn't."

"Ha, ha, ha."

"I see no cause for wibald laughtah. I wegard Mr. Wailton as a most unweasonable man."

And the swell of St. Jim's marched off, still rubbing his hands; and the juniors returned chuckling to Study No. 6 to finish their tea.

CHAPTER 10.

The Roller-Skaters.

SWISH! Clink! Clatter!

"Bai Jove!"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy uttered that exclamation, and peered into the shadows ahead of him.

It was a moonlight night, but a mass of clouds had drifted over the moon, and for the moment the quadrangle of St. Jim's was very dark.

Arthur Augustus had not returned to Study No. 6. He did not like what he termed the ribald laughter which followed his visit to Mr. Railton, for the purpose of putting it straight to that gentleman. The swell of the School House strolled out into the quad to allow the pain in his palms to abate, and also to turn over in his mind an ode he was composing

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By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

for a special number of "Tom Merry's Weekly" that was shortly coming out. D'Arcy believed that the moonlight assisted poetic thought, and he was walking slowly along the asphalt path that led down to the gates, with his hands behind his back, thinking.

"Unfortunate fly, I see thee lie,
 Drowned in the milk, and no help nigh,
 And a tear of sympathy fills my eye,
 As I sigh——"

It was then that the strange clatter on the path caught D'Arcy's attention, and he broke off with an ejaculation.

"Bai Jove! what's that?"

A long-limbed figure loomed up out of the shadows, and cannoned fairly into D'Arcy. It seemed to be coming along with the speed of an express train.

Arthur Augustus went flying, and there was a roar and a clatter.

"What the——"

"Ow!"

"Look out!"

Bump! bump!

Clatter! Crash! Clink!

Arthur Augustus sat up dazedly. His first thought was that a motor-car had somehow broken into the St. Jim's quadrangle, and was running amuck there.

But then he recognised the voices of Figgins & Co., the chums of the Fourth in the New House.

"Oh, what's happened?"

"I ran into something."

"Why didn't you call out, ass, instead of spreading yourself round for me to sprawl over?"

"I did, but you didn't stop!"

"Ow! I think I've broken something."

"You've jolly near broken my back, Fatty Wynn."

"Oh, never mind your back. I'm thinking of my leg."

"Bless your leg."

"What on earth was it you ran into, Figgins? I suppose no silly idiot has been leaving things about the path?"

"Can't understand."

"Bai Jove!"

"Hallo! I know that yap. It's Gussy."

"We might have guessed it was Gussy when something was mucked up," said Kerr.

"Yes, rather."

"Weally, deah boys——"

"Fall on him! Squash him! Here, Fatty!"

Arthur Augustus bounced up as if he were made of india-rubber.

"I wefuse to be fallen on. Pway keep your distance, Fatty Wynn, or I shall stwike you."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The clouds had passed, and the moon shone forth again with brilliant light. The New House trio clattered to their feet. The cause of the clatter, and of the speed with which the juniors had been going, was explained as soon as the moonlight shone again. Figgins & Co. were on roller-skates.

"Bai Jove!" ejaculated D'Arcy. "You were skatin', you silly asses."

"Well, we can't go on the river," said Figgins. "We're skating by moonlight, you see, on this blessed path."

"It's vewy dangewous to pedestwians."

"How were we to know that a howling duffer would come ambling along just as the moon went behind a cloud?" demanded Kerr.

"I wefuse to be alluded to as a howlin' duffah——"

"Well, shrieking ass, then."

"I wegard that term as equally oppwobwious. I think——"

"No you don't! Come on, Figgy."

"I wepeat, Kerr——"

"Rats!"

And Figgins & Co. skated off. D'Arcy shouted after them, running in pursuit, though it was not much use running after a skater.

"Kerr, I wegard you as a wude ass! Pway weturn, and I will give you a feahful thwashin'. I considah you a wank outsidah!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Swish! Swish! Clatter!

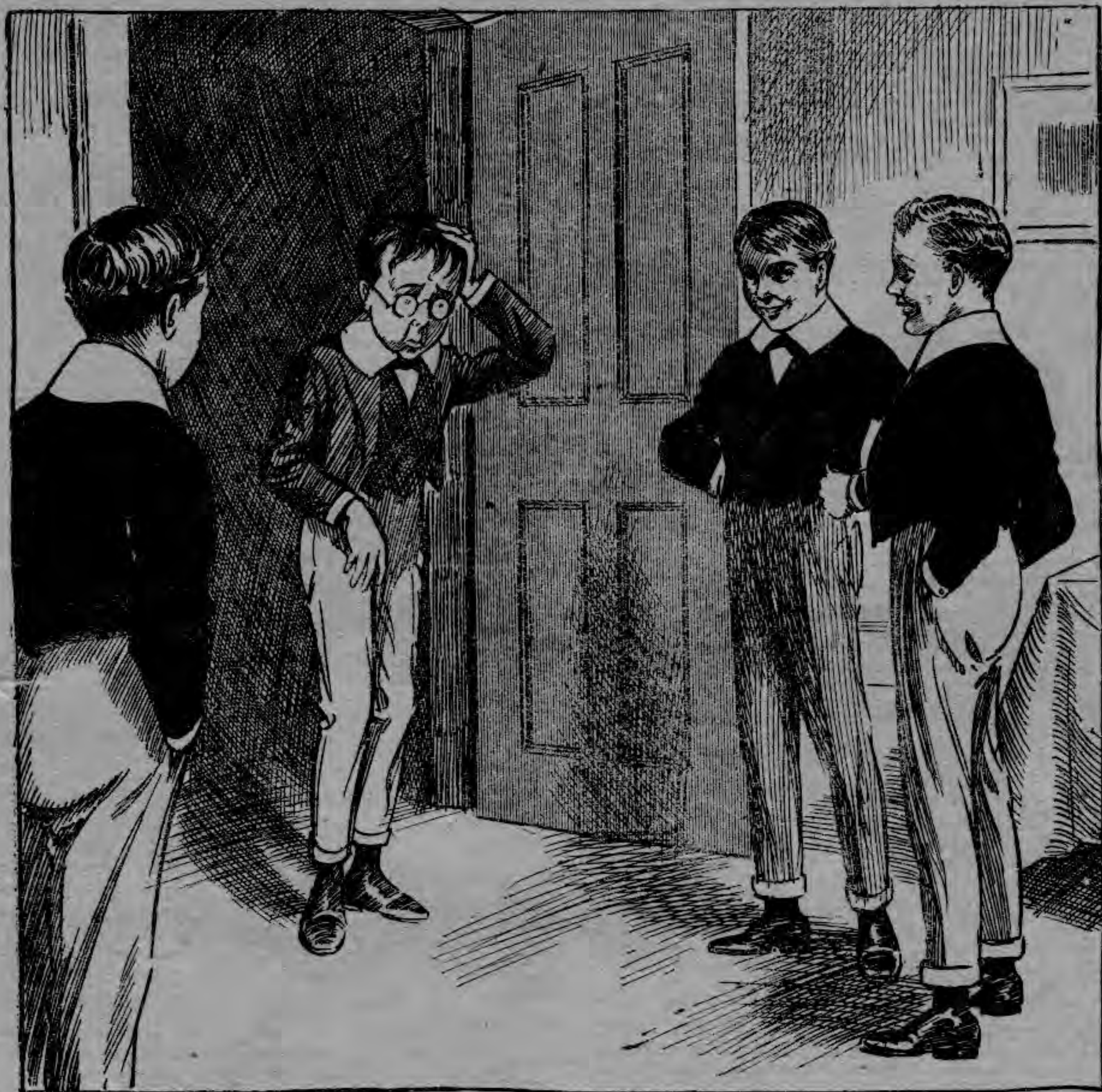
"Come back, you wottahs! I wegard you with uttah contempt!"

Figgins chuckled.

"Let's go back," he murmured. "Three abreast, holding hands. It will be all up with the one and only Gustavus."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The three juniors swung round, and swept back along the path. The path, though not wide, was very level and smooth, and quite comfortable for roller-skates, though, of course, not as good as the floor of a rink. But Figgins & Co. could have



Skimpole blinked at Tom Merry & Co. ruefully. "Upon second thoughts, I do not think I will play in the hockey match," he said. "It would take me longer to learn roller skating than to play snap."

skated anywhere. They came sweeping back along the path, joining hands, and nicely filling it from side to side.

D'Arcy had called to them to come, but now that they were coming at top speed, it occurred to him that the impact might be painful.

He turned and ran.

"Faster!" grinned Figgins.

The skaters swept on at express speed.

They caught up with Arthur Augustus in less than a half-minute, and Figgins reached out and tipped his hat over his eyes. D'Arcy made a clutch at it to save it, and Kerr gave him a poke in the ribs, and Wynn a thump on the shoulder. The swell of St. Jim's pitched forward on his hands and knees, and one knee went on the silk-hat.

Crunch!

"Oh! Bai Jove! Gweat Scott! My hat!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Figgins & Co.

They swept on, leaving the swell of the School House sprawling over his ruined topper. D'Arcy staggered to his feet, the crushed topper in his hand. He gazed at it, and gazed after Figgins & Co.

The New House juniors came sweeping back.

"Clear the track!" shouted Figgins.

"You wottahs!"

"Ha, ha! Get out of the way!"

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

"Jump off the path, ass."

"I decline to jump off the path."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

They swept down upon him. Kerr jerked away the broken topper, and stuck it on his own head as a trophy. D'Arcy was left sitting in the path as the skaters swept by.

"Bai Jove!"

Swish! clatter! swish-swish!

Figgins & Co. were coming back again. D'Arcy braced himself to meet the shock, determined that the New House juniors should come to grief this time.

But Figgins & Co. were all over him in a moment. Kerr jammed the crushed topper on his head, and Fatty Wynn gave him a little poke that made him sit down again. D'Arcy clutched out wildly, and caught Figgins by one leg, and brought him to the ground.

"Oh!" roared Figgins.

The Co. stopped, and skated back. D'Arcy and Figgins were mixed upon the ground. Kerr and Wynn sorted them out, and Figgins rose gasping. Arthur Augustus was wildly excited, and he struggled frantically in the grasp of the Co.

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NEXT THURSDAY: "THE ST. JIM'S FOOTBALLERS!" By **MARTIN CLIFFORD.**

"Pway welease me, you wottahs. I am goin' to thwash Figgins—"

"Ha, ha! Look here—"

"I ordah you to welease me at once."

"Ha, ha! What shall we do with him, Figgins?"

"Gussy, will you run away like a good boy if we let you go?" asked Figgins.

"I wefuse to wun away. I am goin' to give you a feahful thwashin'. Kerr, welease me at once. Wynn, I shall stwike you unless you let go."

"He's going to lick the lot of us," said Figgins plaintively.

"It's hardly safe to go about the quadrangle with Gussy roving about like a lion seeking whom he may devour."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"We can't give up skating just yet, and, on the other hand, our lives aren't safe with Gussy knocking about. What are we to do?"

"Drown him in the fountain?" suggested Kerr.

"Good wheeze! Would you like to be drowned in the fountain, Gussy?"

"Wottahs!"

"He declines. Any other suggestion? We want to meet Gussy's views as much as possible, as he's the person to be executed."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Wascals!"

"Shut him up in the old chapel for a bit," suggested Fatty Wynn. "We can fasten the door on him, and tell Blake presently where to find him."

"Good. Would you like to be shut up in the chapel, Gussy?"

"I wegard you as a beast, Figgins."

"Will you make it pax?"

"Certainly not."

"Then it's the chapel," said Figgins decisively.

"Good! Yank him along."

And the New House juniors tramped along on their skates, and yanked the struggling swell of the School House with them.

Figgins swung open the door of the ruined chapel, and D'Arcy was huddled in. He was planted against the wall, and held there.

"Now, then," said Figgins, "are you going to make it pax?"

"No."

"Final?"

"No. I am goin' to thwash you."

"Good!"

D'Arcy was bumped down upon the cold, cold stone. Then the three New House fellows skated out, and dragged the big door shut behind them. There was a great key, a foot long, in the rusty lock. Kerr had changed it to the outside. Figgins now turned it with an effort, and it grated round.

The next moment D'Arcy was hammering furiously at the door from inside.

"Let me out, you wottahs!"

"Are you going to make it pax?" bawled Figgins, through the door.

"No. I wefuse to do anythin' of the sort."

"Then you can stay there till you decide to do something of the sort," chuckled Figgins. "I should advise exercises to keep yourself warm."

And the New House trio skated off, leaving Arthur Augustus D'Arcy vainly hammering at the inside of the door of the old chapel.

CHAPTER 11.

From Information Received.

"**W**HERE on earth is Gussy?"

Blake and his chums had finished their prep., and it dawned upon them that Arthur Augustus D'Arcy had been a long time absent.

"Off somewhere," said Dig., settling down in the armchair, with his feet on the fender and the latest "Pluck" in his hands.

"He's a long time."

"Yes. Never mind."

"Oh, chuck that book away, and—"

"Rats! I'm going to read this circus story—it's good. Let Gussy stew in his own juice," said Digby elegantly. "It's only a question of dig."

"He may have gone out and got lost," said Herries thoughtfully. "If you like, I'll go round to the kennels and fetch Towser, and we'll track him down."

Blake grunted.

"You leave Towser where he is. I'm fed up with Towser."

"Well, you remember how he tracked the burglars—"

"I remember how he tracked the kipper—"

"Look here, Blake—"

"Look here, Herries—"

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"Oh, shut up, you two!" said Dig. "If you can't agree on that eternal topic why can't you give it a rest? I want to read."

"Well, where's Gussy?"

"Blow Gussy!"

"He may have gone in to jaw with Tom Merry," said Herries. "He was saying something about a game of chess with Manners, too. Let's see if he's there, and rout him out. If he doesn't do his prep. soon he'll be too late."

"Come on, then!"

Blake and Herries went along to Tom Merry's study, leaving Digby to the enjoyment of his "Pluck." The Terrible Three were at home. They had finished prep., and were enjoying a three-handed contest with foils when the Fourth-Formers arrived.

Tom Merry was defending himself against a combined attack by Manners and Lowther, and holding his own very well against the two.

