

"MR. MERRY."

A Splendid
Tale of the
Chums of
St. Jim's.

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NO. 153.

VOL. 5.



"On Monday I take up Mr. Selby's position of Master of the Third," said Tom Merry quietly. "Master of the Third!" gasped Wally D'Arcy, staggered. "M-m-m-my Form-Master!" (See page 4 inside.)

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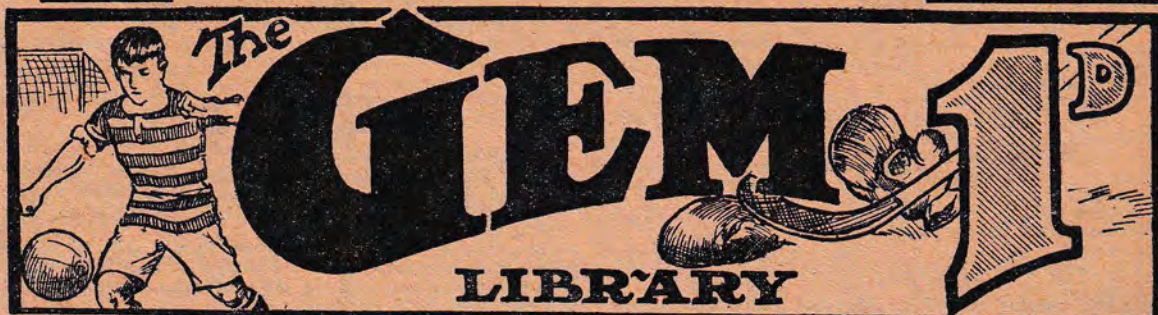
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CHAPTER 1.

Disgusted with Gussy.

"TOM MERRY here?"

Wally—D'Arcy minor, of the Third Form—looked into the Shell study as he asked the question.

It was the study that had belonged to Tom Merry, when the latter was at St. Jim's, and it was crowded at the present moment with Tom Merry's old friends.

The study was so crowded, as a matter of fact, that some of the fellows had no room or chairs to sit down, and were leaning against the mantelpiece, or standing with their hands in their pockets.

Manners and Lowther, Tom Merry's old chums in the Shell Form, were sitting on the table, not without danger to the tea-things. Tea was ready in the study, and the kettle was singing on the hob—all waiting for the arrival of the guest of the evening.

Blake, Digby, Herries, and Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, of the Fourth, occupied various chairs.

Figgins, Kerr, and Wynn, also of the Fourth—New House fellows—had found room in the study somehow. Kangaroo, the Cornstalk junior, was sitting on the window-seat. They were chatting—two or three at a time—when Wally, of the Third, looked in, most of them speaking, and very few listening. The buzz of talk stopped as the fag put his head in at the door, with his usual cheeky expression.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy jammed his eyeglass into his eye, and turned it upon his minor with considerable dignity.

"Weally, Wally—" he began.

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

"Weally—"

"Is Tom Merry here?"

"You say 'please,'" said D'Arcy major severely. "I am shocked and surprised at you, Wally! Aftah all the trouble I have taken with your mannahs—"

"Oh, rats!" said Wally cheerfully. "Come off, old son!"

Mr. MERRY

A Splendid, Long,
Complete School Tale of
the Juniors of St. Jim's.

BY

Martin Clifford.

D'Arcy gasped.

He could not think of a reply sufficiently crushing at a moment's notice, so he remained with his mouth open, without words coming forth; and Wally took advantage of it to go on:

"You see, I want to see Tom Merry. You know our Form-master is away now, and we're having some high jinks in the Form-room, now Selby's off the scent. Where's Tom Merry?"

"He's not here," said Blake.

Wally's keen eyes were gleaming round the Shell study.

"I was told he was here!" he exclaimed. "Where is he? I suppose you're standing that feed for Tom Merry?"

"Yaas, wathah!" said Arthur Augustus.

"Then you're off-side!" declared Wally. "We're standing Tom Merry a feed. As soon as I knew he was visiting St. Jim's, I made up my mind that the Third were going to do him down in A1 style, and while Selby's away is the opportunity we've been looking for."

"What a howwibly vulgah expression, Wally!"

"Rats! Tom Merry's coming to the Third Form-room to feed with us. We've got sardines and jam."

"Together?" asked Monty Lowther.

"Oh, don't be funny! Where's Tom Merry?"

"He's gone to see the Head."

"Blessed if I know what he wants to waste time on the Head for, when there's the Third Form to be considered!" said Wally peevishly. "Look here, it's understood, I suppose, that we're going to have him?"

"No fear!"

"Now, don't be an ass, Manners!"

"It will be understood that you're going to have a thick ear, if you don't buzz off!" exclaimed Manners.

"You cheeky young bounder—"

"Yaas, wathah! I must say I agree with Mannahs in chawctawisin' you as a cheeky young boundah, Wally! At the same time, I should not allow Mannahs to give my nash a thick ear."

A LONG, COMPLETE TALE OF TOM MERRY AGAIN NEXT THURSDAY

No. 153 (New Series.)

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"Oh, rats!" said Manners.

"If you say wats to me, Mannahs—"

"Well, I do; heaps of 'em!"

"Undah the cirs, then, I shall have to cowweat you, Mannahs. I am sowwy to intewwupt this convivial meetin' by thwashin' Mannahs—"

"Br-r-r-r!"

"I wegard that as an uttably widiculous wemark, Mannahs!"

"Br-r-r-r!"

"I considah you an ass!"

"Br-r-r-r!"

"If you make that widiculous noise at me again, Mannahs, I shall stwike you!"

"Br-r-r-r!"

"You uttah ass—"

"Br-r-r-r!"

Arthur Augustus rushed at Manners. Manners slipped off the table, and dodged round it.

"Stop, you ass!" shouted D'Arcy.

"Br-r-r-r!"

"Bai Jove!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, ring off!" said Wally, at the door. "Chuck it, you know. The question is— Ow! Leggo! Chuck it, you blessed kangaroo!"

Wally came into the study with a jump like a kangaroo himself, with the Cornstalk's grip on his collar.

"Chuck it!" he roared. "Oh— Yow! Gussy, you chump!"

"Oh!"

Arthur Augustus had rushed right into his minor in his frantic pursuit of Manners. The juniors burst into a roar.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Wally threw his arms around D'Arcy to save himself, and Kangaroo stepped out of the way. Major and minor rolled on the floor together.

"Ow!"

"Yawwoh!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Wally was undermost, but he soon altered that. He rolled his major off, and Arthur Augustus bumped on the carpet. The carpet, like most of the carpets in junior studies, was chiefly a receptacle for dust. D'Arcy's heavy bump upon it brought the dust up in clouds.

"Bai Jove!"

Wally scrambled up.

"You chump—"

"Ow! You awful young ass! My twousahs will be wuined!"

"Jolly good thing, too!"

"Wally, you young wuffian—"

"Oh, scat!"

"Bai Jove! Upon the whole, Mannahs, I shall be vewy pleased if you will kick that diswespectful young wuffian out of the study!"

"Certainly!" said Manners. "Anything to oblige!"

"Here, hands off!" said Wally. "Ow!"

A boot helped Wally into the passage. He turned in the doorway to tell the juniors his opinion of them. But the boot was rising again, and the hero of the Third Form scuttled down the passage instead.

Blake helped D'Arcy up. He helped him up by the collar, with the natural result that the collar tore away from the stud.

"Oh, Jemima!" exclaimed Blake, in great astonishment.

"There goes the collar!"

"You feahful ass!"

"Is that what you call gratitude?" exclaimed Blake indignantly.

"Weally, Blake—"

"I think we all ought to observe that we're shocked at Gussy getting into a state like this and creating disturbances on such a festive occasion," Monty Lowther remarked.

"Weally, Lowthah—"

"I put it to all the fellows," said Lowther: "Are we disgusted with Gussy? Every chap in favour of the motion will signify the same by putting up his hand."

Every hand went up.

"You uttah asses—"

"Do we consider Gussy a dusty, disreputable bounder? Every one in favour of the motion will signify the same by turning up his nose."

"Weally—"

Every nose was turned up. The facial contortions this led to were almost alarming.

"Weally, you feahful asses—"

"We're disgusted with you, Gussy!"

"I wegard you—"

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"We refuse to be regarded by a person who disgusts us," said Monty Lowther loftily. "The best thing you can do is to retire from the study and get a clean collar!"

And, under the circumstances, Arthur Augustus thought so, too.

CHAPTER 2.

A Task for Tom Merry.

TOM MERRY was in the Head's study.

The Head was speaking to Mr. Railton, the master of the School House—Tom Merry's House-master before the lad left St. Jim's.

Tom Merry stood silent.

As a matter of fact, his mind was in a whirl. Since the ruin of his fortunes, which had compelled him to leave St. Jim's, the lad had had no hope of returning to the old school.

He had come back there this day to play in a footer match, but with no idea of remaining. He had been surprised and pleased when Mr. Railton had told him that a post had been found for him at St. Jim's, where he could earn his living while remaining at the old school.

Needless to say, Tom Merry had gladly accepted the offer.

Mr. Railton took him to the Head's study, and Tom Merry was waiting now to hear what was the post that was offered him.

He could not imagine what it was.

But he was quite content to accept any position that Mr. Railton considered advisable for him. He knew that he could not have a truer friend than his old House-master.

The Head turned to Tom Merry as Mr. Railton finished speaking.

"You are willing to accept a post here, then, Merry?"

"Yes, sir," said Tom Merry brightly.

"It will mean hard work."

"I'm prepared to work hard, sir."

"It will mean many difficulties."

"If you think I'm good enough, sir—"

"I think you can make the attempt, at all events," said Dr. Holmes. "I will tell you what we have thought of for you, and if you care to attempt it, you can do so with my best wishes."

"Yes, sir."

"Mr. Selby, the master of the Third Form, has been allowed to leave for his health. It would be necessary for me to take a substitute in his place while he is away. It has occurred to me that you might take his place."

Tom Merry started.

Mr. Selby, the master of the Form of which Wally was an ornament, was not a popular master, having a bad digestion and a bad temper; but it had to be admitted that he had many trials in the Third Form. Wally & Co. were not what could be considered ideal pupils by any master.

"Now, I think you are quite sufficiently advanced to take charge of the Third Form temporarily," said the Head. "You were the top of your Form, and practically ready to pass into the Fifth. You could take charge of the Third, so far as instruction went, if you cared; and the question is whether you could get the juniors to respect and obey you. Would you care to make the attempt?"

"Certainly, sir!"

Tom Merry's reply was without hesitation.

The task proposed to him might be onerous and very difficult, but Tom Merry was not one to shrink from it on that account.

He would make the attempt, at least, and if he failed, it would only be after he had done his best.

"If you are successful with the Third Form," resumed the Head, "I do not say that the same position here may be permanent, but I shall undoubtedly be able to get you a post in some such capacity. I shall be putting you to the test. It is not the career that was intended for you, but—"

"But it is a great opening for a fellow without resources, sir," said Tom Merry. "I can't say how much I thank you, sir—you and Mr. Railton!"

"Not at all!" said the Head. "I will have a notice put up to the effect that, from Monday morning, you will take charge of the Third Form, and will occupy the Third Form-master's place in every way. It depends upon yourself what success you make of the matter."

"I shall do my best, sir."

"I am sure of that, Merry. While in this post, you will use the masters'-room, of course, and you will use your judgment as to the degree of intimacy you keep up with boys in junior Forms."

"Yes, sir."

And the Head and Mr. Railton shook hands with Tom Merry, and he left the study, with his brain in something of a whirl.

To take the place of Mr. Selby was about the last thing he had thought of.

Tom Merry, Form-master!

He could not help smiling at the thought.

Master of the Third! He would be "Mr. Merry" now to the fags; and he wondered how they would take it.

After all, Wally and the rest were fond of him; he had always been popular with the fags. He was sure they would back him up. Doubtless there would be little ruffles and ripples of trouble, owing to the exuberant spirits of the fags, but he had no doubt that with a judicious combination of kindness and firmness he would be able to smooth matters down.

At all events, it was a chance—a great chance.

If he satisfied the Head, he would keep the position until Mr. Selby returned, and then he would be recommended to some other and similar post. The Head of St. Jim's had a far-reaching influence in such matters.

It might be the making of his future.

True, it was not the future Tom Merry had dreamed of. Like most boys, he had had all kinds of vague dreams of the future. He had thought of the sea—of white sails glancing on blue waters—of travel in distant lands—of pulling in his College-boat—of many things that were not likely now to come to pass.

But he did not repine now that the visions were over.

To a lad who had tramped the streets of London without a copper or a crust, the position that was offered him was splendid.

And Tom Merry had not forgotten how to be grateful.

He made his way slowly towards the old study in the Shell passage. He wondered how his chums would take the news.

They would be on a different footing in the future, of course. But for to-day they would be on the old lines, and he would be a junior among the juniors. Monday could take care of itself, for the present.

A youth with big spectacles and a bumpy forehead met him in the Shell passage, and extended a bony hand to grip a button and stop him.

It was Skimpole, the genius of the Shell.

"Dear me," said Skimpole. "I am glad you are still here, Tom Merry. Before you leave the school, I wish to present you with a splendid volume which clearly demonstrates the truth of the great science of Determinism. I wish you to keep it as a souvenir. It will comfort you in times of trouble. When small cares oppress a fellow, there is endless consolation in the great truths of science, in reflecting on the origin of the human race, and—"

"Thanks very much, Skimmy!" said Tom Merry, laughing. "But I'm not leaving St. Jim's."

