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NO. 151.

VOL. 5.



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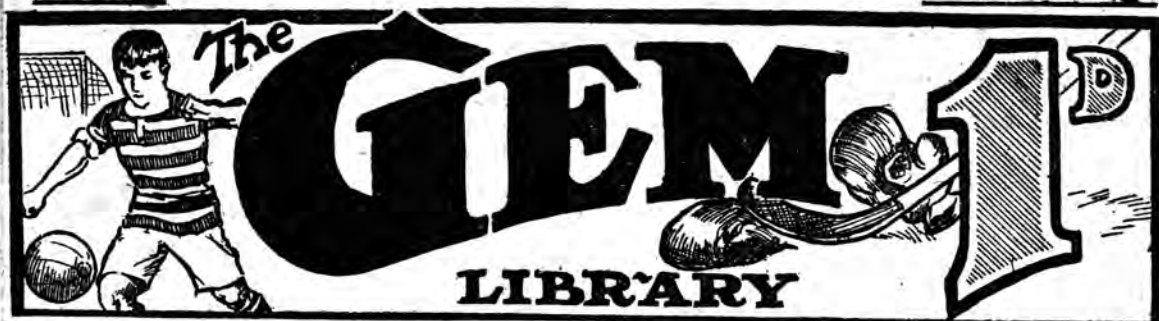
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A Splendid, Long, Complete Tale of the Juniors of St. Jim's.
By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

CHAPTER 1.

A New Year's Resolve.

"W EALLY, Tom Mewwy——"
"Now, look here, old chap——"
"Just listen to me——"
"You're an ass, you know——"
"You see, old fellow——"

Tom Merry listened patiently, with a faint smile upon his face.

The chums of St. Jim's were sitting round a big fire in Arthur Augustus's own room. St. Jim's had broken up for the Christmas holidays, and several of the old friends were spending the holiday at D'Arcy's place.

It had been a merry Christmas—all the merrier because Tom Merry was there.

On Christmas Eve Blake and the rest had found the hero of St. Jim's in London, and had forced him, willy-nilly, to come down to Eastwood for Christmas.

Tom Merry had come. But Christmas was over now; and though the vacation was not yet ended, and it was not yet time for the juniors to return to St. Jim's, Tom Merry felt that it was time for him to go.

For Tom Merry was not to return to the old school with his chums.

Tom Merry had his living to earn, and he had to face the wide world to find a place for himself.

But the moment Tom Merry broached the subject of going there was a general protest from all the juniors.

The chums were sitting round D'Arcy's fire. Arthur Augustus had two rooms to himself at Eastwood; and this one, the sitting-room, was a handsome and spacious apartment.

There were bookcases, and trophies on the walls, and a tiger-skin before the fire; and the fire was of logs, that glowed and crackled in the wide hearth. The chums of St. Jim's had been making themselves very comfortable.

It was getting near bedtime, and Tom Merry had said that he must go on the morrow. He felt that he had stayed too long already.

He listened with a smile to the protests of his chums. But they did not change his resolution. That was fixed.

"Why don't you speak, you image?" demanded Monty Lowther indignantly.

"What is there to say?" said Tom Merry. "I must go."

"Rats!"

"Bosh!"

"Piffle!"

"Yaas, wathah! Wats!"

"TOM MERRY & Co." and "THE IRON ISLAND" Next Thursday.

No. 151 (New Series.)

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THURSDAY:

TOM MERRY AGAINST ST. JIM'S

—SPECIAL TALE OF THE JUNIORS OF ST. JIM'S—

"Now, look here, you chaps—" said Tom Merry appealingly.

"I wefuse to do anythin' of the sort!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, jamming his monocle into his eye, and regarding Tom Merry severely. "I twust, Tom Mewwy, that I have not failed in hospitality duwin' this vac.?"

"Of course not, Gussy."

"You have nothin' to complain of about my governah'?"

"No; of course not."

"My eldah bwothah, Conway, has played the game, I suppose?"

"Yes, yes!"

"If young Wally has wowwied you—"

"Wally has been a brick!"

"I pwesume it is not Cousin Ethel—"

"My dear Gussy—"

"Then, if you have nothin' to complain of, why do you want to bolt?" demanded Arthur Augustus.

"You see—"

"I decline to see!"

"But you know—"

"On the contrary, deah boy, I don't know."

"Now, look here—"

"Wats!"

Tom Merry cast an appealing look round the circle, half lighted in the glow from the fire.

But every head was solemnly shaken.

"Can't let you go," said Jack Blake.

"Certainly not!" declared Herries.

"Rats!" said Lowther. "Stick where you are!"

Tom Merry sighed.

"I jolly well wish I could!" he said. "I'd like to stay here the rest of the vac., and I'd give my little finger to be coming back to St. Jim's with you! But you know it's impossible, old fellows."

"I suppose you can't come back to coll. as all your tin is gone," Manners remarked; "but you can stick here for the rest of the vac."

"And then?"

"Well—"

"No good waiting for something to turn up," said Tom Merry, with a shake of the head. "I've got to make something turn up."

"But you can't go to London again without any tin."

"I sha'n't try London this time. Not much chance for a fellow there without anything in his pocket," said Tom Merry, shivering, as he remembered what he had been through in his short experience of the seamy side of London life.

"But what will you do?"

"I hardly know yet."

"Oh, it's wotten!" said D'Arcy. "Stay where you are."

"Yes, rather!"

"Listen to reason, Tom."

"Don't play the giddy goat, you know!"

"Now, look here, you chaps," said Tom Merry. "Look the facts. I'm here as Gussy's guest, and that's all right. I'm wearing clothes I've borrowed from you chaps—Ye's trousers, Lowther's jacket, Manners' waistcoat, Ye's boots! It's all very well for a few days, but it's something I can keep up. You don't want to turn me into a sponge, I suppose?"

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—"

"I haven't a shilling in my pocket, and you fellows have to pay my expenses wherever we go. As I said, it's all right for a few days; but if I keep it up any longer, I shall grow into a blessed worm!"

"Oh!"

"Better look facts in the face," said Tom Merry. "Better part with me while you can still feel some respect for an old chum."

"Weally, you know—"

"Put yourself in my place, and think it over," said Tom Merry quietly. "That's all I ask."

There was an awkward silence.

Tom Merry's fall from fortune had cut his old friends very deeply, and they were only anxious to stand by him and help him in his misfortune.

But it was impossible.

Each of the fellows, as he thought it over, had to admit to himself that, in Tom Merry's place, he would have made the same resolve that Tom Merry was making.

"I'll tell you what," said Herries, as if struck by a brilliant idea. "Let's toss up for it. Heads you go, and tails you stay."

Tom Merry shook his head.

"Won't do, old son."

"But don't be unreasonable. You see—"

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"Look here, we'll leave it to Cousin Ethel to decide, if you like," said Tom Merry. "I know she'll do the right thing. Let's send her a message, and ask her to come here and decide for us."

"Wippen' ideah, deah boy!"

"Good!" said Blake.

"And you'll stand by what Cousin Ethel says?" asked Lowther.

Tom Merry nodded.

"Yes."

D'Arcy rang the bell, and sent the message to Cousin Ethel. The girl entered the room a few minutes later, with a smiling face.

"You want me to umpire in a dispute?" she said, as the juniors rose to their feet. "What is it?"

"Go ahead, Tom Merry."

"Pewwaps I had bettah explain—"

"Dry up, Gussy!"

"Weally, Blake—"

"Order! Get on with the washing, Tom."

Tom Merry explained.

Cousin Ethel listened, with a quiet face and great attention. Her expression gave no indication of her thoughts.

"Well, Cousin Ethel?" said all the juniors together, when Tom Merry had finished explaining how matters stood.

"I think Tom Merry is right," said Cousin Ethel quietly.

"Weally, Ethel—"

"Yes; he is quite right," said Ethel. "There is no harm in a boy receiving help from his friends when he is down on his luck, but to get into the habit of it would be bad for all concerned. Tom is quite right."

"But, weally—"

"You asked me to umpire," said Ethel, smiling. "It is not playing the game to raise objections to the referee's decisions, Arthur."

"Bai Jove!"

"Now I shall have to run away, because Dolores will be waiting for me. Good-night!"

"Good-night, Cousin Ethel!"

Arthur Augustus held the door open in his stately way for Cousin Ethel.

The juniors looked at one another when the girl was gone. "That settles it," said Tom Merry.

"I—I suppose so," said Monty Lowther glumly. "Ethel's right, I suppose."

"Of course she is."

"Yaas, wathah! But—"

"But what, Gussy?"

"I wish you weren't goin', Tom Mewwy."

Tom Merry laughed rather ruefully.

"I wish I weren't, Gussy. But what has to be, has to be. But we shall meet again, and before long, I hope."

CHAPTER 2.

D'Arcy's Wheeze.

ARTHUR AUGUSTUS D'ARCY wore an extremely thoughtful expression when he retired to bed that evening. D'Arcy, Blake, and Herries occupied D'Arcy's bed-chamber. It was a large room, and two extra beds had been put into it for D'Arcy's chums. Tom Merry, Manners, and Lowther had the next room.

Arthur Augustus took off his jacket, and hung it carefully upon a wooden hanger, and put it in a wardrobe. Then he sat down to take off his boots. He was looking extremely reflective all the time.

"Feeling bad, Gussy?" asked Blake sympathetically.

D'Arcy started.

"Eh? Did you speak, Blake?"

"Yes. Was it the Christmas-pudding—"

"Eh?"

"Or the mince-pies?"

"Weally, Blake—"

"Or the claret?" asked Blake. "I warned you that a kid like you ought to have let the claret alone; but you were determined to follow the road to ruin, in spite of the warnings of your best friends."

"Pway don't be an ass, Blake," said D'Arcy. "I've been thinkin'—"

"Oh, is that it? I knew there was something unusual the matter."

"Weally, deah boy, I have been turnin' the mattah over in my mind," pursued D'Arcy, unheeding, "about Tom Mewwy, you know. Why shouldn't he wemain here till the end of the vac.?"

"He won't."

"And he's right," said Herries, in his direct way. "We

want him to stay, of course; but it is best for him to have his way."

"Yaas, wathah; but—"

"He'll go, if he's made up his mind to it," said Blake, as he kicked his boots off.

"No stopping him. I'm sorry."

"Yaas, but he might be made to stay."

"Made to!" said Blake, staring.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Do you mean he might be tied hand and foot, and locked up in the cellar, like a chap in a newspaper serial?" demanded Blake.

"Pway don't be an ass, Blake! Cousin Ethel thinks it is wight for Tom Mewwy to go; and I suppose she is wight. She's a jolly clevah gal, and has more bwains, as a mattah of fact, than us chaps."

"Hang it all!" exclaimed Blake. "Speak for yourself."

"I am speakin' for myself, deah boy. If she has more bwains than I have, it stands to weason that she has more than you. I pwesume that you do not need me to teach you that the gwentah always contains the less."

"Ass!"

"Weally, Blake—"

"Fathcad!"

"If you were not my guest, deah boy, I should give you a foahful thwashin' for that oppwobwious remark."

"Chump!"

"As it is, you may considah yourself feahfully thwashed."

Blake grinned.

"And you may consider yourself knocked down, jumped on, floor-wiped, and generally wrecked," he replied.

"I wefuse to considah anythin' of the sort. Look here, to wesume the subject, atfah your wude intewwuptions—"

"I suppose Towser will be all right," Herries remarked thoughtfully.

"Weally, Hewwies—"

"Or do you think, perhaps, I'd better go and have a look at him before I go to bed?" asked Herries.

"Wats!"

"Oh, blow Towser," said Jack Blake.

"Yaas, wathah!"

Herries grunted, and plunged into bed. To Herries' mind the most important guest at Eastwood that Christmas was Towser the bulldog.

"I've been thinkin'," resumed D'Arcy, "that we might do somethin' about Tom Mewwy, to keep him here till the end of the vac, you know."

"What could we do?" said Blake.

"Well, I've been thinkin'—"

"We've heard that before."

"Pway don't intewwupt, Blake. Suppose we had a dodge for keepin' Tom Mewwy here. It would be a good ideah, wouldn't it? If he's goin' out into the cwuel world, the longah he puts it off the bettah."

"Well, yes."

"Then I've got a wheeze."

"Go ahead."

"The ghost!" said D'Arcy, in a thrilling whisper.

Jack Blake jumped.

"You ass!" he exclaimed.

"Weally, Blake—"

"You startled me. What do you mean by the ghost?" demanded Blake, looking round the room.

"I mean the ghost of Eastwood."

"The which?"

"The ghost of Eastwood. I suppose you know," said D'Arcy, with great dignity, "that there is a family ghost in our family."

"Rats!" came from Herries' bed.

"Weally, Hewwies!"

"I've heard you say that you don't believe in ghosts," said Blake, laughing.

"Well, of course, family ghosts are different."

"Do you mean to say that you believe in the family ghost?" exclaimed Herries.

"Well, not exactly believe in it," D'Arcy said cautiously. "But nevah mind that; that is beside the question. What I was thinkin' of is, suppose the ghost of Sir Roger D'Arcy appeared to Tom Mewwy this evenin'—"

"My hat!"

"And warned him not to leave the house till the end of the vac."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I see no cause whatever for wibald laughtah," said Arthur Augustus, with dignity. "I suppose Tom Mewwy would be bound to heed a ghostly warnin'."

"But you don't mean to say that you can call up Sir Roger's ghost by telegraph or telephone?" exclaimed Blake.

"Have you got his number?"

"Pway don't be an ass, Blake!"

"Or do you know just when and where he walks."

"I am not thinkin' of a weal ghost, of course. I am thinkin' that I might get myself up as a ghost. A fellow of my tact and judgment would be able to cawwy the thing through all wight."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Pway don't cackle, Blake. There is no purpose whatever to be served by cacklin'. What do you think of the ideah?"

"Rotten!"

"What do you think, Hewwies?"

"Bosh!"

"I am sowwy to hear you say so, deah boys, because it shows me that—"

"That the idea is idiotic?"

"Oh, no. That you are idiotic, you know."

"What?" roared Blake.

"I wegard it as an excellent idea, and I am goin' to work it," said Arthur Augustus firmly. "I suppose you chaps will help me?"

"Oh, we'll help you," said Blake resignedly. "How are you going to get into Tom Merry's room? It will look suspicious if a ghost opens the door."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, pway shut up, Hewwies. I shall be able to get into the woom without opening the door, as there is a slidin' panel in the wall, and a secwet passage. This house is vewy old, and is full of them, you know."

"By Jove!"

"I wathah think that a ghostly visitant will make Tom Mewwy change his mind about leavin' before the end of the vac. And before the end of the vac, I shall have had time to think the mattah out, you know, and I am sure I shall have thought of some dodge for savin' Tom Mewwy from the howwid necessity of workin'."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Weally, you know—"

"And suppose they buzz pillows at you?" demanded Herries.

"Bai Jove! I nevah thought of that. Pewwaps one of you fellows had bettah play the ghost," said Arthur Augustus thoughtfully.

"No fear!"

"Undah the circs.—"

"Rats!"

And Blake and Herries were very firm upon that point. If Arthur Augustus wanted ghost to be played, it was pretty clear that he would have to play it himself.

CHAPTER 3.

The Ghost.

TOM MERRY did not sleep readily that night.

The Terrible Three had turned in, and the light was out; but there was a fire of logs in the bed-room grate, and it was slow to die out.

Every now and then a tongue of flame leaped up from the dying embers, and danced in strange lights and shadows upon the gleaming panels of the old oaken walls.

Tom Merry did not feel inclined to sleep.

Neither, for that matter, did Manners or Lowther.

The Terrible Three could not help thinking of the morrow, when Tom Merry was to go forth into the bleak world—alone!

The chums of the St. Jim's Shell lay in their beds, discussing the matter, the fire flickered and died down.

It was half an hour or more before their voices were silent, and Manners was the first to drop off to sleep.

Monty Lowther followed his example.

Then Tom Merry lay thinking, his eyes dreamily fixed upon the fire, which was very low now, glimmering rody in the great fireplace.

There was silence in the room.

Suddenly, from the deep silence, came a sound.

Tom Merry heard it, but he hardly knew what it was. He only realised that it was a sound in the darkness.

It might have been an ember falling on the hearth. It disturbed the hero of the Shell only for a moment.

His eyelids were growing heavy now, and in a few more minutes he would have passed insensibly from musing to slumber.

But suddenly something—an intangible shadow, seemingly—passed between him and the few red cinders that remained of the fire.

Tom Merry started.

It was only for an instant, but for that one instant the red glow of the fire had been blotted out from his view. It could only have been by a form passing between him and the fire.

Manners and Lowther were asleep in bed. There was someone else in the room.

Tom Merry was wide enough awake now.

He sat up in bed, his wide eyes staring before him, striving to pierce the gloom.

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Another Splendid, Long, Complete School Tale of The Chums of St. Jim's.

NEXT THURSDAY: "TOM MERRY AGAINST ST. JIM'S."

"Who's there?" he exclaimed, in a sharp, clear voice. There was no reply, but Tom Merry thought that he heard a faint rustle.

"Who's there?"

There was a grunt from Monty Lowther's bed.

"Hallo! What's the row?"

"There's somebody in the room," said Tom Merry, in a steady voice.

"My hat!"

Monty Lowther rolled out of bed. Tom Merry stepped out, and walked across to the switch of the electric light, which was beside the doorway.

Click!

The room was flooded with light.

Tom Merry cast a quick, searching glance round him.

There was no one in the room but himself and Lowther, and Manners sleeping peacefully in his bed.

Tom Merry looked amazed.

"Well, my hat!" he ejaculated.

Lowther grinned.

"You were dreaming!" he exclaimed.

"I wasn't! I tell you there was somebody in the room."

"Well, where is he now?" asked Lowther.

"I don't know."

"We should have heard the door go if he'd gone out."

Tom Merry nodded. He looked under the beds, and behind the wardrobes, but there was no intruder to be seen.

"Well, I'm blessed if I understand this!" he exclaimed.

"The rotter must have nipped out into the passage, whoever he was."

"That he didn't!" said Lowther, examining the door. "I remember turning the key in the lock—and look!"

The door was locked still.

Tom Merry wrinkled his brows, puzzled.

"Well, I don't understand it!" he exclaimed.

"Oh, you were dreaming!"

"I tell you I wasn't!"

Manners, awakened by the voices, sat up in bed and yawned and rubbed his eyes sleepily.

"Hallo! What's the row?" he asked.

Tom Merry explained.

"Oh, you were dreaming!" said Manners at once.

"But I was wide awake!" objected Tom Merry. "Something passed between me and the fire, and I heard a rustle, too."

"Well, it must have been the ghost, then," said Manners comfortably. "You know, we're on the haunted corridor. One of Gussy's ancestors was murdered in one of these rooms, and he walks the house at Christmas-time, you know. I suppose he finds it nice and cool, after what he's been used to."

"You ass, Manners—"

"Well, get back to bed, and turn the light out, and let a chap go to sleep."

"But there was somebody—"

"Oh, rats and mice!"

Tom Merry switched off the light, and the juniors turned in again.

Manners and Lowther had no doubt whatever that Tom Merry had been half asleep, and had dreamed the whole occurrence. But Tom Merry was convinced that what he had seen had been real.

He did not sleep when he laid down again.

He lay quiet, waiting to see if there would be a repetition of the mysterious occurrence.

Ten minutes elapsed.

In the quiet of the old house, Tom Merry could hear the wind rustling in the leafless branches of the trees outside. The sound of a rat scuttling behind the wainscot was very clear in the silent room.

But a rustle, closer at hand than the rustle of the trees, caught Tom Merry's ears all of a sudden.

He sat up in bed, breathing hard.

As before, a dark shadow passed between him and the dim glow of the dying fire.

Tom Merry leaped from the bed.

As he did so a tongue of flame shot up from the smouldering wood, and for a moment illumined the chamber.

Tom Merry started back, with a cry.

For the sudden, evanescent light showed a figure in white, with a face of staring pallor, close upon him.

The next instant the light was gone.

All was blackness again.

"Good heavens!" gasped Tom Merry.

For a single instant he hesitated, the blood thrilling at his heart. Then he flung himself furiously forward.

He thought some soft garment brushed against him for a moment; but, if so, it was only for a moment.

Then it eluded him.

He crashed against a chair in the dark, and stumbled, and

fell with a bump. There was a loud, alarmed voice from Lowther's bed.

"What's that?"

Without replying, Tom Merry ran to the switch of the electric light and pressed it. The light flooded the room in an instant.

Manners and Lowther were sitting up in bed in blank amazement, and their eyes were fixed upon Tom Merry.

"What is it?" cried Manners.

But Tom Merry did not reply.

His eyes were searching the room for the mysterious figure in white. But they searched for it in vain.

It had disappeared, if it had been there; and his imagination had not deceived him.

The Terrible Three were alone in the room!

CHAPTER 4.

A Ghostly Warning!

"TOM!"

"What's the matter?"

Tom Merry drew a quick, sharp breath.

"It's a ghost, or somebody playing ghost!" he exclaimed.

"You've been dreaming again!"

"Were you asleep?"

"No, I wasn't," said Tom Merry; "and I saw it clearly this time—a figure in white."

"Oh, draw it mild, old chap!"

"I tell you I saw it!"

"Rats!"

"You were asleep, Tommy," said Lowther. "You couldn't have seen it, you know. It's the state of your nerves, and you've been reading giddy ghost stories in Christmas numbers. Get to bed, and go to sleep!"

Tom Merry smiled grimly as he turned off the light.

He knew he had not been mistaken; that there had really been an intruder in the room. As the door was locked, he could only conclude that there was a secret mode of entrance into the room, probably by a sliding panel in the wall.

But it also occurred to him that the visitant, whoever he was, was probably near enough to hear what was said in the room, and so it was best to say nothing.

Tom Merry sat up in bed with a pillow grasped in his hand, waiting. Manners and Lowther, after delivering themselves of a great deal of good advice, composed themselves to slumber once more.

Tom Merry waited.

The minutes passed slowly.

But a faint sound, the same that he had heard before, and which Tom Merry now guessed to be the sound of a moving panel in the wall, warned him to prepare.

His grasp tightened upon the pillow.