They did not leave off as the Fourth-Formers came in, and Blake and Herries had to dodge away to avoid the foils.

"Here, look out!" exclaimed Blake indignantly.

"Keep clear," said Lowther. "We're busy."

"I want to ask you—"

"No time for conundrums now," said Manners. "Keep clear."

"I wasn't going to ask you a conundrum, ass! I was going to ask you—"

"Touched!" yelled Lowther, as he pinked Tom Merry's arm.

"Only a tap," said Tom Merry.

"Never mind, it counts."

"Look here, you silly cuckoos!" began Blake wrathfully.

"We've come here—"

"Stand clear."

"I want to say—"

"Touched!" shouted Tom Merry, as his foil glided under Manners's arm.

He recovered it instantly, and guarded himself.

"Ow!" said Manners.

"Hurt?"

"No, ass! I suppose a chap can say 'Ow!' if he likes?"

"Oh, certainly."

"It was that dummy Blake put me out," said Manners.

"Let's leave off for a bit, and put him out."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Blessed if I see what these Fourth-Form kids want in a senior study."

"Senior!" hooted Blake. "Senior rats!"

Manners and Lowther snorted at Blake, and made a determined attack upon Tom Merry. Tom had to give ground, and he backed into Blake.

Blake stood as firm as a rock. He wasn't going to make room for a Shell fellow. Tom had to halt, and Manners and Lowther pinked him, and pinked past him at Blake. They winked at Tom, and Tom Merry understood, and began to guard very badly. Manners and Lowther fenced past him, and poked Blake all over.

"Here, hold on!" roared Blake. "What do you call this?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Stop it!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Jack Blake bounded away. He ran to the grate and seized the poker, and tossed the tongs to Herries.

"Time we joined in," he remarked. "Come on, Herries!"

"Right-ho!" said Herries.

The Terrible Three lowered their foils.

"Time!" said Tom Merry, laughing. "What do you Fourth-Form kids want?"

"It's about Gussy," said Blake. "We came to see if he was here."

"Well, you can see that he isn't."

"Do you know where he is?"

"Haven't the faintest idea."

"Why don't you keep him on a chain, if you're anxious about him?" said Lowther.

"Oh, go and eat coke! Come on, Herries!"

"Hold on!" said Tom Merry. "If Gussy's in trouble again we'll help you look for him."

"Good!"

And the Terrible Three followed Blake. They met Noble in the passage, and questioned him. Kangaroo shook his head.

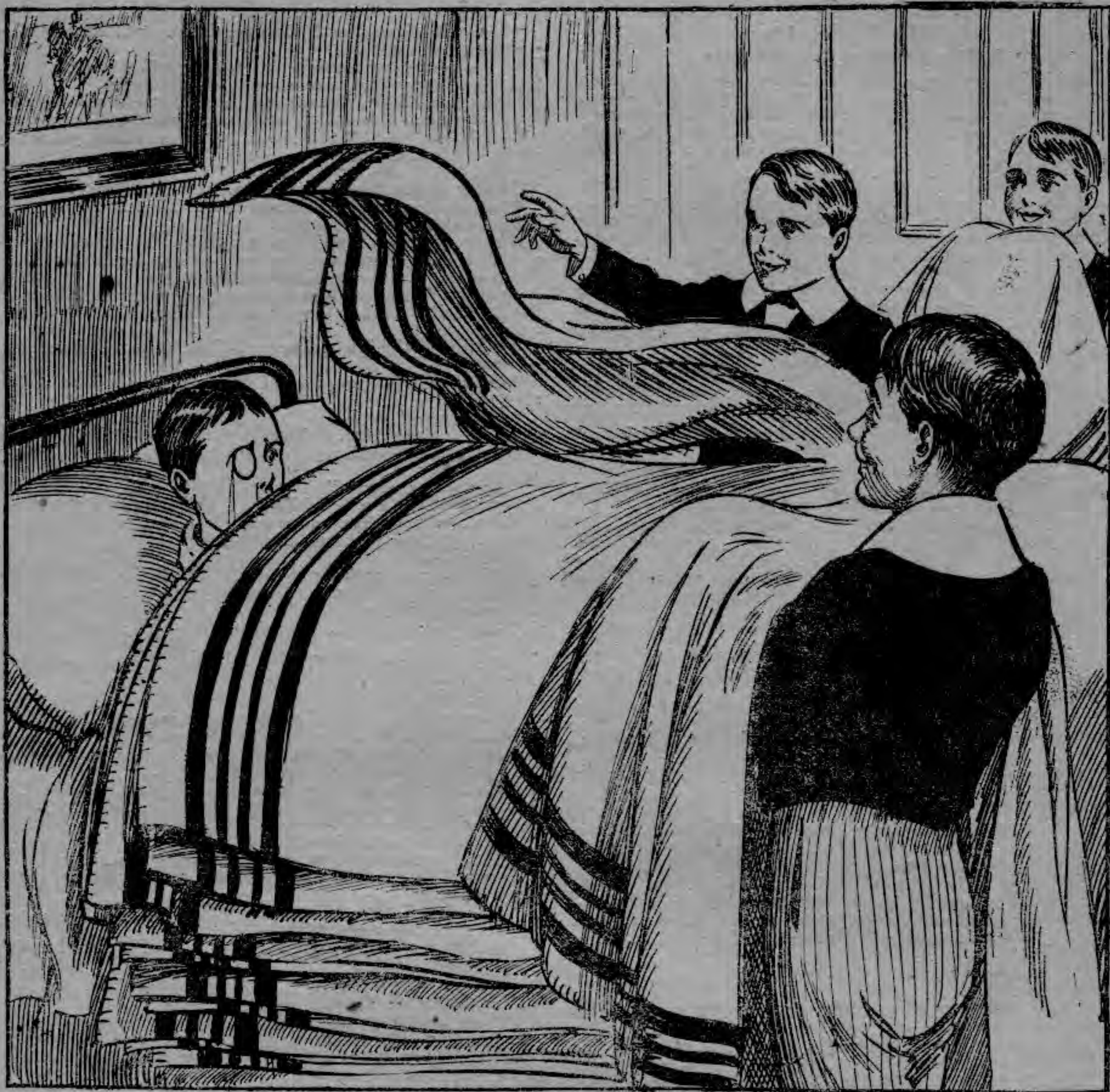
"He's not in the common-room," he said. "Hallo, Dane! You've been in the gym. Is the one and only there?"

Clifton Dane laughed. He knew whom that was.

"No, I haven't seen Gussy."

"Where the dickens has he got to?" growled Blake. "I suppose we'd better look for him, or he won't do his prep. to-night. We'll give him the frog's march when we find him."

"Good egg!"



The blankets from the other beds in the dormitory were piled on to the perspiring swell of St. Jim's, until he struggled under a heap of nine or ten. "Pway welcase me, deah boys!" he gasped.

"Hallo, here's Taggles!" said Blake, as they went towards the stairs. "What on earth does Taggy want here at this time in the evening? Taggy, old son, what's the trouble?"

The school porter stopped and grunted. Taggles had reached a period of life when the fewer stairs he mounted the better he liked it.

"It's a note, Master Blake."

"For me?"

"Yes."

"From whom?" asked Blake, in surprise.

"From Master Figgins. He said you would understand that the messenger was to have a shilling," said Taggles, with some emphasis.

"It's a lark," said Tom Merry, laughing.

"I shouldn't wonder. Figgy has done it to stick me for a shilling and to help Taggles nearer the grave with more gin-and-water."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Look 'ere—" began Taggles wrathfully.

"Right-ho, Taggles! You shall have the boblet if there's anything in the letter worth it. If it's a lark you can take the letter back to Figgins and ask him for the bob."

"Good business!" said Lowther.

Blake opened the note. He read it, and gave a long whistle.

"Well, what's the news?" demanded half a dozen voices.

"The young ass!"

"What is it?"

"Oh, a lark, of course!"

"Look 'ere—" said Taggles.

"Read it out!" exclaimed Manners.

"Right-ho! Listen:

"Dear Blake,—If you miss any old thing belonging to your study, you can look for it in the ruined chapel.—FIGGINS."

The juniors stared for a moment in surprise, and then burst into a simultaneous roar of laughter.

"Ha, ha, ha! Gussy!"

"Of course!" said Blake. "He was bound to fall into Figgy's clutches. He was bound to get shut up in the chapel. We can never shut him up in the study."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Taggy, old son, you shall have the boblet, as this letter contains important information as to the mysterious disappearance of Arthur Adolphus, Esquire," said Blake solemnly. "Get a lantern to show us the way, and the boblet is thine."

"I'll get a lantern," said Taggles.

And he stumped down the stairs. Five minutes later, with Taggles and the lighted lantern, the juniors were on their way to the ruined chapel of St. Jim's.

CHAPTER 12.

Arthur Augustus Has An Idea.

DARK and gloomy looked the old chapel as the juniors approached it. Lowther was carrying the lantern now, and the light streamed round upon the juniors. The moon had set behind a bank of clouds, and the quad was very dark. Taggles followed the juniors, a little anxious about his shilling.

They reached the door of the chapel. It was a side door, the main entrance of the old building being long swept away by the hand of time. Within that door was the only part of the building that remained intact—a room shut in by stone walls and masses of ivied masonry piled in disorder.

"The key's in the lock," remarked Kangaroo.

"It's locked on the outside," said Blake, tapping at the door. "Hallo! Anybody in there?"

"Bai Jove!"

"Ha, ha! Gussy's voice!"

There was a knock on the door from within.

"Hallo! Is that you, Gussy?"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"How did you get in there?"

"I was thwust in beah by force by thwee howwid wuffians."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"It is no laughin' mattah. Pway open the door."

Blake grated the huge key round in the lock. The door creaked open. It was very stiff upon its hinges.

"Give it a shove, all together," suggested Tom Merry.

"Right-ho! Shove away!" And they shoved the door together.

It flew back quickly enough then, and there was a wild yell from within, and the sound of a bump on the floor.

"Ow! Yow! Ow!"

"My only hat!" gasped Blake. "Fancy a chap standing just inside while we were shoving the door open! Oh, Gussy!"

"Ow!"

"Are you hurt?"

"Yow!"

"Blessed if I can make head or tail of what he's saying! Is it Chinese or Esperanto? Come out, Gussy."

"Gwoo! I've had a a feahful shock, and you have thwown me quite into a fluttah, you uttah asses!"

"Never mind. Come forth."

Lowther held up the lantern to show a light into the doorway. Arthur Augustus was heard to sniff, and pick himself up in the darkness within.

Then he came forth!

The juniors stared at him blankly. His hat was a wreck—which was not a wonder, considering what it had gone through—and his clothes showed awful traces of the slime of the damp old ruin.

They looked at him—and then they yelled.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

D'Arcy looked at the rescuers through his eyeglass—the only clean thing about him, to all appearance.

"You uttah asses——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I wegard you as beasts!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Pway do not cackle in that widiculous mannah. I can see nothin' whatevah to laugh at."

"But we can," grinned Tom Merry. "And don't forget that we are your heroic rescuers for the second time to-day. And remember that you owe Taggles a shilling, too, for bringing us information as to your whereabouts."

"Wats!"

"Now, Gussy, if you are going to welsh a respectable old gentleman, who has taken a great deal of trouble to get you rescued——"

"I wegard you as an ass, Tom Mewwy. I shall be vewy pleased to pwesent Taggles with a shillin'. Pway accept this shillin', Taggles."

"Suttinly, sir," said Taggles. "Now, if you young gents will give me my lantern, I'll be hoff."

"Well, I think we've finished with it," said Blake. "Have you had enough of it, Gussy? You were not thinking of putting in a longer stay in there, I suppose?"

"I wegard the question as widiculous, Blake."

"Then here's your lantern, Taggy."

"Thank you, Master Blake."

Taggles carried off his lantern, and the juniors returned to the School House. D'Arcy walked with his nose very high in the air. His chums had certainly rescued him, but they had not taken the matter in a properly serious spirit.

And the other fellows whom they met by the way did not take it in a serious spirit, either. The first person they encountered on entering the School House was D'Arcy minor. Wally stared at his major, and gave a prolonged chuckle.

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"My only Aunt Jane!" he ejaculated. "Whatever have you been doing, Gussy?"

"Pway don't be inquisitive, Wally," said D'Arcy loftily. "It is a vewy sewious fault in a kid of your age."

"Oh, come off, you know!" said Wally. "Is it a lark?"

"Pway buzz off, and don't ask impertinent questions."

"Look here," said Wally seriously. "I can't have you going about in this state, Gus."

"Eh?"

"Think of the honour of the family," said Wally severely. "What am I to say to the chaps in the Third if they see my major in this state?"

Arthur Augustus simply gasped. His chums chuckled joyously. D'Arcy minor was the most untidy fag in the Third Form at St. Jim's—which was saying a great deal. Arthur Augustus seldom met him without giving him a lecture on the art of dressing and keeping tidy. Wally was repaying an old score now.

"Weally, Wally," said the swell of the School House feebly—"weally——"

"I'm ashamed of you, Gussy! Suppose Cousin Ethel should see you!"

"Weally——"

"Think of me, too. You know how carefully I always observe you, and follow your example. Now, suppose I grow untidy?"

"You young wascal!"

"It might happen," said Wally, shaking his head. "There's nothing like slovenliness in an elder brother to cause the same thing in younger members of the family."

"Wally——"

"It's no good making excuses," said Wally, wagging his forefinger admonishingly at his major; "no good at all! I'm ashamed of you, Gus!"

"You young ass! I have been the victim of a wotten joke——"

"I'm shocked at you!"

"Wally——"

"I'm disgusted!"

D'Arcy made no further attempt to explain. Instead, he made a rush at his minor. Wally skipped away and escaped, and Arthur Augustus, with a very red face, hurried upstairs. The juniors followed him, chuckling.

"Hallo, where are you going to?" demanded Blake, as D'Arcy was mounting the second flight of stairs. "It's not bedtime yet!"

"I'm going to the dorm."

"But it's not bedtime, and you've got your prep to do. There will be trouble with Lathom in the morning, if you don't do it."

"I suppose I cannot do pwep in this state?"

"You'd better not miss it."

"I shall wequiah a wash and a change of clothes befoah I do my pwep, Blake."