"Dear me! I am very pleased. Are you coming back into the Shell?"

"No; I've got a post here."

"How good! Have you come into your money again?"

"No; I'm as poor as a church mouse still."

"It is very hard, Merry. Under Socialism, of course, all cash will be nationalised, and everybody will be as rich as everybody else, or perhaps a little richer."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"It is very fortunate that you are not leaving St. Jim's, as I want a good long talk with you on the subject of evolution. I have just been trying to explain the matter to Gore, and he says he's quite willing to believe that I descended from an apelike creature of prehistoric times, because he can trace a family resemblance in my features, but he denies the truth of it so far as he is concerned—"

"Go hon!"

"When I pointed out the various low and animal traits in his character, as proof of my statement, he became annoyed for some reason, and so violent that I left the study. I will show you some notes I made from Professor Balm-crumpet's work on Determinism, showing that everything which exists in a certain state, exists in that state and in no other until it changes its form in some manner."

And Skimpole, the scientific genius, went through his pockets carefully, pocket after pocket, searching for those valuable notes.

He was several minutes finding them.

"Here they are!" he exclaimed, looking round for Tom Merry again. "Listen—oh, dear! Merry, where are you? I really think it is almost rude of Merry to depart without warning while I am looking for my notes."

And Skimpole drifted away sadly.

Tom Merry had hurried on to his study while he had the opportunity. Skimpole, like most persons who deal largely in "isms," was a portentous bore.

There was a shout of welcome as Tom Merry entered the study.

"Here he is!"

"Come on, Tommy; tea's ready!"

And half a dozen welcoming hands seized Tom Merry to push him into the seat of honour at the hospitable board.

CHAPTER 3.

What Larks!

"TEA for Tommy!"

"Pass the ham!"

"And the bacon!"

"And the eggs!"

"And the toast!"

"Help yourself, Tommy, my son!"

"Pile in!"

Tom Merry laughed.

"Oh, draw it mild!" he exclaimed. "I'm not going to lay in provisions for a siege, you know. Give a chap a chance."

"You're going on a long journey, you know."

"I'm not."

"What!"

"I'm staying at St. Jim's."

The juniors stared at him.

They did not take in the full force of the statement for a moment, but when they did, there was a rush for him.

Tom Merry had a cup of tea in his hand, but in their enthusiasm the juniors did not stop to think about that.

They collared the hero of the Shell and simply hugged him, and slapped him on the back, and shook his hands, and poked him in the ribs.

"Yaroo!" roared Tom Merry, as the hot tea swamped over his waistcoat. "Yaroo! Stop it! Yow! Help!"

"Good old Tommy!"

"Not out after all!"

"Hurrah!"

"Leggo!" roared Tom Merry. "Yaroo! Leggo!"

The study door opened.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, looking extremely spick and span in a new collar and a carefully dusted jacket, stood upon the threshold. His eyeglass gleamed upon the excited juniors.

"Bai Jove!" he ejaculated.

"Leggo, you asses—"

"Bravo!"

"Hurrah!"

"Weally, deah boys, it's not good form to wamplie a fellow's clothes when he comes to pay you a visit," said Arthur Augustus disapprovingly. "Pway don't be excited. It's wathah wotten taste to get excited, anyhow."

"He's staying!" roared Kangaroo

"What!"

"Staying at St. Jim's!" yelled Figgins.

"Bai Jove!"

"My hat! We'll have to stand a splendid feed to celebrate this!" ejaculated Fatty Wynn.

"Yes, rather!"

"Hurrah!"

"Bai Jove, I congwatulate you, Tom Mewwy, and us, too!" exclaimed D'Arcy. "I wegard it as wippin' good news! At the same time, I considah it wot to thwow a chap's tea ovah his waistcoat."

"Rats!"

"Weally, Kerr—"

Tom Merry, very much ruffled, sat in his chair again, and dabbed his waistcoat with his handkerchief. He was ruddy and laughing.

"Well, I'm glad you're glad!" he exclaimed. "But don't ever be any gladder, or you'll ruin me in clothes."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"But I say, it's ripping!" exclaimed Monty Lowther, with beaming eyes. "You're really, truly staying at St. Jim's!"

"Really, truly!"

"Hurrah!"

"Hip-hip-hurrah!"

"Yaas, I must wemark that I wegard it as wippin'."

"It will be glorious to have you back in the Shell again, old chap," said Manners affectionately. "Things have gone to rot in the Form since you left."

"Yes, rather," said Lowther. "Even these Fourth Form kinds are beginning to get their ears up at footer."

"Weally, Lowthah—"

"Oh, rats!" said Figgins.

"But I'm not coming back into the Shell, kids," said Tom Merry.

"What! Passed into the Fifth?"

"No!"

"What, then?"

"Bai Jove! It isn't poss. that you have been put in the Fourth—weduced to the wanks!" exclaimed D'Arcy.

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Another Splendid, Long, Complete School Tale of Tom Merry & Co.

NEXT THURSDAY: "TOM MERRY'S RETURN TO ST. JIM'S."

Tom Merry smiled.

"No."

"Then what do you mean?" demanded Blake.

"I'm not coming back as a pupil at all."

"Oh!"

"I'm taking a job here."

"A— a job!"

"Yes."

"My hat!" gasped Lowther. "You don't mean to say you've taken on the job Binks chucked up, when he came into his money?"

"Ha, ha! No. I'm not going to be boots."

"Wathah not!"

"Then what are you?"

"Form-master."

"Hey?"

"What?"

"Which?"

"I'm temporary master of the Third Form, while Mr. Selby is away for his health."

"My only hat!"

"Gweat Scott!"

"My word!"

"Are you joking?"

"Serious as a giddy judge, my sons," said Tom Merry. "Temporary master of the Third. I'm going to have the unalloyed delight of instructing Wally. Don't you envy me?"

"Bai Jove!"

The juniors were silent. They could not imagine Tom Merry as a Form-master. They could only stare at him and wonder.

Monty Lowther broke the silence at last.

"Well, I'm blessed," he said. "Have you got the nerve?"

"I hope so."

"You're really going to try it?"

"Yes."

"Wally was here a few minutes ago," said Lowther. "He wanted to take you to tea in the Third Form room. It seems that they're getting up great junks there while their Form-master's gone. While the cat's away, you know."

"H'm!"

"He didn't guess that it was his future Form-master he was inviting," grinned Manners.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Bai Jove, I shall have to give Wally some instruction in tweekin' Tom Mewwy with pwopah respect!"

"Lot of difference that will make."

"Weally, Lowthah—"

There was a kick at the door, and it flew open. The cheery, cheeky face of Wally D'Arcy looked into the Shell study once more. He grinned at the juniors, and gave Tom Merry a cool nod.

"Oh, here you are!" he exclaimed. "I've come back for you. We want you to come to tea in the Form-room. We're standing jam and sardines. Jameson's got a tip from his uncle, and we're blueing the lot, and I've sold Curly Gibson's white rabbits. You'll come, won't you?"

"Weally, Wally—"

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

"Weally, Wally, you young wascal, Tom Mewwy cannot possibly come. In the first place, he is engaged with us."

"Oh, you old fogies don't count! Besides, I suppose Tom Merry can eat more than one tea. I know I can."

"It is not only that—"

"We've got jam and sardines—"

"Weally, Wally—"

"Sardines and jam, you know."

"Tom Mewwy cannot possibly come, because it would be infwa dig, for a Form-mastah to take tea with his pupils."

"Off your rocker?" asked Wally pleasantly.

"It's a fact," said Tom Merry quietly. "On Monday I take up Mr. Selby's position, temporarily."

Wally looked dazed.

He knew that Tom Merry would never utter an untruth, whether seriously or in joke, so he could not but believe the statement.

And it simply staggered him.

"You—you mean it?" he said faintly.

"Certainly."

"You're taking old Selby's place?"

"Yes."

"Master of the Third?"

"Exactly."

"M-m-m-my Form-master!"

"Yes, your Form-master, Wally!"

Wally stared at Tom Merry for some seconds in silence. Then he burst into a wild roar.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Weally, Wally—" remonstrated his major, shocked.

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"Ha, ha, ha!" shrieked Wally. "I must go and tell Jameson and Curly this! Ha, ha, ha! What larks! Ha, ha, ha!"

And the fag simply staggered away, shrieking with merriment, and the last words the chums heard as he departed were:

"What larks!"

CHAPTER 4.

D'Arcy Speaks a Few Words to the Third.

TOM MERRY finished his tea in the Shell study in silence.

His appointment to the post of Form-master of the Third had struck Wally in the sense of being wonderfully comical.

What larks! That had been the worthy Wally's view of it. What larks! It showed that the fag was not likely to take Tom Merry's Form-mastership in a very serious spirit.

And if Wally took it like this, what would the other fags be like?

Tom Merry wondered.

Wally liked him well, and would always back him up; he knew that. But Wally would back him up in his own way. That was equally certain.

And Wally's way would probably not be a way that "Mr. Merry" could approve of.

Tom Merry was silent and thoughtful.

The juniors left the study after tea, Figgins & Co. going back to their own House to carry the astonishing news there, much to the amazement and incredulity of Third Form boys who belonged to the New House, and some of whom loudly declared at once that they would not stand it.

Blake & Co. went downstairs discussing the matter, leaving the Terrible Three alone in their study. Manners and Lowther were serious. There might be a humorous side to the matter, but naturally it did not appeal very much to Tom Merry, and his chums sympathised with him too much to take the matter in a light spirit.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was just as considerate and thoughtful as either of Tom Merry's chums in the Shell. The wrinkle in his aristocratic brow showed that he was thinking the matter over very seriously.

"You fellows wemembah what young Wally said as he went away?" the swell of St. Jim's remarked, after a long and thoughtful pause.

"Yes, the young bounder."

"Yaas, I must admit that my minah is wathah a boundah; but you have noticed, of course, that I have a gweat deal of eldah-bwothahly influence ovah him."

"Can't say I have," said Digby.

"Weally, Dig—"

"Nor I, either," said Herries. "By the way, would you chaps care to come and see me feed Towser?"

"Rats!"

"Yaas, wathah! Wats, Hewwies!"

So Herries, with a snort, went off alone to feed Towser, and Arthur Augustus D'Arcy resumed the thread of his discourse.

"I have been thinkin' that it would be my dutay to speak to Wally, and the Third Form genewally, and impress upon them the fact that they ought to tweek Tom Mewwy with pwopah respect when he takes up the posish of Form-mastah on Monday. What do you think of the ideah, Blake?"

"Rotten!" said Blake, with cheerful frankness.

"Weally, Blake—"

"You'll only get guyed, you see."

"I should uttably wefuse to be guyed!"

"My dear ass—"

"I decline to be called an ass!"

And Arthur Augustus walked away in great dignity. Blake and Digby and Kangaroo joined a crowd that had gathered round the notice-board.

There was already a notice there in the Head's hand.

It stated concisely that Mr. Selby's absence owing to ill-health would be prolonged, and that Thomas Merry would take his place, in charge of the Third Form, until further arrangements.

The whole School House was reading the notice in amazement.

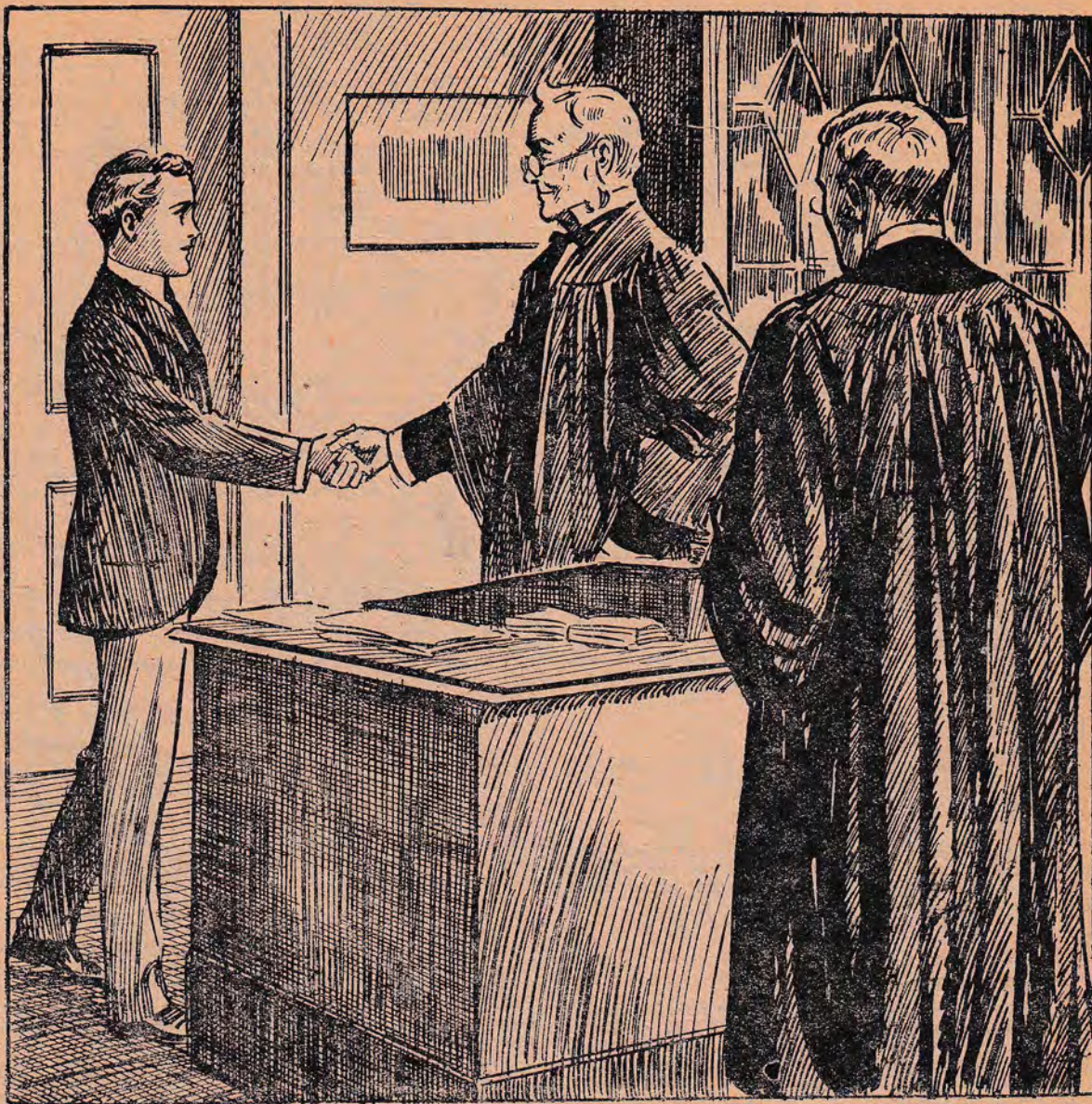
A similar notice was posted up in the New House for the benefit of Third Form boys who boarded in that establishment.