Again the dark shadow passed before the feeble gleam in the grate.

Whiz!

At the same instant Tom Merry hurled the pillow.

It shot through the air, and evidently came in contact with a solid body, for there was a heavy biif! and the sound of a fall.

"Yow!"

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

"Hallo! What's this?"

"The giddy ghost!"

Tom Merry leapt out of bed.

But a faint click showed that the ghost was gone, and that a panel had closed behind him.

Tom Merry switched on the light.

The pillow lay in the midst of the cinders, and there were embers scattered far and wide, showing that the "ghost" had fallen in the dead fire.

The last spark had been extinguished.

"My hat!" said Monty Lowther, with a whistle. "Then there was really somebody, after all!"

"Phew!" said Manners.

Tom Merry laughed.

"Yes," he said. "It may have been one of those Fourth Form bounders. Whoever it was, he had a tumble."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"We shall be able to sleep quietly now perhaps."

The chums went back to bed.

This time Tom Merry allowed himself to sleep, pretty well convinced that the ghost would not return for a repetition of his unpleasant experience.

But he had hardly sunk into slumber when he was awakened. What awakened him he hardly knew, but he awakened to see dimly a form at his bedside.

A deep voice thrilled in his ears:

"Beware!"

Tom Merry sat up.

"Wh-h-at!" he gasped.

"Beware!"



"Who's there?" exclaimed Tom Merry in a sharp clear voice, as something—an intangible shadow, seemingly—passed between him and the fire. (See page 4.)

It was a deep, thrilling voice, evidently not natural to the speaker; but Tom Merry thought he could guess to whom it belonged.

"Who are you?" he asked.

"Ask me not!" said the deep voice. "Take warnin'!"

Tom Merry grinned. The ghost of Eastwood had evidently fallen into the modern habit of dropping his final "g's."

"Take warnin', youth!"

"Eh?"

"Depart not!"

"What?"

"Depart not f'rom this woof until the end of the vac.!"

"Take warnin'!"

"My hat!"

"Take warnin' f'rom me, weckless youth, and depart not f'rom this woof until the end of the vac.!"

And the figure glided away.

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

He rolled in the bed, yelling.

On their beds Manners and Lowther were rolling and yelling, too. They had woke up, and they had heard the familiar tones.

There was a click.

The secret panel had fastened again, the ghost was gone.

Tom Merry simply yelled.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared back his chums.

"Ho, ho, ho!"

"He, he, he!"

"Gussy—the ghost!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

And for a quarter of an hour after that ghostly visitation little was heard in Tom Merry's room but yells and chuckles and gasps.

CHAPTER 5.

Bowled Out!

THE next morning, when the Terrible Three came down to the breakfast table, they found Arthur Augustus D'Arcy already there. The swell of St. Jim's looked at them rather anxiously.

He half expected to see them pale and wan, as was only to be looked for after a ghostly visitation from the world of shadows.

They disappointed him in this respect.

Instead of paleness and wanness, their faces were quite rosy, and wore cheerful smiles. True, D'Arcy had heard laughter

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as he left the room the previous night after the ghostly visit; but he had attributed that to hysterical fright.

Breakfast was what Blake called a movable feast at Eastwood during the holidays. They had it when they liked.

Lord Eastwood was not down, and most of his guests had not appeared at the early hour when the St. Jim's juniors rose.

The juniors had the table mostly to themselves, even Cousin Ethel and Dolores, her friend, not being down.

Arthur Augustus was doing the honours.

"Good-mornin', deah boys!" he said.

"Good-morning, old son!" said Tom Merry.

"I twust you slept well last night, Tom Mewwy?"

"Ripping!"

"Weren't you disturbed at all?"

"Well, just a little."

The Fourth-Formers looked at each other. They were getting at the ghost story now. Blake and Herries grinned. They knew by the Shell fellows' looks that the Terrible Three had not been imposed upon by the ghost of Eastwood.

"What disturbed you?" asked Arthur Augustus, looking at the coffee-pot, which he was wielding, and avoiding the Shell fellows' eyes.

"Somebody came into the room," said Tom Merry.

"Bai Jove!"

"As the door was locked, we could only conclude that it was a ghost."

"Gweat Scott!"

"You see, that was the only possible explanation under the circumstances; only there was one thing that made us suspicious."

"What was that?" asked Jack Blake.

"The ghost had very big feet," said Monty Lowther solemnly.

"Oh, weally, Lowthah—" began D'Arcy.

"What did you say?" asked Lowther, fixing his eyes inquiringly upon the swell of St. Jim's.

D'Arcy looked down at the coffee he was pouring. He realised that he could not object to the big feet without giving away the fact that he was the ghost.

"Oh, nothin'!" he mumbled.

"I thought you spoke."

"It's all wight."

"Perhaps you saw the ghost, too, last night," suggested Manners, with an air of great interest.

"Do you take sugar, Mannahs?"

"Yes, rather!"

"Did the ghost speak to you?" asked Herries.

"You bet!"

"What did he say?"

"Well, I hardly like to say," said Lowther solemnly. "I could hardly repeat what the ghost said, you know."

"Weally, Lowthah—"

"Hallo!"

"Oh, all wight—it's all wight!"

"You're pouring the coffee over the tablecloth," shrieked Blake.

"Bai Jove, so I am!"

"You don't seem quite yourself this morning, Gussy," said Tom Merry, with concern. "Did you sleep well last night?"

"Oh, pweetty well, deah boy."

"Didn't see any ghosts?"

"N-n-no."

"My hat! You're spilling the coffee again!"

"Well, you are clumsy," said Manners. "I shall begin to think that you've seen the ghost, Gussy, and you won't own up."

"Weally, Mannahs—"

"You needn't mind owning up," said Lowther. "I understand that the ghost is a sort of family concern—chap related to you who killed himself, or was killed by somebody, or something in that line. It's awfully respectable to have a family ghost, and I hear that they're sold with the ancestors now to chaps who get rich suddenly on the Stock Exchange."

"Weally—"

"There's Crooke of the Shell, at St. Jim's," pursued Lowther. "His father's a millionaire since his latest swindle—I mean his latest business operation—and I hear now that Crooke is descended from Sir Hook de Crooke, who came over with the Conqueror, and the Herald's College are going to work out the pedigree at a low figure."

"I twust you do not compare those Stock Exchange boundahs with us, Lowthah. As for that chap Cwooke, I know perfectly well that he's not descended from anybody. When I see a chap like Cwooke I am wathah inclined to believe in evolution, yea know, and think that he developed from a lizard or somethin'."

"But to come back to the giddy ghost," said Blake.

"What did he really say to you?"

"What was his language like?" asked Herries.

THE GRAM LIBRARY.—No. 151.

"Awful!"

"Weally, Lowthah—"

"Yes?"

"Oh, I— Will you take sugar?"

"Certainly! Of course, we know that it was somebody playing ghost, because he smelt very strongly of onions," said Lowther. "He had been eating fried onions and drinking beer."

"Crash!"

The coffee-pot fell upon the crockeryware, and coffee ran in streams over the tablecloth. There was a shout from the juniors, but Arthur Augustus did not heed.

He jammed his monocle into his eye and glared at Lowther.

"You uttah wottah—"

"What?"

"You feahful beast—"

"Eh?"

"You know you are wottin', you feahful wottah!"

"Why, how do you know?" demanded Lowther innocently. "You couldn't have been there."

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Blake.

"Where's the joke?" inquired Manners. "Gussy couldn't possibly have been there, because the door was locked."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Weally, you know—"

"Besides, it couldn't have been Gussy playing ghost—think of the language."

"The awful language—"

"You uttah wottahs—"

"Blessed if I see why Gussy should be getting his hair off," said Lowther, tackling his second egg. "It's not my fault if his family ghost smells of onions."

"And uses awful language," said Manners.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I wegard you as a pweawicatin' ass, Lowthah. I wegard you as anothah pweawicatin' ass, Mannahs! I considah—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You ass!" roared Tom Merry. "Ha, ha, ha! Do you think we didn't know it was you?"

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—"

"Do you think we should believe that you had an ancestral ghost with exactly the same giddy accent that you lather on to us?"

"Bai Jove, I nevah thought of that!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Then you knew—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Depart not from this woof!" groaned Monty Lowther. "Stay undah this woof till the end of the giddy vac. Ha, ha, ha!"

Arthur Augustus looked from one to another of the juniors. His face was scarlet. He saw that he had inadvertently given himself away as the ghost of Sir Roger.

"Bai Jove!" he murmured.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Weally, you fellahs—"

"You're bowled out, Gussy," grinned Tom Merry. "It's jolly kind of you, old chap, but I don't think it would have worked even if the real ghost had come. I can't stay till the end of the vac. Ha, ha, ha!"

"Bai Jove!"

"Oh, my only hat!" roared Blake. "Ha, ha, ha!"

"Bai Jove! It appeahs that the wheeze has not worked," said D'Arcy, grinning at last. "Bai Jove, you know! What's to be done now?"

"I should recommend ringing for some more coffee," said Monty Lowther.

"Bai Jove! You're wight!"

And Arthur Augustus rang for some more coffee.

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CHAPTER 6.

Herries is Taken Ill.

THE kindly attentions of the Eastwood ghost having failed to shake Tom Merry's resolve, the hero of the Shell prepared for his departure after breakfast. While he was so engaged the other fellows talked it over. That Tom Merry must go sooner or later they knew, but they were naturally reluctant to lose sight of him. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy's idea of some dodge for keeping him at Eastwood till the end of the vacation found favour in all eyes, Manners and Lowther being as keen about it as the Fourth-Formers.

"But how's it to be done?" Lowther wanted to know.

Arthur Augustus sat with an elbow on his knee and his chin resting in his hand, and his brows corrugated with thought.

Monty Lowther eyed him curiously.

"Is that intended for a living picture?" he asked.

Arthur Augustus started from his reverie.

"Weally, Lowthah—"

"Or are you waiting for Manners to take a snapshot?"

"It would break the camera," said Manners seriously.

"Weally, Mannahs—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I was thinkin' it out," said Arthur Augustus indignantly.

"Now you have thrown me into a fluttah with your intewuptions, and I shall have to start again."

"No more ghosts, I hope?" said Lowther sarcastically.

"Certainly not. I was thinkin' that pewwaps one of you chaps could fall ill."

"Ill?" said Manners, staring.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Why on earth should we fall ill?"

"That's the wheeze."

"Blessed if I'm going to be ill, wheeze or no wheeze!" said Lowther emphatically.

"Ass! I don't mean weally ill."

"What do you mean, then?"

"Suppose one of you chaps pwetended to be ill, you know, and Tom Mewwy would be so anxious about you that he wouldn't go till you were well again," the swell of St. Jim's explained eagerly.

"Well, there might be something in that," Blake remarked, in a reflective sort of way. "But what sort of an illness could it be?"

"Oh, I know. You remember you sang a tenor solo last night, Gussy—" began Lowther.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Well, it stands to reason that somebody must be feeling a bit bad afterwards—we're not all so jolly strong. Are you feeling ill, Blake?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Weally, Lowthah—"

"Are you ill, Herries?"

"I wefuse to take any notice of your wotten jokes, Lowthah. I was thinkin' that Blake could pwetend to be ill, you see, as Blake is wathah a good actah, and, in fact, has done vewy well in the amateuh dwamatic performances at St. Jim's."

"Hear, hear!"

Jack Blake winked at the window.

"No fear!" he remarked.

"Weally, Blake—"

"I feel sure that I couldn't do it. One of Tom Merry's best chums is the man. I suggest Lowther or Manners."

"Vewy well—"

"Oh, I couldn't do it," said Monty Lowther. "Besides, I feel that this is a matter for the Fourth Form, not for the Shell."

"Just what I was thinking," Manners assented.

"Hewwies, then—"

"Oh, rats!" said Herries uneasily.

"Weally, Hewwies, old man, you're just the chap, you know," urged Arthur Augustus.

"Why don't you take it on yourself?" demanded Herries.

"Weally, you know, I shall be wanted to awwange the whole biznez, and I cannot be stage-managah and leadin' actah, too."

"I'm not much of an actor."

"Why, you're ripping!" said Blake. "Isn't he?"

"Yes, rather," said Monty Lowther. "You remember the time Herries did Brutus at St. Jim's, don't you, Manners?"

"What-ho!" said Manners. "He brought the house down."

"Well, if he didn't, it was a wonder, anyway. You remember what I said afterwards."

"Yes; you said you wondered what Shakespeare would say if he heard Brutus being done like that," said Manners, with a nod.

"You ass," roared Lowther, "I don't mean that! You

remember I said I—I'd never heard Brutus's lines rendered like that—never."

"So you did," agreed Manners.

"And I never had," said Lowther.

"Nor I, either."

"Yaas, wathah!" said D'Arcy. "So you see, Hewwies—"

"Well, if you really think I could do it," said Herries dubiously.

"I am sure of it, deah boy."

"Oh, it's a dead cert!" said Manners.

"Safe as houses," declared Monty Lowther.

"Well, what am I to do?" asked Herries, evidently only half liking the task, in spite of the flattering assurances of the juniors.

"All you have to do is to fall down and gwoan feahfully," said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "We'll do the west."

"Well, I suppose I could do that."

"Of course you could," said Lowther. "Groan, and shriek a bit. You would shriek much more naturally, of course, if you felt some real pain. Perhaps I had better stick a pin into you."

Herries glared.

"Perhaps you hadn't," he said. "If you stick a pin into me, you'll get my fist in your eye the next second, I promise you that."

"Weally, Hewwies, I don't think you ought to spoil a good wheeze because you're afwaid of a little pain," said Arthur Augustus severely.

"Oh, rats!"

"If you say wats to me, Hewwies—"

"Rats!"

"Weally, you know—"

"Hush!" whispered Blake. "Here comes Tom Merry!"

In a moment the rising altercation was hushed. Herries, remembering the part assigned to him, lay back in his chair, and prepared to groan.

The others stood round with faces long and serious.

Tom Merry came into the room.

He was looking serious enough.

"Well, chaps, my bag's packed," he said.

Groan!

Tom Merry started.

Gro-o-oan!

Herries rolled almost off his chair, and groaned heavily.

Tom Merry looked alarmed.

"Great Scott! What's the matter with Herries?" he exclaimed.

"Bai Jove!"

"Are you ill, Herries?" asked Blake, in great concern.

"Oh, oh, oh!"

"Have you got a pain?"

"Is he in a fit?"

"Gweat Scott!"

"Groan! Groan!"

"Run for a doctor, or something!" exclaimed Jack Blake, in alarm. "There's a doctor staying in the house, I believe, D'Arcy."

"Yaas; Dr. Nipper. He'll be in the gun-woom with the governah."

Tom Merry started to the door.

Arthur Augustus seized a jug of flowers from a stand, threw the flowers to the floor, and flung the water into Herries's face to revive him.

There was a formidable yell from Herries.

He left off groaning, leaped to his feet, dashed the water out of his eyes, and rushed upon the swell of St. Jim's like a bull. Arthur Augustus dodged round Blake in alarm.

"Keep off, you ass!" he gasped.

"Lemme get at him!" yelled Herries. "I'll teach him to douse me with water!"

"You ass! I was only keepin' up appeawances."

"Appearances!" roared Herries. "Lemme get at him, I say! I'll teach him to keep up appearances by dousing me with cold water!"

"You duffah!"

"Hold on, Herries—"

"Tom Merry will hear you—he can't be gone far yet—"

"Let me get at him!" roared Herries.

"Bai Jove—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

It was a roar of laughter from the doorway.

The chums swung round.

Tom Merry was standing there, his hands to his sides, roaring with laughter. He had heard Herries' stentorian tones, and had turned back. He was gazing at the juniors with eyes wet with mirth.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Bai Jove! The game's up now."

"All your fault, you silly chump!" grunted Herries.

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 151.

mopping his wet face with his pocket-handkerchief. "Ow! I'm soaked!"

"I weseuse to admit it was my fault. I—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Tom Merry came back into the room, still chuckling.

CHAPTER 7.

Tom Merry's New Year!

THE St. Jim's juniors looked at one another rather sheepishly.

Herries' illness had come to so sudden an end, owing to D'Arcy's enthusiasm in keeping up appearances, that it was evident that the game was up.

The wheeze had failed, and Tom Merry had seen through it, as was evident from his laughter.

The hero of the Shell laughed till the tears ran down his cheeks.

"That was a jolly quick recovery, Herries, old man!" he exclaimed.

Herries granted.

"It was all Gussy's fault," he said.

"Weally, Howwies—"

"Well, as you're not ill, we can say good-bye," said Tom Merry, laughing.

"Bai Jove!"

"Rats!" said Lowther. "Are you really going this morning?"

"Must, old man."

"From the local station here?"

"Yes."

"We'll come with you as far as that, anyway."

"Good! I shall be glad to have you."

"We shall come, too," said a soft voice, as Cousin Ethel came into the room with her friend Dolores Pelham. "Won't we, Dolores?"

"Yes, indeed," said Dolores, turning her big dark eyes upon Tom Merry very kindly.

"Thank you so much!" said Tom Merry. "You're all so good that it's simply rotten to have to leave you."

"Wait till I get a dry collar on," said Herries.

"Right-ho, old man!"

"I will ordah the waggonette," said Arthur Augustus.

By the time the waggonette was ready, and brought round to the house, Herries was in drier attire. Tom Merry had already bidden farewell to Lord Eastwood, his kind host, and Conway and Wally.

With the girls and his chums, he entered the waggonette, and Arthur Augustus took the reins.

The vehicle dashed away in the clear, frosty morning.

Tom Merry sat very silent.

It was a strange New Year to him.

He had made a resolve for the New Year—a right resolve, he knew—to have nothing more from his friends, and to go out into the world to seek his fortune.

What would the end of it be?

He could not tell.

But in spite of the dubiousness of the future, he felt cheered and strengthened by his resolve, and invigorated, too, by the frosty clearness of the air.

After all, why should not the future be bright?

He had accepted a small help from his friends; he was not penniless now, and in his bag was packed all that his chums could cram into it that would be likely to be useful to him.

He went with hope in his heart, and the best wishes of true friends, and the remembrance of much kindness, to cheer him on.

"You are going to London?" Dolores asked him.

Tom Merry shook his head.

"No; I shall head for Southampton."

"That is a seaport?" asked the Spanish girl.

"Yes," said Tom Merry, smiling.

"You are thinking of going to sea?"

"It is possible that I may."

Dolores clasped her hands.

"Oh, how splendid it is to be a boy!" she exclaimed. "You are going out to a life of freedom and adventure—and we girls have to remain quietly at home."

Tom Merry laughed.

"I don't think I am to be envied," he said. "I'd much rather go back to school. I'm going because I have to. I fancy that a life of freedom and adventure, as you call it, means hard work and short commons. Not that I'm afraid of it, either. I hope I shall get through somehow."

Dolores nodded; she was very thoughtful. Arthur Augustus was looking thoughtful, too. He was debating in his mind whether to upset the waggonette, and so prevent Tom Merry from catching his train.

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As there were ladies in it, he decided that, upon the whole, it wouldn't do.

The waggonette drove into the village, and up to the little station.

The whole party accompanied Tom Merry into the station, and upon the platform, and there they had to wait five minutes for the train.

There was a sombre silence.

Parting with a dear friend is never pleasant; and under the dubious circumstances, the parting now was doubly painful.

Arthur Augustus' usually sunny face was quite gloomy.

Tom Merry looked the most cheerful of the party.

But it is probable that his cheerfulness was for the greater part assumed, in order to avoid depressing his friends by low spirits.

"Bai Jove!" said Arthur Augustus, for about the tenth time. "It's wotten, you know."

Blake grunted.

"Tom Mewwy, old son, I wish you'd take that othah fivah," said D'Arcy, in a whisper.

Tom Merry shook his head.

"But you are stonay, deah boy."

Tom smiled.

"I have five pounds," he said.

"Yaas, but—"

"It's all right, Gussy."

"Look here," said Lowther. "No more of your blessed disappearing, you know. You've got to let us hear from you pretty frequently."

Tom Merry hesitated.

"Promise!" exclaimed Manners.

"You see—"

"Come now, honour bright!"

"You see—"

"Here comes the train," said Monty Lowther. "We won't let you into it unless you promise. We'll hold you back, I tell you."

Tom Merry laughed.

"All right, I promise!" he exclaimed. "I'll let you know where I am, once a week. Is that all right?"

"All serene!"

The train came into the station.

"Good-bye, and good luck," said Cousin Ethel; "and mind you remember that you always have good friends here, Tom Merry."

"I'm not likely to forget it," said Tom Merry.

"No, I am sure of that," said Ethel. "But when you are away—"

"Dear me! Is that you, Tom Merry?"

A youth in large spectacles, with a bumpy forehead and blinking eyes, descended from the train.

He raised a large hat to Cousin Ethel, and blinked at the juniors. And from the St. Jim's fellows came an exclamation in a sort of chorus:

"Skimpy!"

Skimpole, of the Shell, grinned.

"Yes, here I am!" he exclaimed.

"Hallo, old Skimpy!" said Tom Merry. "Jolly glad to see you again, but I've got to get off by this train. Good-bye!"

"Stop a minute!"

"The train—"

"Never mind the train," said Skimpole hurriedly. "It's a matter of life and death."

"By Jove!"

"Gweat Scott!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "Are you jokin', Skimpy?"

"Certainly not. I never joke. A sincere Socialist has no time for a sense of humour, as you could see by any Socialist speech in the papers."

"But what's the matter?"

"Stand clear, there!" shouted the guard.

Tom Merry hesitated.

It was his train, and it was time for him to go. But Skimpole's sudden appearance had disconcerted him, and Skimpole had said it was a matter of life and death.

"You must stay!" muttered Lowther.

Tom Merry stepped back from the train.

The latter rumbled out of the station, and disappeared down the line; but Tom Merry was not in it. The hero of St. Jim's was still standing on the platform with his chums.

ANSWERS

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CHAPTER 8.

The Social Reformer.

SKIMPOLE blinked at the juniors of St. Jim's, who were looking very curious. Skimpole wore a silk hat, size seven and a half, which he was continually pushing back, as the rim appeared to feel oppressive to his bumpy forehead. Skimpole had a carpet bag in his left hand, and an umbrella under his arm. The pockets of his overcoat were bulging with papers.