"Look here——"

"Wats!"

Arthur Augustus mounted the stairs to the Fourth-Form dormitory. He stripped, and washed, and changed his clothes. He had just finished changing when the dormitory door was thrown open, and the Fourth Form came streaming in to bed.

"Bai Jove!" said D'Arcy.

"Changed, I see!" grinned Blake. "Well, now you can unchange again, you giddy ass! What about your prep?"

"I am afwaid it is too late now," said D'Arcy, beginning to remove his boots again. "I shall have to explain to Mr. Lathom in the morning."

"I hope he'll listen to you," grinned Digby. "If I were a betting chap, I should lay ten to one against your explanation satisfying Lathom."

"I suppose that as a weasonable man he will listen to weason. I shall put it to him as one gentleman to anothah."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I uttally fail to see any cause for mewwiment in that wemark."

The Fourth-Formers chuckled, and went to bed. D'Arcy turned in with the rest. The lights were put out in the dormitory, and the prefect on duty bade the boys good-night and withdrew.

The juniors were tired, as they generally were after a half-holiday, and they did not talk as much as usual after lights out. They dropped off to sleep; but D'Arcy, who was thinking, stayed awake.

"Blake! I say, Blake, deah boy!" D'Arcy called out.

There was no reply. Jack Blake was reposing safely in the arms of Morpheus.

"Blake, Blake!"

Jack Blake grunted.

"Groo! Groo!"

"Blake! Are you asleep, Blake, deah boy?"

"Yes," growled Blake, waking up; "I'm asleep! Lemme alone! Shut up! Groo!"

"I want to speak to you, Blake."

"To-morrow, dummy! Groo!"

"But I want—"

"Shut up!" roared Blake.

"I want to wemark—"

"I want to go to sleep!" shrieked Blake. "I'm tired! I'm sleepy! Shut up! Ring off! Go and eat coke! Silence!"

"Yaas, certainly. But I was about to wemark—"

Blake grasped his pillow. That would certainly have cut D'Arcy short; but Blake reflected that he would have to get out of bed to recover it—and the night was cold—or else sleep without a pillow, which would not be comfortable. So he resigned himself to his fate.

"What is it, you ass? Quick!"

"I wefuse to be called an ass."

Blake breathed hard through his nose.

"Will you tell me what you've woke me up for?" he demanded, in suppressed tones.

"Certainly, deah boy! I woke you up to speak to you. I will not keep you awake long. I have only a few words to say to you, you know."

"You utter duffer—"

"I decline to be chawactewised as a duffah! I—"

"Will you come to the point?"

"How am I to come to the point when you keep on intewwuptin' me?"

Blake snorted. The pillow came very near to flying through the air at that moment, but Jack restrained himself.

"Buck up, Gussy!"

"Certainly, deah boy! You should nevah allow youah courtesy to a chum to welapse, you know, even in a moment of iwvitation like the pwesent."

"Is that what you woke me up to say to me?"

"Not at all, deah boy. It's about the skatin'."

"Blow the skating!"

"The ice on the wivah is thawin' worse than evah."

"Bless the ice!"

"It will be wotten by Saturday, and Waiton is certain not to allow us to play hockey on the ice, you know."

"Yes, I know!" shrieked Blake. "Have you woke me in the middle of the night, when I'm as sleepy as a log, to tell me things I know?"

"Not at all, deah boy! Pway be patient. I was goin' to wemark that I have a wippin' ideah. We cannot play hockey on the ice this time, but it would be wotten to put off the match—especially as the gwound won't be fit for footah."

"Will you come to the point?"

"Yaas, wathah! I am comin' to it as fast as I can, considewin' the inconsiderate way you keep on intewwuptin' me. My ideah is that as we cannot play on the ice, we should turn the gym. into a wink—"

"Into a which?"

"Wink."

"Oh, a rink!" said Blake.

"Yaas, wathah! That we should turn the gym. into a wink, and play the hockey-match theash on wollah-skates. What do you think of the ideah?"

"I'll tell you to-morrow," said Blake sleepily. "Can't talk now, or think. Shut up."

"I say, Blake!"

Snore!

"Blake! I say, Blake! Blake!"

Whiz!

The pillow flew at last.

It caught D'Arcy on the side of the head as he sat up in bed, and fairly bowled him over. He rolled off the bed tangled in the bedclothes, and there was a heavy bump on the floor.

Then a voice of wrath was heard in the darkness of the dormitory.

"You uttah beast!"

Snore!

"I considah you an absolute bwute."

Snore!

"I shall give you a feahful thwashin' in the mornin', Blake."

Snore!

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy gave it up. He turned into bed again, and went to sleep himself.

CHAPTER 13.

The Team.

D'ARCY explained to Mr. Lathom in the morning that he had really not had time to do his prep. But he found the Fourth Form-master as unreasonable as Mr. Railton had been on a previous occasion. He received an imposition of a hundred lines, and when he ventured to remonstrate and explain further, the lines were increased

by fifty. At that point D'Arcy decided to stop, and cut his losses, as it were.

Meanwhile, the idea of having the hockey match on skates in the gym. was catching on. The thaw was more pronounced than ever, and it was pretty clear that the ice would not bear again till there was a complete change in the weather.

The hockey match had to be played on roller-skates, or not played at all; and it all depended upon whether the juniors could obtain permission to keep the gymnasium for their own sole use on Saturday afternoon.

But that was a big "whether." For if the Saturday was wet, as was extremely probable, there would be a crowd of fellows wanting to use the gym. True, the game would only last seventy minutes. But though the Sixth might have reserved the use of the gym. for themselves for seventy minutes with ease, it was a different matter with the Fourth Form and the Shell.

"Well, the thaw means business," said Jack Blake, looking out of the hall window after the Fourth Form had come out from morning lessons. "It's raining."

"Howwid!" said D'Arcy, who was looking extremely thoughtful. "I say, Blake—"

"Hallo! Any more ideas?"

"No, deah boy; but last night—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"There is nothin' to laugh at. Last night you hurled a pillow at me in the wudest way poss—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"It stwuck me with violence, and thwew me into quite a fluttah. In the heat of the moment I said I would thwash you in the mornin'."

"Seize him!" shouted Blake, in great alarm.

Herries and Digby promptly collared the swell of the School House, and ran him against the wall, and pinned him there.

"Got him!" said Herries.

"Weally, Hewwies—"

"Good! Hold him tight!"

"Weally, Blake—"

"I'll go and look for some rope, to tie him up," said Blake.

"I wefuse to be tied up. Welease me at once, you wuff wottahs! I was goin' to say—"

"Don't let him go!"

"All right; we've got him."

"I was goin' to say—"

"In future," said Blake thoughtfully, "you must always be ready to seize Gussy at a moment's notice when these ferocious fits come upon him. We can't have him running amok like a blessed Malay, or a giddy Berserker."

"Weally, Blake, I was goin'—"

"Will you make it pax, Gussy?"

"You misappwehend me entirely. I—"

"Will you make it pax?" roared Blake.

"Let me explain—"

"Bang his napper against the wall," said Blake.

Biff! D'Arcy gave a shout.

"Ow! Wow!"

"Now, then, Gussy, is it pax?"

"You uttah ass!"

"Second bang," said Jack.

Biff!

"Ow! Yow! Gerrooh!"

"Is it pax, Gussy?"

"You don't undahstand—"

"Third bang!"

Biff!

There was a yell of laughter from a crowd of juniors who were gathering round to watch the peculiar scene. Arthur Augustus struggled desperately in the grasp of his captors.

"Welease me, you wottahs!" he roared.

"Is it pax?"

"Yaas, wathah, you ass!"

Herries and Digby let him go. Blake chuckled softly.

"Sorry for your napper, and I hope the wall isn't damaged," he remarked. "It's against the rules to bang at the wall like that with lumps of wood."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You uttah ass!" growled D'Arcy, rubbing the back of his head. The head wasn't hurt very much, but the hair was disarranged, a more serious matter in the eyes of the swell of St. Jim's. "I was goin'—"

"Well, you can't now."

"Ass! You uttably misappwehend. I was goin' to explain that upon second thoughts I had decided not to thwash you, as no doubt you were pwovoked at the time by bein' woke up out of your sleep."

Blake burst into a roar.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I wegard you as a hasty ass, Blake."

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NEXT THURSDAY: "THE ST. JIM'S FOOTBALLERS!" By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

"Ha, ha, ha! You shouldn't be so jolly long-winded, Gussy. Ha, ha, ha!"

"Wats!"

"About the roller-skating," said Tom Merry, coming up. "That seems to be settled, and it's a question of getting the gym. on Saturday afternoon now."

"Oh, we shall have to have it!"

"I'll ask Kildare; he'll do the best he can for us," said Tom thoughtfully. "You can always depend on Kildare to play the game."

"Thank you!" said the captain of St. Jim's, who came in at the door at the same moment. "Unsolicited testimonials thankfully received."

Tom Merry swung round, turning red. Kildare laughed.

"It's all right, Merry; I know you didn't know I was here," he said. "But what is it you are going to ask me?"

"It's about the gym. We had a hockey match on the ice fixed for Saturday, and this rotten thaw has mucked it up," explained Tom Merry. "We were wondering if we could have the gym. for an hour on Saturday afternoon, for a match on roller-skates."

Kildare nodded.

"Yes, I'll fix it for you."

"Oh, thanks awfully, Kildare! It's jolly good of you."

"Well, you know, I always play the game," said Kildare, with a smile, passing on.

The juniors exchanged glances of satisfaction.

"That's jolly good!" said Monty Lowther. "We can take it as settled that the match will come off. How many fellows are you playing, Tom?"

"Eleven."

"And the list isn't settled yet?"

"It will be settled to-day," said Tom Merry, "and the chaps will have to get all the practice they can. Figgins & Co. were skating last night on the path out there. We can do the same, I suppose; or in the passages here, when the coast's clear."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"As for the team, that won't be much trouble. Three jolly good players from the Shell, first—myself, Manners, and Lowther—"

"Bai Jove!"

"Then three from the Fourth—Blake, Herries, Digby—that's six."

"I twust, Tom Mewwy, that you will not make it nees-sawy for me to mention my claims myself," said D'Arcy, with a great deal of dignity.

"Well, I don't know about you, Gussy. If it were a necktie competition, or a silk hat show, I'd put you in at once, but—"

"I wathah fancy myself at hockey, Tom Mewwy."

"Yes; but no doubt it's all fancy on your part."

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—"

"Oh, Gussy can play!" said Blake, who didn't intend a fellow in his study to be left out. "I propose him, Dig seconds him, and Herries thirds him, and I suppose that's enough."

"Rats!" said Lowther.

"Look here, you Shell-fish—"

"Yaas, wathah! I considah—"

"It's all right, Gussy goes in," said Tom Merry hastily.

"The only condition is, that he doesn't try to play hockey in patent leather shoes or a silk hat."

"I wegard that condish as fwivolous, Tom Mewwy. I twust no gentleman pwesent would evah suspect me of appeawin' anywhere in unsuitable attire."

"That makes seven, then," said Tom Merry. "Of course, Kangaroo and Clifton Dane must go in. That's nine. Reilly, of course—we must have at least one Irishman. I'm not going to be responsible for another wrong to old Ireland."

"Faith, and ye're right!" said the boy from Belfast.

"That's ten. For the other one, there's Glyn and—and Gore."

"Oh, blow Gore!" said Lowther.

"Thank you, Lowther!" said Gore, who had come up in time to hear his name mentioned. "I think I can play hockey pretty well."

"It's entirely on a chap's form, in a case like this," said Tom Merry, with a reproving glance at his chum. "It's between Gore and Glyn."

"Glyn's going to see his people on Saturday afternoon," said Harry Noble.

"Good! If he were wanted particularly for the match, he couldn't go and see his people, or anybody else's people," said the hockey captain warmly. "But as we have Gore, Glyn can go and eat toffee. That's the team."

"What price me?" demanded Hancock, of the Fourth.

Tom Merry looked at him.

"Twopence," he suggested.

"Oh, don't be an ass!"

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NEXT THURSDAY: **"THE ST. JIM'S FOOTBALLERS!"** By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

"Well, twopence-ha'penny—and that's expensive."

"Look here, I can play hockey!"

"So can I!" said Mellish.

"And I!" remarked Smith minor.

"Well, you can all show what you can do between now and Saturday," said Tom Merry. "If any chap shows better form than a member of the team, he gets the cap, that's all. The team is selected on that understanding, of course."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Then that's settled!" said Tom Merry, as he walked away, to avoid any further explanations as to the excellent form of the rejected candidates, and their uncommon claims to consideration.

CHAPTER 14.

Skimpole Offers His Services.

TOM MERRY was sitting in his study, fastening on a pair of roller-skates, when the door opened, and Skimpole, of the Shell, put his head in. The amateur Determinist of St. Jim's blinked round the study, spotted Tom Merry, and came in.

"I came here to see you, Merry," he remarked.

"Well, take a good look, and bunk," said Tom cheerfully. "I haven't time now to hear anything about hereditament or envirohny."

"You mistake; you should say heredity and environment."

"Doesn't it work the same both ways?" asked Tom Merry innocently.

"Certainly not. Heredity is—"

Crash! Skimpole jumped as Tom Merry crashed down the skate he had fastened on one boot, and lifted the other foot.

"Dear me! You quite startled me, Merry."

"Never mind; run away!"

"I came here to say—"

"Scat! I tell you, I can't stand Determinism. Take Socialism again; there's more sense in that, anyway," said Tom Merry. "Look here, suppose you come into a fortune some day, and you have a wicked relation wants to shove you into a lunatic asylum, as they do in novels. Well, if they could get the medical men to certify that you were a Determinist, that would be enough. You would be shut up."

Skimpole blinked at him. Skimpole had never in the course of his career been known to see a joke, however obvious.

"How absurd, Merry! You speak of Determinism as if it were a synonymous term for lunacy."

"Well, isn't it?"

"Certainly not. Determinism—"

Crash! Tom Merry rose to his feet.

"I'm off," he remarked. "Try and get done by the time I come in, won't you, Skimpy? You can talk as much as you like till then."