The school received the news with wonder, but most of the fellows were glad that Tom Merry was staying, upon whatever terms he stayed.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy passed the interested crowd at the notice-board, and made his way to the Third Form-room.

He knocked at the door, in his punctilious way.

"Come in, fathead!" sang out a voice, which he recognised as that of his younger brother.



"From Monday morning, you will take charge of the Third Form, Merry," said Dr. Holmes, shaking hands with the one-time leader of the Shell. "I shall do my best, sir," said Tom Merry, gratefully. (See page 2.)

With a heightened colour, the swell of St. Jim's entered the Form-room.

It was crowded with fags.

Wally had related the wonderful news, and it gathered the Third Form together as of old the fiery cross gathered the Highland clans.

The general point of view taken was well expressed in Wally's own words:

"What larks!"

With a Middle School fellow for Form-master, the Third thought that they would be able to do as they liked.

While Mr. Selby was away they had been under the charge of prefects; and Knox, who had been in charge of them that day, was a most unpleasant fellow and a bully.

Knox would not be able to interfere with them when they had a Form-master again. And if their Form-master was Tom Merry, all would be serene. They did not think that the Shell fellow would inspire much terror.

Diggs declared that everything in the garden would be lovely, and Hardy had already gone to fetch his white rabbits into the Form-room. A game of leap-frog had been proposed, seconded, and passed unanimously, when the swell of the Fourth presented himself. He was greeted with a far from friendly glare.

"Blessed Fourth-Former!" said Jameson. "What does he want?"

"Weally, Jameson——"

"Want anything, Gus, old son?" asked Wally.

"That is not a respectful way to address your majah, Wally."

"Rats!"

"Weally, you young wascal——"

"I say, D'Arcy minor, we can't stand about listening to your relations," said Curly Gibson. "Let's play."

"Right you are."

"I insist upon your listening to me, Wally."

"Oh, do ring off!" said Wally indignantly. "It's rotten for me to have a brother in the Fourth, anyway, without the chap coming here to bore us."

"You young wagamuffin——"

"Come on!" shouted Jameson.

"Pway listen to me!"

"Will you play a game of leap-frog with us, Gussy?" asked his minor.

"Bai Jove! Leap-frog!"

D'Arcy's hair fairly bristled on his head at the indignity in the idea of his playing leap-frog with fags.

"Yes; come on."

"You young wuffians!"
 "My hat!" said Curly Gibson. "I can't say you paid much attention to your brother's manners when you brought him up, young D'Arcy."
 "Shocking!" said Jameson.
 "Bai Jove!"
 "Get out, Gussy, old man."
 "I refuse to get out. I've come here to impress upon you—"

"Rats!"
 "To impress upon you the importance of tweekin'—"
 "Outside!"
 "Collar him!"
 "Make him play!"
 "Ha, ha, ha!"

The fags, yelling with laughter, closed in a crowd round Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. The swell of the Fourth almost foamed with indignation.

"Hands off, you howwid young wascals!" he shouted. "I came here to speak a few words—"

"Well, you've spoken 'em!"
 "Ha, ha, ha!"
 "Make a back, Gussy!"
 "Tuck in your tuppenny!"
 "Ha, ha, ha!"

Arthur Augustus struggled violently. To be told to make a back, and to tuck in his tuppenny, was more than the blood of the D'Arcys could stand.

But the struggles of the elegant junior were futile against the overwhelming numbers of the Third.

They dragged him down the room, and he was bent over; and as he stood, hardly knowing where he was or what he was doing, in his bewilderment, Wally took a flying leap over him.

"Come on!" shouted Wally. "Follow your leader."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Jameson followed. Arthur Augustus rose at the same moment, and Jameson went backwards instead of forwards, and sat down.

There was a roar.

"Yow!" howled Jameson.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Bai Jove! You young wottahs—"

"Yow! I'm hurt!" howled Jameson. "Bump him! He did that on purpose! Bump him! Bump the beast! Yow!"

"You howwid young wuffians—"

"Bump him!"

"Bump the cad!"

Arthur Augustus fought for his life. Fags scrambled over him like ants. The uproar was terrific; and in the midst of it the Form-room door opened, and the furious face of Knox glared into the room.

CHAPTER 5.

The New Form-master.

KNOX glared at the fags, and the fags ceased their disturbance for a moment and glared back at Knox. They weren't afraid of the bullying prefect now. They had a brand-new Form-master to oppose to him.

"You young villains!" roared Knox. "What do you mean by kicking up all this din?"

"Only a little fun," said Wally.

"Ow!" murmured D'Arcy.

Arthur Augustus was on the floor, and nine or ten of the fags were sitting on him to keep him there safely.

There was very little of the swell of St. Jim's to be seen—a red and dusty face, from which the eyeglass had disappeared, and a hand, and a boot.

The rest of him had disappeared under the swarm of fags.

Knox strode into the room. Wally's cool reply had not diminished his temper by any means.

"Now then, you young rotters—"

"Hold on, Knox! You're not in charge now."

"What?"

"We've got a new Form-master."

The prefect started.

He had read the notice in the hall, and laughed a sneering laugh over it. Knox had disliked Tom Merry intensely while the lad was at St. Jim's, and the dislike had not been decreased by absence.

That Tom Merry should make a success of his mastership of the Third he did not desire in the least, even if he had considered it probable—which he did not.

He paused, and the scowl passed from his hard face, giving place to a grim and jeering grin.

"Oh!" he said.

"So you've done with us," said Wally. "You can report us to our Form-master if you like."

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Knox chuckled softly.

"Very well, I shall do so," he said.

And he went out of the Form-room, still chuckling.

If Knox could manage it Tom Merry would have his hands full on the first occasion that he essayed to act as Form-master to the Third, and would make a ghastly failure of the whole business. That was the prefect's kindly hope and intention.

There was a chuckle of triumph in the Third Form-room, too, as the prefect went out.

The Third Form rejoiced.

"What larks!" exclaimed Jameson.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Bai Jove! You young wascals, I ordah you to welease me at once!"

"No fear!"

"Weally, you feahful young boundahs—"

"Ha, ha! Bump him!"

"Bai Jove!"

Bump! Bump!

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Knox heard the terrific din as he departed. He grinned cheerfully, and made his way to the Shell study, where Tom Merry was chatting with Manners and Lowther.

The Terrible Three looked up as Knox came in.

They were ready for trouble at once. But Knox had an extremely polite manner.

"I understand that you are master of the Third Form now, Merry?" he said.

"Yes," said Tom Merry.

"Then you had better look after your Form," said the prefect. "They are raising a shindy in the Form-room."

"Oh?"

"I leave it entirely with you, Mr. Merry," said the prefect, with a grin.

And he went out of the study before Tom Merry could reply.

"Phew!" said Manners. "You'll be beginning your duties early, Tom."

Tom Merry rose to his feet.

"I suppose I'd better go," he said.

"We'll come and back you up."

Tom Merry shook his head.

"No, you'd better not," he said. "I shall go as a Form-master, but you fellows are only chaps in the Shell. They might look on it as a Form raid."

And Tom Merry left the study alone.

He hurried to the Third Form-room, in a very dubious state of mind as to what he should do when he arrived there. It was his first essay at keeping a disorderly junior Form in order.

The din from the Form-room was echoing up the passage as Tom Merry approached the door.

He opened the door, and stepped in, and closed it again behind him immediately, to shut off the noise as well as possible from the rest of the House.

Clouds of dust were flying in the Form-room, and in the midst of it he caught sight of arms and legs and heads and Eton jackets indiscriminately mixed.

"Bai Jove!" came a faint voice from the writhing heap of humanity. "Welease me, you wottahs! You uttah young wascals, welease me at once!"

"Gussy!" exclaimed Tom Merry.

"Bai Jove! Wescue, Tom Mewwy! Wescue, deah boy!"

"Boys!"

Tom Merry thundered out the word in the deepest tone he could assume.

It made some of the fags jump, and Wally looked round.

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"Oh, keep it up, kids!" he exclaimed. "It's only old Tom!"

"What larks!" grinned Jameson.

Bump!

"Bai Jove! Wescue!"

"Stop that immediately!" exclaimed Tom Merry.

"Oh, rats!"

"Clear out, you Shell bounder!"

"We'll bump you, too!"

"Ow! Wescue!"

Tom Merry's mind was made up at once.

He strode towards the struggling group and grasped Wally by the collar, with a jerk of his strong arm he dragged the leader of the fags away and hurled him to the hearthrug. Then he grasped Jameson, and hurled him after Wally. Curly Gibson followed. But by this time the fags were scrambling round Tom Merry in an extremely warlike way.

"Hands off!" roared Diggs. "You Shell bounder——"

Smack!

A box on the ear caused Diggs to stop suddenly.

There was a threatening yell from the Third.

"Down him!"

"Bump him!"

Tom Merry faced the horde of infuriated fags with all the dignity of attitude he could muster at so short a notice.

"Boys!"

"Oh, rats!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Don't try to palm that off on us, old man!"

"Yah!"

"Boys!"

"Yah!"

"Boo!"

"Rats!"

"Go home!"

"Boys!" repeated Tom Merry firmly. "I am your Form-master now. Stand back! Mind, if any boy here should lay a finger upon me I should have to report him to the Head for a flogging!"

The fags drew back involuntarily at that.

Certainly, if Tom Merry was a Form-master now, any violence shown towards him would be followed by a flogging at least.

Even Wally hesitated.

"Oh, come off, Tom Merry!" he exclaimed. "You don't expect us to take that, do you? You can call yourself a Form-master if you like; but, as a matter of fact, you're only Tom Merry."

"Mr. Merry!" said Tom severely.

"What?"

"You must call me Mr. Merry in future."

"Rats!" yelled the Third.

Tom frowned.

"Order!" he exclaimed. "The next boy who interrupts me or speaks in a disrespectful manner will take fifty lines."

"Oh, go home!"

Tom Merry flashed round towards the speaker.

"Who spoke?"

"I did!" said Jameson defiantly.

"Take fifty lines, Jameson."

"Rats!"

"Take a hundred."

"More rats!"

"Here, draw it mild!" whispered Curly Gibson. "Remember what was on the Head's notice in the hall, you know. Don't be an ass!"

Tom Merry looked steadily at Jameson.

"Jameson, you will come with me immediately to the Head's study unless you beg my pardon at once."

"I won't!"

"Very well. I will take you."

"Rescue, chaps!" shouted Jameson.

The Third made a movement forward.

"Very well!" said Tom Merry quietly. "I will call in the prefects!"

And he stepped to the door and threw it open.

CHAPTER 6.

Order.

THE Third Form stood astounded, dumbfounded for a minute.

Tom Merry stood with his hand on the open door regarding them. His face was hard and set. Tom Merry knew perfectly well that if he was to have any authority over the Third Form at all it must be established now.

The fags stood looking at him like young tigers. He might be their temporary Form-master, by order of the Head. But they could not dissociate him in their minds from the old Tom Merry of the Shell whom they had known, and

whom they had cheeked often enough, thereby taking advantage of his good nature.

But it was a changed Tom Merry who stood looking at them now.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy had risen to his feet, very dusty and rumbled. He stood looking on in amazement. His eyeglass had been smashed in the scuffle, and he was groping in his pockets for another.

"Are you coming with me, Jameson?" asked Tom Merry quietly.

"No!" howled Jameson.

"Better go!" whispered Diggs.

"I won't!"

"Very well. Kildare! Darrel!"

As a Form-master, Tom Merry had a perfect right to call upon the prefects to aid in maintaining order in his Form. There was no doubt, when the Third came to think of it, that Kildare and Darrel and Rushden would come to his aid at once. And the boldest of the fags fairly shivered at the idea of the Form-room being invaded by angry prefects with canes.

"I say, hold on!" exclaimed Wally quickly. "My only Aunt Jane! We don't want a row, you know."