Skimpole wore, in addition to the silk hat, overcoat and umbrella, a very serious expression.

It was perfectly clear that some mission of great importance had brought the genius of St. Jim's down to Easthorpe during the Christmas vacation.

Skimpole, the amateur Socialist, the uncompromising Determinist, whose youthful head was filled up with matters he was not old enough to understand, was a singular youth in many ways.

At St. Jim's he devoted a great deal of time to reading books by such masters of literature as Professor Balm-crumpet and Dr. Loosetop, to say nothing of the lesser lights, Blyndman and Scratchford. From these books he learned that the social system was rotten to the core, and that the only way to save the community was to place affairs in the hands of Loosetop & Co. for management. And Skimpole believed everything he read if it was in sufficiently long and imposing words. Hence it was certain that Herbert Skimpole would come across many wonderful and weird ideas.

But what was Skimpole, of the Shell, doing down in this quiet country village, at a time, too, when he should have been enjoying his Christmas holidays?

The juniors surrounded him with questions. Skimpole certainly had many peculiar ways, but he was a harmless and obliging fellow, and everybody liked him, while they laughed at his Determinism, and his ideas of evolution, and the rest of the learned nonsense he had imbibed from absurd books.

"What's the mattah, Skimmy?" asked Arthur Augustus.

"Somebody ill, I suppose."

"Not dangerous, I hope."

"What is it, Skimmy?"

"Who's in danger?"

"I didn't know you knew anybody in Easthorpe."

"Wathah not."

Skimpole blinked at them.

"Nobody is ill, that I am aware of," he said. "Why should you conclude that somebody was ill?"

They stared at him.

"You said it was a matter of life and death that brought you down here," exclaimed Tom Merry indignantly.

"Bai Jove! I suppose he was wottin'."

"Talk sense, Skimmy, old chap."

"Impossible," said Lowther gravely. "A sincere Socialist never talks sense."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Dear me!" said Skimpole. "I really——"

"Explain!"

"Expound!"

"Come to the point!"

"Really, you know——" began Skimpole.

"What is a matter of life and death, if nobody is ill?" asked Cousin Ethel.

"The most important event of modern times hangs in the balance," said Skimpole impressively.

"Eh?"

"What?"

"Have you not heard the news?"

"News!"

"The great news?"

"What great news?"

"Extraordinary!" murmured Skimpole.

"Bai Jove, you know, pe'waps the Germans have landed," exclaimed D'Arcy. "We haven't got the mornin' papahs here yet. I was weadin' in a newspaper the week before last that they would probably be heah in a fortnight or so."

"Have the Germans come, Skimmy?"

"I did not see any in this train," said Skimpole, looking a little bewildered. "What Germans are you alluding to, Blake?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"What's the news, then?"

"You have surely not been unaware that there has been raging in the country a——"

"Snowstorm?"

"Certainly not. An election."

"Election!"

"Certainly—a General Election. Are you not aware that, owing to certain causes, the election in Easthorpe has been postponed until this week, and the House of Commons will

not be complete until the member for Easthorpe is returned?"

"Bai Jove!"

"What on earth——"

"You don't mean to say you've come down here about the General Election, Skimmy?" demanded Tom Merry, in wonder.

"Certainly!"

"Candidate for the House of Commons, I suppose?" suggested Lowther.

"No, Lowther. There is an absurd restriction about schoolboys being elected for the House of Commons, otherwise I should certainly put up for election," said Skimpole. "I flatter myself that I should wake up the country a little if I had a voice in the National Council. I should wake Parliament up."

"More likely send it to sleep."

"Really, Lowther——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I have come down here to back up the Socialist candidate," went on Skimpole. "I hear that he is being opposed by a nominee of a selfish, grasping aristocrat."

"Bai Jove!"

"The eldest son of a base-minded, grasping, bloated nobleman is the other candidate," said Skimpole. "I'm going to work for Jack Snorter, the people's candidate."

"Gweat Scott!"

"I want all you fellows to help me."

"Bai Jove!"

"Tom Merry especially. Next to myself, I regard Tom Merry as having more brains than any other fellow at St. Jim's."

"Thanks!" said Tom Merry laughing.

"Besides, Tom Merry having lost all his money, he will naturally become a revolutionist," said Skimpole. "It is utterly useless preaching revolution to people with five hundred a year. Everybody who has anything to lose has a stupid and selfish prejudice against the revolution."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Tom Merry is now poor, so he will naturally be willing to work for the great cause, and back me up against the bloated aristocrats."

Tom Merry laughed.

"Not much!" he said.

"Really, Merry——"

"I don't know anything about elections, and jolly little about politics, and I care less," said Tom Merry. "And I shouldn't be of any use, and I haven't any time. And you've made me lose my train for nothing."

"Really, you know——"

"Do you mean to say that this is a matter of life and death, Skimmy?" demanded Jack Blake.

Skimpole blinked at him.

"Of course, Blake!"

"Well, of all the silly asses——"

"Of all the fatheads——"

"Of all the frabjous chumps——"

"Yaas, wathah! Of all the fwabjous asses——"

"Really, you fellows, it is a matter of life and death for the people of England. The constituency of Easthorpe is the last to be polled, and the voice of Easthorpe must be heard with no undecided tone in the election. If Easthorpe returns the red flag candidate, England may be saved yet."

"Bai Jove!"

"I call upon you all to back me up, and to help in securing the return of Jack Snorter, the people's candidate, and the defeat of the bloated, miserable, land-grabbing, effete aristocrat."

"Ha, ha, ha! That's good for your major, Gussy."

D'Arcy turned his eyeglass indignantly upon Skimpole.

"You uttah ass!" he said. "Do you know that my eldah bwathah, Conway, is the candidate for Easthorpe?"

"Dear me! Now I remember, the candidate's name is Lord Conway."

"He is not at all bloated," said Arthur Augustus warmly.

"He is not quite so slim as I am, but it is a wotten ewwah to desewibe him as bloated. I appeal to the fellows."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Perhaps Skimmy will apologise now," suggested Manners.

Skimpole shook his head.

"Impossible. Lord Conway is the representative of a corrupt and thoroughly rotten system," he exclaimed. "I am against him, and I am determined to purge Easthorpe of the vile aristocratic influence under which it groans."

"Bai Jove!"

"I have resolved——"

"Wats!"

"Really, D'Arcy——"

"Weally, Skimmy——"

"Oh, cheese it!" said Herries. "Have you had your breakfast, Skimmy?"

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 151.

NEXT THURSDAY: "TOM MERRY AGAINST ST. JIM'S." Another Splendid, Long, Complete School Tale of The Chums of St. Jim's.

"Breakfast!" said Skimpole absently. "I have no time for breakfast. I am devoting myself to the great cause."
 "Bettah come along to Eastwood and have a feed, anyway," said D'Arcy hospitably.
 Skimpole shook his head.
 "Thank you, D'Arcy; but it would compromise my sacred cause if I were to eat in the house of a bloated aristocrat."
 "My governah is not bloated, you ass!"
 "It's all the same. I am going at once to the house of Jack Snorter. Will you fellows come with me, and work in the good cause?"
 "No fear!"
 "I appeal to you, Tom Merry—" **"Rats!"**
 "Then I must plough a lonely furrow," said Skimpole. "Good-bye!"
 "Look here—" **"I am sorry, but I can waste no time with the destinies of the country at stake."**
 And Skimpole drifted out of the station.
 The juniors looked at one another, and burst into a roar.
 "Ha, ha, ha!"
 Skimpole did not hear or heed. He drifted on, with the preoccupation natural to a person who held the destinies of England in his hands.

CHAPTER 9.

The People's Candidate has a Narrow Escape.

TOM MERRY laughed heartily. Skimpole's arrival and Skimpole's purposes were funny enough; but Tom Merry realised that he had lost his train, and that there was not another for an hour.

"You can't go now!" said Blake decidedly.
 "Not till the next train," said Tom Merry, with a nod.
 "Not at all."
 "Why not?"
 "You heard what Skimpole said? It's a matter of life and death. As Skimmy is backing up the Snorter party, we're bound to back up the Eastwood candidate. What do you fellows say?" demanded Blake.
 "Hear, hear!" said all the fellows together.
 "Certainly!" said Cousin Ethel, with a smile.
 "Yaas, wathah! My majah, you know, is a wippin' candidate, and he ought to be weturned," said D'Arcy seriously.
 "Why, Easthorpe has always weturned the eldest son of Lord Eastwood, you know, from time immemorial! It's like the cheek of any othah party to put up a candidate for Eastwood! I weward it in the light of attemptin' to pick a chap's pocket!"
 "Hear, hear!"
 "I have a gweat respect for the Labah partay," went on Arthur Augustus. "I weward them as doin' a gweat work. It's a vewy odd welflection, you know; but if the workin'-classes did not keep on workin', and pwoducin' food and clothes and things, we should all have to work ourselves, which would be howwid!"
 "Awful!"

"Therefore, I have a gweat admiwation for the workin'-classes. I weward it as noble and disintewested of them to go on workin' like this, and lettin' the uppah classes have all the proceeds."

"Hear, hear!"
 "And, therefore, I have a gweat belief in the Labah partay, because it stands to weason that the chaps who do all the work ought to be wewpwsented in Parliament," said the swell of St. Jim's. "But I think there's such a thing as good taste, even in politics; and when a chap like my governah is in the habit of namin' a membah for a certain constituency, I think it's wathah bad form to intahfere."
 "Of course," grinned Blake. And the chums of St. Jim's chuckled in chorus.

"Therefore," said D'Arcy, "as a lesson to ewewybody in genewal not to intahfere with a chap's pwivate affairs in this weckless way, I think we ought to work for Lord Conway's election, and biff the Snortah partay."

"Hurrah!"
 "I call upon Tom Mewwy to wemain here and lend a hand. Next to myself, he's the most bwainy chap in the party."

Tom Merry laughed.
 "I don't see that we should be of any use, Gusey," he remarked.

"My dear chap, we should do lots of things—go wound and canvass for votes, and tear up the othah partay's bannahs and things!" said Arthur Augustus, rather vaguely.
 "There are lots of things to do at election times. I know a place where eggs can be bought cheap, too."
 "Ha, ha, ha!"

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 151.

THE CHUMS OF RYLCOMBE GRAMMAR SCHOOL ARE IN THE "EMPIRE" LIBRARY.

"Now, you've got to stay till after the election, anyway, Tom Merry."

Tom Merry looked at Cousin Ethel. After all, a few days more or less made no difference to him, and he was not eager to leave his friends.

Cousin Ethel nodded.

"Stay for the election," she said. "I think it is quite possible that you may be of use in canvaessing for Lord Conway."

"Very well," said Tom Merry.

"You'll stay?"

"For the election—yes; and go the following morning."

"Bwavo!"

"Hurrah!"

The juniors of St. Jim's streamed out of the station, with Tom Merry in their midst. There was a sound of a roar from the village street.

"Hallo!" exclaimed Monty Lowther. "That sounds like election business already."

Loud came the roar through the frosty air.

"Duck 'im!"

"Down with 'im!"

"This way!"

"Hurrah! Down with Snorter!"

"Bai Jove! It's an election wow!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus.

A crowd came surging along the village street towards the horse-pond, which was near the station.

There were forty or fifty men in the crowd—some of them yokels in smock frocks, some of them shopmen, and some old villagers; all of them highly excited.

They bore in their midst a young man with a pale face and pale hair, pale eyes, and a flaming red necktie.

He was struggling feebly as the angry crowd hustled him along towards the horse-pond.

"Bai Jove! Who's that?" exclaimed D'Arcy.

"Ha, ha, ha! It must be Snorter—the red necktie, you know."

"Bai Jove!"

"Duck 'im!" roared the crowd.

"I say, it's too rotten to duck a chap on a bitter morning like this!" exclaimed Tom Merry. "That chap doesn't look as if he could stand much, either."

"Bai Jove—no!"

"Let's chip in; it will be a row," said Blake. "Nothing like a free fight on a frosty morning, you know. The girls can go into the station."

"Indeed, we shall not!" said Cousin Ethel.

"But you mustn't get hurt—"

"Stuff!" said Dolores decidedly.

"But, you see—"

"Bai Jove, you know, we can't go for 'em; they're our side!" said D'Arcy. "They're all Conway votahs, you see, duckyin' the wival candidate!"

"But—"

"I will speak to them!" exclaimed Ethel. And she ran forward, and stood in the way of the mob. "Mr. Grum, what are you going to do with that man?"

Mr. Grum, the landlord of the Eastwood Arms, stopped and scratched his nose. He was the leader of the mob, and loudest in his denunciations of the rival candidate, who had evidently been mobbed while making a speech in the village. But Mr. Grum knew Lord Eastwood's niece well, and he touched his hat respectfully.

"You see, miss—" he said.

"Who is he?"

"He's the Soci'list candydate, miss."

"I stand for Liberty, Freedom, and Equality!" bellowed the young man in the red tie breathlessly. "I stand—"

"Shut up!"

"Duck 'im!"

"I stand—"

"Horder!" said Mr. Grum severely. "'Ow dare you interrupt the young lady?"

"I stand—"

"Horder, I say!"

"You must let him go," said Cousin Ethel.

"Oh, miss!"

The girl nodded firmly.

"You must let him go!" she exclaimed. "You would not please Lord Eastwood or my Cousin Conway by any kind of violence. If you disapprove of Mr. Snorter, you can vote against him on polling-day."

"That we will, miss!" said a score of voices.

"Very well. But you must not be hard on the poor man. Let him talk as much as he likes," said Ethel.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"I stand for freedom!" bawled the Socialist candidate.

"I stand—"

"Horder!"

"But he's been a-callin' of us names, miss," said Mr.

Grum. "He was standin' hup in the market-place, and cullin' us all slaves and crawlin' worms, and such-like!"

"So you are!" exploded Mr. Snorter. "Slaves of the capitalist classes; crawling worms, who lick the feet of the bloated aristocrat, while he is rolling in gold on the tessellated floors of his marble palaces!"

"My hat! There's a picture for you!" murmured Blake. "You 'ear, 'im, miss?" said Mr. Grum. "Don't you think that p'raps a little duckin' in the 'orse-pond would do 'im good?"

Ethel laughed.

"No, no! Now, please do let him go, Mr. Grum."

"You 'ear what the young lady says?" exclaimed Mr. Grum resignedly, turning to the crowd. "Let 'im go!"

The Easthorpe men reluctantly released their victim.

Mr. Snorter shook himself, and put his collar a little straight, and jerked at his flaming tie, which contrasted hideously with the unhealthy pallor of his face, and gasped for breath.

"Thank you, miss!" he said. "You're very kind. But I'm standing up for the good cause, and I defy these slaves of the tyrant to stifle the voice of a free man!"

"Don't be foolish!" said Ethel. "Run away while you may."

Mr. Snorter stood his ground.

"I stand up for freedom and—"

"Get hout!" roared Mr. Grum.

"Not a step!" said Mr. Snorter. "I stand here, and I stand here if I'm torn limb from limb! Oh, you benighted slaves of a capitalistic tyranny—"

"Well, the beggar's got pluck, anyway," said Tom Merry. "I like him for that. Do let him go on talking if he wants to, Mr. Grum. Talking never did any harm yet, you know—or any good, either."

Mr. Grum laughed.

"I stand up—"

"If it wasn't for the young lady, you'd soon be lyin' down!" grunted Mr. Grum. "But let him alone, boys. He's a 'armless idiot!"

And Mr. Snorter was left alone.

CHAPTER 10.

Taking Sides.

"BAI Jove, that was jolly pluckay of you, Ethel!" said Arthur Augustus, as they walked back to Eastwood House. "I am glad they didn't duck the poor chap, though he certainly is a silly ass, you know!"

"Looks as if there'll be some exciting times in Easthorpe," Tom Merry remarked.

"Yaas, wathah! There's goin' to be a big meetin' this evenin'," said Arthur Augustus. "There will be a cwowd in from the other places wound about, and, as Mr. Snorter has a big followin' among the hands at the ironworks, there will be a lot on his side. There will vevy likely be a wow."

"Then we'll jolly well be there!" exclaimed Blake.

"What-ho!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

The St. Jim's juniors went in to lunch, and Lord Eastwood greeted Tom Merry with a warm pressure of the hand.

"I'm glad you are staying longer," he said. "As for Arthur's idea of helping Conway in the election, I am sure I do not know how it will work, but probably Arthur will do no harm, if he does no good."

"Weally, dad—"

Tom Merry smiled.

"We'll try not to do any harm, at any rate, sir," he said.

After lunch, Ethel and Dolores went on a visit, and the boys turned their minds to the task of electioneering.

Lord Conway, the heir of Eastwood, was taking his candidature very easily.

The eldest son of Lord Eastwood had always sat in Parliament for Easthorpe, as D'Arcy had said, and Lord Conway regarded his seat as quite secure, as, indeed, it was. In a quiet country constituency like Easthorpe, modern ideas were slow to make their way, and the people's candidate had not even a sporting chance. In one quarter of the constituency, where manufactures had been established, Mr. Snorter had a chance, but the majority against him at the poll was likely to be six or seven to one.

As a matter of fact, Mr. Snorter did not expect to get elected. He was fighting a forlorn hope more for the sake of advertisement than anything else.

As there was no doubt in his mind about the result, Lord Conway was taking matters quite easily, and doing very little electioneering; and, in fact, until the arrival of Mr. Snorter, there had been no excitement at all in the neighbourhood.

The Easthorpe folk were more concerned with the price of bacon than with the state of the Navy, and some of them

had never heard of Tariff Reform, and others who had heard of it imagined it to be a species of Free Trade.

Therefore, Lord Conway did not receive the offer of help from the juniors with any great enthusiasm.

Arthur Augustus pointed out the advantage of having a select band of backers backing him up in this way, but to unresponsive ears.

"You see, Conway, old man," said D'Arcy, "it's due to the free and independent electahs to make a bit of a wow on an occasion like this. You ought to come down to the town, and talk against Snortah."

The viscount laughed.

"I've made a speech in Easthorpe, and a speech at Huckleberry Heath, and a speech in the market place at Lowcot," he said. "That's enough."

"Bai Jove! If I were standin' for Parliament, I should make dozens of speeches, and wouse up the electowate to a sense of the dangah."

"But there isn't any danger," said Conway.

"Weally, deah boy, there's the question of 'Fwee Twade or Tawiff Weform."

"Which side do you take?"

Arthur Augustus rubbed his nose thoughtfully.

"I don't know," he confessed. "I haven't thought it out yet. But surely a chap ought to take one side or the othah, and stand up for it."

"I prefer sitting down."

"Weally, Conway—"

"But you can stand up, if you like," said Lord Conway.

"Undah the cires—"

"I'm going to play a game of billiards now, with old Raby. You can stand up for my rights in Easthorpe. Good luck!"

"Look here, Conway, Tom Mewwy is stayin' specially to see you through—"

"Thanks awfully!"

"We are takin' up this mattah sewiously."

"Go it, then!" said Lord Conway lazily.

And he sauntered away towards the billiard-room.

In the doorway appeared the youthful figure of Wally, and he took his eldest brother by the coat sleeve, and stopped him. The hero of the Third Form at St. Jim's was looking very serious. Jameson, his chum of the Third, who was spending the Christmas holiday with him at Eastwood, was following him.

"Oh, I've found you!" said Wally.

Lord Conway looked resigned.

"Do you want to help me in the election?" he demanded.

"That's the idea," said Wally. "Jameson and I are going to back you up, ain't we, Jim?"

"That's it," said Jameson.

"We want a couple of pounds for electioneering expenses," Wally explained.

Lord Conway laughed.

"Then you won't get it!" he exclaimed. "You've had too much money lately, Wally."

"I suppose you don't want us to join the opposition," said Wally, truculently.

Lord Conway burst into a roar.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Look here!" exclaimed Wally, "I don't want any cheek! Come to think of it, I don't approve of a free and independent constituency being represented by one of you titled idlers, and if you don't mind your P's and Q's, I shall go and electioneer for the popular candidate."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Look here, Conway, if you want to back up the Snorter party, you're going the right way to work!" exclaimed Wally indignantly.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"We're willing to back you up, and—"

"Please don't," said Lord Conway, still laughing. "I'd take it as a personal favour if you'll go and back up Snorter. Really!"

And he pushed past the hero of the Third, and made his escape.

Wally glared after him in a rage.

"My only Aunt Jane!" he exclaimed. "The cheek!"

"The nerve!" said Jameson.

"Weally, Wally, I wegard Conway's weply as quite appropwiate," said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy severely. "It is uttah wubbish for you youngstahs to think of intahfewin' in politics."

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

"You cannot undahstand the issues at stake, in the least, and—"

"Do you?" howled Wally.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"What's the difference between Free Trade and Tariff Reform?"

"Well, you see—you see—"

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NEXT THURSDAY: "TOM MERRY AGAINST ST. JIM'S."

Another Splendid, Long, Complete School Tale of The Chums of St. Jim's.

"Look here, if we're backing up Snorter, that chap's an enemy!" exclaimed Jameson.

Wally whistled.

"By George, of course he is!" he ejaculated.

"Weally, Wally—"

"Down with the enemy!" roared Wally.

"You—you young ass—ow—you uttah young wascals—yow!"

Wally and Jameson rushed upon the swell of St. Jim's. In a moment Arthur Augustus was whirling over, and he came down on the floor in a sitting posture, with a loud bump!"

"Ow!"

"Bump him!"

"Yow!"

Bump!

Bump!

"Yawwoh!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The two young rascals jerked D'Arcy's collar loose, tore his necktie out, ruffled his hair, and fled. They left Arthur Augustus D'Arcy sitting on the carpet in a state of bewildered and speechless fury.

CHAPTER 11.

A Chase on the Ice.

"Gussy!"

"Where's Gussy?"

"Gussy, where art thou?"

"Bai Jove!"

"Hallo! I know that sweet voice!" exclaimed Tom Merry, entering the room. "My hat! What's happened to Gussy?"

The chums of St. Jim's were looking for D'Arcy. They came in, in time to see him sitting in bewilderment where the fags of the Third had left him.