"Pray wait a minute, Merry. I did not come here, really, to speak upon the subject of Determinism, immensely important as it is. I had a suggestion to make with regard to the roller-skating hockey match on Saturday afternoon."

"Oh!" said Tom Merry, pausing at the door. "Good! What is it? I don't mind listening a minute if you're really going to talk sense; but I'm afraid it's too good to be true."

"Ah!" said Skimpole, with a sigh. "What a state of intellect, when a hockey match seems to outweigh in importance the vast truths of Determinism—"

"Why, there you go again! I'm off."

"Wait a moment. About the hockey match—"

"Buck up; I'm in a hurry!"

"Well, I hear that you have selected a team of eleven players, the full number, and that it includes yourself and Lowther and Manners, Blake and his friends, Reilly, Gore, and the two chaps from the end study."

"Exactly!"

"I suppose, in case of necessity, one of them would be willing to stand out."

"Have to, if I found a better player," said Tom Merry concisely. "Willing or not wouldn't make much difference."

"Exactly. I quite expected you to take this view, Merry. It agrees with the scientific theory of the survival of the fittest."

"Blow the survival of the fittest!"

"Really, Merry, that is speaking of a great scientific theory with disrespect. The law of the survival of the fittest was one of the greatest discoveries of modern times."

"Piffle! Ever since people knew anything, they knew that a chap who was most fit to survive in a tussle, would

survive," said Tom Merry cheerfully. "Nothing modern about that discovery. Good-bye!"

"Hold on! I was going to suggest a good player——"

"Now you're talking. Who is it?"

"Myself."

"Hey?"

"I was thinking of offering my services in the hockey match," said Skimpole, blinking at the astounded hockey captain through his spectacles. "Do you think favourably of the idea, Merry?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Really, Merry——"

"My only hat! Ha, ha, ha!"

"What's the joke?" asked Manners, coming into the study for his roller-skates. "Tell your uncle, that he may join in the smile."

Tom Merry clung to the doorpost and yelled.

"Skimmy offers his services in the hockey match."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Thinking that one of the chaps would be willing to stand out to make room for a better player, you know," said Tom, almost weeping.

Manners shrieked. Skimpole blinked at them in great surprise.

"Of course, Merry, it is open to you as captain of the School House side to refuse my offer," he remarked. "I see no cause for merriment, however."

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled Manners.

"Have you ever played hockey?" asked Tom Merry explosively.

"Well, no," said Skimpole. "I have watched a game; though, unfortunately, I am so short-sighted that I could see very little."

"Oh, my only aunt!"

"But, of course, you would explain the rules to me before we started," said Skimpole. "I am very quick at picking up games. My Aunt Janette taught me snap in a single evening."

Tom Merry clung helplessly to the doorpost. Manners laid down in the armchair, kicked up his feet and screamed. Skimpole blinked from one to the other, evidently in a state of great astonishment.

"I fail to see the cause of this merriment," he said wonderingly. "Really, Merry——"

"He learned snap in a single evening," said Tom Merry feebly. "There's not much difference between snap and hockey, of course."

"Ha, ha, ha!" shrieked Manners.

"You would explain the rules to me before we started, and I should probably make few mistakes," said Skimpole. "As for the skating, I admit that I am not a good skater—in a way. I have tried, but somehow my legs declined to remain stationary when I wished them to do so, and I assumed on several occasions a horizontal instead of a perpendicular position. This was annoying. However, I have now worked out the matter on scientific principles; which, you know, cannot fail. By holding my feet in a certain position, I shall conquer the difficulties of roller skating——"

"My only summer tile!" moaned Manners.

"Really, Manners——"

"But how do you know your feet will stay where you hold 'em?" asked Tom Merry, in a faint voice, weak with laughter.

"By the fact that mind always governs matter," said Skimpole. "I shall will my feet to remain in a certain position. Mind always governs matter, if exerted with sufficient will-force."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Instead of this absurd merriment, Merry, suppose you put me to the test."

"Oh, dear, dear!" moaned Tom Merry. "I know you will be the death of me, Skimmy. Why don't you stick to science? It suits you better than roller-skating. You can always come out strong in six-syllableism."

"I have never heard of that," said Skimpole, with interest. "Is it a new science?"

"No; an old one," grinned Tom Merry. "Shove your skates on, Manners. The coast is clear now, but I don't know how long it will be before some ass comes bothering along."

"Right you are," said Manners.

"But really, Merry——"

"Skimmy, old man, you're awfully good to offer your services like this, but I really think you couldn't learn skating and hockey both as quickly as you learned rap——"

"Snap!"

"Oh, yes, snap! So I shall have to decline."

"Really, Merry, I think I have a right to a trial," said Skimpole, with dignity.

"You are a trial in yourself, Skimmy—a trial to every-

body. You put an awful strain on a chap's ribs, for instance."

"I think you ought to test me."

"Good!" exclaimed Manners, with a chuckle. "Try him on roller skates, Tommy. I'll put Lowther's skates on him."

Tom Merry laughed.

"Look here, Skimmy, better take my advice, and not try. But I'll give you a chance if you like. But I advise you not. You can't skate."

"On scientific principles——"

"My dear chap, scientific principles are all right on paper," said Tom Merry. "Scientific principles help you to establish the truth of a theory which everybody knows isn't true. But they're no good for practical matters; and roller skating is practical—awfully."

"What-ho!" said Manners.

"I prefer to try, and put science to the test," said Skimpole.

"Oh, all right! Shove Lowther's skates on his feet, Manners, old man."

"Here you are, Skimmy. Sit down."

Skimpole sat down in the armchair, and Manners solemnly fastened the roller skates upon his boots.

CHAPTER 15.

Skimpole on Skates.

SKIMPOLE smiled a beaming smile while Manners was putting on the skates for him. Tom Merry stood in the doorway and looked on, grinning. That Skimpole would come to grief he knew; but there was no refusing him. It was necessary for the genius of the School to learn by bitter experience. There was a swish of rollers in the passage, and Jack Blake came whizzing along. He stopped at the doorway, and caught hold of Tom Merry's shoulder.

"How long are you going to be?" he demanded.

"Sorry," said Tom, laughing. "I've just received a most flattering offer for the hockey team—a first-class man."

"Oh!" said Blake. "All right, so long as you don't ask one of Study No. 6 to stand out. Who is it?"

"Skimpole."

"What!"

"Herbert Skimpole, of that ilk."

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled Blake.

"He can't skate, and he can't play hockey," explained Tom Merry. "But he learned snap in a single evening, so he thinks he can pick up enough before Saturday to be given his cap for a House match."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Skimpole blinked at them.

"You seem to be amused, Blake."

"Not at all," gurgled Blake. "I'm doing this for fun. Ha, ha, ha! My only hat! Ha, ha, ha! Oh, no, I'm not amused! Ha, ha, ha!"

"I have established on scientific principles that——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"There you are," said Manners, rising to his feet. "The skates are on, kid. Shall we give you a hand up?"

"No, thank you," said Skimpole, rising carefully with his hands on the arms of the chair. "I think I can manage."

"Then I'll jolly well get out of your way," said Manners, retreating hastily toward the doorway.

The three juniors looked on with great interest. Skimpole having worked out the matter on scientific principles, and having an absolute reliance upon science, of course did not need any assistance. He had only to stand up and set the scientific principles going. He stood up—but the scientific principles appeared to be a little rocky.

For Skimpole's right foot shot away with him, and he followed it in a state of great amazement, till he brought up against the table.

The table wasn't built to stand the shock of a cannon like that. It fairly flew, and a host of the belongings of the Terrible Three were scattered far and wide.

"Look out!" roared Tom Merry.

"Dear me!" Skimpole gasped. "This—this is very surprising."

He was sitting on a heap of crumpled foolscap, with which were mixed books and pens and an overflowing inkpot. He blinked round with an expression that made Tom Merry and Lowther forget the destruction of their property, and shriek with laughter.

"Shall I help you up?" gasped Tom Merry.

"No, thank you; I—I think I slipped that time."

"Ha, ha, ha! I'm pretty sure you did."

Skimpole put his hands on the floor, and rose cautiously to his knees. All was plain sailing, so far. Then he put one skate on the floor. Then he raised the other knee from the floor, and as he did so the skate shot away with him.

What happened next Skimpole did not know, till he found himself embracing the armchair, without the faintest idea as to how he had got across the room.

"Dear me!" said Skimpole, gasping. "Perhaps it would be advisable for you to assist me a little at first, Merry. The movements are so extremely sudden that I do not have time to bring my scientific system into play."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Tom Merry and Manners slid across to him, and raised him from the floor. Skimpole hung a dead weight upon them, his skates keeping up a clatter.

"My only hat!" ejaculated Blake. "I hope Knox isn't in his study underneath. If he's working, you'll have him up soon."

"Better get out of the study?" suggested Manners.

"Yes, rather."

"Pray—pray be careful!" gasped Skimpole. "I have a strange feeling of helplessness. It is very curious, but my scientific principles do not seem to work."

"Awfully curious, I must say."

"I—I think I can go now. Let go—"

The juniors released him. Skimpole's feet tore away, and he threw his arms wildly round the necks of the chairs.

There he hung, his feet a couple of feet in front of him—which is a very good pun, by the way. Tom Merry and Manners braced themselves to meet the shock, and fortunately Skimpole was a lightweight. If it had been Fatty Wynn, of the New House, the three of them would have gone down in a heap.

"Bring him out," said Blake. "I believe I can hear Knox's door opening."

"Phew!"

The Shell fellows dragged Skimpole out of the study. In the passage, on the smooth linoleum, skating was easy—for anyone who could skate. It was harder than ever for the genius of the Shell.

"Try to keep upright," urged Tom Merry. "Lean a little forward, and throw all your weight on the skate that's on the ground—see? The centre of gravity changes from one leg to the other, according as one skate's down or the other."

"I understand perfectly, Merry, in theory—"

"Try it in practice."

"On scientific principles—"

"Blow scientific principles—"

"I—I think I can get along holding to the wall," said Skimpole. "Let go."

"All right."

They let him go. By some sort of miracle, Skimpole crept along the wall for half a dozen paces without shooting off at random. His confidence—the fatal confidence of a beginner—returned.

"Hallo!" exclaimed Blake suddenly. "I thought so—there's Knox."

Knox, the prefect, had suddenly appeared at the end of the passage nearest the stairs. He had evidently been in his study under Tom Merry's, and had been disturbed by the terrific clatter overhead.

His face was very red and excited, his eyes gleaming, and he had a cane in his hand. He came along the passage with long strides.

Skimpole started as he saw him—and meditated retreat. But the roller-skates settled that matter for him.

His right foot shot forward, and his left foot followed, and Skimpole went down the passage towards Knox like an express train.

His arms waved wildly, and his left foot rose into the air—and stayed there, the leg sticking out at almost right angles like a danger signal.

"My only hat!" ejaculated Tom Merry. "Look-out, Knox!"

But it was too late for Knox to look out.

Skimpole was upon him like an avalanche. He met the astounded prefect chest to chest, and Knox went staggering back.

Skimpole threw his arms wildly round the Sixth-Former to hold on, and they whirled round in a close and affectionate embrace.

Knox was dazed, and seemed to be quite helpless in Skimpole's grasp; and Skimpole was certainly quite helpless on the skates. He dared not let go Knox in case the skates should run away with him.

Manners began to whistle the "Merry Widow" waltz, and the other two juniors yelled with laughter. A dozen fellows along the passage were looking on and shrieking. Knox gasped with fury.

"Let go, you young villain!" he roared.

"I—I c-can't!" gasped Skimpole. "I'm sorry, Knox, but it is impossible for me to let go, unless someone comes and takes the skates off."

"You—you—you—"

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NEXT THURSDAY: **"THE ST. JIM'S FOOTBALLERS!"** By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

Knox made an effort to fling the unhappy skater off, but Skimpole held on for his life.

Clatter, clatter, clatter! rang the skates in the passage. The din was terrific, and it was increased by the wild yells of laughter from the juniors.

There was a sudden call of "Cave!" as Mr. Railton appeared on the scene. The House-master was frowning.

"What can all this terrible uproar be about? Dear me!"

"Get off, you young hound!" roared Knox, striking Skimpole angrily.

"Knox!"

"I—I didn't see you, sir," stammered Knox, calming down a little. "I have been assaulted by this junior."

"Skimpole?"

"Ye-e-es, sir."

"What do you mean by skating in the corridors? Release Knox at once."

"I-c-c-can't, sir."

"What do you mean?"

"I—I shall fall down."

Tom Merry and Manners skinned up, and seized the unhappy genius of the Shell, and dragged him off his victim. Knox staggered against the wall his face very black, but his temper restrained by the presence of the House-master—which was a very fortunate circumstance indeed for Skimpole.

"You boys must not skate in the passages," said Mr. Railton. "It is dangerous, and will ruin the linoleum. Skimpole, did you fall upon Knox on purpose?"

"He did!" snarled Knox.

"I was speaking to Skimpole," said Mr. Railton coldly.

"No, sir," said Skimpole. "I was startled, and—and I hung on to him, sir, so as not to fall down. I am sure that Knox would not object to suffering a little, in order to save another person from suffering a great deal."

Mr. Railton smiled slightly.

"It appears to have been an accident, Knox," he said, with some emphasis. "You will each take a hundred lines for skating in the house. I think the matter may end here, Knox."

"Very well, sir," said Knox sulkily.

Tom Merry & Co. dragged Skimpole back to the study and yanked his skates off. Skimpole blinked at them, and gasped.

"Upon second thoughts, Merry, I do not think I will play in the hockey match," he said thoughtfully. "I think it would probably take me longer to learn skating than to learn to play snap."

"Go hon!"

"I am sorry, because I intended to play a fine game, and help you to defeat the New House team. But you must do the best you can."

And they assured him that they would.

CHAPTER 16.

The Day of the Match.

SATURDAY turned out to be a wet and weeping day; but it did not affect the juniors of St. Jim's. Had they still been hoping for hockey on the ice, there would have been wailing and gnashing of teeth at the weather. But in the gym, the rain did not matter.

While other fellows, who had been looking forward to footer, were bemoaning their lot, Tom Merry & Co. prepared briskly for the hockey match in the gym.