"I—I'll come with you if you like!" gasped Jameson.

A voice called from the passage. It was Darrel's.

"Anybody want me?"

"It's all right!" called back Tom Merry.

And he stepped into the Form-room again and closed the door.

The fags of the Third were looking very sheepish. They had felt the iron hand in the velvet glove already.

"You are ready to come with me, Jameson, if I do not call in the prefects?" asked Tom Merry quietly.

"Ye-e-es!" stammered Jameson.

"Very well. If you prefer to ask pardon, and to do your imposition—Tom Merry very nearly said 'impot,' but stopped himself in time—"I will excuse you this once."

Jameson looked dubious. He glanced at Wally for guidance.

"Beg pardon, you ass!" muttered Wally.

"But——"

"You ass! Beg his pardon at once. What do you mean by cheeking a Form-master, anyway?" demanded Wally.

Jameson nearly staggered at that question.

"I beg your pardon, Tom Merry!" he faltered.

"Mr. Merry!" said Tom.

"I—I mean, Mr. Merry."

"Very well. You will show up your hundred lines on Monday, Jameson. Now, boys, all this disorder must cease at once!"

"Yes, Tom!"

"Yes, sir, please!"

"Yes, sir!" said the Third, with lamblike docility.

"If I hear any more noise in this Form-room," said Tom Merry, "I shall come back, and then you will get impositions all round. D'Arcy, kindly leave before I do."

"Yaas, wathah!"

Arthur Augustus had found his spare eyeglass, and he jammed it into his eye. He gave the grinning Third an indignant look, and then fixed his monocle upon Tom Merry.

"Thank you vewy much for wescuin' me fwom that extremely unpleasant posish," he said. "These young vascals——"

"That will do, D'Arcy!"

"What?"

"Please retire from the room."

"Certainly, deah boy."

"You must call me Mr. Merry."

"Eh?"

"Now, please go!"

"Ya-a-a-as, wathah!" stammered the swell of St. Jim's

"B-b-but——"

"Come, come, go!"

"Bai Jove! I came here to speak a few words to these young boundahs, you know, and to point out to them the necessity of tweekin' their Form-mastah with wescue!"

"Thank you, D'Arcy, but it was not at all necessary. I can manage my Form myself," said Tom Merry severely. "You may go."

"M-m-may go!"

"Exactly!"

"Weally, Tom Mewwy——"

"You must call me 'sir' when addressing me!"

"Bai Jove!"

And Arthur Augustus, in a state of great astonishment, moved to the door—and so bewildered was he, that he walked right into the door instead of opening it.

"Bai Jove!" he ejaculated again.

Then he retired from the Third Form-room, leaving the

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Third grinning. But their grins faded away as Tom Merry looked at them with a severe face.

"Mind, no more disorder, or you'll hear from me," said Mr. Merry.

"Oh!"

Tom Merry left the Form-room. The fags looked at one another in grim silence, some too astounded, and some too angry to speak.

"Well, my only Aunt Jane!" exclaimed Wally, at last. "It won't be such larks after all! Tom Merry—ahem, Mr. Merry!—means business."

"The rotter!"

"The beast!"

"Rats! He's neither, and you know it. He's minding his business, and he's quite in the right, and you jolly well know it," said Wally unexpectedly. "He's going to make us toe the line, if he can."

"He can't!" said Jameson fiercely.

"He's jolly well made you do it."

"Oh, shut up!"

"But we're not going to take this lying down," said Wally decidedly. "He'll be as bad as old Selby if we let him get his ears up like this. I don't blame him—but we're not going to stand it!"

"Hear, hear!" shouted the Third.

"Are we downhearted?"

"No!"

"On Monday mornings," said Wally impressively, "we'll start. We'll give Mr. Merry the doing of his life. What do you say?"

"Hurrah!"

And the Third gave a cheer for Wally and the proposed "doing," and a deep, deep groan for Mr. Merry.

CHAPTER 7.

What Lowther Did.

SUNDAY was a very quiet day to "Mr. Merry." He spent it with his chums for the most part, attending service in the beautiful old chapel at St. Jim's, as in the old days.

For the one day he was Tom Merry again; for even the unruly Third were not inclined to give trouble on that day, and Tom Merry's real duties did not commence until the morrow.

To the morrow Tom looked forward with some little apprehension, which, however, he concealed very well.

His new dignity sat very queerly upon him; but no doubt he would grow more accustomed to it in time, and, as Lowther remarked, he would learn to make allowances for Mr. Selby's consistent bad temper towards the Third.

The Terrible Three took a quiet walk in the meadows after service on Sunday afternoon. There was frost on the grass, and frost on the leafless trees. The afternoon was cold, and the wind keen, but the Terrible Three felt very cheerful. The solemn service had left an impression upon their minds. And they were all three together again, and that meant a great deal to the chums who had always been inseparable.

"It's ripping to have you back again, Tommy," Manners remarked, for about the tenth time.

"And it's ripping for me to be here, old son," said Tom Merry. "I jolly well wish I were coming back into the Shell, that's all."

"Yes, rather!" said Lowther, with a sigh.

"Though I suppose we shouldn't remain in the Shell much longer," Tom Merry remarked. "We shall be getting our remove into the Fifth."

"Giddy seniors!" said Lowther. "I wonder what it will feel like?"

"Well, I shall never know, I suppose, as I jumped straight from being a junior to being a Form-master," said Tom Merry, with a smile. "I jolly well hope I shall make a success of it in the Third, that's all."

"We'll back you up, old son."

"I don't see what you can do, except to take the situation seriously, and keep the fellows from making fun of Mister Merry," said Tom. "I shall have to depend on myself in the Third Form-room."

"I suppose so."

"I think I shall be able to keep my end up. After all, the fags like me, and they'll toe the line when they find out that I'm in earnest. And I'm jolly glad to be back at St. Jim's on any terms. You don't know how I've missed the old place."

"I can guess, Tom."

"I wish I could do something for that chap who helped me in London when I was on the rocks," said Tom Merry wistfully. "You remember that little ragamuffin at Blucher's Buildings—young Joe."

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"He was an awful little toad to look at," said Manners.

"He was the only friend I found there."

"He introduced you to a pickpocket, didn't he, as a way of helping you on?" said Lowther, with a grin.

"Poor Joe! He was brought up among such things, and he never knew any better," said Tom. "That's what I'd save him from, if I could—show him a better way to live, and teach him decent things. But I suppose I shall never be able to help anybody now. It's all I can do to help myself."

"Luck may change."

Tom Merry laughed.

"I don't see how. You see, all Miss Fawcett's money, and all mine, was swept away in that speculation which she invested in. Of course, she was led into it by that villain Crooke."

"The respected parent of Crooke of the Shell, here at St. Jim's," Manners commented.

"I wouldn't say a word to Crooke about it," said Tom Merry hastily. "He can't help what his father does."

"I know jolly well he's a chip of the old block. He lends money at interest among the fellows."

"I'd jolly soon stop that if I were captain of the Shell again," said Tom Merry, with a frown. "But never mind Crooke. His father ruined us, but I can't think it will do the man any good. Honesty is the best policy, all the time."

"Haven't you heard from Miss Fawcett's brother—"

"Uncle Frank?"

"Yes. Surely—"

Tom Merry shook his head.

"No. He left England more than six months ago, as I told you, to go on an exploring expedition, and there has been no word from him since. He may not turn up for a couple of years, and there's no post-office in the Cannibal Islands to write to. Besides, if he came back—"

Tom Merry paused.

"Well?" said Manners.

"Well, I don't know that I could take anything from him," said Tom quietly. "You see, he's not really my uncle; he's my guardian's brother, though I call him Uncle Frank. I couldn't sponge on him when I'm able to earn my living."

"He would jolly well insist on taking you in hand, I think."

"Well, he's too far away now, anyway, and not likely to return."

There was a short silence.

"Nothing heard from your uncle in India?" said Manners presently.

Tom Merry shook his head, with a dark shade crossing his face.

"No. They do not know at Simla whether he is alive or dead."

"It's rough."

"I say, Tommy!" exclaimed Lowther, after another long pause, during which the three juniors strolled on quietly by the bank of the frozen Ryll. "Look here! I know you don't like a chap to meddle in your affairs—"

"I've never said that to you, Monty—"

"I know, but you might—"

"Never!"

"If you knew."

"If I knew what?" asked Tom Merry, looking at Monty Lowther in surprise.

"What I've done."

"What have you done?"

Lowther was silent.

"Blessed if I know!" said Manners. "You haven't told me, Monty. What's the giddy mystery?"

"I haven't told anybody," said Lowther.

"Well, what is it?"

"Look here, Tom! You remember the time you had a run over to the United States to visit your Uncle Poinsett in the Far West?"

"Yes, rather!"

"Mr. Poinsett is a millionaire."

Tom Merry frowned a little.

"Yes, Monty."

"He said when you were there that he was going to make you his heir."

"I remember."

"Well, then, why shouldn't he help you now that you're on the rocks?"

Tom Merry was silent.

"Well?" demanded Lowther.

"Well," said Tom Merry, hesitating. "You see, it's all very well. I know Mr. Poinsett would jump to help me if he knew. But—well, Miss Fawcett is provided for now—she has a home at Cleveland Lodge, you know, and now Laurel Villa is let she has an income large enough for her needs. I can look after myself. I don't feel like writing

to Mr. Poinsett and asking him for help—I should feel so much like a cadger."

"But he's your uncle."

"Yes, but he's under no obligation to provide for all his nephews, I suppose. Uncles don't generally do it, you know."

"But he's fond of you."

"That's so, I know."

"And he'd feel hurt if you don't ask him when he comes to know about it."

"I should be sorry, but——"

"But what?"

"But I've never written a begging letter in my life, and I never will," said Tom Merry quietly.

Manners and Lowther were silent for a moment or two. They understood Tom Merry's feeling, though they believed that he was carrying it too far. It was the pride and spirit of an honourable lad, who shrank with shame from the mere thought of being looked upon as a poor relation begging for help. True, Tom Merry was a little too punctilious, considering his American uncle's great affection for him. But it was a fault on the right side.

"Well, I think you're an ass!" said Lowther, at last.

"Thanks, old chap!"

"What do you think, Manners?"

"I think he's an ass, too!"

"Thanks again!" said Tom Merry, with a smile.

"I suppose you'll be down on me," said Monty Lowther slowly.

"What for?"

"For what I've done."

Tom Merry looked uneasy.

"What have you done, Monty?"

"I did it weeks ago—in fact, a few days after you had your bad luck."

"But what?"

"I wrote to Mr. Poinsett."

"Oh!"

"You see, I knew you were a punctilious ass, and wouldn't do it," said Monty Lowther. "I knew Miss Fawcett wouldn't if you didn't like the idea. I knew you wouldn't let me if I asked you. So I wrote."

"Oh, Monty!"

"I never said a word, even to Manners," said Monty Lowther. "When I found you in London at Christmas, I can tell you I was jolly glad I had written. Well, I've had a reply from Mr. Poinsett."

Tom Merry did not speak.

"He said that he was coming to England, and that he would be here soon after his reply," said Lowther.

"Oh!"

"And now," said Lowther, "you can punch my head for meddling in your affairs if you like, Tom, but I'm glad I did it."

Tom Merry smiled faintly.

"I won't punch your head, Monty, but I'm sorry you did it. But I know you meant to help me, and it's all right. Don't say any more about it."

"I won't," said Lowther, "except that I'm glad I did it, and that I think you'll be glad, too, in the long run."

And the subject dropped.

CHAPTER 8.

In Authority.

MONDAY morning. Tom Merry rose from his bed in the room formerly occupied by Mr. Selby, now absent from St. Jim's.

The winter dawn was creeping in at the windows.

The School House boots had brought in a can of hot water, and strange enough was it to Tom Merry to have the House page bringing him hot water in the morning. He had been used to taking a cold bath in the Shell dormitory, or besieging the bath-room with the other fellows, towel on arm. This was a change, and it brought home to him quite clearly the difference in his position. He was a master now.

Tom Merry was a little puzzled as to attire. He could not very well dress in Etons to take the Form; and certainly he was hardly old enough to wear a frock-coat. Mr. Selby's old gown was twice too large for him, and he would certainly not have inspired the Third Form with seriousness if he had donned it.

He decided upon a dark jacket and grey trousers, the jacket borrowed from Manners and the trousers from Lowther. Thus attired, he descended to the breakfast-room.

He had to take the head of the Third Form table in the School House. Two-thirds of the Third Form boarded in the School House, Wally and Curly Gibson among others, Jameson being a New House boy. Tom Merry took his seat at the head of the fags' table with as much coolness as he could muster.

The fags grinned as they took their seats.

The general grin up and down the table did not inspire Tom Merry with very great confidence.

But he preserved an outward calm.

"Please, sir," said Wally, with exaggerated respect.

"Good-morning, sir!"

"Good-morning, boys!"

"It's a nice morning, sir," said Curly Gibson affably.

"Yes," said Tom Merry.

"The rain is awfully wet, sir," said Diggs. "I mean, it would be if it were raining, sir, and it might be if the weather were wet."

Tom Merry did not apparently hear this remark. He could not help hearing the soft chuckle that swept down the breakfast-table.

"May I pass you the salt, sir?" asked Wally.

"Thanks, no!"

"May I pass you the mustard, sir?"

"No."

"May I pass you the pepper, sir?"

"If you speak again, D'Arcy minor, I shall give you fifty lines," said Mr. Merry firmly.