Arthur Augustus sat and blinked dubiously at the juniors, and groped for his eyeglass.

"Bai Jove!" he gasped feebly.

Blake grasped him by the shoulders, and raised him up. Herries lent a helping hand. The Terrible Three chuckled together.

"What's happened?" asked Manners. "Have you been playing ghost again?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Would you mind waiting like that for a few minutes, while I fetch my camera, Gussy?"

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

"It won't take a minute—"

"I weward you as an ass!"

"But how did you get like that?" asked Monty Lowther.

"Surely you haven't been doing it for fun!"

"Weally, Lowthah!"

Words failed the swell of St. Jim's. He groped for a stud to fasten his collar, but the stud was missing.

"I have been twated in a wuffianly way!" he exclaimed.

"It was young Wally, and that young wuffian who is spendin' the vac. here with him. They are a pair of young wuffians. They are backin' up the Socialist candidate."

"What!"

"It is a fact, deah boys. And they have started on me."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I do not weward it as a laughin' mattah," said the swell of St. Jim's, somewhat stiffly. "I must wewire to my woom to put myself tiday aftah this wuffianly attack. I twust you will look for Wally, and bump him and Jameson. They are a pair of young wuffians."

"Oh, certainly," said Tom Merry. "We can't have Wally backing up the enemy. That will have to be nipped in the bud at once."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Come on, you fellows!"

"Of course, you must not hurt them," said Arthur Augustus hastily. "But they ought to have a severe lesson, you know. The poll is to-morrow, and it would encourage the enemy vewy much if they knew that my minah was backin' them up."

"Of course it would," said Lowther gravely. "The thing must be sat upon at once. We'll see to it."

"Vewy good!"

And Arthur Augustus retired for a wash and a brush up, as Blake put it, and the juniors proceeded to look for Wally. Wally and Jameson had gone out to slide on the frozen lake in the Eastwood grounds.

"There they are!" Monty Lowther exclaimed, as he caught sight of the two fags skinning over the frozen surface of the lake.

Blake put his hands to his mouth, and shouted.

"Wally!"

D'Arcy minor looked round.

"Hallo!" he shouted back.

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 151.

"Come off!"

"Eh?"

"Come here!"

"Rats!"

"We're going to bump you."

"More rats!"

"We'll come and fetch you if you don't come."

"Bosh!"

"Come on!" exclaimed Blake; and he slid out on the ice. "My only Aunt Jane!" exclaimed Wally. "We shall have to dodge those duffers."

Jameson looked a little alarmed.

"Blessed if I see how we're going to do it!" he exclaimed.

"Oh, follow me!"

Wally slid off at top speed along the frozen lake.

Jameson kept close at his heels, looking back at Tom Merry & Co., who were speeding immediately in hot pursuit.

The St. Jim's juniors laughed as they slid. They had little doubt of quickly overtaking the fags of the Third.

"Buck up!" shouted Tom Merry.

"Stop, you young duffers!" shouted Blake.

"Rats!" came back from Wally.

"We shall have to teach the young bounders respect for the Shell, anyway!" exclaimed Monty Lowther.

"For the Fourth, you mean," said Herries.

"Rats!"

"Fathead!"

"Look here—"

"Bosh!"

"If you want a thick ear, Herries, I can give you one!" roared Lowther.

"Go ahead!" said Herries defiantly.

The next moment Herries and Lowther were embracing, and waltzing over the ice. The ice was very slippery, and they lost their footing and slid and rolled. They rolled into a mass of reeds, where the ice was thin and crumbling, and there it cracked and let them into a foot's depth of muddy water.

"Groo!" gasped Lowther.

"Yow!"

"Leggo!"

"Gerroff!"

The two juniors dragged themselves out of the water, wet and muddy and shivering.

Neither felt inclined to carry the dispute any further. They were soaked and shivering. They exchanged uncomplimentary remarks as they broke into a run in the direction of the house, to obtain dry clothing.

Wally had seen the disaster with a glance over his shoulder, and he chuckled gleefully.

Tom Merry and Manners and Blake were still speeding on his track, and he was approaching the end of the lake now. The juniors had entered into the spirit of the thing, and they had separated widely so that the fugitives would not be able to double back, and so elude them.

"They'll have us in a tick!" panted Jameson, who had bellows to mend with a vengeance by this time.

"Stuff!" said Wally. "Keep on!"

"I c-can't!"

"Well, roll over, and let 'em fall on you!" suggested Wally.

"Look here—"

"It's a jolly good wheeze!"

Jameson snorted angrily. But, as a matter of fact, he was destined to carry out Wally's suggestion without intending to do so. His foot caught in a rut of the ice, and he rolled helplessly over on the frozen surface, and Blake, who was only a few paces behind him, ran into him before he could stop himself, and rolled over, too.

"Oh!" roared Blake.

"Yow!" gasped Jameson.

Tom Merry and Manners were speeding on after Wally. Jameson jumped up. Blake was sitting on the ice and rubbing the back of his head, which had come into violent contact with the frozen surface.

Jameson did not let the opportunity slip. He cut off at right angles to his former course, and reached the bank, and fled.

Wally was at the end of the lake by this time, and Tom Merry and Manners closed in upon him.

The hero of the Third turned round and faced them. In this spot the ice, close to the shore over shallow water, was thin and flaky, and seemed disinclined to bear the weight of the juniors, to judge by the threatening cracks it gave.

"Hallo!" said Wally. "Better keep off!"

"Rats!"

"Better make it pax!"

"More rats!"

Tom Merry and Manners rushed on, and reached Wally. The fag of the Third stood like a rock and grinned.

"Hands' off!" he exclaimed. "Or——"

The hands closed upon him.

"Oh, all right!" grinned Wally. "You will have it!"

And he stamped heavily upon the ice.

Crash!

In a moment it was smashing under him, and the dark water was curling up, and down went Wally and Tom Merry and Manners together through the ice. There was a freezing gasp from the two Shell fellows.

"Yow! Ugh!"

CHAPTER 12.

Tariff Reform and Free Trade.

"GROO!"

"Yoop!"

The water was not two feet deep, and the juniors were only immersed to the waist. But they had to let go of Wally to save themselves, and the hero of the Third scrambled and trampled through the ice and swelling water to the shore.

Tom Merry and Manners struggled wrathfully after him.

"You young rascal!" shouted Manners.

"You fathead!" gasped Tom Merry.

Wally grinned at them from the bank. He was one mass of mud and dirty water from head to foot, and presented a terrible aspect. But he was quite cool.

"Well, you would have it," he remarked. "You can't say I didn't warn you."

Then, as the Shell fellows scrambled ashore, he took to flight and dashed away towards the house.

Tom Merry shook the water from him, and burst into a laugh.

"The young rascal!" he exclaimed. "He's done us this time!"

Manners grinned.

"Yes, rather! Let's get in; we shall catch our death of cold! My teeth are c-c-chattering already! Ugh!"

"Come on, then!"

The chums of the Shell started at a run for the house. Wally had a good start, and he had almost reached the house, when Arthur Augustus came out.

Arthur Augustus had brushed and combed himself most beautifully, and was in a most perfect state of elegance. He started, and stopped, as he saw Wally, and stared at him through his monocle in amazement and horror.

"Wally! Is that weally you, Wally?"

"Yes, it's me, old cock!" gasped Wally.

"Weally, Wally——"

"It's me—as large as life!"

"Your remark is ungrammatical, Wally, and extremely vulgar. I weally wish you would be a little more careful in your choice of expressions. Undah the cirs— Keep off, you howwid young boundah! Don't you come neah me in that howwid state."

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled Wally, as he closed in upon his elegant major.

"Wally—weally—— Oh!"

The fog of the Third clasped Arthur Augustus in his arms, and gave him a most affectionate hug, yelling with laughter. Mud in clots and chunks was transferred from Wally to his major, and the elegant attire of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was reduced to almost the same state as Wally's.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy struggled furiously in the grasp of his minor.

But Wally's grip was not to be relaxed—till he had transferred to Arthur Augustus almost as much mud as he carried himself.

Then he released the swell of St. Jim's and staggered away, howling with laughter.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Bai Jove, I'll——"

But Wally, shrieking with merriment, darted into the house and dashed up to his room, where he immediately locked himself in.

Tom Merry and Manners came running up in the dusk.

"Here he is!" exclaimed Tom Merry, catching sight of a muddy figure.

"Collar the young bounder!"

They collared the muddy figure.

Arthur Augustus uttered a yell of expostulation.

"Ow! Hold on—I mean, leggo!"

"Gussy!"

"Pway release me, deah boys!"

They let go him in amazement.

"How on earth did you get into this state?" demanded Tom Merry.

"It was Wally!"

"Wally?" gasped Manners.

"Yaas, wathah! He collahed me and wubbed all this howwid mud upon me!" panted the swell of St. Jim's. "I know I look howwid!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Weally, Tom Mewwy——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You uttah ass——"

Tom Merry and Manners staggered into the house yelling with laughter. Arthur Augustus, who could see nothing to laugh at, followed them in, sniffing. For the second time that day he proceeded to his room and changed his clothes.

But all the St. Jim's juniors met a little later in the drawing-room for tea, and then all were smiles.

In Lady Eastwood's presence they never showed any of the exuberant spirits that called forth so much attention elsewhere.

Indeed, Lady Eastwood, who often heard of the little japes played by the juniors, wondered how it was that such nice, quiet boys did such things.

After tea the juniors prepared to go down to the town.

There was to be a mass meeting that evening, and a crowd was expected over from the ironworks to back up Mr. Jack Snorter.

If the agricultural part of the community, who backed up Lord Conway to a man, showed any desire to duck the Socialist, the ironworks hands were likely to interfere, and there would be a lively time.

If there was a lively time, the juniors of St. Jim's did not mean to be left out of it, and they intended to be present at the meeting.

Arthur Augustus was taking the backing of the Eastwood candidate in deadly earnest. He looked as serious as if the whole weight of the election lay upon his own personal shoulders.

The swell of St. Jim's took much more interest in the election than his elder brother did; for Lord Conway was playing billiards after tea, and did not seem to be even aware that there was a meeting in Easthorpe at all.

While Tom Merry & Co. were getting ready to go out Wally came into their room. He grinned at his major.

"Pax, you fellows!" he exclaimed.

"Weally, Wally——"

"Look here, on second thoughts, I'm going to back up the family candidate," said Wally. "I'll come and help you fellows. Jameson has taken on a chap's offer to teach him bezique, and I've nothing to do."

"Weally——"

"I'll come and keep you chaps out of mischief."

"I wefuse to look upon it in that light, Wallay. But you can come and help us if you like. I heah that there will vewly likely be a wow."

Wally chuckled.

"Good! And Skimmy's sure to be at the meeting, and we can get some fun out of the old duffer, you know."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Of course, Gussy going as the representative of the Eastwood candidate, he ought to carry some sign," said Monty Lowther thoughtfully. "We'd better all wear rosettes of the Eastwood colours, and D'Arcy ought to show something—say a sandwich-board—with the Eastwood principles written large. I suppose Lord Conway has some political principles, hasn't he, Gussy?"

"I don't know," said D'Arcy doubtfully. "Vewly likely, deah boy."

"Is he a Tariff Reformer or a Free Fooder?"

"I don't wemembah."

"Look here, the true political genius knows how to pick the best from every party, and stand up for what's good in all ideas," said Jack Blake. "I've read that somewhere, and there's a lot in it."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Then I think that D'Arcy ought to stand up for Free Trade and Tariff Reform," said Blake. "Also for a strong Navy and for economy in the fleet."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Bai Jove, that's not a bad idea!" exclaimed D'Arcy.

"Let's pweare a bannah."

"Good egg!"

"Hear, hear!"

And the juniors set to work.

Blake quickly obtained a large sheet of cardboard a couple of feet long, and this was pinned upon D'Arcy's breast in the form of a sandwich-board.

Upon the cardboard Blake scrawled, with a brush dipped in ink, the following inscription, in the largest letters the size of the cardboard would allow:

"VOTE FOR THE EASTWOOD CANDIDATE.

"FREE TRADE AND TARIFF REFORM.

"STRONG NAVY AND ECONOMY IN NAVAL EXPENDITURE.

"ABOLITION OF THE VETO AND STRENGTHENING OF THE HOUSE OF LORDS."

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Another Splendid, Long, Complete School Tale of The Chums of St. Jim's.

Arthur Augustus looked a little perplexed.

"Isn't that just a little bit contwadictow?" he asked.

"My dear chap, that's what you want—you want to represent every sort of opinion," said Blake. "That's the aim of every true politician. You're not supposed to have any opinions of your own. Members of Parliament never have."

"Yaas, but—"

"That's the best of both parties there, and a truly patriotic chap stands up for what's best in both parties, irrespective of party jealousies."

"Yaas, that's vewy true."

"Then come along, and don't waste any more time jawing."

"Weally, Blake—"

"Better go out quietly at the back," grinned Wally. "If the governor saw that he mightn't think it exactly the thing."

"Stuff!" said Blake. "Still, we'll get out quietly, all the same."

And they did.

CHAPTER 13.

Snorter and Liberty.

THERE was a glare of light in the quiet old streets of Easthorpe.

The usually quiet little country town was very much alive on that particular evening.

There had been a fall of snow, and the streets were white with it, and the powdery flakes were still falling.

But the electors of Easthorpe and the surrounding districts, who were to be polled on the morrow, cared nothing for the snow.

Great issues were at stake.

On the one side were party promises and wind, and on the other side there were wind and party promises, so, naturally enough, the free and independent electors of Easthorpe were very lively on the last evening before the poll.

People had been pouring in from surrounding places, and the little town had twice as many folk as usual within its limits.

Crowds paraded the streets, bearing banners and flags, and when rival processions met there were yells and hustlings, and sometimes the banners were broken up.

But all that only added to the liveliness of the election eve.

Great posters flamed through the quiet streets, advocating the various attractions of Tariff Reform and Free Trade. The inhabitants of Easthorpe were invited to vote for a strong Navy, as if the efficiency of the British fleet depended wholly upon the electors of that little district, and, naturally, they all felt very serious about it. Loudly-coloured posters announced that it was time for the voice of Easthorpe to be loudly heard, and in a way that would sound from one end of the Empire to the other. The Tariff Reform posters promised the people plenty of work and good trade. The Easthorpe folk thought those things very desirable. The rival posters offered to rescue them from the unemployment and bad trade that would be caused by Tariff Reform. And this offer, too, seemed a very noble one.

There was great excitement in the streets when the chums of St. Jim's arrived.

The sight of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, with the announcement that he bore, suspended for the moment the hostility between rival sections.

One huge yell of laughter greeted the swell of St. Jim's.

Mr. Grum, outside the Eastwood Arms, held his hands to his fat sides and roared. Arthur Augustus stopped, and jammed his monocle into his eye, and regarded the stout innkeeper with an indignant glance.

Arthur Augustus was prepared for the mockery of the Snorter faction, but it was too bad to be laughed at in this way by so staunch an adherent of the Eastwood party as Mr. Grum.

"Weally, my deah sir—" began Arthur Augustus.

The fat innkeeper roared.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Weally, Mr. Gwum—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I fail to see the cause of this extwemely wude outburst of mewment," said the swell of St. Jim's, with great dignity.

The tears rolled down Mr. Grum's fat cheeks.

"Scouse me, sir," he gasped; "I can't 'elp it."

"I weally fail to see why you cannot help laughin' in that extwemely wude mannah, Mr. Gwum," said Arthur Augustus, in his most stately way.

"But—but that notice!" gasped the fat innkeeper. "Free Trade and Tariff Reform! Ho, ho, ho!"

"Weally—"

Yells of laughter on all sides chimed in with Mr. Grum's.

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Arthur Augustus D'Arcy looked round him.

His own comrades were laughing as loudly as any.

It dawned upon the swell of St. Jim's that he was being elaborately "rotted" by the juniors.

"Weally, deah boys—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Tom Merry, Manners, and Lowther were hugging one another in helpless merriment. Blake seemed to be on the verge of hysterics.

The swell of St. Jim's turned very pink.

"You feahful wottahs—"

"Oh, my hat!"

"So you were wottin'—"

"Oh, don't, Gussy! I'm feeling faint!" murmured Blake.

Arthur Augustus stripped off the placard.

Amid roars of laughter from the crowd he tore it into pieces, and scattered the fragments in the snow on the ground.

"Weally, deah boys, I wegard this as altogethah too bad!" he exclaimed, turning his monocle round upon the juniors.

But Tom Merry & Co. were too hysterical to reply.

"Hallo!" exclaimed Monty Lowther suddenly, as they went down the thronged street. "Here's Skimpole!"

"Skimpole, bai Jove!"

It was Skimpole, in all his glory.

Skimpole was backing up the cause of the Socialist candidate with all his well-known keenness and enthusiasm.

He had a band round his enormous silk hat, with the inscription on it, in large letters:

"VOTE FOR SNORTER AND LIBERTY!"

There was a placard on his chest, also calling upon the electors to plump for Snorter and Reform.

He had a flaming red tie, and he held a red flag in each hand, symbolical of the destructive nature of the principles he advocated.

"My hat!" gasped Manners. "He looks about suitable for a lunatic asylum in that rig."

"Yaas, wathah, bai Jove!"

"Vote for Snorter and Reform!" yelled Skimpole.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The crowd took up the yell of laughter. Skimpole certainly did look very funny.

But what cared Herbert Skimpole for that? Nothing. Skimpole was out for Snorter and Liberty, and he did not mean to be deterred by mere merriment.

He waved the red flags defiantly in the air.

"Snorter and Liberty!" he bellowed.

There was a rush of some wild spirits in the crowd, and Skimpole was surrounded, and rushed away up the street.

"By George, I hope they won't hurt him!" exclaimed Tom Merry.

"Yaas, wathah! Let's see."

The St. Jim's juniors tried to follow Skimpole.

But the crowd was too thick, and, push as they would, they could not get near the enthusiastic backer of the Snorter party.

Above the heads of the yelling crowd a red flag waved, and then disappeared. Amid the hoots and boos the voice of the genius of the Shell could still be faintly heard:

"Snorter and Liberty! Hurrah!"

CHAPTER 14.

Rough on Skimpole.

"SKIMPOLE!"

"Bai Jove!"

"He'll be getting hurt!"

"Blessed if we can help it!" exclaimed Tom Merry, panting breathlessly after his exertions to get through the crowd.

"We can't reach him."

"Hark!" exclaimed Lowther.

From the midst of the shouting, surging mob came the faint tones of Herbert Skimpole once more:

"Snorter and Liberty!"

Then the voice was heard no more.

Suddenly Skimpole came into view. He was hoisted upon the broad shoulders of a couple of Easthorpe farmers, and, amid the shouts and jeers of the crowd, he was paraded up the High Street.

Skimpole was in a sorry plight by this time.

His clothes were in tatters, his silk hat was battered in, and looked a mere wreck, and the red flags were tied round his neck.

He gasped and spluttered as he was paraded along.

The chums of St. Jim's could not help joining in the laughter. Skimpole had been roughly handled, but not really hurt; the crowd were quite good-tempered.

The genius of the Shell disappeared up the street, vainly protesting at the top of his treble voice.



Arthur Augustus seized a jug of water and flung the contents into Herries' face to revive him. There was a formidable yell from Herries. "Keep off, you ass!" he gasped. (See page 7.)

"Bai Jove!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "I wogard that as funnay."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Crowds were pouring in the direction of the old Market Place, where Mr. Jack Snorter was to address a mass meeting. The juniors of St. Jim's followed the rest.

By dint of the free use of knees and elbows they obtained good places, and were in time for the speech.

Mr. Jack Snorter, supported by a group of men in red neckties, was standing upon a barrel outside the Market Place, with a bowler hat on the back of his head and a flush of enthusiasm in his face.

He was addressing the meeting; but what he said could hardly be distinguished, so loud was the roar of interruption.

Counter roars came from the ironworks crowd, and every moment it seemed certain that the rival sections would come to blows.

"Bai Jove, you know, this is gettin' excitin'," Arthur Augustus D'Arcy remarked.

The swell of St. Jim's was squeezed behind a big workman, and his silk hat was suffering cruelly.

Mr. Snorter, on top of his barrel, was gesticulating and shouting, but only a word here and there could be heard.

An egg came whizzing through the air from the back of the crowd, and it caught Mr. Snorter on the nose, and burst.

Squelch!

"Groo!" gasped Mr. Snorter.

He sat down on the barrel, dabbing at his face with a pocket-handkerchief. The egg was not a new-laid one, and the scent of it was wafted as far as the spot where the St. Jim's juniors were standing.

"My hat!" murmured Lowther. "Phew!"

"Gweat Scott!"

The figure of Herbert Skimpole, tattered and muddy, appeared beside Mr. Snorter, and the genius of the Shell waved his hand to the crowd.

"Listen to me, my friends—"

"Yah!" roared the crowd.

"Shut up!"

Skimpole shook his head.

"A sincere Socialist never shuts up," he replied. "It has never been known in the history of the movement. I wish to explain to you the principles upon which Mr. Snorter is standing for election, and I will endeavour to use simple language suited to your low order of intellect. I—Oooocch!"

A second egg caught Skimpole on the chin.

It burst there.

"Ow!" roared Skimpole. "Groo! Ouch! Yah!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Gerrooh!"

"Rush them!" roared someone.

"Hurrah!"

There was a rush of the crowd.

Mr. Snorter disappeared in one direction, and Skimpole in another, carried away by the surge. There was a roar from Mr. Snorter's backers, and scrambling and scrimmaging on all sides. The chums of St. Jim's held together in the mob by interlocking their arms.

"We shall have to get Skimmy out of this," said Tom Merry.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"There he is!" exclaimed Blake.

Skimpole had mounted upon a bench outside the Eastwood Arms.

He was waving his hands frantically and haranguing the jeering crowd.

"My friends, how long will you bend the knee to the haughty capitalist, rolling in wealth on the marble staircases of his tessellated palace?" he shrieked. "How long

"There he is! Collar him!"

"Ow!" roared Skimpole, as the chums of St. Jim's grasped him. "Let go! I order you to let go! As a free citizen

"Rats!"

"Wats!"

"Bring him along!"