The gym, large as it was, was not quite large enough for a hockey ground of the full size to be marked out in it. But as Blake remarked, there would be plenty of room, and they would have to make the best of it.

"Bai Jove! that was a wippin' ideah of mine about playin' in the gym," Arthur Augustus D'Arcy remarked, as he put on his boots in the study after dinner on Saturday. "It's wainin' like anythin'."

"Yes—out of the mouths of babes and sucklings, you know," said Digby.

"Weally, Dig—"

"It's jolly lucky we've got the gym," said Blake, "and lucky we've got a covered passage we can get into it by."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"The ice is broken up into little bits on the Ryll, and even Gussy wouldn't be ass enough to try to skate there now," Herries remarked.

"Weally, Hewwies—"

"Where's my stick," said Blake. "I left it here. What silly ass has moved my hockey-stick? What howling idiot—oh, all right, here it is!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Weally, Blake, I wegard you as a hasty ass!"

"Get a move on," said Blake. "I suppose you don't want Figgins & Co. to wait for us?"

"I have been pwactisin' a stwoke," said D'Arcy, taking up

his hockey-stick. "This is wathah a good stick, and just the pwopah weight. I weally think I shall be wathah successful to-day."

"I don't think."

"F'winstance, look at this stwoke——"

"Sticks!" grunted Blake, as D'Arcy flourished his club.

"It wasn't too high, Blake."

"It was about a foot above your shoulder."

"I will twy again——"

"Never mind. Come on."

"You see," went on D'Arcy, unheeding. "Suppose the ball is there, deah boy, and I am comin' along heah—I go like this, and weach out like that——"

"Ow!" yelled Herries.

"Bai Jove! What's the mattah, Hewwies?"

"You ass! You've broken my ankle!" roared Herries.

"Imposs. It was a vewy light stwoke. I weally wish you would not put your ankle in the way when I am givin' a demonstwation."

"You frabjous ass!"

"I wefuse to be called an ass. I twust, Hewwies, that you will not compel me to give you a thwashin' just before a House match."

"Br-r-r-r!"

"Supposin' I have made that stwoke, which Hewwies intewwupted with his silly ankle," resumed D'Arcy, "I wecovah my stick like this——"

Crash!

The clock flew off the mantelpiece in fragments as the end of D'Arcy's weapon crashed into it.

"Gweat Sectt!"

"You dangerous ass!" gasped Blake. "Come on, I tell you, before you wreck the study."

"Weally, Blake, I should pwefer to give you a demonstwation. Supposin' I swing round the stick like this——"

Crash!

"The bookcase this time!" shrieked Blake, seizing his chum by the arm. "Come on, you duffer, before you do any more damage!"

"I wefuse——"

"Help him behind, Dig."

"Certainly," said Digby.

He helped D'Arcy from behind, and the swell of the School House staggered into the passage. He whirled round in wrath.

"Dig! You wottah——"

"Oh, come on!"

Blake dragged D'Arcy away, and Dig and Herries followed, carrying their skates and hockey-sticks.

Tom Merry and his chums were already in the gym. Kangaroo and Clifton Dane joined Blake & Co. en route, and Reilly and Gore turned up a few minutes later.

Gore was very quiet, but he looked quite fit and determined.

A great number of juniors, and a goodly sprinkling of seniors, had gathered in the gym. to witness the match.

Hockey on roller-skates was a new thing at St. Jim's, and most of the fellows were curious to see it; and it was quite likely to be taken up by the seniors. And as the weather outside was extremely bad, the hockey teams had a good audience on that account as well.

Figgins & Co. were there in force.

Figgins and Kerr were forwards, and Fatty Wynn was to keep goal, as he did for the New House juniors in the football matches. As a goalkeeper, Fatty was as reliable at hockey as at footer, or as when he played full back in a Rugger fifteen.

The player who passed Fatty Wynn would be worth his salt. The fat Fourth-Former was always a tower of strength to his side.

The full hockey number had been fixed for the teams. The ground was already marked out in the gym., which had been cleared for the purpose.

Wally D'Arcy was there, of course, with a group of Third-Form fags, superintending the proceedings with an air of conscious superiority.

He nudged Tom Merry in the ribs with his knuckles, with a nudge that made the hero of the Shell gasp for breath. Tom looked down at him.

"I don't much like the look of some of your men," said D'Arcy minor cheerfully. "Are you open to take good advice?"

"Oh, certainly!" said Tom Merry, laughing.

"Weally, Wally," interrupted Arthur Augustus, turning his eyeglass upon his minor, "I wegard your wemarks as bein' extwemely impertinent."

"Oh, don't you begin, Guss!"

"Pway address me with pwopah wespect, or do not weply to me at all, Wally. I considah——"

"Ring off, old chap," said Wally. "Look here, Tom Merry, take a tip from me. Chuck out Manners and Gussy——"

"You young wascal——"

"And play Jamason and me, instead. We shall keep the game going better."

"Bai Jove!"

"Awfully obliged," said Tom Merry laughing. "I quite forgot the Third when I was selecting the team. Thanks for your offer, but I won't take advantage of your good-nature."

"You'll be sorry for it," said Wally, with the air of a boding prophet.

"I'll risk it."

Wally snorted, and rejoined his chums. The two umpires, Kildare and Darrel, of the Sixth, who had consented to act for the juniors, consulted, and Kildare called to Tom Merry.

"Are you ready, Merry?"

"Right-ho!"

And the teams, having donned their skates, glided upon the ground. The School House were in red shirts, the New House in blue, and both teams looked very fit.

CHAPTER 17.

The Hockey Match.

TOM MERRY and Figgins bullied off, and the game started. It was lively from the very start, as was only to be expected with the keenest youngsters of both houses in the teams. The roller-skates, of course, made it livelier.

For many fellows who could play hockey well, or skate well, could not do both well; and some who could do both well on separate occasions, found that they could not do both well together.

There were three or four players on either side, however, who were quite up to the mark, and most of the tussle was between these, the others getting into the way more than anything else.

In a few minutes there were nearly a dozen fellows sprawling on the floor of the gym., with a wild clatter of skates, and others falling over them.

Every fall was greeted with loud yells of laughter from the spectators, who saw only the comical side of the matter.

"Faith!" gasped Reilly, as he slipped over in touching the ball, and crashed down. "Faith, an sure I—— Ow! Ye omadhaun!"

Gore crashed over on him, flattening Reilly to the floor.

D'Arcy was speeding past, and one of Gore's flying legs caught him, and the swell of St. Jim's added himself to the heap.

Manners and Lowther piled themselves on top, and a couple of New House juniors collided with them and sprawled down.

Reilly, under the heap, was gasping terrifically.

"Faith, and get off, ye gossoons!" he gasped. "Is it wantin' to kill me ye are? Sure and I'm suffocatin' intirely!"

"Bai Jove!"

"Help!"

"Gerroff!"

"Faith, and I——"

Tom Merry was speeding towards goal.

He dribbled the ball in fine style, with as much skill as he showed with the leather on the footer-field.

Blake and Kangaroo were backing him up manfully.

The New House forwards and halves had been beaten, and the backs were sprawling over each other, not yet having mastered the difficulty of hockey on skates.

Only Fatty Wynn stood between the School House juniors and the score of the first goal of the match.

Tom Merry sent the ball in.

Fatty Wynn smiled serenely.

The ball was not the bulky object for a kick that Fatty was used to on the footer-field, but his eye never failed him.

He kicked the ball out, and it shot away past the twenty-five yards.

But Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was on his feet now.

His eyeglass was hanging at the end of its cord; but even without the assistance of his famous monocle D'Arcy saw what was wanted, and rushed into the breach as it were.

Right at the ball he went, and put in practice the stroke that had proved so destructive to the clock and the bookcase in Study No. 6.

Having dribbled the ball within the circle, D'Arcy cut it for goal, and it shot in past the goalkeeper, who wasn't quite prepared for it.

Fatty Wynn gasped.

Tom Merry gave a shout.

"Bravo, Gussy!"

"Bai Jove!"

"Hurray!" roared the crowd in the gym. "Bravo, Gussy! Hurray! Goal! Goal for the School House! Hurray!"

And the gym. rang with the cheer.

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Arthur Augustus bowed gracefully to the crowd. He felt that he fully deserved the cheers, but he acknowledged them with the greatest politeness all the same. Figgins gave him a tap on the back with his stick.

"Bai Jove, Figgy—"

"Bravo, Gussy!"

"Weally, Figgins—"

"Oh, that's all right; I'm only showing how much I admire you!" explained the New House captain, with a grin. Arthur Augustus rubbed his shoulder.

"Vewy good, Figgins; but I twust you will show it without usin' your stick next time, deah boy."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The bully-off was watched now with the keenest interest by the crowd in the gym.

The players were getting more into the swing of the game, and there was less sprawling and stumbling as it proceeded.

Figgins & Co. made desperate efforts to get the score level by half-time; but the School House defence was too sound.

The first thirty-five minutes ended in the score being one for the School House, nil for the New House.

Then came the brief interval, a rest which the players were greatly in want of. The half had been only thirty-five minutes long, but most of them were showing signs of bellows to mend.

Five or six of each side, however, were still pretty fit, and there were half a dozen who were fresh as paint.

Arthur Augustus was one of them.

In spite of his elegant ways, the swell of the School House was very fit, and he always seemed to be in good condition, and capable of exertions of which his appearance did not give promise.

He was in high spirits now; as he had reason to be, after having scored the only goal taken in the first half.

"I wegard it as a wippin' game," he returned, "and played on skates I weally think it is supewiah to the othah way."

"Well, it's jolly good fun, anyway," said Blake.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"And Gussy is doing wonders," said Tom Merry. "How on earth did you manage to get that goal, Gussy?"

Arthur Augustus turned his eyeglass upon the hero of the Shell.

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—"

"Was it a fluke or a miracle?" asked Monty Lowther, affably.

"Weally, Lowthah—"

"Hallo! Ready, my sons," said Tom Merry, taking up his stick.

And the team went on for the second thirty-five.

The spectators, who had broken up into chatting or yawning groups, turned their attention to the field of play again.

The second half opened well, and gave promise of better hockey than the first had produced.

The juniors, though some of their energy was gone, had got into the swing of the game, and were keeping their feet wonderfully well.

There were collisions and sprawling every now and then, but never more than two or three down at a time.

Which was pretty good, considering that it was the first game, and was being played with the greatest keenness.

Fortune smiled upon the New House early in the second half.

A corner hit materialised into a goal for Figgins, in spite of the efforts of the School House, and Figgins's face beamed with satisfaction. The score was level, and the teams had now to fight for the winning goal.

The struggle was very keen after that.

The swish of the skates, the clicking of the sticks, the suppressed exclamations of the players, gave a curious impression of excitement and keenness.

It was Tom Merry who baffled Fatty Wynn next, putting the ball into the goal with a cunning stroke that quite deceived the goalkeeper.

The School House fellows in the crowd gave a cheer.

Two up for the School House.

"Goal! Bravo, Merry! Hurray!"

"Goal!"

Figgins set his teeth determinedly.

He meant to equalise, at least, or "bu'st" something, as he muttered to Kerr, and the Scottish junior fully agreed with him.

It was Kerr who equalised, in the last ten minutes of the game, amid intense excitement.

Kerr put the ball in with what looked like an easy stroke, and the crowd gave Kerr a well-deserved cheer.

"Goal! Hurray!"

The score was level again.

Kildare had glanced at his watch. Five minutes more to play—three minutes—two!

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Tom Merry glanced at his comrades with flashing eyes. "One goal more!" he muttered. "What-ho!" Swish, swish, went the rollers on the smooth floor of the gym. Click, click, click, rang the sticks. The white ball rolled and ran.

Down came the School House forwards, passing wonderfully. Figgins & Co. rushed in to defend. At that critical moment a strap of Figgins's right skate came loose, and he reeled over and sat down.

In a second his followers were sprawling all over him. It was the last chance for the School House; but they took it.

They rushed on, and attacked Fatty Wynn hotly. The backs could do nothing, and it all depended upon Fatty.

Twice Fatty saved, and the crowd cheered; but the third shot found the New House goalkeeper wanting.

The ball glanced in from Blake's stick like a white streak, and there was a roar.

"Goal!"

The ball was in the net!

There were fifty seconds more to play!

The School House had won!

And then the field of play was invaded by a crowd of fellows, and the skaters were rushed off, and the goal-getters of the winning side were shouldered round the gym, in triumph—a good many of their enthusiastic admirers getting knocks from the skates, but passing them unheeded in their excitement.

"Hard cheese, Figgy!" said Tom Merry, clapping his adversary on the back when it was all over. "Hard cheese, old man!"

Figgins grinned cheerfully.

"Better luck next time."

"Yaas, wathah!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy thoughtfully. "I weally think, Tom Mewwy, that I had bettah stand out of the next match, you know, so as to give the New House a chance."