Wally did not speak again. He winked at Curly Gibson.

"May I pass you the bread, sir?" asked Gibson, taking up the rag.

And the Third Form chuckled.

Tom Merry turned red. He realised now that it was a concerted thing among the young rascals.

"No, Gibson," he said.

"May I pass you the butter, sir?"

"Certainly not!"

"May I pass you the bacon?"

"Silence, Gibson!"

"But, sir——"

"Another word, and I shall give you fifty lines."

Curly Gibson assumed an expression of martyr-like patience.

"May I pass you the eggs, sir?" asked Diggs.

"No, Diggs."

"May I pass you a knife, sir?"

"Diggs——"

"May I pass you a fork, sir?"

"Take fifty lines, Diggs."

"Oh, sir! What for, sir?"

"For impertinence, Diggs."

"But I only wanted to pass you a fork, sir," said Diggs, in an extremely injured tone. "Surely there's no harm in wanting to oblige one's Form-master, sir?"

"Silence, Diggs!"

"Certainly, sir, but——"

"Silence, I say!"

"May I pass you the cruet, sir?" asked Wilson, from lower down the table.

Tom Merry breathed hard.

"No, Wilson."

"May I pass you a plate, sir?"

"Listen to me, boys!" said Tom Merry firmly. "The next boy who offers to pass me anything will be caned in the Form-room after breakfast."

"Oh, sir!"

The fags exclaimed it in an indignant and shocked chorus.

"I mean it."

"But, sir——"

"Silence! Go on with your breakfast."

The fags went on with their breakfast.

The silence lasted, at the longest computation, two minutes.

Then Murphy, a merry-eyed, freckled Irish lad, recommenced the attack, but in a slightly different manner.

"If you please, sir——" he said.

"Yes, Murphy."

"Will you pass me the salt, sir?"

"Certainly!"

"And please will you pass me the pepper, sir?"

"Very well."

"And please will——"

"Silence, Murphy!"

"Faith, sir, I——"

"Not a word."

"Sure, sir——"

"Take fifty lines, Murphy."

"Faith!"

"Silence!"

"Please, sir," said Cornish, "will you pass me the mustard, sir?"

"Yes, Cornish."

"And please will you pass me a plate, sir?"

Tom Merry's face was almost scarlet by this time.

Some of the fellows at the other tables were grinning, having overheard the rag, and Tom Merry was keenly conscious of a great many glances bent upon him.

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 153.

NEXT THURSDAY: "TOM MERRY'S RETURN TO ST. JIM'S." Another Splendid, Long, Complete School Tale of Tom Merry & Co.

The fags were grinning cheerfully.

They all liked Tom Merry, but, as Wally said, they had to consider the dignity and independence of the Third Form at St. Jim's.

Mr. Merry must be made to understand that the Third could not be imposed upon by him or by anybody else.

The fags were quite willing to let Tom Merry go his way if he would let them go theirs, and Wally & Co. regarded that as a fair exchange, and really playing the game.

If Mr. Merry did not think so, so much the worse for Mr. Merry.

That was Wally's view of the matter. And that was how he had made the rest of the Third look at it.

"Might I ask you for a plate, sir?" repeated Cornish.

"No, Cornish."

"Oh, sir!"

"You must not ask me to pass you anything," said Tom Merry desperately. "You must pass one another things if you need them."

"Mr. Selby used to pass us things, sir," said Wally reproachfully.

"Yes, indeed, sir."

"Mr. Selby was very nice, sir."

"Mr. Selby said—"

"Never mind Mr. Selby!" exclaimed Tom Merry.

Wally looked surprised.

"But the Head said we were always to mind Mr. Selby, sir," he exclaimed. "He specially told us always to mind Mr. Selby, sir."

"Yes, sir, he did, sir."

"Oh, yes, Mr. Merry."

Mr. Merry breathed hard through his nose.

"The next boy who speaks at this table will be sent in to the Head to be caned," he said. "Now, silence!"

And with that terrific threat silence was restored at last.

But if silence was restored, order could scarcely be said to be reigning, for the fags made a great pretence of wishing to speak, but not daring to do so for fear of their terrible Form-master.

When Wally wanted the salt—or didn't want it, perhaps—he would ask for it in dumb show, with many gesticulations.

Every now and then the fags would put their fingers to their lips, or would make an appearance of being just going to speak, and check themselves in a very dramatic way.

That breakfast was an ordeal to Tom Merry.

But everything comes to an end, and so did that breakfast, and Tom Merry rose from the table at last with great relief.

The fags crowded out, chuckling and gleeful.

"My only Aunt Jane!" said Wally, in the passage.

"Didn't we pull his noble leg a treat? What?"

"We did!" grinned Curly Gibson.

"Didn't we make him look pink?"

"Ha, ha! Yes!"

"We'll soon have him in good order," said Wally complacently; "and when we've reduced him to a state of tameness, and he sees things in their proper light, then we'll take him up and make a friend of him, and we'll have some high old times in the Form-room."

"Hurrah!" chorused the fags.

Which was a pleasant prospect indeed for Mr. Merry.

CHAPTER 9.

Master of the Third.

MR. MERRY took his place at the master's desk in the Form-room on the stroke of nine o'clock.

Not a member of the Third Form had yet appeared.

Tom Merry waited.

The fags were entitled to another quarter of a minute, but it occurred to Tom Merry that they did not mean to turn up at all.

He wondered what he would do if they didn't come.

If the whole Form stayed out he would have to look for them, and it would be an endless task searching for fags in all the nooks and corners and recesses of St. Jim's.

But just as nine boomed out the fags marched into the Form-room.

Wally & Co. did not mean to give their new Form-master an excuse for calling in the prefects by playing the truant in a body.

Besides, there were very few of them who would have cared to miss the fun they anticipated that Monday morning in class.

Tom Merry looked at the Third Form, and his heart sank. For a moment, as the tramp of feet came in the doorway, he had hoped that Wally & Co. meant to be orderly and docile that morning, and to remain content with the way they had ragged their new master at breakfast.

But it was evidently not the case.

The fags had all put flowers in their coats.

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 153.

"THE RIVALS OF ST. WODE'S." A Grand New School Tale, by Charles Hamilton, is in the "EMPIRE" Library this week. Price One Halfpenny.

Now, there was no great harm in a fag putting a flower in his coat in itself. Fellows had turned up in the class-rooms with flowers in their coats before. It was not quite the thing, but so long as a fellow was moderate in it no special notice would be taken.

But moderation was not part of the little game played by Wally & Co.

Pretty nearly every sort of flower that could be obtained at that time of the year was represented on the Eton jackets of the Third.

Tom Merry guessed easily enough that Wally must have made some arrangement with the Rylcombe florist to send down an assortment of blossoms in time for school that morning.

Jameson wore a geranium large enough for a flower-pot, and Wally wore a still larger one of a glaring red.

Curly Gibson had a chrysanthemum, and Cornish a red rose, and Diggs a bunch of violets, while several of the juniors had mere vegetable leaves in their buttonholes.

Wilson, going further than all the rest, wore a small cabbage, and one fellow had a cauliflower, and another a potato.

The whole exhibition was utterly absurd, but the fags walked into the room with solemn and serious faces.

Tom Merry looked at them.

He called a halt.

"Boys! Stop!"

The Form stopped.

They faced Tom Merry with the solemnity of owls.

"Yes, sir!" said Wally.

"Yes, sir!" chorussed the fags. "Good-morning, sir!"

"Good-morning! But—"

"It's a fine morning, sir."

"If it doesn't rain, sir."

"Or snow, sir."

"Or hail, sir."

"Or—"

"Silence!"

"Yes, sir!"

"Certainly, sir!"

"Just so, sir!"

"Silence!" repeated Tom Merry, as sternly as he could.

"Now, what do you mean by coming into the Form-room in this ridiculous way?"

"What ridiculous way, sir?"

"I mean, wearing those ridiculous things in your coats."

"They're flowers, sir," said Wally innocently. "It's a festive occasion, sir. We felt that we ought to make some sort of a celebration on the occasion of having a new Form-master, Mr. Merry."

"Just so, sir."

"Precisely, sir."

"That's how it is, sir."

"It's in your honour, sir."

"We all admire you so much, sir."

Tom Merry gasped.

How to deal with that extremely humorous Form he did not quite know.

"Take those flowers out at once, and throw them into the passage," he said sternly.

"Oh, sir!"

"If you please, sir—"

"Obey me instantly!"

"Very well, sir."

"Mr. Selby wouldn't have told us to do that, sir."

"Oh, dry up, Jameson! You know Mr. Merry told us we weren't to mind Mr. Selby."

"Quite so; I forgot. I'm sure I beg Mr. Merry's pardon."

"Silence! Take those flowers away at once."

"Certainly, sir."

The Third-Formers marched to the door, and the offending flowers were obediently hurled forth into the passage.

Then they marched in again.

Tom Merry frowned.

"Wilson!" he rapped out.

The hero of the cabbage looked at him meekly and respectfully.

"Yes, Mr. Merry."

"You have not obeyed me."

"I sir?"

"Yes, you."

"What have I done, sir—I mean, what haven't I done, sir?"

ANSWERS

"You still have that thing in your buttonhole."
 "Yes, sir."
 "I ordered you to throw it into the passage."
 "Oh, no, sir, you didn't!" exclaimed Wilson, in great astonishment.
 "Wilson! How dare you!"
 "But you didn't, sir," persisted Wilson. "You told us to throw the flowers into the passage, sir. I hadn't any flowers about me, sir."
 "Wilson!"
 "Yes, sir."
 "Wilson, I—I—"
 "Oh, you were referring to this buttonhole, sir," said Wilson. "This isn't a flower, sir. This is a cabbage, sir. The cabbage isn't a flower, sir. It's a vegetable, sir."
 "Throw it into the passage at once!"
 "Oh, certainly, sir!"
 The offending cabbage was hurled forth. Tom Merry fixed his eyes upon the potato stuck on Murphy's coat.
 "Murphy!" he rapped out.
 "Yes, sor."
 "Throw that ridiculous potato away at once!"
 "Faith, and it's me national emblem, Mr. Merry!"
 "I was referring to vegetables as well as flowers—in fact, to all those things," said Mr. Merry, with a heightened colour. "Go to the door again and throw away everything you have about you into the passage."
 Wally grinned at his chums.
 "Very well, sir."
 The Third Form marched to the door.
 Crash—crash—crash!
 They took Tom Merry's order literally—more literally, of course, than the new master of the Third intended them to take it.
 They hurled into the passage everything they had about them.
 Books and papers and pens and marbles and tops and all sorts of oddments went into the passage in a crashing shower.

CHAPTER 10.

Latin.

TOM MERRY gasped for breath.
 How was he to deal with this Form.
 The Third, keeping up an almost preternatural gravity, turned back into the Form-room after throwing everything they had about them into the passage.
 "It's done, sir," said Wally seriously.
 "Take your places!" gasped Tom Merry.
 "Yes, sir."
 Tom Merry calmed himself down.
 Excepting for an occasional chuckle, instantly suppressed, the Third Form were as grave as a bench of bishops or judges.
 "Now, boys!" said Mr. Merry.
 The class waited.
 "Where are your books?"
 "In the passage, sir," said Wally meekly.
 "In the passage?"
 "Yes, sir."
 Tom Merry snapped his teeth.
 "Go and fetch them in at once, then," he said.
 "Certainly, sir."
 Tom Merry waited till the Third Form had brought their books in. It took them a considerable time, as might be expected.
 The time for first lesson was very nearly up now, and so far the Third Form had been eminently successful.
 But Mr. Merry's temper was beginning to rise.
 "We're drawing him a treat!" Wally whispered. "He'll be getting his rag out jolly soon now, my pippins!"
 "What-ho!" said Curly.
 Tom Merry frowned.
 "You were talking, D'Arcy minor."
 "Yes, sir," said Wally cheerfully.
 "Take fifty lines."
 "Where shall I take them, sir?"
 Tom Merry breathed hard.
 "You were talking, D'Arcy minor."
 "Yes, sir. Whose?"
 "Virgil."
 "Yes, sir. Which book, sir?"
 "The first book," said Tom Merry, with considerable calmness.
 "Certainly, Mr. Merry. I dote on the first book of Virgil," said Wally blandly. "But if I take a hundred lines from it won't it leave rather a blank in the poem, sir?"
 "Two hundred lines, D'Arcy minor."
 "Thank you very much, sir!"