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

"Yow! Leggo! Oh! Ow! I protest! I have to make a speech—"

"You've done enough speechifying for this evening," grinned Blake. "You're coming home with us now."

"I refuse—I—"

"You can refuse as much as you like, deah boy, but you are comin' all the same."

"Really—"

"Bwing him along."

"This way, Skimmy."

"I protest—"

"Just as you like; come on."

And Skimpole came on.

He had no choice about the matter, for the St. Jim's juniors had hold of him, and he was borne along in the midst of them, whether he wanted it or not.

He protested with what little breath he had left; but it made no difference. He was whirled along in the direction of Eastwood.

It was not till they were half-way down the lane that Herbert Skimpole was allowed to stand upon his own feet.

Then he assumed a perpendicular attitude, gasping for breath.

"Really—" he panted.

"Weally, deah boy, you'd bettah come home to dinnah," said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "I will lend you some clothes."

"I have my duty to do."

"Wats!"

"As a sincere Socialist—"

"Bosh!"

"As a propagator of modern ideas—"

"Wubbish!"

"Really, D'Arcy—"

"Weally, Skimpole—"

"Oh, come on!" exclaimed Tom Merry. "We've got to get in for dinner, and we don't want to be late. The meeting's over now, Skimmy, and you may as well come and have some grub."

And Skimpole, on reflection, thought that he might as well.

Half an hour later Skimpole, washed and brushed, and clad in some of D'Arcy's clothes, too fatigued by his experiences even to talk, was seated at the hospitable table at Eastwood.

CHAPTER 15.

Skimpole the Comforter.

THE next day the polling took place, and though Tom Merry did not stay long enough at Eastwood to hear the result, there was no doubt of Lord Conway's success. On the following morning Tom Merry kept to his resolve, and bade farewell to his kind friends in Eastwood. Skimpole was leaving the same day, and he entered Tom Merry's carriage at the Easthorpe Station.

The St. Jim's juniors stood with Ethel and Dolores on the platform as the train sped out of the station.

"Good-bye and good luck!"

Tom Merry waved his hand back to his chums. Then the train swept round a curve in the line, and the juniors disappeared from sight.

Tom Merry was gone.

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With saddened faces, Arthur Augustus and his chums turned away.

Tom Merry's face was sad also as he sat in the carriage, and looked out of the windows upon the countryside, clear and cold in a hard frost.

The last few days had been very merry; but now it was time to face the stern realities of life once more.

He was plunged into silent thought, and Skimpole made several remarks without the hero of the Shell hearing him.

"Dear me!" said Skimpole. "I trust you are not getting deaf, Tom Merry."

Tom Merry started.

"Eh? Did you speak, Skimpole?" he asked.

"Indeed, I did, Tom Merry."

"Sorry—I was thinking. What did you say?"

"Is there anything the matter?"

Tom Merry smiled faintly.

"Oh, no!"

"You seem somewhat downhearted," said Skimpole, blinking at Tom Merry benevolently through his big spectacles.

"Well, I'm leaving the fellows, I don't know for how long, you know."

Skimpole nodded.

"And I suppose the change in your fortunes has had a somewhat depressing effect?" he remarked.

"Yes, I suppose so."

"I am very sorry," said Skimpole. "Perhaps I could relieve your mind, and while away the time till we reach Lowcot Junction, by a little entertaining conversation."

"Oh, don't trouble, old chap!"

"No trouble at all," said Skimpole obligingly. "Not in the least. I have a book here—it is the famous volume of Professor Balmcrumpet on the subject of Determinism. I trust you are interested in Determinism. If so, I will explain the whole matter to you at full length."

"Thanks!" said Tom Merry. "But—but I'm not interested in the least."

"That is all the more reason why I should explain the matter, as it is a subject every person should be interested in."

"Chuck it, old man!"

"Not at all, Tom Merry. This opportunity may never recur. I will explain. Determinism is the science which proves that everything which is, is as it is, and exists in no other form than the form it bears."

"Go hon!"

"It proves that hereditary things are due to heredity, and that the qualities we get from our surroundings are caused by our environment."

"Wonderful!"

"Yes, it is indeed a wonderful discovery. There is a common idea that Determinism is merely old nonsense under a new name, but I assure you that this is not the case. The names of Balmcrumpet and Loosetop are sufficient to show how seriously it should be taken."

Tom Merry laughed.

"Suppose," went on Skimpole cheerfully—"suppose you are a murderer—"

"What!"

"Or a thief—"

"Eh?"

"Shall I blame you for having reverted in conduct to the brutal instincts of some remote ancestor? Certainly not. If you were to attack me with the utmost violence, and strike me on the nose, should I blame you? Of course not. My dear fellow, it would be simply the savage nature of the ancestor creeping out, and you would be no more to blame than if you stole my watch."

"Honour bright?"

"Certainly."

"Then here goes!" said Tom Merry.

And his knuckles came sharply upon Skimpole's nose.

The genius of the Shell gave a wild howl.

"Yow! Yaroo!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Skimpole rubbed his nose hard, and put his spectacles straight, and blinked at Tom Merry in bewilderment.

"What did you do that for, Tom Merry?" he demanded.

"Why, you're not blaming me, surely?" exclaimed Tom Merry, in surprise. "It was due to my heredity or my environment, I'm not sure which."

"Yow! You ass! I was only putting a case. Science is not a thing that can be put into practice on all occasions, of course," growled Skimpole, rubbing his nose. "You have caused me a considerable pain in the nose."

"My blessed heredity!" said Tom Merry.

Skimpole grunted, and drew to the further end of the carriage before he proceeded with the further exposition of the brilliant principles of Determinism.

"You are quite mistaken," he began. "You were wrong

"Rats! I must have been right, if I'm not to blame, and you said I'm not," said Tom Merry. "That's common-sense."

"My dear fellow," said Skimpole patiently. "Science has nothing to do with common-sense. What an idea!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The train stopped.

"All change 'ere!" sang out a porter.

"Dear me! It is Lowcot Junction," said Skimpole, blinking out of the window. "We shall have to part here, Tom Merry. It is very unfortunate, because I intended to fully explain the principles of Determinism to you, and I have not had time. I hope you will accept Professor Balmcrumpet's volume as a parting gift."

"I'm afraid I couldn't carry it, Skimmy, old chap. Thanks all the same. Good-bye!"

And Tom Merry shook hands with Skimpole on the platform, and walked out of the station, carrying his bag in his hand.

CHAPTER 16.

A Winger Wanted.

TOM MERRY did not intend to go further on his way by the railroad. He had little cash, and what he had it was necessary to be careful with. The weather was frosty and fine, and Tom Merry was a good walker. The rest and the merry holiday at Eastwood had done him a great deal of good after his privations in London. He felt fit and cheerful, and ready to face the world.

With his light bag in his hand, he tramped along the lane from Lowcot Junction. The roads were hard and bare, there was frost on the bushes and the trees, but no snow on the ground, and the keen wind did not trouble him. He was soon in a glow with the exercise.

Half a mile after mile passed under his feet, and he was five miles from the junction when he stopped at a wayside inn to rest and purchase a frugal lunch of bread and cheese, with a jug of milk.

The inn was on the outskirts of a village, and opposite it was a level expanse fenced in, where a couple of goal-posts showed Tom Merry that football was played.

A crowd was gathering on the ground, and Tom Merry guessed that a match was coming off ere long, and he was tempted to stay and look on. It was long—and seemed longer—since Tom Merry had played a game of football—he had hardly seen a game of footer since he had left St. Jim's.

The longing for the old game was strong upon him.

He had intended to rest at the inn for an hour, and so he made up his mind to watch the first part of the match, at least.

The innkeeper, a jovial old fellow, willingly gave him information about the match.

The local team was playing Wayland Ramblers, and Tom Merry started as he heard the name.

Wayland was the market town not far from St. Jim's, and he had often heard of the Wayland Ramblers, and had seen them play. He had never played with them, however. The Waylanders were a grown-up team, and not likely to meet juniors in a match. Tom Merry knew, however, that there had been talk of a match between the Wayland Ramblers and the seniors of St. Jim's—the first eleven.

The footballers from Wayland naturally interested Tom Merry, and his interest deepened when the innkeeper told him that the players were now staying at the inn.

They came out a few minutes later to go on the ground.

Tom Merry looked them over keenly.

They were a very fine set of young fellows, belonging to the business section of Wayland town, and their manager, Mr. Philpot, was with the team. Mr. Philpot was a banker in Wayland, and several of his clerks were in the team. They were chatting cheerfully as they came out of the inn, with coats on over their football garb. There was no dressing-room on the village ground.

Tom Merry knew two or three of the fellows by sight, having seen them play in Wayland when he was at St. Jim's; but no one there knew him, and he did not expect to be recognised.

Nor was he. Some of the players glanced at the lad eating his bread and cheese at the bench outside the inn, but that was all.

"A fine day for the game, my lads!" said Mr. Philpot, rubbing his plump hands. "We shall beat them—eh, Yorke?"

Yorke, the Wayland captain, nodded his head.

"I'm sure we shall, Mr. Philpot!" he said.

"Come, we'd better get on the ground now."

The team walked over the road to the gate, and passed in. The home eleven, in blue and white, were already on the ground.

Tom Merry finished his lunch, and, leaving his bag in the charge of the innkeeper, followed the players across, and paid threepence for admission to the ground.

A goodly crowd was collecting, but there was plenty of room to stand, and Tom Merry chose a place well up to the front.

In spite of Mr. Philpot's confidence that his team would win, Tom Merry, as he glanced over their opponents—the Rimdale Athletic, they were called—had his doubts about the matter.

The Rimdale fellows looked more powerful upon the whole, and they were certainly an older team; and the way they were punting the ball about looked as if they knew their business.

Tom Merry was of opinion that the Waylanders had all their work cut out to win; and as for the crowd, they evidently considered that the visitors had no chance at all—after the fashion of the home crowd.

The teams were on the ground, but there was another five minutes to elapse before the time fixed for the kick-off, and the referee was not yet on the scene. As a matter of fact, the gentleman who was to referee the match was staying in the inn for a final drink before appearing.

The players had no mind to hang about doing nothing in the cold in their extremely light attire, so both teams mingled in a punt about.

Tom Merry noticed the inside-right of the Wayland team—a young fellow of about eighteen, very light and very fast.

He was very reckless in the punting, and several times threw himself in the way of the Rimdale fellows, all of whom were much heavier; and suddenly he was hurled to the ground in a collision.

It was a pure accident; but it was severe for the Wayland man. He went down heavily, and the big Rimdaler stumbled and fell upon his legs.

There was a cry of pain from the inside-right.

The punting stopped instantly.

Mr. Philpot dashed up to the scene, and the players gathered round with anxious faces.

"Are you hurt, Grey?" exclaimed the Wayland manager.

The winger groaned.

"I—I'm afraid so, sir!" he gasped. "It's my ankle."

"Not serious, I hope?"

"It hurts."

The crowd were serious and silent. They were glad the accident had not happened to a home player. But it was hard luck for the Ramblers to have a man injured just before the commencement of the match.

Mr. Philpot and Yorke examined the fallen player's ankle.

Their faces showed plainly enough that the injury was serious.

"A bad sprain," said Mr. Philpot quietly. "It must have twisted over as he fell. Was there ever such cruel luck!"

"It's rotten, Mr. Philpot!"

"Can't Grey play, sir?" asked several voices.

"No," said Mr. Philpot, "not to-day—and not for some weeks, I think. Carry him to the inn."

Several of the Waylanders raised the winger from the ground, and he was carried out of the footer-field and across the road to the inn.

Mr. Philpot and Yorke stood consulting with grave faces.

"It means playing a man short," the manager remarked. "Owing to Simpson being ill, we haven't brought a reserve."

Yorke nodded.

"It's hard luck, sir. The worst of it is, that Rimdale are in such good form that we have our work cut out with them anyway."

"Then playing a man short—"

"It means disaster."

Mr. Philpot pursed his lips.

"Suppose we could get a man here to take Grey's place," he said. "There must be a good many fellows in the crowd who can play footer."

"I don't know about asking a Rimdale man to play again; Rimdale," said the Wayland skipper dubiously.

"Well, better anything than a man short."

"I don't know that anybody would offer."

"I could ask, anyway."

"Well, it wouldn't do any harm, sir," assented the Wayland captain.

"I'll do it."

Mr. Philpot walked over to the ropes.

"One of our men has sprained his ankle, and won't be able to play in the match," he said. "Anybody here offer to play as a substitute?"

The village fellows looked at one another.

No one felt inclined to offer to play against his own team; and, as they wanted their eleven to win, such a recruit could hardly have put his heart into it.

Tom Merry glanced round.

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Then he stopped forward.

"Will you try me, sir?"

Mr. Philpot looked at him, and smiled for a moment.

Tom Merry was much below the team in weight and size, of course. The idea of playing a boy under fifteen at first appealed to the Wayland manager as absurd.

But as he glanced over the lad's well-knit figure, erect head, and clear, steady eyes, the Wayland gentleman's expression changed.

"You don't belong to this town?" he asked.

"No, sir."

"What is your name?"

"Tom Merry."

"You have played inside-right?"

"Centre-forward, inside-right, or half—just as you like, sir," said Tom Merry. "I was junior football captain at St. Jim's."

"St. Jim's? The public school near Wayland?"

"Yes, sir."

Mr. Philpot looked scrutinisingly at the junior.

"You belong to St. Jim's?" he asked.

"I did up to Christmas, sir."

"Ah, I forgot! Of course, it is now the vacation."

"I have left the school, Mr. Philpot," said Tom Merry quietly. "I'll play for you with pleasure this afternoon, if I'm any use."

"Well, the junior captain of St. Jim's ought to be able to put up a good game," said Mr. Philpot. "What do you think, Yorke?"

The Wayland captain had been looking Tom Merry over with an approving eye.

"Try him, sir," he said.

"You think it's a good idea?"

"Certainly, Mr. Philpot!"

The manager turned to Tom Merry again.

"Thank you for your offer," he said. "We'll try you with pleasure. You can have Grey's things; they won't be too large for you—much. Thanks, my lad! This way."

Tom Merry's eyes danced as he followed the manager into the inn.

For once in a way, in spite of his changed circumstances, he was to enjoy a game of footer once more; and the fact that he was obliging a captain in a difficulty made him feel justified in expending the time for it.

In a very few minutes Tom Merry was standing up in Grey's footer-shorts and jersey, which were not so very much too large for him.

Then, with a light heart, he came down to the footer-field, where he found the referee on the scene, and the teams ready to begin.

CHAPTER 17.

A Chance for Tom Merry.

TOM MERRY lined up with the Wayland men.

Yorke gave him a pat on the shoulder and a smile of welcome.

"Good for you!" he exclaimed. "You look very fit, and I think you'll do us credit. We're jolly well obliged to you, anyway!"

"Not at all!" said Tom Merry brightly. "I'm only too jolly glad to have a tussle at the old game—and the harder the better."

Yorke laughed.

"Well, this will be a stiff tussle enough," he said.

And the Wayland captain was right.

Rimdale won the toss and gave the Waylanders the wind to play against, and the ball was kicked off under that advantage. And, with the wind behind them, Rimdale led off with a hot attack.

Tom Merry played very cautiously at first, taking the measure of his comrades and his opponents.

He soon decided that the Rimdalers depended more upon strength and weight than upon finesse, and the Waylanders, while they were faster, were of little use in a charge against their heavy adversaries.

The wind, too, was a great advantage to the home team.

By speed, and quick fine play, the Waylanders held their own, but again and again the enemy came perilously near to goal.

Tom Merry backed up his centre well, but he soon discovered that he need expect little support from his outside.

The outside right was a slight, wiry man with a very dark complexion, and Tom Merry heard him called Blane by the others.

He assumed a manner towards Tom Merry, from the first, that was not pleasant to the lad, as if the latter were a mere schoolboy, and it would be useless to pass the ball to him under any circumstances.

As a matter of fact, Blane was a selfish player, and liked

to keep the ball to himself when, strictly speaking, he should have passed, and Tom Merry's presence in the team gave him the excuse he wanted.

But he was quickly called to account by his skipper.

He had taken the ball along the touch line, and was tackled by the backs, and could have let Tom have the ball with perfect ease.

Instead of that, he made a desperate attempt to kick, and the ball was headed back and sent into midfield.

Yorke simply glared at the winger.

"Do you call that play, Blane?" he bellowed. "Why didn't you pass to your inside?"

"Lot of good that would be," sneered Blane.

Yorke's eyes flashed.

"You'll pass next time, or there'll be trouble," he rapped out hotly.

Blane bit his lip hard.

There was no time for more. A Wayland forward had brought the ball on again, and the attack was being pushed.

But it cleared, and the chance passed, and more than one of the Waylanders looked darkly at the outside wing man.

Blane was in a bad temper, too.

With Yorke's eye upon him, he dared not "starve" the inside winger as he had been doing before; but there was no real cordiality in his play now, and he was better pleased when Tom Merry missed a pass than when he captured one.

Under such difficulties, it did not seem likely that the hero of St. Jim's would distinguish himself, or that he would make the Wayland eleven believe that they had an acquisition in the new recruit.

But fortune favoured the hero of the Shell.

He captured a pass out from the centre, and brought it well up the field, and then let the centre have it back just in the nick of time, and Yorke sent the ball whizzing in.

There was a yell as the goalie missed it.

It was the first blood of the Waylanders; and, although Yorke had kicked the goal, it was due more to Tom Merry than to the Wayland skipper.

Yorke knew that himself, and he clapped Tom Merry on the shoulder as they went back to the centre of the field.

"Good for you, my lad!" he exclaimed. "Splendid!"

Tom Merry flushed with pleasure.

"I'm glad you're satisfied," he exclaimed.

"More than satisfied, my boy."

Blane sneered.

"I don't see anything in it, for one," he said. "Anybody could have done that pass, I should think."

Yorke turned upon him.

"You couldn't, for one," he exclaimed. "Your passing to-day has been rotten all through—bad form from start to finish."

Blane turned crimson.

"Of course, I can't expect to show up so well as a school-boy just out of school!" he exclaimed sneeringly.

"Whether you expect to or not, you haven't done it," said Yorke. "Line up, and hold your tongue!"

And Blane ground his teeth and was silent.

Tom Merry avoided looking at the outside winger while the skipper was putting him in his place in this style. There was no doubt that Blane deserved it, but Tom Merry felt sorry for the fellow who had allowed temper and jealousy to carry him away.

The ball was kicked off again, the equalising goal being kicked just before the referee blew the whistle for the interval.

Mr. Philpot clapped Tom Merry on the shoulder as the Wayland players came off.

"Excellent, my lad!" he exclaimed. "Much better than we could possibly have expected. Don't you think so, Yorke?"

"Yes, I do, Mr. Philpot," said Yorke heartily. "I don't think we miss Grey, as a matter of fact, sir. The lad more than fills his place."

"I was thinking so myself."

"If Grey isn't able to play in our match next week, sir, perhaps the lad would be able to fill his place for us again," Yorke suggested.

"That would be splendid," said Mr. Philpot. "What do you say, Tom Merry? Will you be in our part of the country next week?"

"I don't know, sir."

"Where are you going now?"

"Nowhere in particular, sir," said Tom Merry. "As a matter of fact, I am looking for work."

Both Mr. Philpot and Yorke looked at him curiously, and Tom Merry flushed a little under their gaze.

"Looking for work?" the manager repeated.

Tom Merry nodded.

"What kind of work?"

"Anything, sir, that's honest," Tom Merry coloured again. "The truth is, sir, I've had ill-luck; all my money's gone, and I've had to leave school, and I'm looking for a chance to earn my living."

"I see," said Mr. Philpot, pursing his lips thoughtfully.

"It is possible that I may be of some assistance to you, as far as that goes. I'll tell you what, my lad. Come and stay with me for a week at my place in Wayland, and I'll see what can be done. It will be no loss to you."

"You're very kind, sir," faltered Tom Merry.

"Not a bit of it," said Mr. Philpot heartily. "If we could get you to play in poor Grey's place next week, it would be a good thing for us, anyway. But there, time's up; we'll talk of it after the match."

And the players went into the field again.

The whistle went for the second half, and now the Wayland Ramblers played with the wind behind their backs.

They had managed to keep level in the first half with the wind against them, and so now their hopes were high, especially as the wind was keener now.

The second half was hot and fast from the start. The Rimdale men charged heavily, and although there was no foul play, they claimed their strict rights in the matter of heavy charging to the very full.

By sheer weight they drove their attack home, and the ball was placed in the Wayland net.

The crowd cheered loudly. Rimdale were one up now; but the Ramblers were playing up splendidly to get level.

With a fine combined attack they brought the leather up to the home goal, and broke through the defence.

Yorke, at centre, was well marked, and Tom Merry had the ball.

"To me!" shouted Blane.

He was not so far wrong, for a pass out seemed to be the only chance. But Tom Merry knew that if he passed out, Blane would not send in the ball again, and nothing would come of it. He preferred a pass to Carter, the inside left winger. With a beautiful long pass he sent the ball across to the left wing, and Carter was on it like a shot, and before the surprised defence knew what was happening, the winger had slammed the ball into the net.

"Goal!" gasped Yorke.

Goal it was.

"It's the kid's goal," said Carter genially.

And Tom Merry was slapped on the back till he was sore. Blane was scowling at him savagely.

If that long pass had failed, Blane would have had grounds of complaint, but it had succeeded, and he was effectually silenced. But his look showed Tom Merry that he had made an enemy.

Mr. Philpot was clapping his hands till his gloves burst. The stout gentleman who presided over the Wayland Ramblers Football Club was wild with delight.

The score was equal now, and there was a quarter of an hour more to play. Many of the players were quite gruelled now, and some had hardly a run left in them. Play was much slackier till about five minutes before the close.

Then both sides, conscious that a draw was imminent, bucked up.

Again the home attack swept up to the Wayland goal, and the defence had all their work cut out to keep it intact. Play went to midfield again, however, and then the Ramblers worked their way along the touch-line towards the enemy's country. In the last few minutes of the game they were crowding before the Rimdale goal, and the referee was seen to look at his watch.

Mr. Philpot looked very anxious.