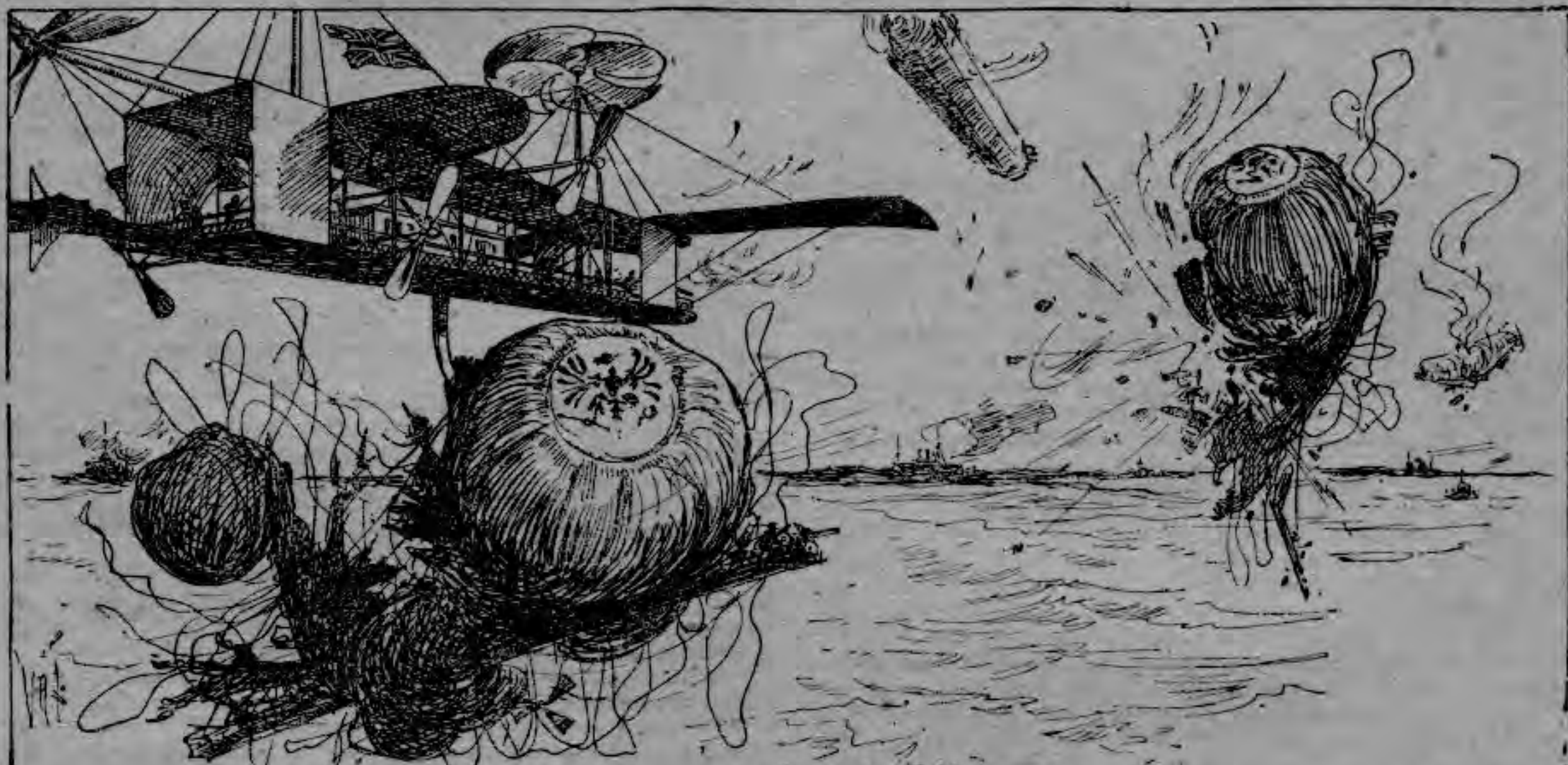
THE END.

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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. By the Condor's aid, however, the battle ends in a great victory for the allies.

Sam and Stephen are then commissioned to reconnoitre the Vosges Mountain district, which is being terrorised by a band of German Uhlans under a Colonel Hunde, known as the Black Hound.

The two young scouts ride into the mountains, where they fall in with the Seigneur of Malmaison, who is waging guerilla warfare against the Germans. His castle is attacked by the Uhlans, but with the exception of the seigneur himself, all the occupants escape.

As the two young scouts with their mountaineer guide take to the woods, they hear the roar of an explosion, and the castle of Malmaison, with the old seigneur and his enemies, is blown to pieces.

(Now go on with the story.)

"The Last of His Race."

Dumbstruck and aghast, Sam and Stephen gazed at the wrecked castle as the roar of the explosion died away. A great cloud of dust mingled with the smoke that arose, and the faint cries of men came from the outskirts of it.

The catastrophe was so sudden and unexpected that there was hardly time to realise it. Friends and foes perished alike in that awful moment, and the very skies seemed to groan as the thunderous echoes rolled along the hilltops. Then came silence, till the guide's harsh voice broke in:

"The seigneur has struck his last blow," said the mountaineer, whose swarthy face had hardly moved a muscle. "For a thousand years there have been Malmaisons in the Vosges, and now there are no more. But the victory lies with monseigneur."

"Yes," said Sam, in a low voice.

"Very true, monsieur. Now let us journey on, for what

are left of the Prussian dogs will soon be scouring these woods."

The boys and the guide had been able to see without being seen, their forms screened by the bushes that crowned the hilltop. But now the guide, bending low among the shrubs, led the way out and down the wooded hillside, where the undergrowth was so thick that there was little chance of being seen.

"He need not have died," said Stephen, thinking of the seigneur. "He could have escaped with us if he'd chose. What a grand fellow he was, and what a pity!"

"He didn't want to live," said Sam pensively. "He was the last of his race. He'd lost his only son, and so the old home was nothing to him."

The brothers said no more for a while, thinking of their own father, and the old manor-house of Courthope Towers that they had defended when the Germans overran Essex.

"Well, I wish we hadn't seen the end, though it was a fitting one for him," said Stephen. "He was like some grim old eagle of the mountains, guarding his eyrie up yonder. We owe our lives to him, too."

"We'll come back and finish the vengeance for him," said Sam.

"It's for us to see the Germans driven out of the Vosges for good and all. We won't spare the horses to-night, and I've hopes of reaching Du Plessay with our message by the dawn. The daylight's drawing in already."

"How far is it to the house of Pere le Vandois?" asked Stephen of the guide.

"More than two leagues," replied the mountaineer, "and right through the country which the Uhlans are over-running. But put trust in me, and do as I instruct you, and I will undertake to bring you through unseen. That is more than most men could do."

Sam did not tell the guide that he could have done the same himself better than any scout in the mountains now he was in the open. He let the man suppose he was doing them a great service, as it evidently pleased him.

The guide not being in a hurry, while Sam decidedly was, the boys forced the pace a good deal, and surprised their companion. But neither of the brothers were careless about it. They had had too sharp a lesson in their capture by Colonel Hunde's men the day before.

"By the way," asked Sam of the guide, as they made their way through the valley forests, "did the Black Hound come

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no grief at the castle, do you know? Was he with the storm-lag-party?"

"Not he!" said the guide, with a grim chuckle. "I wish he had been! He sent a force big enough to take the place, but he kept away from Malmaison himself. I know that. Perhaps he had a dream that warned him."

"That's queer. I shouldn't have thought him a coward, whatever else he may be," said Sam.

"You'd suppose he'd want to go himself and see the vengeance taken," said Stephen.

"He had no stomach for Malmaison after the night he spent there," answered the guide. "He will not readily forget the schooling monseigneur gave him to the day of his death. And may that day be soon!" added the guide darkly, "for his men have been burning and looting again among the cottages on the St. Die Hills, I have heard, and by his direct orders."

"Well, he'll be there for us to tackle when we come back with Du Plessay's troops," said Sam; and then he dropped his voice: "Go easy; there's the lance of a trooper showing above those juniper-bushes away to the right!"

There is no need to describe in detail the journey back to the foothills. Four or five times during the day the party of three had to creep like snakes to avoid the Uhlan patrols, and once they were forced to lie hidden for a long time, while a cordon of Germans swept through the woods back and forth. But they were never in any great danger of being discovered, and the guide had to acknowledge that the boys were more than his equal in scouting work, though his services were of much value in taking them by the shortest and safest route.

For all that, the daylight was spent before they came within sight of the hills they had reached on the first night, so many were the delays, and Sam recognised them.

"We know where we are now. We can go right ahead, if you'd like to leave us," he said.

"Yonder is the slope where Pete le Vandois' cottage stands among the trees," the guide answered. "If horses are there. If you have truly no further need of me, I shall not be sorry to go, for my own house is far back, and I have fears for it at the hands of these cursed Germans, who seem to take a pleasure in burning out our homes."

"Then get back and look after your hearth by all means," said Stephen. "We shall do well enough now, and in half an hour shall be mounted and riding for Metz. You have done us a great service."

"Won't you let us do something for you in return?" said Sam, wondering how to recompense the guide.

"I take no reward from the friends of Malmaison," said the mountaineer. "The best of luck attend you, messieurs! Come soon with your men and smoke out this nest of hornets. I shall be there to help. Good-night!"

He vanished like a ghost among the pine-trees before another word could be said, and the boys hurried along on their nearly completed journey. It was now quite dark.

"There's something queer about this," said Sam, pausing. "We haven't mistaken the way, surely! From where we are now we ought to see the chimney of Le Vandois' farmhouse against the sky over the tops of those young pine-trees. I noticed it from here yesterday morning."

"You can see the smoke rising all right," said Stephen.

"It's rising in a funny sort of way," was all Sam replied. "Go carefully, now; we don't know what we may run against."

Stephen was confident enough, but a strange foreboding of evil filled Sam's mind. They stalked the house as carefully as if it were an enemy's instead of a friend's, and when at last they emerged from among the pine-trees a dismal sight met their eyes.

Pere le Vandois' home had been burned to the ground. Only parts of the low mud walls were standing. The place was like a blackened scar on the green grass, and from the smouldering heaps of ashes a thin column of smoke was drifting lazily upwards.

"My word!" muttered Stephen. "The Uhlans have been here!"

"The horses!" exclaimed Sam, hurrying across the baked ground.

The stables were burned down, too, and among their ruins lay the charred bodies of the grey and the dun which Sam and his brother had ridden from Luneville. The Uhlans had apparently thought them not worth taking, for they had been shot in their stalls, and the stables then set alight.

"The blackguards!" said Sam, between his teeth. "This is what they call making war!"

"How on earth are we to get back?"

"What's happened to poor old Le Vandois, I wonder?"

It was evident there was nothing to be done. The loss of the horses was very serious for the boys, for it meant more

stalking on foot, and delays. But the thought of what had happened to their kindly hosts troubled the boys most.

There was no sign of anyone in the neighbourhood, and Sam was just about to make a reconnaissance before moving on, when a dark figure flitted silently through the trees and came up to him. It was Pere le Vandois. The old man gripped a gun in one hand, and his eyes were shining like a leopard's.

"So you are back," he said, in a low voice. "You will have to return to Luneville afoot, I fear. I am very sorry your horses are dead."

"Good heavens, Pere," said Sam, "what has brought this calamity on you? The Uhlans did it, of course?"

"The Black Hound himself ordered it," said Le Vandois. "He was riding by with one of his staff and a troop of Lancers about noon. I was away, but my son resisted when they started to burn the house, and so they shot him. But he killed two of them."

Sam turned pale.

"Good father," he said, "this is a terrible thing, for I fear it must have come to their knowledge that you gave us shelter, and that you had our horses here. I feel it is our fault. I wish we had never—"

"Not a word!" said the old man emphatically. "I am but too glad to have helped any enemy of theirs, even at twice this cost. Tell me what happened at the chateau, for I heard you had been taken there."

Sam told him in as few words as possible, and Le Vandois struck his gun butt in the ground with grim joy.

"That is like balm to my ears to hear you say it!" he said. "I wonder no longer that the Black Hound came here instead of to Malmaison yesterday. I have been lying in the woods, hoping for his return."

"You think he'll come back here? Why should he?" asked Stephen.

"I have a feeling that he will come," said the old man—"yes, I feel sure that he will come! If not, I go to him. There are not forests enough in France or Germany to hide him from my vengeance."

"I don't wonder you are bitter against him," Sam said. "Be very sure I would deal with him the same myself if I met him, for your only fault was in giving us shelter. We were the cause of it, and when these Uhlans are driven out, you must let us make good the loss, for we are not poor, and it is right we should."

"The offer does honour to you, but it is useless," said Le Vandois. "I desire nothing but to be quits with this German ruffian for the way he has used me. Go about your errand, messieurs, and bring those who will stamp the Germans out. These vermin have overrun the Vosges long enough."

The Black Hound Meets His Fate.

There was nothing for it but to hurry on, for they had far to go; and Le Vandois, without another word, disappeared into the woods again. The boys set off at a brisk pace along the bridle-path.

"That's enough to make anyone sorry he'd ever let off any German that was ever in front of his rifle!" said Stephen gloomily. "Not that they are all brutes, by any means; but they seem to have got hold of as pernicious a breed of Uhlans as ever lived, here in the Vosges."

"It's a catastrophe all round," said Sam. "It's no use our thinking of anything but our duty, which is to get right away as quickly as we can. I'm sorry for Le Vandois, but the loss of our horses is the worst thing that's happened, for it'll take us two days to reach Du Plessay on foot. We must just strike out straight across the ridge as soon as we are out of this bridle-path, and then across the plains as fast as we can leg it. So step out for all you're worth, and—Great guns!"

He smothered the exclamation, for as they turned the corner of the path they nearly ran right into two mounted Germans, the sound of whose horses' hoofs had been deadened by the carpet of pine-needles underfoot. The moon was now shining bright and clear, and it shone on the face of Colonel Hunde himself and a staff officer who was riding with him.

The staff-officer gave a cry, and whipped out a revolver; but Stephen was quicker still. He took a rapid shot with his carbine under his elbow, and the officer collapsed, and rolled out of his saddle with a groan.

Sam drew no weapon, but hurled himself at Hunde as the colonel was dragging his six-shooter out of its holster. He flung his powerful arms round the man and plucked him bodily out of the saddle. They came down together, the Uhlan leader striking the ground with a crash that stunned him for a moment. Sam picked up the fallen revolver and sprang to his feet.

"Make sure of him!" cried Stephen. "Sit on him and put a strap round his wrists!"

"The horses! Get the horses!" shouted Sam impatiently, for neither of the fallen men moved. "They're more to us than twenty men! We don't want prisoners!"

He dashed after the big chestnut charger the colonel had ridden, which shied away and dashed off, Sam in pursuit. Stephen had already caught the staff-officer's horse, and lucky it was he did so, for Sam would never have come up with the other. Stephen passed him at a gallop, and, overtaking the fugitive charger, caught it by the bridle, and pulled it up. Sam ran to the spot, and swung himself into the saddle.

"Glory! What luck!" he cried.

"It was the Black Hound himself!" exclaimed Stephen. "Look out! By gum, he's getting away! After him!"

The Uhlan colonel, gathering his wits together, had struggled to his feet. The boys spurred towards him, being now a good distance away, and, seeing them coming, he turned and ran for it.

"We can't burden ourselves with prisoners," said Sam. "Better leave him now."