"If you are impertinent again, D'Arcy minor, I shall cane you."
 "Impertinent, sir!" exclaimed Wally.
 "Yes, D'Arcy minor."
 "I hope you don't consider me impertinent, sir. My brother Gus wouldn't like it at all, sir."
 "Never mind your brother now—"
 "Oh, I never do mind him, sir."
 "That will do, D'Arcy minor."
 "Yes, sir. I assure you that I never mind Gus, any more than I mind his friends in the middle school, those blessed Shell bounders that he chums up with."
 Tom Merry flushed.
 He was one of the Shell fellows who had been very friendly with Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, as, of course, the young rascals of the Third knew very well.
 "You need say no more, D'Arcy minor."
 "No, sir."
 "What is the first lesson this morning?"
 There was no reply.
 "You heard me, D'Arcy minor?"
 "Yes, sir. But you told me not to speak, sir," said Wally innocently.
 "You may answer that question."
 "First lesson's over now, sir," said Wally, looking at the Form-room clock. "It's time for second lesson, sir."
 "What is second lesson this morning?"
 "Latin grammar, sir."
 "Very good."
 Tom Merry armed himself with Mr. Selby's books.
 Tom had been head of the Shell in classics, and in that, at least, he would find no impediment when he came to his examination for the remove into the Fifth. So he was quite able, as far as knowledge went, to take the Third in Latin.
 But learning a thing and teaching a thing are two very different matters, as Tom Merry soon discovered.
 Besides that, the Third were determined not to understand.
 The simplest thing might be explained to them a dozen times over by Tom Merry, and to every explanation they opposed a wooden incapacity to comprehend.
 "We were doing deponent verbs, sir," said Wally, in an injured tone, when Tom Merry began on adjectives of the Third Declamation.
 "Very well," said poor Tom. "We will take deponent verbs."
 "Yes, sir, we're all fond of deponent verbs, sir," said Cornish.
 "A deponent verb," said Tom Merry, "is active in form—I mean passive in form, but active in meaning."
 "Yes, sir."
 "Kindly tell me the form of a deponent verb, Jameson."
 "Third Form, sir."
 And the class giggled.
 "Jameson!"
 "Yes, sir."
 "A deponent verb is passive in form."
 "Yes, sir. So are we, sir."
 "What?"
 "I'm sure I'm very passive in Form, sir," said Jameson innocently. "Wally is sometimes active in Form, sir, but I'm always passive."
 "Ha, ha, ha!" yelled the Third Form.
 Tom Merry could hardly help smiling himself.
 "You must not make puns in class, Jameson," he said, as severely as he could. "The formation of a deponent verb is passive."
 "Yes, sir."
 "But the meaning equals that of an active verb."
 "Quite so, sir."
 "Now, Cornish, define a deponent verb."
 "Yes, sir."
 "I am waiting, Cornish."
 "A deponent verb, sir?" said Cornish reflectively.
 "Yes. Go on."
 "It is active in the Third Form, sir—"
 "What?"
 "And passive in the dormitory, sir."
 And the Third Form giggled.
 "Cornish, take fifty deponent verbs—I—I mean fifty lines," gasped Tom Merry.
 And then the Third yelled.
 "How many deponent verbs, sir?" asked Cornish.
 "Fifty lines, Cornish—lines, not deponent verbs."
 "I'm sure I don't mind which, sir."
 "Silence!"
 "Yes, sir. Quite so, sir. Which kind of lines am I to take, active or passive, sir? I always prefer taking an active line myself."
 "A hundred lines, Cornish."
 "Oh, sir!"

"We will now take a deponent verb," said Tom Merry.

"Where, sir?"

"Fifty lines, D'Arcy minor."

"Oh, sir!"

"Not another word! Silence! The first boy who speaks will be caned!"

And silence settled in the Third Form-room, and Tom Merry opened his book with as business-like an air as he could assume.

CHAPTER 11.

More Trouble.

A PIN might have been heard to drop in the Third Form-room.

The juniors were almost preternaturally silent.

That they were mentally preparing another rag Tom Merry knew perfectly well, but he had to pretend to be unaware of it.

He looked rather confusedly through Mr. Selby's book, which he had taken up for the instruction of the Third.

The marks in the book in pencil were unknown signs to him, and his brain was in a somewhat confused state from what he had been through already.

But he stuck nobly to his task.

His voice sounded quite hollow as he began to speak in the dead stillness of the Form-room.

"We will take the verb hortor," he began.

Silence.

"D'Arcy minor!"

No reply.

Tom Merry raised his voice.

"D'Arcy minor!"

Grim silence.

The red came into Tom Merry's cheeks again.

Wally sat looking directly at him, evidently hearing, but with a solemn expression on his face, and his lips dramatically set and sealed.

Wally evidently didn't mean to speak.

"D'Arcy minor!" said Tom, crescendo.

Still silence.

"D'Arcy minor, answer me at once."

"But you told me not to speak, sir!" exclaimed D'Arcy minor, with a very injured look at his Form-master.

Tom Merry bit his lip.

"You said that the first boy to speak would be caned, sir," said Wally. "I hope you don't mean to cane me for answering you, sir."

"I shall cane you if you are impertinent, D'Arcy minor."

"Oh, sir! Impertinent, sir! Why, sir, we never used to be impertinent even to Mr. Selby, sir, though you told us never to mind him."

"That will do, D'Arcy minor."

"Oh, very well, sir, but I shouldn't mind going on."

"We will take the deponent verb hortor, to exhort."

"Certainly, sir, if you like."

"Hortor, hortatus sum, hortari—"

"First-rate, sir."

"D'Arcy minor."

"I can't help admiring you, Mr. Merry. You remind me so much of Mr. Selby when you open your mouth like that, sir."

And the Third Form giggled.

Tom Merry felt helpless. He had been piling lines upon the fags till he had quite forgotten how many lines were due from each junior, but there was no doubt that a record crop was due.

But the lines did not seem to have any extensive effect upon the impudence of Wally & Co.

He was loth to revert to the cane. But how else was he to keep order, when the fags, instead of listening to the pearls of wisdom that fell from his lips, were only watching his mouth to see if he opened it like Mr. Selby on a Latin vowel.

"D'Arcy minor, stand out before the class," said Mr. Merry sternly.

"Yes, sir."

Wally came meekly out.

"Now, Wally—I mean D'Arcy minor—"

"You may call me Wally, sir, if you like," said the junior amicably. "I always let my friends call me Wally, sir."

Tom Merry coloured.

"I shall be compelled to cane you, D'Arcy minor."

"I hope not, sir."

"You compel me to punish you."

"I'm sure I don't mean to, sir. If it's all the same to you, sir, we'll call the matter settled, sir."

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"Stand in the corner, D'Arcy minor," said the harassed Form-master. "Stand in the corner on a chair at once."

"On a chair, sir?"

"Yes."

"In a corner, sir?"

"Yes, I tell you."

"Which corner, sir?"

Tom Merry grasped Wally by the collar and led him to the corner, and planted him upon a chair there.

Instead of being abashed by his position, Wally winked at the class, and sent them into convulsions of laughter.

Tom Merry rapped the desk with Mr. Selby's pointer.

"Silence!" he roared.

Silence was restored.

Tom Merry opened his book again, with a crimson face.

The peculiar looks of the Third Form in the direction of Wally, and their suppressed giggles, made him look round quickly at that cheerful fag.

Wally was standing on the chair, with his hand up to his face, the fingers extended as far as they would extend.

His thumb was against his nose, and the extended fingers were stretched in the direction of the new Form-master.

It was certainly a most disrespectful attitude, and one that Arthur Augustus D'Arcy would never have approved of under any circumstances.

Wally jerked his hand down as Tom Merry turned round; but not before the new master of the Third had seen him.

"D'Arcy minor!" thundered the Form-master.

"Yes, sir."

"Turn your face to the wall immediately."

"Certainly, sir."

Wally turned his face to the wall. Tom Merry turned to the class again. But a chuckle in the Form made him glance round.

Wally was in his old position, and Mr. Merry frowned angrily.

"I told you to turn your face to the wall, D'Arcy minor!" he exclaimed.

"Well, I did it, sir," he said.

"You—you—I meant you to keep it turned to the wall."

"Oh, sir! Did you, sir? You didn't say so, sir."

"Turn it to the wall at once, and keep it there."

"With pleasure, sir."

And Wally turned to the wall.

Tom Merry went on with the lesson, with a worried look upon his crimson and perspiring face.

Crash!

Bump!

He swung round again towards Wally.

Wally sat on the floor, and the chair was overturned. Wally was groaning deeply, as if in great pain.

Tom Merry ran towards him in alarm.

"Wally, are you hurt?" he cried.

Groan!

"How did it happen?"

Groan!

"Wally, old man!" exclaimed Tom Merry, forgetting for the moment that he was Form-master.

"I—I fell down," murmured Wally. "It—it must have been through pushing the chair over with my feet, I think. Ow!"

And he groaned.

Tom Merry frowned darkly. He realised that he had been the victim of another jape on the part of the untiring hero of the Third.

"Are you hurt, D'Arcy minor?" he exclaimed sternly.

"Oh, no, sir!" said Wally cheerfully.

"Then what are you groaning for?"

"I've been told it's a good exercise for the chest, sir."

The Third Form simply shrieked.

Tom Merry was speechless for a moment. Then he grasped the pointer.

"Hold out your hand, D'Arcy minor!" he exclaimed.

"M-m-m-my hand, sir?"

"Yes, at once."

"What for, Mr. Merry?"

"I am going to cane you."

"Oh, my only Aunt Jane! You're not going to lick an old chum, Tom Merry?" exclaimed Wally reproachfully. And at that appeal Tom Merry almost melted.

But he had his dignity as Form-master to maintain, and his authority with the unruly Third to think of.

"Hold out your hand!" he repeated.

Wally held out his hand.

Tom Merry gave him a cut, so light that it seemed no more severe than the touch of a fly settling on the skin.

"Now go back to your place, D'Arcy minor," he said severely.

And D'Arcy minor grinned and went.

"THE RIVALS OF ST. WODE'S." A Grand New School Tale, by Charles Hamilton, is in the "EMPIRE" Library this week. Price One Halfpenny.

CHAPTER 12.

Herr Schneider is Angry.

BUMP!

"Mein Gott!"
Tom Merry had resumed that eventful Latin lesson, when the sudden fall, and the sound of an emphatic German voice, in the passage without, interrupted him.

He knew the far from dulcet tones of Herr Schneider, the German-master of St. Jim's.

Tom Merry remembered the things that had been cast in the passage from the Form-room, and he guessed what had happened. The German-master was an exceedingly short-sighted gentleman.

The Form-room door was flung open, and the fat German bounced into the room in a rage, his face very like that of a turkey-cock.

"I tinks tat it is infamous, ain't it?" he roared.

"Yes?" said Mr. Merry.

"I come along mit meinself, and I falls over all sorts of tings scattered in der bassage, ain't it, pefore."

"I am sorry—"

"I tink tat it is ein trap laid for me, after."

"Not at all, Herr Schneider—"

The German waved his hands furiously. He had barked his shins, and he was in a towering rage. Herr Schneider was of a suspicious turn of mind, and he had had a great deal of trouble with Tom Merry when the latter was a pupil in the Shell Form at St. Jim's.

The first thought that leaped into the German's suspicious mind now was that Tom Merry was taking advantage of his position as Form-master to the Third, which placed him on a level with the other masters, to pay off old scores.

It was not in Tom Merry's mind to do such a thing, of course, and in fact such a proceeding would never have entered his thoughts at all.

But Herr Schneider was not a reasonable man.

He waved his hands and raved, half in German and half in English, while he hopped with the pain of his leg.

"It is ein drick!" he roared. "I tink tat you play vat you call a shape on me, ain't it, after."

"I never intended to jape you, sir—"

"I tink it is a rotten shape, pefore."

Tom Merry was silent. It had certainly been a little thoughtless to have the things thrown into the passage, but he had not expected the fags to add books and things to the flowers when they hurled them out. Nor would anybody but Herr Schneider have fallen over such obstacles.

But it was evidently useless to attempt to reason with the German-master.

He advanced towards Tom Merry, his fat face red with rage.

"I tells you vat I tinks!" he exclaimed. "I tinks you vas an impudent young rascal, ain't it, Merry, pefore."

"Sir!"

"Young dricky rascal, after."

"I hope you will remember that I am here in the position of a Form-master, Herr Schneider," said Tom Merry, with dignity.

"Ja, ja, and den you plays dem rotten shapes on a Sherman shentleman, ain't it."

"I did not play any tricks on you, Herr Schneider."

"Mein Gott! Dat is not true!"

Tom Merry flushed red.

"Herr Schneider!"

The German waved his fat hands furiously.

"I say tat is not true. You takes advantage of it to blay ein shape upon a Sherman shentleman."

"Sir!"

"You dalk to me! You pad poy!"

For a Form-master to be characterised as a bad boy before his class was altogether too bad!

The meekest of Form-masters could not possibly have stood it; and Tom Merry had been so exasperated that morning that he was not in a meek mood.

He pointed indignantly to the door.

"Leave my Form-room, Herr Schneider!" he exclaimed.

The fat German-master simply jumped.

"Vat?"

"Leave this room!"

"Mein Gott!"

"I am Form-master here. Leave the room at once!"

Herr Schneider stood rooted to the spot.

Anger and amazement mingled in his crimson face. He seemed hardly able to believe his ears, though they were really large enough to be depended upon.

Tom Merry was a Form-master now certainly, but the German had meant to treat him as if he were still a junior in the Shell.

The master of the Third was not to be so treated, however. His eyes were flashing, and his finger pointed to the door.

"Mein Gott!" gasped Herr Schneider.

"Go!"

"Himmel!"

"You hear me?"

The German gave a roar of rage.

"I hears you, and I tinks I trashes you for your sheek. Ain't it? I tinks I knocks you into small pieces after."

And he rushed right at Tom Merry.

The master of the Third backed away.

"Hands off, Herr Schneider—"

"I tinks I licks you pefore!"

He grasped the junior master.

There was a yell from D'Arcy minor.

"Rescue, the Third! Don't let the German sausage rag our Form-master! Rescue!"

The Third gave a roar.

They had been ragging their master all the morning themselves, true.

But that was no reason why they should sit quiet and see him ragged by anybody else. Besides, the temptation to make a pretext for rushing the German-master and bumping him over as if he were a junior was too strong.

Wally rushed on first, and the Third followed him in a crowd.