"Play up, boys!" he shouted. "One more for Wayland!"

The "boys" were doing their best. Yorke sent the ball in, and the goalkeeper fisted it forth; but, as it came, a lithe figure leapt forward, and a head met the ball, and it whizzed back past the goalie and lodged in the net.

There was a yell.

"Goal!"

Phip!

The whistle rang out.

Tom Merry had headed the ball into the net almost on the stroke of time; and he had won the match for the Wayland Ramblers.

The players crowded round him as they walked off the field, and Mr. Philpot grasped him warmly by the hand.

"You've done it, my lad," he exclaimed, shaking Tom Merry's hand again and again. "You've done it! The winning goal, by jove!"

"It was ripping!" exclaimed Yorke, slapping Tom Merry on the back. "I hope the kid will play for us next week, sir."

"Oh, we'll make him," said Carter.

Mr. Philpot dropped his hand on Tom Merry's shoulder.

"What do you say, my lad?" he exclaimed. "Will you come home and stay with me, as my guest, for a few days, and play for us in our next match?"

It was hardly possible to refuse; nor did Tom Merry wish to do so. He was more likely to find the employment he sought with Mr. Philpot's aid than without it, and the kindness of the Wayland footballers, with one exception, made him anxious to do anything he could to oblige them.

"Yes, sir," he exclaimed. "Thank you very much for your kindness. I'd like nothing better, if you think I shall be of any use to you."

"Yes, I rather think you will," smiled the manager. "Come and change your things, my lad, and dine with us before we take the train home."

And an hour or so afterwards, Tom Merry was in the train, speeding towards Wayland, with the crowd of footballers in a merry mood over their victory.

THE END.

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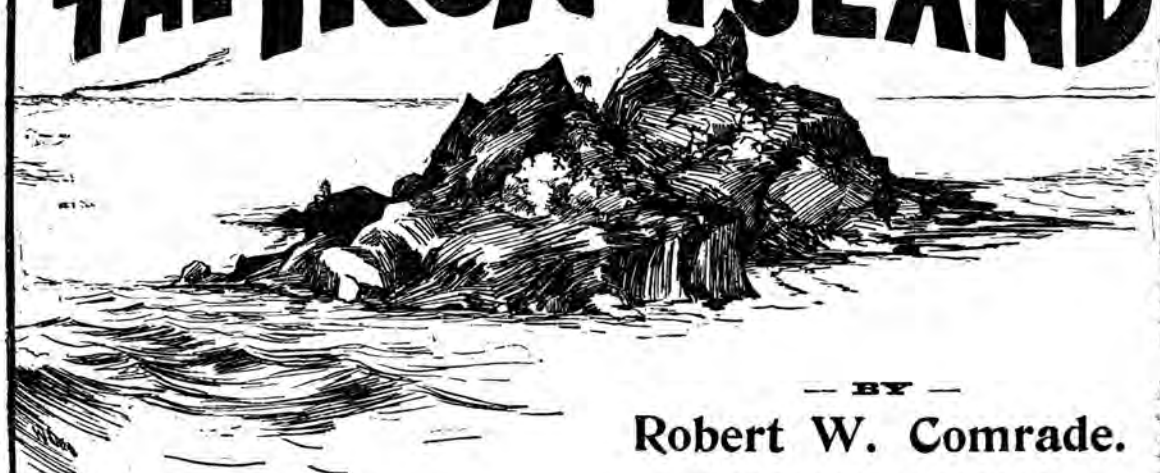
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THE IRON ISLAND



— BY —

Robert W. Comrade.

THE FIRST CHAPTERS BRIEFLY RE-WITTEN.

Philip Graydon is a young Englishman, who has been marooned for eight years on an uncharted island in the Pacific Ocean by a criminal society called the Brotherhood of Iron, of which Graydon is an ex-member. He was astounded one day to meet a fashionably-dressed young lady on the island of which he had for so long been the only occupant. The new-comer was Dolores de las Mercedes, an actress, who had caused serious disturbance in France by adopting the title of Queen of France for the sake of advertisement. The French Government had considered it necessary that she should retire from civilisation for a time, and had landed her, with a tent and complete equipment, on the Iron Island, little knowing that it had already an occupant. Dolores and Graydon put their heads together, and evolve a plan of escape. The plan is successful, and Graydon and Dolores, as Frank Kingston and Kathleen O'Brien, arrive safely in London, where they each engage suites of rooms at the Hotel Cyril. The identity of Frank Kingston, who is ostensibly a young man who has made his fortune in the goldfields, is quite unsuspected by the Brotherhood, and with the help of Fraser, an ex-member of the Brotherhood, Kingston opens his campaign against the formidable society.

His first victim is Detective-inspector Caine, who is completely ruined, no one save Kingston knowing whence the blow fell. Sir Robert Gissing, a famous banker, is the next object of Kingston's schemes, his daughter Ivy being kidnapped, and himself lodged in Cragmoor Prison for embezzlement. For the sake of little Ivy Gissing, who is in Dolores' charge on the yacht Coronet, Kingston decides to effect Sir Robert's escape—now that he is ruined—from prison. To this end Kingston, in the character of an old seaman, rents a cottage on the moor near the prison.

(Now go on with the story).

Sir Robert Reforms.

Frank Kingston slowly emerged from his little cottage near the great convict prison. His disguise was perfect; as Ben Jenkins, the sailor, he was a different man. His voice was different, manners different, in fact, everything.

It was two miles to the nearest village—Pellstead—and he walked the whole distance in his bent and decrepit attitude. He saw no one the whole way, but Kingston meant to take no chances.

The village was a fairly large one, lying at the bottom of a hollow. In the summer-time a good many holiday-makers stayed there; but now, in winter, the visitors were scarce in the extreme.

In all Pellstead the only strangers were a Mrs. Smith and her little granddaughter—Americans. It was generally known that the child was there by doctor's orders, and as they were evidently well-to-do, the villagers were in consequence very respectful. Kingston had found it necessary

to form still another personality for Dolores—for a few days only—because, in the light of after events, Mrs. Smith might possibly find herself the object of an inquiry. But as she had ostensibly come from a Plymouth hotel, to trace her would be impossible.

"Old Jenkins" trudged into Pellstead stolidly smoking a clay-pipe; for although Kingston did not smoke, it was necessary to do so when disguised. He looked his part to perfection, and as the news had got about concerning his tenancy of the cottage, nobody was surprised to see him.

He went straight to the biggest inn the village boasted; the proprietor called it the Grand Hotel, but there was nothing grand about it. The landlord's daughter was in the tap-room when Kingston swung the doors open.

"Mornin', lassie!" he said, in a wheezy voice. "Is Mrs. Smith in, d'ye know?"

The girl, a stalwart West-country lass, looked at Jenkins in surprise, and informed him that Mrs. Smith was.

"Then jest tell 'er as I'm 'ere, will ye?" wheezed Kingston. "Tell 'er old Jenkins 'as called. She'll know wot ye mean, lassie."

The girl looked doubtful.

"Swab me!" exclaimed Kingston. "Wot's the matter wi' ye, lass? I ain't a tramp."

At last the girl went. Dolores was seated in a rear apartment reading, while Ivy, looking altogether unlike the descriptions circulated about her, played about with numerous toys. Truth to tell, she was enjoying herself more than she had ever done in her life before.

"Oh, Jenkins!" cried Dolores, as the landlord's daughter told her of the visitor. "Show him in, Emily, will you? Just fancy that old sailor coming here! He saved my little darling from falling into the dock at Plymouth, you know, and I shall never be able to thank him enough."

Emily went to the tap-room again, accepting the explanation of the old salt's visit unquestioningly. Very soon it would be about the whole village, and if the two were seen together it would cause no remark.

Kingston smiled as Emily showed him into Mrs. Smith's presence. Both were disguised to perfection, Kingston's being especially good. His acting was a marvellous performance in itself.

"Oh, I'm glad you've come, Mr. Kingston!" whispered Dolores, after they had talked rather loudly in their feigned personalities. "The Comet is waiting in London, ready for immediate departure. When do you think you will bring off the escape of Sir Robert?"

"It all depends," replied Kingston. "Everything is ready now, and it only remains for us to receive word from Fraser. This visit of mine this morning is merely to let the villagers know that we are acquainted. When you visit my cottage no one will be surprised. I am only an ancient mariner, anyhow."

"It is wonderful!" said Dolores, gazing in undisguised

admiration. "I should never have thought it possible, Mr. Kingston. I understood you could not make your own face up?"

Kingston laughed softly.

"I have been studying the art a good deal in my leisure," he said. "But, of course, in a case such as this now before us your assistance is indispensable. I could not disguise myself as Colonel Marsden to the state of perfection you could. And it is important there should be no slip, Dolores—very important. All we have to do now is to wait until the governor takes it into his head to drive out in the evening; for our work must be done after dark, or not at all. It may be to-night; it may not be till next week—we cannot tell."

"There is certainly no hurry," smiled Dolores. "You said a month, and this is but the second day."

"Nevertheless, I wish to get the business over with the least possible delay. I wish to be away from Devonshire before the week is out, if possible."

"It would be better, of course. Well, as soon as I hear from Fraser I will do my part. You can rely on me for that, Mr. Kingston."

But Fraser's time had not come yet. He kept his eyes open sharply enough, and often caught a glimpse of Sir Robert Gissing in the exercise yard. The baronet seemed somehow to have lost all his haggard looks. His eyes shone expectantly, and although he feigned sullenness, it could be seen that something—something the warders could not make out—was buoying him up.

When he took exercise he walked briskly, and as if he enjoyed it. The feeling of hope was strong within him. Somehow he felt assured that he was going to be rescued. Although Kingston seemed such a fop, he had inspired confidence into Sir Robert's breast. The baronet absolutely knew that he was going to be delivered from his terrible position.

On the fourth day of his stay at Cragmoor—two days after "old Jenkins" visit to Mrs. Smith at Pellstead—he received a visit from the governor. It was the dinner hour, and although the meal was frugal and scant, Sir Robert enjoyed it thoroughly. It is amazing what hope will do in a man.

"I shall escape!" thought Gissing, pacing up and down the confines of his cell. "I know I shall escape! Kingston meant what he said, every word of it. Yet I have always regarded him as an incapable nincompoop. He is a remarkable man. I can make nothing of him. One moment he seems completely inane, and the next as quick and clear-witted as any man could be."

Sir Robert sat down restlessly.

"He is not all he makes out to be; his words puzzled me greatly. From the manner of his speech I could almost believe he is aware of my former villainous career, for which Heaven forgive me. The loss of my darling child, culminating in this last terrible development, has made me realise what a scoundrel I have been, what a disgrace to my country."

He rose again, and smiled confidently as he heard the steady beat of the warden in the passage outside.

"Kingston will foil them all," he muttered beneath his breath. "My confidence in the man amazes even myself; yet it is there, and I cannot shake it off. But I don't deserve to be rescued, I don't deserve to be touched. If I were to receive my just punishment I should remain here for ten years. What a fool I have been! What a blind fool! Mount-Fannell led me into it first of all; it was he who made me become a member of the Brotherhood."

He clenched his fists.

"And I should have been a member now but for my child. She has converted me, changed my whole character. Great powers, but it is marvellous what a child can do! And she is waiting for me outside in Kingston's keeping. Oh, how I long to clasp her in my arms!"

The vision appeared before his eyes, and they welled with tears. It was marvellous what a change had been wrought in this man—this hard-hearted member of the Inner Council. His whole nature was altered.

"This lesson will be enough for all time," Sir Robert mused. "It has shown me the foolishness of being dishonest—the utter senselessness of it! I swear before Heaven now that when I get away I will begin a new life altogether. I am not old—forty-seven is far from being old—and I have brains to earn my living. The Brotherhood can—"

A key grated in the lock, and the massive door swung open. A warden stood respectfully aside, and Colonel Marsden entered the cell. He nodded to the warden.

"You may go," he said. "In five minutes return and let me out. I wish to have a few words with No. 145."

"Very good, sir!"

The door slammed, and governor and prisoner were alone. What a vast amount of difference there was between them in

ordinary life—yet as members of the Brotherhood of Iron, none! Both were Inner Councillors, both influential men.

Sir Robert spoke first:

"No. 145!" he said bitterly. "It used to be No. 16 in the Council Chamber! You went by number there, Marsden!"

"Silence!" snapped out the governor. "Remember, Gissing, you are a felon now—"

"A felon?" repeated Sir Robert. "Jovè, but you are a fine fellow to say that, Marsden! I think, of the two, I may lay claim to have led a cleaner life than you!"

"But you are convicted, whereas I am still a free man," sneered the governor. "You were a fool to get yourself caught, Gissing! You are at my mercy now—"

"At your mercy?" Sir Robert laughed in derision. "Take care, Marsden, lest your words recoil on your own head! When I leave this place, shall I be at your mercy then? Will you not be at mine? I know everything—every secret of the Brotherhood—"

Colonel Marsden laughed.

"Secrets are harmless as long as they are kept," he said, "and I shall see that yours are kept, Gissing. You have turned traitor, eh? You have turned against the Brotherhood?"

"I have learned wisdom at last!" cried the baronet. "Your foul Brotherhood is the cause of my present plight! I realise now what a fool I have been. My child has shown me my error—"

"Your child?"

The governor laughed derisively.

"Really, Gissing, you are sentimental!"

"Sentimental or not, it was my little girl who made me realise that honesty pays in the end," cried Gissing. "You come here with your jeering tongue—"

"That will do," put in the governor. "I see the course you are taking—cr—No. 145, and I shall see that you are kept under special watch and in solitary confinement. You have brought it on yourself, and to speak, plainly, as we can't afford to take risks, you will have to suffer."

Sir Robert felt a cold shiver pass down him. Was Kingston going to be foiled after all? Were his plans for Gissing's escape to be ruined by the governor? What chance could he have, with the baronet in solitary confinement?

"You can do as you like," cried Sir Robert desperately. "I care little what becomes of me. But there is this—the Brotherhood of Iron shall know me no more. I have done with it for ever!"

"Very dramatic!" sneered the governor. "But pray steady your voice, Gissing. Your words are no surprise to me. I am well aware that you have done with the Brotherhood—you are no good to us anyhow. I am glad I paid this visit, for I know now your true attitude. You are a traitor—"

"Yes, I am a traitor," breathed Sir Robert.

"And the sentence of traitors is well-known to you, Gissing. That sentence I will see carried out!"

"You are going to murder me?"

"Decidedly not. The Brotherhood will, however, attend to your case. It is not murder, but just punishment."

Sir Robert's eyes flashed dangerously. A burst of hot words were on his lips, but he checked himself in time, remembering that if he gave the governor an inkling of the truth escape would be impossible. Marsden was off his guard now, and must remain so.

So he sat down sullenly, without uttering a word, and the colonel, naturally thinking it was submission, chuckled softly to himself and left the cell.

The Game Commences.

The governor hurried down the corridor, and so through the prison to his own private house, which was connected by a short passage.

Here he met Fraser, who had been telephoning to a firm in Tavistock to send a supply of petrol.

"Oh—er—Stewart," said the governor, "have the car ready to take me to the 6.30 train to-night, will you? I'll tell you when I'll be back later on."

"Very good, sir," replied Fraser. "The 6.30 you said?"

"Yes."

"I'll be ready in ample time, sir."

The colonel entered his study, leaving Fraser in the passage. His eyes shone as he thought of the order.

"Half-past six?" he muttered. "Gum, but it's the very time! I must let Miss O'Brien know at once!"

He walked to the telephone, and was soon put on to the Grand Hotel, Pellstead. The landlord answered the 'phone-call, and Fraser said only a few words to him.

"Will you please tell Mrs. Smith as I can't accept her offer, because the situation I've got here just suits me."

"She wants to engage you to drive a car?" asked the landlord.

"Something o' the sort. The job I've got's good enough

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for me, though. Tell her I'm sorry, won't you? But it can't be done!"

Fraser hung up the receiver and hurried outside. He had received—by post—full instructions from Kingston the previous morning, and was conversant with everything that had occurred.

The message he had just sent to Dolores was the signal for her to be at Ben Jenkins's cottage not later than six o'clock. Fraser busied himself seeing that everything was in order. He was excited and eager for the fray to start.

The method of letting Dolores know when to prepare for action was quite safe. It was utterly impossible for anyone to divine any secret meaning to the message.

Towards tea-time the sky became cloudy and black. Fraser rubbed his hands with satisfaction. Nothing could have suited Kingston's plans better.

By five o'clock a cold, chill drizzle was descending, and a moaning wind rushed across the moor. In the dusk the giant tors stood out in jagged prominence, while the undulating horizon was lost in the thick mist and drizzle.

A more uninviting evening would be hard to name, and the warders were glad enough that everything was snug and secure. The straggling prison seemed particularly sinister to-night.

Colonel Marsden stood looking out of his drawing-room window down the tree-bordered drive. The branches were swaying and moaning in the wind—the drops of moisture falling in showers on the gravel.

"Ugh!" exclaimed the governor. "What a wretched night to be sure! It is bad enough weather in any part of England, but on the moor—"

He shivered, and drew close to the fire. Richard, the butler, put some fresh logs on, and presently a roaring blaze and a warming glow put a different light on matters. The colonel soon became engrossed in a review article, and it was only when he heard the steady buzzing of the motor outside that he remembered his journey.

The wind was rising all the time. It struck the stoutly-built house in fierce gusts, rattling the windows, and whistling through the door-cracks unceasingly. Marsden laid down his magazine ruefully.

"Well," he muttered, glancing at the clock, "I suppose I must go, confound it. Nearly six. No time to spare. But what a brute of a night!"

He rose and left the room. Despite the brilliant light in the hall, it struck chill as he crossed to his study. Here he collected a few papers together, placed them in his hand-bag, and then donned a huge fur motor-coat.

"I used to think this was too heavy," he said to the butler, who assisted him into it; "but, by gad, it'll be none too warm to-night, I'll warrant!"

"It is rough out, sir," replied Richard. "What time will you be home, sir?"

"Not till to-morrow, Richard. So you can get to bed as early as you like. It's the best place this weather, and no mistake."

"You're right, sir," answered the butler, opening the door. "Gracious, the wind's powerful strong, sir!"

The governor bent before the rush of air which met him, intermixed with fine, clinging rain. It was a night unfit for dogs even, yet a better one for Kingston's purpose would have been impossible to find.

Fraser, smothered in waterproofs, was seated in the driver's seat, unconcerned and stolid. Ordinarily, he would have cursed his luck and grumbled loudly, but now he uttered not a word. As a matter of fact, he was feeling excited. The weather seemed to be shaping itself exactly right.

Not one prison official would leave the settlement that night—it was too dirty; too rough. And even supposing someone did venture out of bounds of the prison, the wind and the darkness were bewildering. It was impossible to see a yard ahead of one, let alone hear anything.

Colonel Marsden clambered into the covered body, shouting to Fraser to start. The Daimler ran smoothly forward, turned sharply, and headed down the drive—the powerful gas-lamps showing up the road clearly against the surrounding darkness.

Fraser's heart was beating faster than usual. In a very little time now the moment of action would arrive. Frank Kingston's faithful servant and ally half-dreaded and half-longed to commence the work. He hated the Brotherhood genuinely enough, at all events.

"It's all straightforward," he muttered, under his breath. "There can't be no hitch. The boss'll pull through right enough once we get on the move. But, my word, the sauce of it! I ain't never heard the like!"

The governor sat behind, smoking a cigar and listening to the rhythmic thud of the engine. He could see Fraser through the glass, and suddenly the latter leant down and jammed the brakes on. The big machine jerked to a halt immediately.

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 151.

Fraser was out of his seat like a shot. By the side of the road he could faintly see a little cottage. But what had caused him to stop was the sight of Ben Jenkins. Before the colonel could even imagine what was the matter, both doors were suddenly opened, and Marsden found himself covered by a couple of dangerous-looking revolvers.

The complete unexpectedness of it took his breath away. He stared before him for a moment utterly speechless. The idea was so absurd—so ridiculous.

"What—what is the meaning of this?" he demanded, recovering his voice. "What fool's game—"

"Beggin' your pardon, sir, but it ain't no fool's game."

The governor bent forward.

"Jenkins!" he cried, as he descried the weather-beaten-looking visage of the old sailor.

"No, Colonel Marsden, not Jenkins, but somebody entirely different!" exclaimed Kingston, in an educated voice. "Now, then, Stewart, there's not a moment to lose!"

The governor gasped. What did it mean? Stewart—his own chauffeur! He looked closer. Yes, it was Stewart right enough. He started to his feet, but Fraser snapped his revolver suggestively.

"Get out the other side!" he ordered, with no sign of respect now. "Don't stand there gapin'—hurry up!"

The tone in which he spoke told Marsden that he was deadly serious. Fraser's eyes shone dangerously, and as the colonel was rather fond of living, he complied with the order, utterly puzzled.

The road was muddy and sloppy, the wind cut like a knife, and the rain, heavier now, beat on his face stingingly. The bent figure of Jenkins was upright, and the expression of his face had altered.

With a tumult of thoughts the governor stood in the roadway, covered by the revolvers. Such an outrage as this was unheard of. What was the object of it?

"There are two of us against you, Marsden, so I should advise you not to attempt anything rash," said Kingston quietly. "You will now enter the cottage. These revolvers are not here on show, I may add, and are quite fully loaded. A shot here would be unheard of, so you see the wisdom of complying with our simple request."

The governor glared at his two assailants helplessly, impotently. The huge motor-car stood in the roadway, with its head-lamps illuminating everything close around. The wind whistled round them with terrific force. A light showed in the front room of the cottage, and the governor glanced at it angrily.

"Somebody shall pay for this," he snarled. "It is outrageous—preposterous! What does it mean, Stewart? What in the name of all that's—"

"Time's going," said Fraser sternly. "We don't want to use force, but the boss won't hesitate if you don't shift pretty sharp."

Seeing his unenviable position, the governor turned, his mind in a state of havoc, and walked to the front door of the little cottage. It opened as he approached, and, followed by Kingston and Fraser, he stepped over the high threshold.

The room was illuminated by a large paraffin lamp, and Marsden started as he saw an elderly lady standing against the wall. She was looking quite cool, and gave Kingston a quick look as the three men entered.