"If we don't stop him, he'll set the Uhlans after us, and there'll be a chase lasting all night!" cried Stephen. "Halt there, or I shoot!" he cried, levelling his carbine as he galloped.

Hunde paid no attention. He seemed panic-stricken, and hardly knew where he was going. Rushing round the corner, and straight ahead, he blundered right among the ruins of the cottage, his spurred boots scattering the hot ashes.

Before the boys were in reach, a dark, burly form dashed out from the trees with a wild cry, and the next moment Colonel Hunde was rolling over amid the cinders in the grip of Pere le Vandois, who had leaped on him like a panther.

"Dog!" cried the old mountaineer hoarsely. "It is you, is it? I knew you would come! Now we settle the account, and in a fitting place!"

Sam and his brother pulled up their horses, at a loss what to do. The two men, locked together, were struggling violently, paying no more attention to the hot ashes than if they were in a bed of moss.

"We must help!" cried Stephen, throwing himself from his horse.

"Leave them alone!" replied Sam, remaining in the saddle. "Le Vandois will not thank you to interfere. This is a private matter."

Fascinated and rather aghast at the wild struggle, the boys looked on. It was quickly over. Hunde uttered no sound, but put forth all his strength in the fight with the mountaineer.

They saw him free an arm, and a knife flashed in his hand. Le Vandois caught the wrist, and had drawn a short, straight hunting-blade with his right. There was one last, fierce struggle, and then a gasping cry. Slowly the grip of the fighters relaxed, and they rolled apart.

Both had struck home. Colonel Hunde lay face downwards, quivered, and was still; but on Pere le Vandois's upturned features, as the moonlight shone upon them, there was a strange look of peace, as of a man who had sought his goal, and found it at last. His eyes turned once upon the boys, and the life went out of him quietly. The two forms lay motionless as logs in the silver rays of the moon, the ruins of the cottage standing black beyond them.

Sam reached down and touched his brother on the shoulder, for the younger scout neither moved nor spoke.

"It is such an end as Le Vandois would have wished," said Sam quietly. "He has taken his vengeance, as the Vosges folk do. Mount and ride!"

Stephen, as one in a dream, mounted into the saddle, and, turning their backs on the unhallowed spot, the boys galloped swiftly away down the bridle-path, neither speaking for a long time.

Sam led the way, and they left the path presently, and struck through the woods. Here Sam chose the likeliest route to avoid all Uhlan patrols, and after an half an hour's journey at a slower pace, they reached the open plains. Once there, they turned their backs on the dark Vosges mountains, and set out at a long, swinging canter on their night journey to Metz.

"I thought we were never going to get clear of that business," said Stephen, shortening up his charger's stirrups as he rode; "and, for a finish-up, that last affair was as grim as anything we've seen. Catch me offending a Vosges mountaineer."

"I don't think anybody could feel much pity for Hunde," returned Sam; "he deserved all he got. But as he provided as with horses—which we wanted more than anything else on earth—we'll think as kindly of him as we can. These beasts

are fresh, and will carry us to Metz before dawn. How are you feeling?"

"A bit worn out, and more than half famished," said Stephen. "I can stick out the ride, but the want of grub—"

"Try that leather-bound case at your saddle-bow," said Sam, opening the one at his own saddle. "Thought so! Emergency rations—German style. Erbswurst—that's sausage made of vegetables—and meat tabloids. Rather a mess, but it's better than nothing."

The rations kept the boys' strength up, else they could hardly have faced such a night's ride, after the day they had had. On and on they rode through the dark hours, saving their horses when they could, but taking every care to keep the speed up. There was no fear of falling across any enemy now.

Very worn and tired, after a ride that seemed to have lasted a lifetime, the brothers saw at last the sky lightening, and presently the cold glimmer of dawn shone on their white faces.

"Day at last!" said Stephen thankfully. "The horses have had enough of it, though we're lighter weights than they're used to carrying—at least, I am. That's Metz yonder, isn't it?"

The town could be seen in the distance, and beyond it the military lines, a long way to the north of it.

"We've taken longer than I thought," said Sam; "but it looks as if the Allies have made a good bit of headway, and shoved the German Army back. What's yonder? A French cavalry patrol? Sign to 'em!"

They spoke to the patrol as it came up, and the French sergeant-major saluted. They welcomed the boys, who were now well-known enough by reputation throughout France.

"How goes the fighting?" cried Sam.

"Very well. Morbleu," said the sergeant-major, "we have twisted their tails for them! The marechal has driven the Germans well back from Metz, and all goes bravely. You are in search of Brigadier du Plessay? Bien! Monsieur le Lieutenant, you will find him with his staff, commanding the right wing!"

The boys rode on, spurring their wearied horses forward. All the backwash of a great army soon came into view as they approached the rear of the right wing.

Commissariat waggons, transports, remounts, were everywhere. From the front and round the flanks was heard the mutter of rifle-firing as the early skirmishing began.

"They're at it already," said Stephen. "It's a big dish to serve up—a battle like this. There's nothing to be seen except dust and smoke. I'd like to see more of what's going on; and as for the enemy, they're out of sight. That'll be Du Plessay's post yonder on the little hill."

Twenty minutes later they were before the brigadier in his shelter-tent; and Du Plessay, after returning their salute, shook his irregular young allies warmly by the hand.

"What of the Vosges Uhlans?" he said. "Have you slipped through their fingers?"

"Yes, brigadier," said Sam. "And I bring you the key to the situation, up there in the mountains. Here's my report."

Du Plessay apparently had not seriously believed that the boys would solve the problem, or get him all the information he wanted. His surprise was great as Sam briefly explained the situation, and then handed in the written report he had made.

"Sapristi!" he said. "You are a very prince of scouts, lieutenant! Stay, you are exhausted!" he exclaimed, as Sam, once relieved of the report, swayed where he stood. "It is no wonder, after what you've been through!"

"We're a trifle tired," said Sam. "But if there's anything we can do—"

"At present get a good meal at the staff's mess, and turn in for all the sleep you can get. This will be a night job at St. Dio, and I shall have a surprise for you."

"You won't leave us out, sir?" asked Stephen anxiously.

"We've been hoping to see the thing done."

"Certainly!" answered the brigadier. "But nothing will be done till the morning, and in the meantime I judge it will take more than the sound of artillery to keep you awake."

The boys withdrew, and going to the staff's mess, where breakfast was just preparing, they had a very good meal. The food and drink put new life into them, but they fell asleep even before they had finished, and were carried, snoring, into a shelter-tent behind the lines by a huge, good-natured French commissariat-sergeant.

All day long the battle between the Allies and the Germans was waged fitfully, though the hottest part was miles to the left, where Marechal Sainte Croix, the French Commander-in-Chief, was conducting operations. The boys slept like the dead through it all, and awoke as the afternoon was closing in refreshed and hungry. They made their way at once for Du Plessay's quarters, but were unable to see him.

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till he returned from a gallop to the artillery lines. In the meantime they laid in another square meal, and declared themselves fit for anything. The brigadier received them directly he returned.

"My lads," he said, "this report of yours is perfectly amazing! It puts that destructive German force absolutely in our hands. In half an hour a body of troops—all I can spare—will start on a night march to St. Dio, and will tackle the Uhlans at break of day. Do you feel fit to go with them?"

"Rather, sir!" exclaimed Stephen, wondering what troops would be sent.

"Very well, then, the expedition will be very glad of your services, as your chief, Carfax, is not yet returned. The corps I am sending are exclusively British. Come out here on the earthworks, and you will see them."

A smart, trim-looking regiment of khaki-clad M.I.—mounted infantry—were lying out on the right flank, several hundreds strong. One corps of them had left their horses in the background, and were pouring a galling, long-range fire into the Germans.

"Why, those are Montgomery's Horse!" cried Sam—"the best M.I. corps in the Boer War—raised in London. They distinguished themselves like anything in the invasion. We saw them in action several times."

"The nippiest lot of fellows going!" said Stephen.

"None better could be had for this purpose," replied Du Plessay. "It is not everybody who can trap Uhlans; but I think they will manage it. They only came in this afternoon, but are fed and rested, and I have arranged the matter with their commanding officer, Colonel Caldecott. Here he comes!"

The brigadier quickly presented the boys to a spruce, workman-like-looking officer, who looked as if he had grown up in the saddle.

"Coming with us, are you?" he said. "Uncommonly glad to have you. Capital work you've been doing yonder in the Vosges. Only fair you should be in at the death."

"Yes, brigadier, we're ready at once."

"I will send two-horsed Maxims after you," said Du Plessay. "You'll find them useful; and, by the way, Lieutenant Villiers is as fine a handler of one as I ever saw. Good-bye, colonel, and good fortune to you!"

Colonel Caldecott quickly summoned his force, the bugles rang out, and soon the whole six hundred mounted men, in their smart Colonial kit, were trotting off down the main road. The two boys rode with the colonel.

"This force ought to see the tails of the Uhlans' horses, sir, when it comes to business," said Stephen.

"Ah, but we don't want merely to drive them back over their own frontier," said the colonel, "to return later on with heavy reinforcements! We have to wipe them out. Trapping a force of Uhlans is like catching a weasel asleep. And I'll make bold to say," he added, glancing proudly over his keen, alert corps, "Du Plessay hasn't got the men in all his command that could do it."

"By what I've seen of Hunder's men, it will certainly be no easy task, sir," said Sam. "Will the Uhlans wait to face us?"

"They probably wouldn't unless we obliged them to," said Caldecott grimly. "We shall give them no choice. They will be rounded up."

"By gum," remarked Stephen to Sam, "if this M.I. colonel can round up Uhlans like cattle, he'll be a wonder! I'll believe it when I see it."

Sam had his doubts, too; but the swiftness and the quietness of the march impressed him. After covering about two-thirds of the way, the corps left the roads altogether, and journeyed rapidly across the heath-lands, till presently a halt was called without noise.

"Now," said Caldecott to Sam, "we should be abreast the Pont d'Ours, where your guide is waiting. Go and fetch him up here."

"This chap's one of the right sort," said Sam to himself, as he rode off. "He knows what he's about, and he's never been here before. Good biz, too, not bringing his men along the roads."

Sam rode down below the bridge, by the stream, and a dark figure soon stole cautiously towards the parapet.

"It is you, monsieur, is it not?" said the mountaineer, in a whisper. "Where is your force? I fear for the plans. A Uhlans patrol has just gone along the road."

"Our corps does not use the roads," said Sam, "and the patrol is welcome to all it may meet. Run by my stirrup. We have need of you at once."

Sam took him quickly to where the colonel was awaiting. They conversed together in a low voice for a few minutes, and then Caldecott beckoned to Sam.

"The Uhlans have received some reinforcements," he said. "A certain Captain Felsheim—you spoke of him, I think—

is now the colonel commanding. They have burnt many more farms, and have withdrawn from St. Dio. That is well, for mounted men, as they are, could not have defended the town, anyhow."

"No, sir," said Sam.

"They are chiefly occupying some rocky plain to the west of St. Dio, where they have bivouacked, and are very much on the alert, as they know you have escaped. They will not expect us so soon. Half our force must make a long detour, and get round them, avoiding their patrols. This will be the most important and the most dangerous work. I shall send my second in command with the mountaineer guide, and you two youngsters will go with it."

"Very good, sir," said Sam, greatly pleased.

"I shall be obliged to stay here and advance on their front, throwing out flanking parties. We shall thus, if the move is successful, surround them altogether. At dawn the attack will be made on all sides. They will try and break their way through the ring, and that is what you have to prevent."

Sam understood that well enough. The second in command, Major Treves, had had his instructions, and the party that was to make its way round, left their horses in a wood, and started off, the boys and the guide accompanying them.

It was no child's play that they had to accomplish. It was the most difficult piece of stalking the boys had ever engaged in, and it took a long time, and was very arduous, for Montgomery's Horse had to make a very wide detour.

Had Sam been alone, he could have gone round under the very noses of the Germans; but to take so many men round was a big feat. They went right round the next valley, and back over the hills inward again.

A patrol of four Uhlans came right upon them when they were about half-way. The astonished Germans fired off their carbines, and rode for all they were worth.

Had they got back to give the alarm, the expedition would have failed, but half a dozen well-handled rifles rang out from the crouching line of attackers, and, having a sight of the Uhlans against the sky, they accounted for all four.

The riderless horses went galloping along the line, and they, too, had to be shot, lest they should go back to camp and show only too plainly what was afoot.

"Beastly job!" said Stephen to his brother. "I've seen enough of Uhlans to shoot 'em without compunction—I got one of those fellows with my carbine—but to shoot a decent horse is different, and I left that to the others. But, I say, won't those shots alarm the camp?"

"If you thought a minute, you'd see that, with a strong wind blowing in our teeth, no shots can be heard a few hundred yards ahead of us. I'm surprised at the way the job's going, though. I never thought they'd succeed."

"Our lot'll have to hurry up. The sky's lightening in the east already."

Onward they pushed, silently and rapidly. The German camp was not far off now. The major halted his men, and without a sound two detachments branched off to right and left. The corps closed gradually round the camp, and to the southward Colonel Caldecott was doing the same thing.

The range would still be a very long one; but the day was dawning fast, and just at the last a second patrol, coming up past the German outposts, sighted the British line.

Like lightning the Uhlans wheeled, and galloped back. This time they got clear away, and the camp was humming like a beehive in less than no time. The bugles rang shrilly, and at the time when "Reveille" should have sounded, it was "Boot and saddle" instead. The enemy were fairly roused.

But they were too late. The growing daylight showed the British force the whole of the Uhlans' position, and Montgomery's Horse, without a single horse among them now, were lying in cover in one great ring round the Germans.

The rifles began to bark and spit all round the circle. For a minute all was confusion, and many a Uhlans got into his saddle, only to fall out of it next moment with a bullet through him.

"Look out!" cried Sam warningly. "Here they come!"

"Two more ranks form up, and lie down behind here!" ordered a subaltern calmly.

The Uhlans soon pulled themselves together, and a long line of them, at a call from the bugle, galloped swiftly towards the rifleman in an attempt to break through.

They were foredoomed. Cavalry cannot break through unshaken infantry in a frontal attack.