They fairly hurled themselves upon Herr Schneider.

"Down with Sauerkraut!"

"Bump the German boulder!"

"Schneider, how you vas?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Down him!"

As a matter of fact, it was fortunate for Tom Merry that the Third came to his aid, for the German was in a furious temper.

Tom Merry was a Form-master in dignity, but he was not a Form-master in size, and he would have put up a very poor tussle against the big German.

But the rush of the Third changed the aspect of the matter completely. The fags fairly swarmed over the fat German.

Herr Schneider yelled as they clutched him, and roared as he was dragged over by main force and bumped upon the floor.

"Down him!"

"Bump him!"

"Schneider, how you vas!"

Tom Merry staggered back, gasping for breath. The fags rolled over Herr Schneider, who rolled over on the floor, panting and yelling.

"Ach! Help! Murter! Help! Mein Gott! Ow!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Bump him!"

"Down with him!"

"Stop!" shouted Tom Merry.

"It's all right, sir!" beamed Wally. "We're rescuing you, you know."

"Stop! Oh, dear!"

"What is this? Bless my soul! What is this?"

There was a gasp of dismay from the juniors, and a groan from Tom Merry. Dr. Holmes, the Head of St. Jim's, stood in the open doorway, looking in upon the scene.

CHAPTER 13.

A Difficult Position.

"BLESS my soul!"

Dr. Holmes gazed at the wild scene in amazement. Tom Merry stood quite still.

Tom's crimson face had gone quite pale now. He felt a terrible sinking at the heart. He realised that all was up.

On the first morning of his essay as Form-master to the Third the experiment had proved to be a failure.

Tears of vexation came into his eyes as he thought of it.

"Bless my soul! What does this mean?"

The fags scrambled off Herr Schneider as if he had suddenly become red-hot.

They crowded back to their places looking decidedly sheepish under the sharp, stern eyes of the doctor.

Herr Schneider jumped up.

He was collarless, tieless, and red with wrath and exertion. He was stuttering so furiously with rage that he could not speak.

"Herr Schneider!"

"Ach! Ach! Mein Gott!"

"Merry!"

Tom Merry met the Head's glance bravely.

"Yes, sir?"

"What does this mean?"

"I am very sorry it has occurred, sir. The boys saw Herr Schneider attack me, and they took it upon themselves to come to my help."

"If you please, sir," piped Wally meekly, "we considered ourselves bound to back up our Form-master, sir."

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NEXT THURSDAY: "TOM MERRY'S RETURN TO ST. JIM'S." Another Splendid, Long, Complete School Tale of Tom Merry & Co.

"Herr Schneider!"

"Ach! Mein Gott! Ach!"

"Why did you come here?"

"I falls mit meinselb ofer tings in der passag," roared

Herr Schneider. "I gomes in to box dat Merry——"

"What?" thundered the Head.

"I gomes in to box Merry——"

"You forget yourself, Herr Schneider! Merry is here in the position of master of the Third Form! You had no right to do anything of the sort."

"Ach!"

"Kindly leave the room at once, Herr Schneider."

"But he haf blayed ein trick on me!" roared the German.

"You did not play a trick on him, Merry?"

"Certainly not, sir!"

"Pray go, Herr Schneider. You are very excited. I shall speak to you about this matter later. For the present, please retire."

And Herr Schneider, boiling with rage, retired.

"I depend upon you to keep order here now, Merry," said the Head quietly. "I am sorry you have been interfered with."

"Thank you, sir."

And Dr. Holmes went out and closed the Form-room door.

Tom Merry turned to his class. The Third Form were grinning.

"Will you be quiet now?" said Tom Merry. "You've very nearly got me into serious trouble."

Wally looked remorseful.

"Oh, certainly, sir! It's all right, sir! If anybody rags again I'll punch him into a jelly, Mr. Merry!"

Tom Merry smiled, and lessons were resumed in the Form-room.

At intervals the fags showed signs of breaking out, but the time of dismissal was near at hand, and Tom Merry steered his class safely through the rest of the morning's work.

He breathed a deep sigh of relief when he finally dismissed the class.

The Third went out chuckling.

They had had what they regarded as a glorious morning, and they were anticipating an equally glorious afternoon. Everything in the garden, as Wally remarked, was lovely.

The Third Form were as merry as could be. But the new master of the Third left the Form-room with a shadow upon his face.

The Head had been very kind. But Tom Merry realised from the expression upon Dr. Holmes's kind face as he had turned away that it would not do.

If he was to be master of the Third order would have to be kept in the Third Form-room. And Tom Merry looked forward to the afternoon with a doubting mind.

Monty Lowther and Manners met him in the passage.

"Good-morning, sir!" said Lowther.

"Good-morning, Mr. Merry!"

Tom Merry smiled.

"Don't play the giddy goat," he said. "Come to my room and have a jaw."

"Right-ho!"

In the Third Form-master's room Tom Merry sat in Mr. Selby's armchair while Lowther sat on the table and Manners in the window.

"How did you get on with the Third?" asked Lowther.

"Rotten!"

"Trouble, I suppose?"

"Heaps of it."

"We heard a bit of a row in the Shell-room," Monty Lowther remarked. "I thought I distinguished the dulcet tones of Herr Schneider."

Tom Merry explained.

The chums of the Shell chuckled.

"But it won't do," said Lowther at last. "It's a difficult position, Tommy, and I don't see how you're to manage it. You see, the Third persist in considering you as Tom Merry, not as Mr. Merry."

"And they won't change their point of view in a hurry either," said Manners, with a shake of the head.

"That's the trouble," said Tom Merry.

"If Wally could be induced to take a different view of the matter," Monty Lowther remarked thoughtfully, "he's got a lot of influence in the Third."

"He's too young to understand exactly, I think," said Tom Merry. "His only idea is to bring me round, and make me chummy with the Third."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"If things were explained to him properly——" Manners suggested.

"My hat, yes!" exclaimed Lowther. "Look here, I've got an idea! Come on, Manners! You wait till you hear from us, Tommy."

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"But I say——"

"It's all right! Come on, Manners!"

And Monty Lowther dragged his chum to the door.

Tom Merry started to his feet. He was a little anxious as to what steps his chums might take to help him. They did not seem to understand the difficulties of his position as Form-master really much better than the Third-Form fags did.

"Monty——"

"It's all right!"

"But look here——"

"We'll come back."

"I say, old man——"

But Lowther and Manners were gone.

Tom Merry stood in doubt and dismay. He could not rush down the passage after the chums of the Shell—that would not be in accordance with the dignity of his position. But what was Lowther going to do?

Manners was equally puzzled.

"What's the little game, Monty?" he demanded, as his chum rushed him out into the quad. "What are you up to, you ass?"

"We're going to look for Wally."

"What for?"

"To explain to him."

"But he won't listen."

"Then we'll bump him till he does."

"Well, I don't know——"

"I do! Come on!"

Wally, as it happened, was near the School House door. He was chatting with his major, Arthur Augustus. D'Arcy major was very curious to know how matters had gone in the Third Form-room that morning, and he had prepared a little lecture for his minor.

"Here he is!" exclaimed Monty Lowther.

Arthur Augustus turned his eyeglass upon the Shell fellows.

"Pwaw don't intewwupt me, deah boys," he said. "I'm talkin' to my minah."

"It's all right," said Wally. "You're finished, Gussy."

"I am not finished, Wally."

"Yes, you are, as far as I'm concerned," said Wally coolly.

"I've had enough."

"Weally, Wally——"

"We want to talk to that young rip," said Lowther. "Now, then, Wally, I hear that you have been playing the giddy goat in the Form-room this morning."

Wally eyed him warily.

"Nothing to do with a Shell bouncer," he replied.

"We take a fatherly interest in you," explained Lowther. "We're going to point out to you exactly what you ought to do."

"Rats!"

"And you're going to promise, honest Injun, to do as we say."

"More rats!"

"If you don't——"

"Weally, Lowthah——"

"Don't interrupt, Gussy. If you don't do as we say, Wally, we're going to bump you hard, and bump you again. Savvy?"

"Oh, come off!"

"I wegard it as a good ideah, Lowthah. I shall be vewy pleased to assist you in bumpin' that young wip if he wefuses to pwomise to behave himself."

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

"Weally, Wally——"

"Now, then, what's the verdict, young shaver?" demanded Lowther.

"Rats!"

"Look here——"

"Bosh!"

Manners and Lowther made a simultaneous grab at Wally. But Wally was about as easy to catch as an eel. He dodged the outstretched hands, slipped under Lowther's arm, and ran.

"After him!" shouted Lowther.

"Bai Jove! Yaas, wathah! Aftah the young wascal!"

The chums of the Shell dashed in pursuit.

Wally was cut off from the open quadrangle, but the door of the School House was before him.

He dashed up the steps and in at the open doorway.

Manners and Lowther tore in after him at top speed. Wally reached the foot of the staircase, with the Shell fellows hot on the track. Kangaroo of the Shell appeared above, just coming downstairs, and Lowther yelled to him.

"Stop him, Kangy!"

The Cornstalk grinned.

"What-ho!" he replied.

Wally stopped.

Escape up the stairs was cut off, and Manners and Lowther



"Dear me," said Skimpole. "I am glad you are still here, Tom Merry. I wish to present you with a splendid volume which clearly demonstrates the truth of the great science of Determinism!" (See page 3.)

were close behind. Wally ran along the line of study doors, stopped at that of the Third-Form master, tapped at it, and dashed into the study, escaping the outstretched hands behind by a quarter of an inch.

CHAPTER 14. Wally Comes Round.

MR. MERRY jumped up. Wally had dashed breathlessly into the Form-master's study, and his sudden appearance there startled Tom Merry considerably. Manners and Lowther glared in at the doorway of the study after him.

It would hardly have done to chase Wally fairly into the study. They did not wish to bring ridicule upon the master of the Third by disregarding the dignity of his position.

"The young rip!" murmured Lowther.

"The cheeky young bounder!"

"Bai Jove!"

"Shut the door!" Lowther muttered.

Manners drew the door shut.

Wally was shut up in the study with his youthful Form-master. Tom Merry was looking at him in astonishment.

"What does this mean, Wally—D'Arcy minor?" he exclaimed.

Wally panted.

"Excuse me, sir," he said. "Would you mind telling me exactly how many lines I am to do? You gave me so many this morning that I've forgotten."

Wally asked the question with perfect calmness.

Tom Merry drew a deep breath as he looked at the cool, innocent face of the scamp of the Third.

He had seen Manners and Lowther in the doorway, of course, and knew perfectly well that Wally had dashed into the study to escape their pursuit.

He could hardly help smiling.

As a matter of fact, he did not remember how many lines he had given Wally, nor how many he had given to any other member of the Third.

He knew that the aggregate of lines he had imposed upon the Third Form must amount to some thousands, but the precise total, and how they were distributed, he could not have told for the life of him.

"I know there were less than a million, sir," said Wally, with glib frankness, "but I don't know exactly how many, sir."

Tom Merry coloured.

He felt that he was caught.

"Very well, D'Arcy minor," he said quietly. "You may take a total of five hundred, and you will write them out to-day and to-morrow."

"Yes, sir. Thank you, sir!"

"You may go, D'Arcy minor."

Wally did not go. He had a feeling that Manners and Lowther were waiting for him in the passage.

"If you please, sir, am I to write out Virgil?" he asked, to gain time.

"Yes."

"First book, sir?"

"That will do."

"From the beginning, sir?"

"Certainly."

"It's—it's a nice day, ain't it, Mr. Merry?" said Wally desperately.

Tom Merry smiled. He knew perfectly well why Wally wanted to linger a little longer in the study.

"Yes, Wally," he said. "It's a nice day. Sit down, Wally. I want to talk to you for a few minutes."

"Thank you, sir!"

Wally sat down, looking very demure.

There was a grave expression upon Tom Merry's face.

"Wally," he said quietly, "you and your friends caused me all the trouble you possibly could this morning."

"Oh, sir!"

"You did, Wally."

"You gave us lines for it, sir," said Wally, as if that made the matter quite right.

"I am speaking to you as Tom Merry, not as Mr. Merry, Wally," said Tom gravely. "I'm going to speak to you frankly, as a fellow, you know, not as a Form-master. I believe you used to like me when I was at St. Jim's, Wally."

Wally melted at once.

"Of course I did!" he said. "So did we all."

"Well, then, I want you to think a bit before you have any more ragging in the Form-room. I've taken part in rags myself in my time," said Tom Merry, "but the case is a bit different here. I'm trying to run the Third Form, and if I succeed I stay at St. Jim's. If I fail I have to leave."

"Oh!" said Wally.

"You didn't look at it like that?"

"N-n-no."

"I know it's a lot of fun to you, ragging a boy master," said Tom Merry; "but I know you're a decent chap, kid, and you don't want to cause me real trouble."

"Of course not!" said Wally uneasily.

"Then chuck it, and give me a chance," said Tom Merry. "I'm bound to keep order as Form-master, but you'll find me a better-tempered master than Mr. Selby, all the same. Won't you back me up in the Form-room, Wally?"

The fog was silent.

"You can do as you please, Wally, but I shall keep order at any cost; and if I fail I leave St. Jim's," said Tom Merry quietly.

Wally rose to his feet.

"I didn't look at it like that before, old kid," he said.

"Of course, we'd do anything to keep you at St. Jim's."

Tom Merry's face lighted up.

"I thought you would, Wally."