"Close the door, Stewart," said Kingston, "and hand your revolver to this lady."

Fraser did as instructed, and then, while Colonel Marsden, furious and somewhat startled, raved unceasingly, he and Kingston roped him up. They made no half-job of it, for at last the governor was utterly helpless. A handkerchief across his mouth stopped the flow of abuse, and he could only glare.

"Now," said Kingston sharply, "to business!"

He raised his hands to his head, then slowly lowered them again, nodding to the prisoner.

"Just lay something over his eyes, Stewart," he said. "One cannot be too cautious."

In a moment it was done, and then Dolores set to work. As cleverly as before, when she had disguised Kingston as Don Sebastian, she transformed him into a second edition of Colonel Marsden. Fraser looked on interestedly and with wonder in his eyes. At last it was done, and except in a very brilliant light, the deception would certainly pass unnoticed.

"Splendid!" muttered Kingston, as he gazed at himself in a mirror. "Splendid! The likeness is perfect! Now for the coat!"

Fraser helped him on with the heavy motor-coat. No other change of clothes was necessary, for the fur coat covered him from head to foot.

"Good-bye and good luck!" murmured Dolores, as he laid his hand on the door-knob. "The governor will be quite safe in my hands."

"I know it," replied Kingston, in an exact representation of Marsden's harsh tones. "You may rely on me to carry



"Kingston suddenly became remarkably active, overturning chairs, and yelling, in the Governor's harsh tones, for help. Then he hurled himself at the French windows, shattering them; and then, twirling round, he fell backwards on the carpet. (See page 25.)

my project through. Expect to see me back here within two hours at the outside. In all probability it will be immediately. The risky part of the business commences now. I am literally entering the lions' den; but, if events turn out as I confidently expect, I shall emerge without even a scratch."

He turned abruptly, the door swung open, allowing a blast of icy wind and rain to rush in like a whirlwind, and he was gone—bound on as hazardous a project as man could well attempt.

At the Prison.

Frank Kingston grasped Fraser's shoulder.

"You've done well, Fraser," he said, "very well indeed. My part comes in now; and if I bring mine off as successfully as you have yours, then Sir Robert is as good as rescued."

"There's no doubt about that, sir," replied Fraser. "Somehow, I can't picture you failin' in anything, sir. It must go right with you. Anyhow, I'd back you any day."

Kingston laughed.

"You should never bet, Fraser; it's risky. But come, there is no time to waste talking here. Start your engine,

and reverse the car. The sooner we start the sooner we shall be done."

Fraser switched on, and twirled the starting handle. It was still raining, but much finer now. The wind, however, was, if anything, higher than before. It howled round the corners of the cottage, and literally buzzed through the wire spokes of the Daimler's wheels.

Kingston shook himself, and clambered into the car. Two minutes later it was tearing along the road back to the gloomy collection of buildings which composed Cragmoor Prison.

The adventure was all practice for Fraser, and he was rapidly becoming an expert chauffeur. The car turned up the drive sharply, and swung round to the front entrance. Fraser jumped down and opened the side door.

"Wait here till I come," said Kingston sharply, in an exact imitation of Colonel Marsden's voice. "Have the car all ready for immediate departure."

"Very good, sir."

Kingston inserted his key in the lock—he had taken care to empty Marsden's pockets into his own before binding him—and entered the hall. The wind rushed in with a swirl, and nearly extinguished the light.

Earlier Kingston had obtained from Fraser a rough out-

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 151.

NEXT THURSDAY:

"TOM MERRY AGAINST ST. JIM'S."

Another Splendid, Long, Complete School Tale of The Chums of St. Jim's.

line of the ground floor, the butler's name, the head-warder's name, etc. Without faltering or hesitating he walked across the hall, and entered the passage which led to the governor's private office.

The light was dim here, and he met Richard, the butler. The latter expressed surprise at seeing his master back so soon.

"You said to-morrow, sir!" he exclaimed.

"I know I did, Richard, but I forgot to attend to a matter which was most important. Send Connor to me at once."

"Yes, sir."

The butler departed in search of Connor, the head-warder. Kingston walked boldly into the governor's office, turned on the light, and seated himself at the desk. He had removed neither his hat or his overcoat, and was apparently in a gigantic hurry.

"Ah, Connor!" he exclaimed, as the head-warder entered and saluted. "Give me the key of No. 145's cell, will you?"

"The key, sir?" repeated Connor, puzzled. "Why?"

"Don't haggle, man!" said Kingston impatiently, in Marsden's harsh tones. "Can't you see I'm in a hurry?"

"Sorry, sir," replied Connor hastily. "I haven't got the key with me. Are you going to see No. 145, sir?"

"I am, and I have no time to waste," exclaimed the pseudo-governor. "As you haven't got the key with you, you may as well conduct me to the cell."

"Very well, sir."

Although the head-warder said nothing, he was obviously much puzzled at the order. Still, it was none of his business; the governor could do as he liked.

Kingston felt in no way excited as he followed Connor through several dimly-lit passages. A sense of satisfaction was apparent, but nothing else.

"So far so good," he thought, as he waited a moment while the head-warder procured the key. "I think matters will turn out all right. There is no danger of my being recognised."

The risk never entered his head. One slip, one false move, and he would be foiled. There, surrounded by warders, he would stand no earthly chance of escape. He would be imprisoned himself for assault and conspiracy—he, Frank Kingston, the wealthy young dandy, who was known intimately to the most select London society.

He knew this—knew how terribly hazardous his project was—yet he felt no excitement, no apprehension. He was as cool now as when lolling about at his club. Had he been other than cool, it is doubtful whether he would have carried the deception through.

He thought of everything. As Dolores had said, it was impossible to imagine Kingston making a blunder. Although he had had so little time in which to study Colonel Marsden, he impersonated him with an exactness which was not only infinitely clever, but really amazing.

He did not make the mistake of saying too much. Not a word more than was necessary did he utter, and, by appearing to be in a hurry, it gave the warders no time to study him thoroughly, or think over his words.

True, Connor was surprised at his wishing to see No. 145; but, after all, it was nothing extraordinary. Anything might have cropped up to necessitate it, and Connor knew better than to object. The governor had a habit of discharging men under very slight provocation, and the warders were, in consequence, submissive to a degree.

Kingston knew this—Fraser had kept both his ears open during his stay at Cragmoor—and he also knew how it would assist him. All that was required—similar to a conjuring trick—was cool, brisk action.

Gissing's cell was situated in a corridor apart from the rest, being in solitary confinement; but after a moment the head-warder grated the key in the lock, and swung the door open.

"Leave me with the prisoner for a moment," said Kingston sharply.

The warder saluted, and withdrew down the corridor, leaving Kingston standing just inside the cell. No. 145 was seated on his bed, reading a copy of the Bible. He laid it down now, and looked up at his visitor.

"Well," he said, "what do you want now, Marsden? Have you come to taunt me again?"

"To taunt you?" repeated Kingston.

"Yes, to taunt me. Not so very long ago I was in a higher position in the world than you are, Marsden. Now that I have fallen you jeer at me."

"Listen to me a moment."

"After what you said on your previous visit?" cried Sir Robert. "I don't want to hear another word. Your voice sickens me. What a fool I was not to see things in their true light sooner! It is too late now. However honest I am, however repentant, I shall not live to see the world."

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 151.

again. The Brotherhood can kill me if it chooses. I am sick of life, sick of everything!"

Kingston did not move. Although Sir Robert had acted well, his visitor knew that his words were not sincere—not sincere in the sense that Gissing was sick of life. Kingston could tell that the words were only a blind to deceive the governor.

"He still has faith in me," he thought. "I told him I would rescue him, and he relies on me to keep my word. But what a change of character—what a different man! He was sincere enough when he said he had done with the Brotherhood."

Kingston stood looking at Sir Robert as the latter lowered his head into his hands, then laughed harshly.

"You take your ill-luck badly, Gissing," he said. "You have gambled and lost. As there is no one else to blame but yourself—"

"No one else but myself?" cried Sir Robert. "It was the Brotherhood—"

"Steady your voice, you fool!" snapped the "governor," looking at the door quickly. "I'll make you pay heavily for your treachery if you don't keep your tongue still. Remember, I am governor here, and can, if I choose, put you to the hardest work in the prison."

"Do so!" said Gissing quickly. "Anything is better than being confined night and day in this terrible cell."

"You find it irksome, eh?" sneered Kingston. "I don't wonder at it, for it is certainly far from cheerful. I wish to have a talk with you, Gissing—a long talk—and I am going to stretch a point and have you conveyed to my office."

Without waiting for an answer, Kingston pushed open the door, and beckoned to a warder who was patrolling the corridor. He dared not risk revealing his true identity there, for Gissing, being highly strung, would very probably upset the whole scheme before it was half carried out.

"Take No. 145 to my office immediately," ordered Kingston harshly. "Two of you will be enough. Don't stand there staring; do as I tell you. Perhaps I had better repeat that I am in a hurry."

"Sorry, sir, only the order bein' rather unusual—"

"I have received some remarkable news concerning No. 145, and must speak to him privately. But I see no reason why I should explain to you."

The warder saluted, and hurried off, the explanation of the strange order being quite sufficient to satisfy him. He knew that No. 145 was Sir Robert Gissing, and in no way a desperate character.

Kingston slammed the cell-door to, and hurried down the passage. Although he had passed through the prison only once, he went direct to his own—or, rather, the governor's—office; not once did he hesitate at a turning or doorway.

He seated himself at his desk, having first turned the shade over the light so that his own face was in shadow. Then he waited, half-smiling to himself at the ease with which he was effecting the escape. He was doing nothing, practically. It was the warders who were allowing No. 145 to go free—without their aid he would have been helpless.

It was barely fifteen minutes since the car left the cottage. It was still outside, ready for immediate departure, with the faithful Fraser at the wheel. The night was as rough as ever—the French windows in the governor's office rattling noisily as gust after gust struck the house with stunning force. Kingston could hear the quick patter of the rain on the glass, and the sound caused him to smile.

It was music in his ears to-night—no other sound could have been more welcome. When the critical moment came—But his thoughts were interrupted at this point.

The door opened, and No. 145 appeared, sullen and defiant, in the grip of two stalwart warders.

The Escape of No. 145.

"You may leave him with me," said Kingston quickly, busily glancing through some notes which were jotted down on a piece of paper.

"Alone, sir?"

"I said so. I think I am capable of taking charge of the prisoner. When I have finished with him I will ring the bell. Do not come before."

The warders saluted and withdrew, leaving Gissing, a sorry spectacle in his hideous prison garb, standing in the full glare of the light. He was puzzled at this move on the part of the governor's, but said nothing.

Kingston made no movement until a few seconds had passed, then he rose swiftly and crossed to the door—a stout oak affair. With a quick glance at Gissing, he noiselessly turned the key in the lock.

"What is that for?" demanded Sir Robert. "Why have you locked the door?"

"Because," said Kingston, as he drew the heavy window-curtains together, "I have something very important to

reveal to you, Gissing—something no one else must be aware of."

"Do you think I care?"

"I know you care," replied Kingston tensely, and altering the harsh voice to his own languid tones. "I am not what I seem to be, Sir Robert!"

The baronet staggered back, staring at the governor in bewilderment. His eyes were protruding from his face, his whole attitude one of incredible amazement.

"The voice!" he muttered. "The voice—"

"Exactly," said Kingston coolly. "As I promised you, Sir Robert, I have come! I am not the governor, although everybody here is under the erroneous impression that I am."

"You—are—Kingston?" gasped the baronet, staring before him as if Kingston were some phantom. "Good heavens, I cannot realise it—I cannot believe it!"

Kingston rose to his feet, and laid a hand on his companion's shoulder—the shoulder of the man he had despised with good cause not so many weeks previously.

"Really, Sir Robert, there is not a moment to waste," he said quietly. "The longer we are here the greater the risks we run. Please remember you are a prisoner!"

"Heavens, yes! How can you set me free?" whispered the baronet eagerly. "Here, with all those warders around us, escape seems impossible!"

"Yet, if everything goes right, it is the easiest thing in the world. The very simplicity of it makes it possible. Now, please do exactly as I tell you, and pay no heed to my voice, except to answer whatever you like in a low mutter. I am merely doing it as a safeguard."

He unfastened a portmanteau, and produced a suit of tweeds, handing them to Gissing. But while he did so he was talking loudly in the governor's harsh voice. Anybody passing the door outside would have no suspicion that everything was not as it seemed.

As quickly as possible Sir Robert discarded his prison-garb, and attired himself in the clothes Kingston had brought. While the latter was as cool as a man could be, the baronet himself was consumed with excitement and anxiety. His one thought was to do exactly as Kingston said.

His faith was remarkable. The man he had thought an imbecile was proving the most singular person he had ever met. Gissing looked upon Kingston as an enigma. He was puzzled beyond measure at the cleverness he displayed. Such an escape as this he had never dreamed of.

"Good!" murmured Kingston, without changing the tone of his voice. "You look decidedly better now, Sir Robert! Clothes work a great change in a man's appearance. Now, please allow me to adjust these trifling necessities."

He deftly fastened a grey false beard to Sir Robert's chin, and a similarly coloured wig. The effect was surprising. The baronet's features were entirely disguised. In an ordinary light it would be impossible to detect the deception.

"That will do," said Kingston, stepping back quietly. "It is rough, but it will serve its purpose. Afterwards—but there is no time to talk of afterwards."

"I don't understand, Kingston," exclaimed Sir Robert, in bewilderment. "I am in your hands entirely—anything you say I will do without question, for if you carry the affair as far as this, it seems impossible anything should miscarry."

"The risky part has yet to come," replied Kingston quickly. "You yourself have to do practically nothing. As you now stand, you are effectively disguised. It is merely a precaution, anyhow, for your presence at the prison must remain unknown—"

"But how can I get away?"

"I am telling you," Kingston stuffed the prison clothes into the portmanteau, snapped it to, and drew the window-curtains. "Step out of this window, and you will find yourself on the lawn. Immediately to the left is the drive, and you will see a motor-car standing there."

"A motor-car?"

"Precisely," returned Kingston, still in Marsden's voice. "The driver—my own servant—will know who you are, and will smuggle you into the car. All you have to do then is to be very quiet, and make your presence known to nobody. All the rest I will see to."

"But—"

"There is not a second to lose. Please ask no questions, Sir Robert," Kingston noiselessly unfastened the French windows, allowing a powerful gust of wind and rain to enter. "What you have to do is simplicity itself. Outside it is pitch-dark, and not a soul is about this quarter of the settlement. It is the governor's private garden, and on a night such as this I think one can confidently assume that no one is strolling on the lawn, or having a pipe in the arbour!"

"Hardly," said Sir Robert. "Upon my soul, Kingston, you are a cool customer! You have imbued me with some of your calmness, but for all that I am utterly at sea."

"It is better to be at sea than in prison! You will find the car exactly as I have told you. Expect me in less than five minutes."

"But the warders will know I am gone."

"Exactly! I wish them to know. Phew, what a gale! Splendid for our project, though. Now be careful, Sir Robert; see that no one else is near the car before approaching it—precautions cost nothing whatever."

He held the window open and, still mystified, Sir Robert Gissing, late No. 145, stepped into the chill night. It seemed impossible that only half an hour had elapsed since Fraser drove up to the drive—yet it was the case. The time was barely 7.45.

Kingston rapidly refastened the windows, then turned to the desk again. He was still talking, putting questions and answering them in a voice remarkably like Sir Robert's. While on the Iron Island, during those eight terrible years, he had taught himself to control his voice, and alter the tones of it in a second. His acquired art came in useful now.

Quickly he examined the governor's desk. There was no trace on it—nothing to show the identity of the man who had carried out the daring and audacious rescue. Kingston's glance rapidly swept over the whole room, noting every detail—every mark. He meant to be absolutely certain before leaving that nothing was left whereby he could be traced.

Finally he crossed to the door, silently turned the key back, then prepared for the last move. The heavy fur coat was buttoned up to his chin, and the cap drawn over his eyes.

"Now," he thought, smiling quietly to himself, "for the really funniest thing I have ever attempted. Upon my word, it's too simple!"

Without excitement he suddenly became remarkably active, overturning chairs and rucking the carpet slightly. It was an old trick, but Kingston did not make the usual mistake of overdoing it.

The noise he made was comparatively slight, but with startling suddenness he commenced yelling, in the governor's harsh tones, for help. After ten seconds of this Kingston gathered himself together and literally hurled himself at the French windows with the force of a battering ram.

With a shivering crash they burst open, and a shower of broken glass clattered down upon the gravel path outside. Kingston intended doing his work thoroughly, or not at all. Charging a couple of stout glass doors is no light task, yet he took it all as a matter of course.

Without a scratch or a cut on him he twirled round with lightning-like rapidity and fell backwards on to the carpet, half under the desk, uttering another cry as he did so.

As he had expected, the commotion, culminating in the crash of glass, brought Connor hurrying to the scene, accompanied by another warder. He burst into the office with a startled expression on his face.

"Good gracious!"

He stared before him in bewilderment. There had clearly been a struggle. Connor rushed forward excitedly. Where was No. 145? He had escaped!

"Quick! Sound the alarm! Send men out on the moor to search! No. 145 has escaped!"

Kingston struggled to his feet, holding his head. The others were dividing their attention between the "governor" and the shattered French windows.

"The brute!" cried Kingston furiously. "Turned on me while my back was towards him! I hadn't a chance to defend myself, and before I could move he had thrown me!"

"But the windows, sir—"

"The man was half wild—he jumped clean through them," exclaimed Kingston rapidly. "He can't have gone far; but why don't you go, you fools? He is escaping! He can't have gone far, I tell you, on a night like this. However—"

He broke off as an extra heavy gust nearly blew the light out, and sent a shower of papers from the desk fluttering about the room. Suddenly Kingston apparently pulled himself together and made up his mind.

"Look here, Connor, my car is waiting outside. I will search the road which leads to the station—"

"He might get into old Jenkins's cottage, sir," put in the other warder quickly.

"I will search the place—you needn't go near it; instruct the others not to. There is no sense in doing work twice over. Now make haste and get your men out. Confound it, I'd no idea the fellow was so strong! This is a serious matter, Connor—a very serious matter!"

He jammed his hat on harder and, without another word, darted out of the ruined windows. Apparently he was in a state of great agitation. Connor and his companion hurried off and gave the alarm.

In a very few moments the great bell began to toll, and the roaring gun-fire told the surrounding villagers to keep the doors and windows well bolted. Grumbling at their luck at having to turn out on such a night, the warders poured from the prison on to the dreary moor.

Meanwhile, the object of their search was within ten yards of the governor's own house, calmly sitting in the big Daimler. The ludicrousness of it was really laughable; the audacity a thing to wonder at. Kingston rushed across the

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 151.

NEXT THURSDAY: "TOM MERRY AGAINST ST. JIM'S."

Another Splendid, Long, Complete School Tale of The Chums of St. Jim's.

lawn excitedly, and perceived that the butler was standing agitatedly in the porchway.

"Have you seen him, Stewart?" he gasped to Fraser, who sat stolidly in the motor-car.

"Seen him, sir?" repeated Fraser. "Who, sir?"

"The prisoner! He escaped by way of the lawn—"

"Prisoner, sir? Great Scott! You don't mean to say, sir—"

"Yes, yes!" cried Kingston quickly. "Have you seen him?"

"No, sir; there ain't been nobody this way," exclaimed Fraser, looking startled. Kingston wrenched open the side door and scrambled in.

"Then proceed down the main road at a moderate pace, and keep your eyes open," he ordered. "He may be making for the railway. Look sharp, man, he hasn't been gone two minutes!"

Fraser jumped down from his seat, twirled the starting handle, and a moment later the motor-car was proceeding down the drive. The wind moaned through the trees and struck chill and icy; while the rain, falling fast again, slashed viciously against the wind-screen.

But inside, snug and warm, Kingston was coolly smoothing his ruffled hair. Sir Robert was too bewildered to think clearly—too completely flabbergasted to grasp anything beyond the fact that in some miraculous manner he had been rescued from Cragmoor Prison under the very eyes of dozens of warders; and that now he was escaping in the governor's own motor-car, while the whole countryside was on the look-out for a wild-eyed, muddy, desperate convict, garbed in clothes literally bespattered with the broad arrow!

It seemed too fantastic—too utterly impossible—to be true. Yet it was true—as true as the stars shine in the heavens—and Frank Kingston, the man who had organised the whole daring scheme, sat coolly back among the cushions as though there was nothing in the whole world to think about!

Covering Tracks.

But, although he appeared so careless and languid, Kingston was in reality thinking as deeply as he had ever thought in his life.

There was much to accomplish yet—all the responsibility rested on his shoulders. But, after all, the load was—to him—a light one. Despite the wretched weather conditions, he was enjoying himself immensely; he was in his element, and the spice of adventure was absolutely exhilarating.

It was but five minutes since he had crashed through the French windows—or, to be exact, half-past seven. With a jerk, the car came to a standstill, and Kingston opened the door.

"Don't move," he said to Gissing quickly. "I shall not be a moment, and will bring back with me a friend—a friend who has done as much work, and taken as much risk, in obtaining your escape as I have."

He stepped out into the mud, hurried across the road, and entered the cottage.

Dolores was standing just inside, looking expectant and eager. Kingston, as usual, was cool and unemotional.

"Well," she inquired, "how have you got on? I've been so anxious, waiting here, hardly knowing what to think—"

"As I thought, there was practically no risk," answered Kingston calmly, taking care to mention no names.

Colonel Marsden was in one of the chairs—bound hand and foot, it is true, but his ears would take note of any incautious word that might be uttered.

"You have done everything you planned?"

"Everything. It was simplicity itself. The governor is quite secure, I suppose?"

"It would be impossible for him to get free, and equally impossible to raise an outcry," replied Dolores quickly. "But the warders will search the cottage; they are bound to! I heard the guns, so knew that something was happening. It told me the men were turning out on the moor, and I was fearful lest the cottage was entered—"

"You need fear no longer; the warders will not come near here. I am supposed to be searching it, and have given orders that this place shall be left alone."

"How thoughtful of you! Then we can go, and leave the governor here without fear of detection," cried Dolores. "It is splendid!"