In front, and on each side two hundred repeating-rifles poured their lead into the galloping troop. At first it would have looked to a spectator as if they must surely break through that thin line of khaki jackets, as the swift horses thundered along, and the lance-pennons fluttered wickedly.

But ninety saddles were empty before they had covered half the distance, and not half a dozen troopers ever reached the British lines at all.

A couple of men in khaki fell victims to the lances of

these last, and their slayers soon bit the dust in their turn. A solitary riderless horse galloped through, and got away unheeded.

The Uhlans, rendered desperate, mustered their whole force quickly in two divisions, and tried next to charge through in solid columns.

At this they fared even worse, for the British rifles played on both sides of them as they rode, inflicting very heavy loss, and throwing the columns into confusion.

Felsheim found himself fairly trapped, and his rage was bitter. It came to "*Sauve qui peut*," and the Uhlans, breaking up, rode in every direction, each man seeking an exit for himself.

The loss was then so severe that, finding it impossible to get out, the bugles rallied them to the centre of the plain, and they prepared to make their last stand.

Dismounting and forming up, under a hail of lead, the German troopers shot their own horses, forming a circle with the bodies of their mounts.

In the larger thus made, the Uhlans took to their carbines, and, using the dead horses as a breastwork, replied briskly to the fire of the British lines.

"We've got 'em now!" cried Stephen exultingly. "They find this hotter work than hanging peasants and burning farms."

"They must be expectin' reinforcements," said Sam. "They reckon to hold out a good while like that, an' gain time."

"Lieutenant Villiers!" cried the major. "Half a mile back along the hill road you will find the horsed Maxims coming up. Go out and bring them in, handling the leading gun yourself."

Sam was off like a shot, a bullet stinging his cheek as he went, and he disappeared rapidly beyond the rocks.

Stephen, picking his shots, fired quietly and steadily into the ring of lancer-helmets that showed above the dead troop-horses.

The deadly rifle-duel continued pitilessly on both sides. The British corps was losing more men now; but within the Uhlan enclosure the slaughter was terrible.

The end was not far off. Flesh and blood could not stand against such an attack, and soon the clatter of horses' hoofs was heard, and Sam came thundering in with the first of the galloping Maxims, a second gun close behind him. He swung round and unlimbered in a twinkling.

"Hold on!" cried Major Treves. "It's all up with them. They surrender."

The firing by the Uhlans suddenly ceased. From within the circle of dead horses and men a long lance was raised high, a white flag fluttering from it in the cold morning breeze.

The Black Hound's Uhlans had acknowledged their conquerors. A cheer roared all along the British lines, and down from the spurs of the hillside, with fierce shouts, swarmed the Vosges mountaineers.

Grave News.

"Cease fire!"

The bugles blared the order, and as the din of the battle ceased, a detachment of Colonel Caldecott's men marched out to where the white flag fluttered from the lance-head. The Uhlans—what was left of them—formed up and piled their arms at the major's order, stacking lances and carbines together in the bloodstained circle, and gave themselves up.

"A victory worth winning!" said Stephen, standing up and jerking the empty cartridges out of his carbine. "They've just done you out of your fun, Sam."

"Fun!" said his brother, closing up the Maxim's breech. "It's no fun to me to pump lead into fellows making their last stand. I was jolly glad to see the white rag go up, though I didn't expect it."

"They fought a good fight, and two-thirds of them'll never get up again," Stephen replied. "Brutes though they are, they're not cowards. Well, there'll be no more villagers hanging on the pine-trees now. Here comes Caldecott—the only one of us who's kept his horse."

"Keep those fellows back!" called the colonel, galloping up, as the Vosges mountaineers, suddenly appearing from nowhere, came swarming down with fierce cries. "See they don't fall foul of the prisoners!"

He feared that the men who had suffered so long from the iron rule of the Black Hound might try to seek vengeance on the Uhlans, for the dark, excited faces of the hill-men gave cause for concern. They had been close in the background the whole time, lobbing bullets from their old smooth-bore guns over the heads of the British into the Uhlan ring.

"Long live the British! Down with all German dogs!" they shouted as they rushed up. But the colonel need not have concerned himself about them. Save for a man here and there who shook his clenched fist at the prisoners, who

had burnt him out of house and home, they ignored the conquered Uhlans, and fraternised joyfully with Montgomery's Horse.

The khaki-clad soldiers were soon on the best of terms with the lively hillmen, who pressed on them flasks of wine, tobacco, and anything they had about them, taking no refusal.

The Uhlans filed out, showing no emotion whatever at their capture. They looked stolid and unexcitable as bullocks. A strong detachment, as prisoners' guard, surrounded them, and Captain Felsheim, their commander—the same who had ridden to Malmaison with Hinde—made his formal surrender to Colonel Caldecott.

"We are in your hands," he said gloomily.

"You fought a gallant fight," said Caldecott; "it is the fortune of war!"

"My corps was trapped," the German replied. "I would never have believed that any troops on foot could have surrounded my position as yours did." His eyes fell on Sam and Stephen, who were standing by, and his frown grew deeper. "But I no longer wonder," he continued, "now that I see who your scouts were, and I begin to understand how this force was brought down upon me so quickly. Nothing that those two young fiends might do would surprise me," he added viciously.

"I don't consider them fiends at all," said the colonel, smiling.

"Don't you? They had jolly good luck," growled Felsheim, "or they would have been hanged when we first caught them, instead of taking them to Malmaison."

"You're a little too fond of hanging, by what I can hear. It is a curious task for a soldier or a gentleman," said Colonel Caldecott coldly, turning away. He gave orders for the disposal of the prisoners, who were marched down to the plains. Arrangements were quickly made to put them on the railway and train them to the nearest headquarters for military prisoners. There was no fear of these particular Uhlans seeing any more service while the war lasted.

The horses for the whole of Caldecott's force were brought and picketed, outposts were set, and then came a spell of welcome rest and food. The ambulance corps, which had been sent on, arrived, and was soon attending the wounded. The commissariat was close in the rear, and in a short time the camp-kettles were steaming away with their cargoes of meat and vegetables—for the French transport service is a very good one; and after such a bout as the mounted infantry had had, they deserved a meal of the best.

"This is ripping!" grunted Stephen, stretching himself on the dry heather beside the mess-kits; "better than bully beef and biscuits, eh? Well, our campaign in the Vosges is ended. I suppose we'll soon clear out of here? Montgomery's Horse won't be kept out this way."

"No fear; they'll be wanted at the front," said Sam. "The news has already been telegraphed, and a force of French conscripts—a bit too raw for the main, but good enough to guard this part—are bein' sent on to keep the district we've won back for 'em. They'll post guns along the heights, an' see that no more marauding parties come into the Vosges. Caldecott will be called back to Metz now, I expect."

"He's done his work. Look, you can see the ruins of Chateau Malmaison from here," said Stephen.

"We've seen some pretty queer things on our visit this day, don't you think? The Germans haven't had much change out of the Vosges."

"Well, youngsters," said Colonel Caldecott, riding up, "we've orders to march back to Metz after a couple of hours' rest. You'll come with us, I suppose? I want to thank you both for the help you've given. We owe more to your plucky scouting work here, and your forced ride, than any of us quite realise."

"Please don't thank us, sir!" said Sam. "We've seen the smartest piece of mounted infantry work that's been done in both campaigns, and it was worth a week's journey to witness. I'd like to see the man who'd say anything against Montgomery's Horse!"

Young though the speaker was, the colonel felt as pleased at the compliment as if it came from a veteran.

"Then you'll join us," he said, smiling, "if you think so highly of us? Come, I shall be glad to give you any appointment you choose!"

"It would be an honour, sir," said Sam; "but we mustn't accept, because, you see, we're already booked for service. We belong to the Condor, and our chief is John Carfax."

"Ah, I forgot!" said Caldecott. "When you can cover half the earth in the time it takes me to make a night-march, no doubt you find that more exciting; I should myself. To be in an airship that dictates terms to emperors, is better fun than riding with a mounted infantry corps. Your vessel is laid up for repairs just now, I understand?"

"Yes, sir," said Stephen; "but until she's fit for service again we should be proud if you'll let us ride with you."

"I fear that would not be long," replied the colonel, "for I was told the famous airship would be out again yesterday or to-day. But perhaps it was only a rumour."

Stephen, who had been staring fixedly at the sky to the westward with an astonished air, leaped to his feet suddenly.

"By James," he cried, "there she comes now, or I'm a Dutchman!"

He pointed to the far distance, where a mere speck was to be seen in the sky. The others looked eagerly, though they thought it might be a bird, or anything. But Stephen's keen eyes were right, as usual.

The speck grew rapidly, and was soon seen to be the Condor, sure enough, travelling with the wonderful speed for which she was noted. Onward she came, the whole British force rising and watching her with intense interest. It warmed the boys' hearts to see her.

"Hurrah!" shouted Stephen, flinging up his cap. "There's the chief waving to us, and Kenneth and Hugh as large as life! Gosh, but I'm glad to see her back again!"

It seemed scarcely a minute from the time she was first sighted till the great aeroplane was poised overhead, her enormous fans and propellers whirring.

Carfax, looking over the rail, waved to the boys, and the Condor, astonishing the mountaineers out of their senses, came to the ground as lightly as a feather, and rested there. The greetings between her crew and the brothers were of the warmest.

"She hasn't seemed like the same vessel without you two young sparks aboard," said Carfax, shaking them by the hand. "Colonel Caldecott, I think?" he added, turning to the mounted infantry commandant. "You've made short work of the Uhlans, then?"

"They are a closed chapter," said Caldecott, laughing. "The remainder are on their way into the interior, and I don't think the Vosges will miss them. Excuse me one minute, Mr. Carfax, and I'll ensure you a little privacy."

He turned away to give some orders, and a cordon of his men were soon formed round the Condor, to keep away any unwelcome guests. Carfax and the boys were soon exchanging news eagerly.

"This is great, sir!" said Sam. "We didn't expect to see you for a week. Is the Condor as fit as ever again?"

"Perfectly. The workshops were better than I thought, and we spared no pains to get her out. We rose this morning, and had to go to Metz on urgent affairs. I have seen Marechal Sainte Croix. Learning you were here, within fairly easy reach, I hastened on to pick you up—had you been farther I could not have spared the time. We must get under way at once."

"Is there anything fresh in the wind, sir?" asked Sam, impressed by Carfax's serious air.

"Yes; big trouble—enough to set all Europe alight, if we don't stop it. Are you ready to come? I can't wait for you!"

"Ready on the spot, both of us," said Sam. "Good-bye, colonel; and thank you for a pleasant trip with the corps! We're called off."

A hurried but warm farewell passed between Caldecott and the boys, who then sprang aboard the Condor. Her mighty fans began to whirr, and away she swooped into the skies, till the Vosges Mountains looked like little hillocks far behind.

"Good old Condor!" said Stephen enthusiastically. "It's like being alive again to be back on her! What's the job that's ahead of us, chief?"

"I wish I knew myself," Carfax answered, standing on the bridge, and heading the airship south-westwards. "The cure will be hard to find. But what the trouble is, is plain enough. There is a strong danger of Russia

throwing in her lot with Germany, and bringing her millions of men to the aid of the Kaiser."

"What!" cried Sam. "Surely it's impossible!"

"So you might think, my lad, considering how things have gone in past years. But it's true. The Tsar is quite likely to join the Kaiser in trying to crush Britain and France."

"My word!" said Sam. "If it is so, it's serious news indeed! The allies have got their hands full as it is, and are hard pushed enough, striving against Germany's huge army. But if another whole empire whips in against us—"

"It may mean thorough disaster," broke in Carfax. "In any case, it will prolong the war, and cause endless bloodshed that might have been saved."

There was silence on the Condor for some minutes. The crew knew well enough how grave the news was.

The Condor in Paris.

"Is it a certainty, sir?" asked Sam at last.

"Practically. The news has only just been discovered. The alliance isn't actually made yet, but in twenty-four hours it may be."

"Phew!" said Stephen thoughtfully. "This is a knock-down, I should think. And where are we bound, sir?"

"To Paris," answered Carfax, "to decide what shall be done. We shall have to settle it quickly; there's no time to be lost. My brother Harrington is here. He hastened from England last night."

Sam drew a breath of relief.

"He'll help us solve the problem, sir, if any man on earth can," said Sam. "He's a host in himself."

"Lord Conybeare, the British Minister, is with him, so is Monsieur le Brun, the head of the French Foreign Office."

Neither of these dignitaries much impressed the boys. They knew that the gold-master was a power greater than the Government.

"It's got to be stopped somehow," said Carfax, "and the Condor will be needed, that's certain."

"Conybeare and the other swells may be afraid to employ her," put in Kenneth.

"Harrington won't be," retorted Carfax. "Whatever he and I settle to be done will be done. This is no time for delays and shilly-shallying. I shall have need of you two boys for the actual work, as usual. More than that, I'm going to have you at the council. And now the less said the better till we get to Paris."

The aeroplane sped on her way through the skies all through the morning, travelling at a dizzy pace till Paris was reached.

As the outskirts of the great city, with the silver Seine running through it, came in sight, the Condor slackened speed.

"Is it a Cabinet meeting, or whatever they call it here, that we're going to, sir?" asked Stephen.

"No," said Carfax; "something very much more select—a private meeting of one or two chiefs in a little room, but with more power than half a dozen Parliaments; and neither Russia nor Germany have any inkling that their secret is known—remember that! We will descend here."

The Condor, swooping down, landed Carfax and the boys in the thick glades of Meudon Woods. Kenneth and Hugh had their instructions, and at once took the airship out of sight again.

Her descent had been seen, but what her business was, or whether she had landed any of her crew, none could tell.

She was out of the ken of the Parisians, long before Carfax had left Meudon Woods, though it only took him and the boys thirty-five minutes by the light railway, and then by motor-cab, to reach their destination, the Quai d'Orsay, where stood the famous Government buildings and the Foreign Office.

(Another long instalment of this thrilling serial next week.)

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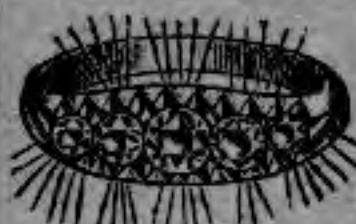
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