In a few seconds the lights were extinguished, the door locked, and the wretched governor was left to his own thoughts, unable to move an inch, and with no present hope of deliverance.

Outside, in the pouring sleet and howling gale, Frank Kingston was assisting his fair companion into the landaulette. Sir Robert was taken aback when he saw the evidently elderly lady enter, but said nothing.

A minute later the car was racing along the road in the direction of Pellstead, Kingston congratulating himself on the

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 151.

success of his mission. Everything had passed off without a hitch. It now remained to get clear without leaving a single trace. And this man of mystery and audacity already saw the way.

He was never at a loss. When a difficulty arose a solution always presented itself to him. Even now he was forming his future plans. But he had to remember that Sir Robert Gissing was in ignorance as to who he was; the baronet only knew he was Frank Kingston, the wealthy young man about town.

Hardly a word was said as the car was being driven to Pellstead, the little village Dolores had stayed at.

In a very few moments Fraser took his clutch out, and applied the brakes.

"Simply get the child," said Kingston quickly, "look round to see that no traces are left, and then hurry out. The quicker you are the better."

"I prepared everything beforehand," Dolores answered. "I shall not be more than a minute. The landlord is expecting me to leave in a hurry, and I have already paid him."

"Excellent!" murmured Kingston, as Dolores stepped into the roadway—which was deserted and rain-sodden.

He could feel, rather than see, that Sir Robert was in a state of agitation and excitement. After all this time he was to see his child again—the child he, in his misery and solitude, had grown to love strongly and passionately.

"This lady," said Kingston, while they waited, "has been a mother to your little girl, Sir Robert, and you can never thank her enough for what she has done. Think of the risk of her undertaking! If she had been detected, or the child recognised, arrest would have been inevitable."

"I realise my stupendous obligation both to you and to her," said Gissing, in a voice quivering with emotion, "and I can never repay my debt. Who is she, Kingston? And why is she doing this for me?"

"Her name is Miss Beck, and she is an old friend of mine," was all Kingston said.

He had no intention of telling the baronet that she was Kathleen O'Brien, for there was no object to be gained by so doing.

"My mind is in a whirl," went on Sir Robert. "I shall never understand why you are so good to me, Kingston; why you are helping me in this manner. I am nothing to you, and—"

"As I told you before, Sir Robert, I am doing it for the sake of your little child. It is her I am thinking of— Ah, here she is!"

One of the side doors opened, and little Ivy Gissing was lifted into the interior. She was excited and vivacious, but seemed rather taken aback at the sight of the two strange men—for she did not, of course, recognise her father.

"My child!" he murmured joyfully. "Thank Heaven you are safe! Don't you know me, little one? I'm your daddy. You must know me!"

The little girl recognised the voice instantly, and clung in her father's arms.

Meanwhile, Dolores had clambered in, and the motor-car had recommenced its journey. Even at Pellstead, on a night such as this, a group of men were standing round the entrance of the biggest inn, carrying lanterns and sticks.

"I'm afraid the poor chaps are on a wild goose chase!" smiled Kingston, glancing at his watch. "Jove, the time's getting on though! Driver," he added, through the tube, "let her go like steam till we get to Exeter!"

Kingston switched on the electric light overhead, and drew the blinds. The car was an exceptionally roomy one, so there was ample space for Kingston to do his work in.

"Now, Sir Robert," he said, when the baronet had got over his first joy, and sat with Ivy on his knee, "the most important thing now is to get clear away. At first it would seem a difficult task."

"Even I, Mr. Kingston, cannot see how we are all going to escape observation," said Dolores.

To look at her, no-one would say she was under fifty; yet Sir Robert would have been considerably surprised had he known that she was one of the prettiest girls in England.

"The matter is very simple," replied Frank Kingston calmly. "It is not eight o'clock yet, and we can easily reach Exeter in an hour. I shall require you, Miss Beck, to alight there alone."

"But—" began Dolores, in surprise.

"I am sorry; but it is the only way. We cannot all leave the car together, so when we do alight it must be one at a time, and in the presence of no one."

"But the child?" asked Dolores. "What will become of her?"

"She will be quite safe. It would be more than unwise for you to take her, Miss Beck. All you have to do at Exeter is to take train for Plymouth, and stay there for the night,

boarding the Coronet to-morrow, and steaming straight for London."

"That is simple enough," answered Dolores thoughtfully. "And if nobody sees me leave the car I cannot possibly be traced."

"Precisely. It will be the same with us all. Sir Robert if you will allow me, I will complete your disguise. I mean there shall be nothing left to chance—nothing whatever."

And Kingston, with Dolores' aid, set to work and altered Sir Robert's features so much that there wasn't the remotest possibility of the police recognising him—it was a masterpiece of make-up.

Shortly afterwards Exeter was reached, and in a quiet part of the town, where nobody seemed to be about, Dolores, with handbag and umbrella, quietly stepped out of the car while it was going, and without a soul being the wiser.

Fraser accelerated, and the Daimler bounded forward. Kingston was feeling somewhat elated, for his plans had worked with amazing smoothness. Marsden would not be found until the next day, he felt sure, for the warders would not go near "old Jenkins'" cottage.

"Rather a long ride before us now, Sir Robert," he exclaimed. "I should suggest you sleep while you have the chance. See, little Ivy is sensible; she has set the example."

The child had fallen back among the cushions, and a contented smile was on her little lips.

Sir Robert looked at her tenderly. It was marvellous what a complete change had been wrought in him.

"A long ride?" he repeated.

"We are going straight to London. And the chauffeur will drive moderately, so as to arrive about nine o'clock. It would be unwise to get there before, as an early arrival would be noticeable."

So Sir Robert, tired out, made himself comfortable, and was very soon fast asleep. The great motor, running as smoothly as clockwork, continued its journey steadily, travelling at a moderate speed, the rhythmical thud-thud! of the engine never altering its tone.

As the night wore on, and the travellers grew nearer the metropolis, the wind dropped and the clouds grew less thick, until finally they passed away altogether, the sky becoming clear and brilliant. The rainfall, too, had been comparatively slight here.

Just as Reading had been passed—at about seven o'clock—Sir Robert opened his eyes and sat upright. Then he started, and looked at the man before him.

It was Kingston—Kingston himself!

When the baronet had gone to sleep his companion had been the replica of Colonel Marsden. Now, however, he was once again the indolent dandy, who seemed too brainless to think coherently on a serious subject.

"By Jove, Sir Robert," he drawled, "you've been asleep a deuce of a time! Hope you're refreshed—eh?"

"Yes, thanks," replied Gissing wonderingly. "But you have taken off your disguise. Why?"

Kingston looked across at him and smiled.

"Yes," he said; "it was no more use, you know. I've done with it now, and am jolly glad to be myself again! It's a real pleasure, I assure you."

At nine-thirty exactly the Daimler pulled up against the kerb in Piccadilly, unnoticed by anybody in the general traffic. Sir Robert Gissing alighted, accompanied by Ivy.

Straight for the Underground station they went, and, as they disappeared, the car glided forward and took its place in the line of traffic.

At Liverpool Street Station Kingston simply stepped out of the car, gave the signal for Fraser to continue, and strolled down the slope to the great station.

His destination was the cloak-room. He handed in his ticket, and procured in exchange a travelling-trunk and two portmanteaux. These he instructed a porter to place on a taxi, following leisurely himself.

"Hotel Cyril," he instructed the cabby, and presently was bowling sharply along the smooth roads in the direction of the Strand.

He was smiling in rather a pleased fashion, for he had absolutely covered all tracks. The hotel people would certainly think that he had returned from one of his erratic trips—as he intended they should—and as to his being connected with the Cragmoor affair—why, the idea was ridiculous!

"Now, the next thing—the very next thing—is to run down to the docks and see Dolores," he mused, as he sat in his rooms. "I don't suppose the Coronet will arrive till afternoon, but when she does, I mustn't lose a moment. There's a lot to discuss, and very little time at our disposal."

(Another thrilling instalment of this wonderful serial next Thursday, describing how Frank Kingston completes Sir Robert Gissing's rescue, and deals with Colonel Marsden at the same time.)

Concluding Chapters of this Great Sea Story.

In the Service of the King.

By LIEUTENANT LEFEVRE.

Norah is Found.

A heavy blow from Oswald's fist, and the man lay still, and Oswald leaped to his feet just in time, as a door at the end of the passage opened, and another man came out. It was the elder Wilson.

Quick as thought, Oswald sprang at him, and hurled him backwards; then, leaping over the prostrate body, sprang into the cabin beyond.

At last he had found her! Norah was there, standing in the centre of the room, white to the lips, and a look of awful terror on her face.

For one moment she stood gazing at Oswald, with eyes that did not seem to see him; then, uttering a low cry, she staggered, and would have fallen had he not sprung forward in time and saved her.

As he held her in his arms, he heard Maxwell's voice shouting his name.

A moment later Maxwell stumbled over the body of Joseph Wilson, and uttered a shout of surprise.

"Why, here are the two we want!" Oswald heard him shout. "Smith, are you there? Where are you?"

"Here! Here!" shouted Oswald; and the next moment Maxwell and half a dozen sailors stumbled into the little cabin.

For a moment Maxwell stood gazing at Oswald, speechless; then he hurried forward to Oswald's side.

"Good heavens! She ain't dead?" he cried. "Those fiends haven't hurt her?"

"No; she has fainted, I think," Oswald said. "I will carry her on to deck, and get her on to the frigate at once. Look after those two outside. They are only stunned; they will come round in a few minutes."

"Oh, I will look after them all right!" Maxwell said quietly.

He stood for a moment looking after Oswald, who, carrying the unconscious girl in his arms, hastened down the passage, and made his way up the companion-way to the deck.

He thanked Heaven that Norah was unconscious, as he picked his way among the mutilated dead that strewed the deck. He thanked Heaven that her eyes were closed to the awful sight that the yellow sun shone down upon.

Blood—blood everywhere! It lay, dark and glistening, on the deck; it ran a sluggish stream in the scuppers, and washed to and fro with the movement of the vessel.

He staggered, and for a moment his senses swam. A ghastly grey face looked up at him from the deck. It was the face of the negro, Bimby, whom he himself had cut down.

"What is the matter with me? What has come over me?" he muttered.

He looked down into the white face of the unconscious girl, and then suddenly uttered a low cry of horror, for on the bosom of her white dress was the dark stain of blood.

She had been wounded; she was dead. He had no strength to go further, he swayed backwards and forwards like a drunken man. He was conscious that some of the crew were hastening towards him—that one had relieved him from his burden; and then it seemed to him that a sudden brilliant flame of light shot out from the sun, and then came darkness.

A Surprise for Oswald.

Oswald opened his eyes languidly and gazed about him. A strange change had come over the scene; the blood-drenched deck of the pirate had gone. He was lying in a bed in a room—a large, cool, airy room, through the open windows of which the sea-breeze came in, and fanned his cheeks.

At a table by the window two people were seated, talking together, an old man and woman—at least, he thought so, though he could scarcely see them from where he lay. What did it all mean?

He lay back wearily on his pillow, and tried to remember. It came back to him little by little—the decks of the Cynthia, the half-nude sailors, grimed with the smoke from their guns, the savages on the pirate ships, Norah, with the bloodstain on her gown, and her white face, lying in his arms.

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NEXT THURSDAY: "TOM MERRY AGAINST ST. JIM'S."

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arms. He remembered now. And so he had been too late to save her, after all.

A sob rose in his throat; tears of weakness came into his eyes, and rolled down his cheeks.

The two people by the window rose hastily, and came gently towards him.

"I thought I heard him move," whispered a voice that was very familiar to him. "Poor lad! How thin, how altered he has grown! You would not have known him, my dear child—eh? But, please Heaven, we shall have him well and sound again before long!"

Oswald opened his eyes slowly, and looked up. He saw the kindly face of the old admiral bending over him, and—But no, he must be dreaming still! How could she be here—his sister, from whom he had parted that awful night—all those long months ago? How could she be here?

The admiral laid his hand gently on Oswald's forehead.

"He is cooler; the fever seems to have left him. I don't think old Davy will have him this time my dear."

"Thank Heaven! It would have broken father's heart to have found him only to lose him again."

These were the last words Oswald heard. When he awakened again the daylight had faded, and a lamp was standing on the table by the window.

Oswald raised his hand to his head, and started at the touch, for his hair had been cut off close. He held up his hand, and gazed at it in wonderment. Was it possible that this was his hand?

It was white and thin; he could almost see the light shining through it. It looked more like the hand of a woman.

Something—he knew not what—prompted him to laugh, though he never felt less merry in his life, and as the queer sound of his weak laughter died away, someone rose from the table and approached the bedside.

It was Maxwell. Oswald wondered who would appear next. Everyone he knew and cared for seemed to be here, except—

Maxwell stood looking down at him gravely.

"You mustn't exert yourself, old chap. Thank goodness you are round the corner now! But you've got to lie still and take it quietly."

"Why?" asked Oswald rebelliously. "Why should I be lying here? Where are the rest—the admiral and Eva? But, oh, that is nonsense! I was dreaming. But, tell me, Maxwell, what place is this? How did I come here?"

"A good deal has happened," Maxwell said, as he sat himself down beside the bed, and took one of Oswald's thin hands in his. "In the first place, you got hurt; then you've had the fever—vomito prieto, as they call it—and it's been a near thing with you, old fellow. Here, drink this; it's Sangaree, and it'll do you good."

Oswald raised himself, and drank down the cool and refreshing liquid.

"I had a curious dream just now. I thought the admiral was here and my sister Eva."

"It wasn't a dream, old chap; they were here. Your sister has only been gone out of the room ten minutes or so, to lie down. She has scarcely left you for a moment since you came. She and—"

"Good heavens! What are you talking about? My sister—she is in England."

"She happens to be in Kingston, Jamaica, at this moment," and your father, Sir George Yorke, is with her. You see, the old gentleman found out, somehow, that he had done you a wrong. Old Maydew is dead. It appears that he knew all the time that you and your friend Leslie were going to attack his coach that night by way of a joke, so he arranged with his nephew and another fellow to go with him, and he let them think that you really were highwaymen. When he died he confessed it, and your father was so cut up by the thought of how he had mistrusted you that he lost no time, but shipped

off straight to Kingston with your sister. He arrived here only the day before the Cynthia came into harbour, and when you were carried ashore, more dead than alive, he was almost out of his senses with grief."

"Then he knows! Thank Heaven!" Oswald muttered.

"Yes, he knows. He saw Burgoyne before—before he died."

"Burgoyne is dead?"

"Yes; he was shot for taking up arms against his own countrymen. That's treachery, you know. Your father tried to beg him off, but he didn't succeed. They let Brag go, though. It appears that he had been led by the nose by Burgoyne, and hadn't the pluck in him to refuse, though he swore he had never struck a blow at our fellows; and I believe he didn't. Anyhow, he got off with his life. And I think that's all the news, old fellow. The Cynthia is in harbour, and the skipper's been very anxious about you. He seems to have taken a fancy to you. Oh, and, by the way, you are Lieutenant Yorke, now!"

Oswald lay for a moment in silence.

"And," he said faintly, "Norah—she was buried at sea. I was not in time to save her, after all? And yet I would have given my life to have saved her!"

"What on earth are you talking about? They don't bury live young women at sea. Miss Norah has been nursing you. She and your sister have been taking it in turns for days and days."

Oswald started up in bed. For a moment he threw off his weakness, and renewed strength came to him.

"She is alive—alive!" he cried in a strong voice.

"Good heavens, yes! Don't get excited! Don't yell like that! Of course, she is alive—alive and well—though she was upset about her relations, still—"

"But I thought she was lying dead in my arms. There was blood on her dress—"

"Of course there was blood on her dress—your blood. You were wounded in the cheek and in the shoulder. There wasn't a scratch on her. She had only fainted."

The door opened as Maxwell was speaking, and Oswald turned his face towards it eagerly.

It had not been a dream, then? It was Eva, his sister, whom he had seen. She came towards him now with a smile on her lips and tears in her eyes, and put her arms about him. But only for a moment; then she rose and stood aside to make room for someone else.

"Father!" Oswald murmured.

Sir George Yorke could not speak, and between these two no words were necessary now. Oswald had been terribly punished for the boyish prank of long ago, and the greatest punishment he had had to bear was his father's mistrust and doubt. But that was past now.

"You have forgiven me, my son?" Sir George murmured.

At this moment the little doctor bustled into the room.

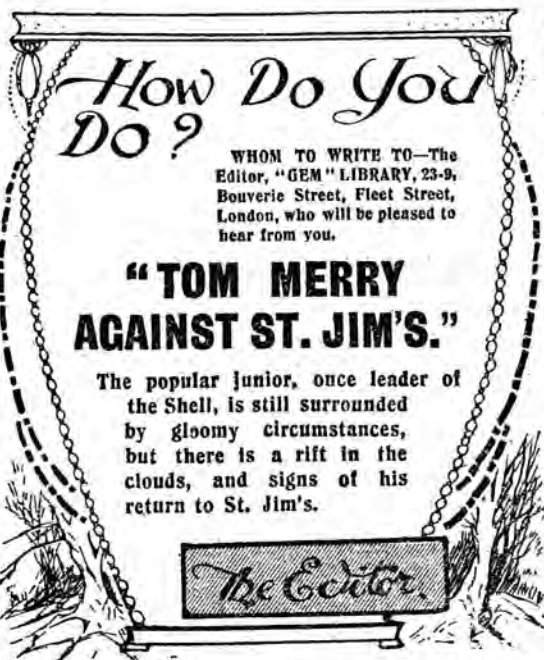
"My good people, this isn't a reception," he said. "I can't have my patient holding a levee like this. Come, clear out of it, every one of you! Sleep—everything depends on sleep! And how do you think he is going to get any sleep while you crowd round him like this? Mr. Maxwell, you are the officer in charge here—eh? Order all hands below! Yes, you, too, my dear; you go and rest. You'll be laid up yourself very soon," he added, in reply to Eva's entreaty to be allowed to stay. "There's Miss Norah waiting to come and take charge of this precious invalid. Now, come—come!"

The energetic little man drove all before him like a flock of sheep. Oswald could hear him bustling them down the stairs.

And then through the open door a slight, girlish figure, dressed in white, came stealing gently into the room.

For a moment she hesitated; then, as he turned and held out his arms to her, she came towards him quickly, with a flush in her cheeks.

(To be concluded next Thursday.)



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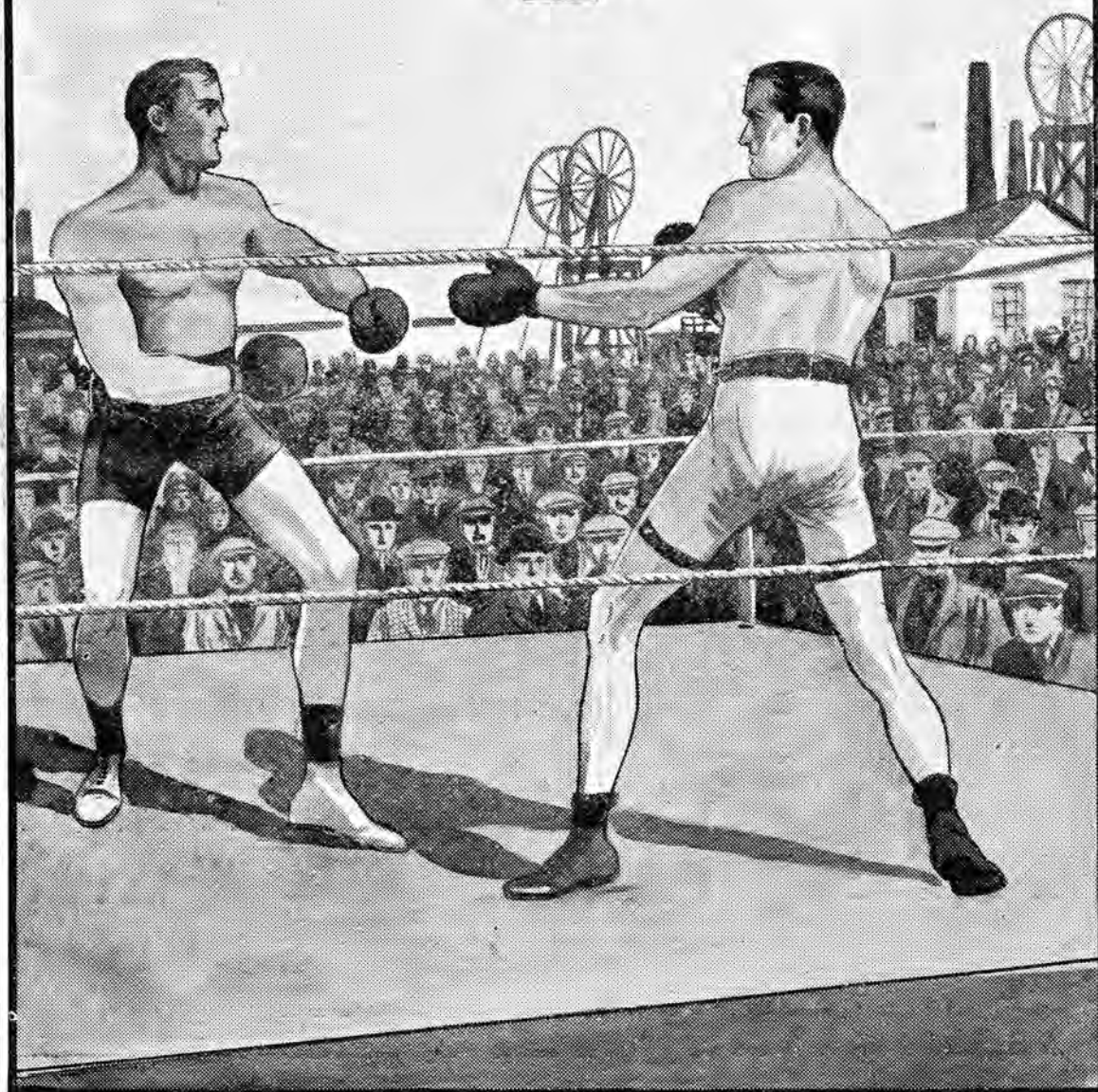
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