"I'll back you up. If any chap breathes a word about ragging I'll pulverise him," said Wally. "You rely on me. I'm on."

Tom smiled.

"I trust you, Wally. Thanks!"

"It's all right, old cock!" said Wally. "Only don't you come too much of the Mr. Merry, you know."

"I won't, Wally."

Tom Merry opened the study door. Manners and Lowther were waiting outside, and they recoiled and looked a little sheepish at the sight of Tom Merry.

"Hem!" said Lowther.

"Hum!" said Manners.

"Let Wally get clear, and then come in and have a jaw," said Tom Merry. "I've got some toffee here."

Wally scuttled off down the passage.

The chums of the Shell entered the study.

"Better have let us bump the young bounder," Monty Lowther remarked.

Tom Merry shook his head.

"I think Wally will back me up in the Form-room after this," he said. "I've had a quiet talk with him."

Monty Lowther looked sceptical.

"The spirit is willing, but I'll wager that the flesh is weak," he remarked. "But I hope it turns out all right. Where's that toffee?"

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"Here you are!"

And Tom Merry, ceasing to be a Form-master for the nonce, shared out chunks of toffee with the chums of the Shell.

CHAPTER 15.

Law and Order.

AFTERNOON classes commenced at St. Jim's. There was a hush in the Third Form-room.

Evidently Wally had been talking to his Form-fellows. Wally's influence was extensive in the Third. He had a doughty pair of fists, and was always willing to use them—willing and ready. That gave him weight in the Form.

But Wally's lead was not always unquestioningly followed—especially when Wally ranged himself on the side of law and order—an uncommon happening.

There were mutinous faces in the Third Form.

Jameson and some others had arranged a little rag for the afternoon, but Wally had let it be known that he was against it, so perhaps there was no real harm done.

But Jameson meant business this time. Jameson wasn't going to knuckle under to a Form-master of fifteen just because the chap had talked Wally over. That was how the redoubtable Jameson looked at the matter. Mr. Merry couldn't have soft-sawdred him, Jameson declared. He wasn't going to give up all the anticipated fun for nothing.

Not if Jameson knew it! And so, although the leader and chief of the Third was now on the Form-master's side, and ready to back him up through thick and thin, still there was a possibility of trouble in the Third Form-room that afternoon.

The lessons commenced in the midst of an unusual silence. Tom Merry felt hopeful. His appeal to Wally had evidently not been made in vain, and the virtuous expression upon Wally's face showed that his good resolutions were at boiling point. But in the midst of second lesson, there arose a strange sound from the back of the class.

Buzz!

Someone was imitating the buzz of a bee, and Tom Merry looked across the class instantly in search of the culprit.

Buzz-z-z!

Tom Merry set his lips.

Trouble was beginning again, he knew. He was still sufficiently a junior to know the beginning of a rag when he saw it.

"Who is making that noise?" he demanded sharply.

Buzz!

It came from a different part of the class now.

Tom Merry turned his head.

"Who is that?"

Buz-z-z-z-z!

Buz-z-z-z-z!

Buz-z-z-z-z!

From several different directions it came.

When Tom Merry looked in the direction of any particular buzz, it ceased, and then it broke out again in another spot.

Tom Merry turned red.

"Stop that noise instantly!"

Buz-z-z!

"Stop it, Jameson," whispered Wally fiercely. "I'll jolly well punch your head if you don't!"

Wally's stage whisper was heard all over the Form-room.

Tom Merry could not help hearing it, but as Wally was virtually backing up authority, Tom affected to hear nothing.

Buz-z-z-z!

Louder and more frequent grew the buzzing.

"Will you stop it?" shouted Tom Merry.

Buz-z-z!

"Boys!"

Buz-z-z!

Tom Merry stood perplexed.

Which of the boys were buzzing he could not tell, though he guessed. He could stop the rag, perhaps, by punishing the whole class, innocent as well as guilty. That would have been very rough on Wally and the friends who were backing him up.

Wally rose in his place.

In his virtuous indignation he did not remember the sedate manners that were due to the class-room.

"Stop that row!" he shouted. "I know you, you rotters! Jameson, I'll punch your silly fat head."

Buzz!

"Sit down, D'Arcy minor!"

Wally looked round in astonishment at Tom Merry.

"Well, I like that!" he exclaimed. "I'm keeping law and order, sir."

"Please sit down!"

"But, sir——"
 "Boys, you must be quiet," said Tom Merry. "I shall have to be very severe with you if you are not quiet."

Buz-z-z!

"Who was that?"

Buz-z-z!

"Jameson, that was you!"

"I, sir?" said Jameson.

"Yes, you."

"Oh, sir!"

"Was it you, Jameson?"

"You said so, sir. Of course, I couldn't contradict you, sir. I respect you too highly, sir."

Buz-z-z-z!

"Take a hundred lines, Jameson!"

"Thank you, sir!"

Buzzzzzz!

Wally jumped up again.
 "Let me handle the cads, sir!" he exclaimed. "I'll jolly soon stop them! Jameson, I told you what I'd do!"

And without heeding Tom Merry's exclamations, Wally left his place and rushed at Jameson.

"Yah!" roared Jameson. "Come on!"

"Now, you rotter——"

"Now, you cad——"

"Take that!"

"Yah! Take that!"

Wally had one arm entwined round Jameson's neck, and he was pommelling away at him with the other hand.

Jameson struggled desperately, pommelling away with equal vigour. They rolled out before the class, staggering and punching and gasping, and making a terrific uproar.

Tom Merry rapped on a desk with his pointer. He did not know what to do. To "wade in" and thrash both the juniors with the pointer was the obvious course. But Wally was fighting his battle, backing him up, though in a way that was likely to lead to more trouble than if he had backed up the raggers instead.

"Stop that instantly!" shouted Tom Merry.

"Yah! Take that! Groo!"

"Ow! There, you beast!"

"I shall cane you both——"

"Jameson, you pig——"

"Wally, you rotter——"

Tramp, tramp! Punch! Gasp! Whoop!

The Third Form were yelling with delight, and cheering on the combatants. Every vestige of law and order had vanished.

Tom Merry was inclined to tear his hair.

He rushed at the two fighting juniors and strove to tear them apart. But that was not so easily done.

Jameson, either by accident or design, punched Tom Merry as much as he punched Wally, and some of Wally's blows were misdirected, and took effect upon the unfortunate master of the Third.

Tom Merry staggered away as a heavy fist was planted in his ribs, and he caught on to a desk and gasped.

The Third Form roared.

"Go it, Wally!"

"Go it, Jimmy!"

"Hurrah!"

The Form-room door opened.

"This is the room!" said the Head of St. Jim's. "Your nephew is here, Mr. Poinsett. He is taking charge of the Third Form, as I explained to you——"

Dr. Holmes broke off.

Tom Merry stared blankly at the Head, and at the handsome, bronzed gentleman in the slouched hat beside him.

"Uncle!" he exclaimed.

CHAPTER 16.

The American Uncle.

MR. POINSETT gazed into the Third Form-room. The big bronzed American gentleman seemed taken quite aback.

Truly, it was a scene to surprise anybody.

The Form-rooms at St. Jim's during classes, generally presented a scene of busy order of earnest quietness.

The Head turned quite red.

He was proud of St. Jim's, and he liked to take a distinguished stranger about the school, pointing out this and that to him, but especially the Forms at work.

The Third Form-room was not a thing to be proud of just then.

Two fellows were out before the class, fighting like heroes of the ring, and the rest of the Form were yelling like a troop of Red Indians.

No wonder Mr. Poinsett was astonished.

No wonder a slight smile crept over his bronzed face, as he gazed in upon the peculiar scene.

"Thunder!" he remarked. "Is this how you keep order here, Tom?"

"Uncle!"

"Yes. Give me your fist, my lad!"

Tom Merry shook hands with his uncle.

He had not been pleased by Monty Lowther's action in communicating his misfortunes to the American rancher.

But now that he gazed upon the kind, bronzed face of his uncle he was only too glad to see it, and to feel that he had a friend to stand by him and back him up once more. His heart leaped at the sight of the rancher.

"Oh, uncle!"

Mr. Poinsett gripped his hand hard.

Wally and Jameson had left off fighting. The Third Form had left off yelling. The heroes of the fistical encounter crept back to their places looking very dishevelled and sheepish.

Wally had a black eye, and Jameson's nose was streaming red, and their collars were torn out, most of the buttons gone from their waistcoats, and they seemed to have scraped up nearly all the dust there was in the Form-room.

The Head looked at the Form sternly.

"This is disgraceful!" he exclaimed.

"We're sorry, sir!" said Wally.

"You should be, indeed!"

"I—I was trying to back up Mr. Merry, sir, and keep order."

"Then you chose a most peculiar method, D'Arcy minor. However, I shall not go into the matter. A prefect will be sent to take charge of the class. Merry, your uncle wishes to see you now."

"Yes, sir."

And Tom Merry left the Form-room with Mr. Poinsett.

"My hat!" said Wally, with a whistle. "That's Tom Merry's American uncle—the rancher millionaire! Wonder what brings him over?"

"Good thing for Tom Merry," grinned Jameson, caressing his nose.

"What-ho!" said Wally. "I suppose the old boy's forgotten me—or perhaps he doesn't know me in this eye. I'll freshen up his memory for him after lessons. We got on all right at his ranch. It was a ripping time!"

"Cave! Here's Kildare!"

The captain of St. Jim's entered the class-room.

He gave the Third Form a grim look. The Third were looking particularly meek and docile, but they did not deceive the St. Jim's captain.

"You young rascals!" he said. "You'll toe the line now. Mind, if there's a whisper in the room this afternoon, I'll make you jump. Mind that!"

And Kildare looked so much in earnest that the fags decided to keep on their very best behaviour for the rest of that afternoon, and their conduct was most exemplary till the time came for dismissal.

Meanwhile, Tom Merry had gone out into the quadrangle with his uncle.

The rancher had a quiet smile upon his face. Tom Merry was silent, not knowing exactly what that smile meant.

"So you have been playing Form-master, Tom?" said Mr. Poinsett.

"Yes, uncle," said Tom. "Dr. Holmes was kind enough to give me a chance."

"I guess you haven't made much of a success of it."

Tom Merry laughed ruefully.

"The kids don't quite catch on yet," he admitted. "You see, their only idea was to have some fun out of the thing. They're good little chaps, you know, but a bit wild and thoughtless."

Mr. Poinsett laughed.

"They haven't reached your years of experience, Tom."

Tom laughed again.

"Well, I'm older than the fags, of course," he said. "Besides, I've been through such a lot of queer experiences lately that it makes a fellow feel older, you know."

"How do you like being Form-master?"

"I hardly know yet."

"Do you think Dr. Holmes would be likely to keep you in the job?"

"I—I don't know."

Mr. Poinsett halted, and faced his nephew squarely.

"Now then, Tom, I've a bone to pick with you!" he exclaimed, in his sternest manner.

"Yes?" said poor Tom.

"You haven't treated me well, Tom."

"I—I'm sure I've never meant to treat you badly, uncle," said Tom Merry. "You've been too kind to me for that. But what have I done?"

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"It isn't so much what you have done as what you haven't done."

"But I—I—"

"Some time ago," said Mr. Poinsett, "I sent for you to visit me on my ranch out in the West."

"Yes, uncle."

"When you came there how did I treat you?"

"Splendidly," said Tom Merry.

"Did I give you as good a time as possible?"

"You certainly did."

"Did I make you understand that you were to look upon me as a friend?"

"Yes, indeed."

"Did I tell you that you were going to be my heir and inherit a cool million, with the best ranch in Arizona thrown in?"

"Ye-e-es!"

"Then what do you mean by it?" demanded Mr. Poinsett.

"By—by what, uncle?"

"By treating me as you have done—neglecting me, sir, in the most outrageous way," said the rancher.

"Oh!"

"Yes, sirrah! You let an old lady invest all your money in a Stock Exchange swindle, and lose it—"

"Miss Fawcett wasn't to blame, uncle," said Tom Merry hastily. "I don't want you to think I blame her for a minute. She was spoofed—I mean, swindled."

"I suppose she was! But that doesn't excuse you! You were left on your uppers, weren't you—stony broke?"

"Yes, uncle."

"And you didn't cable to me?"

"N-n-no!"

"You didn't write to me?"

"N-n-no," faltered Tom Merry.

"You didn't let me hear a word or a whisper of it?"

"N-n-no."

"Then what do you mean by it?" thundered Mr. Poinsett, in a voice that would have rung for a mile or so on his wide ranchlands in Arizona, and which now awoke every echo in the old quadrangle of St. Jim's.

Tom Merry was silent. He was sorry to see his uncle angry, and he began to feel that he had perhaps neglected the old gentleman, as he said, in not asking him for help.

"I'm sorry, uncle," he faltered.

Mr. Poinsett's face broke into a smile. His eyes twinkled merrily.

"It's all right, Tom!" he said, laughing. "I'm not really angry, you know. I felt a bit mad when I first heard it, that's all. I should never have known anything about it if your friend Lowther had not written. I'm going to buy the young fellow the best pony that money can buy in England, sir."

Tom Merry looked relieved.

"I'm glad you're not waxy, uncle. I—I suppose I ought to have told you, but—but I—I didn't want to look like a cadging, poor relation—"

"You'll never be a poor relation to me, Tom," said Mr. Poinsett quietly and kindly. "You are as much to me as if you were my own son, and you are my heir—heir to ten times as much money as you have lost, my boy. I had intended to come over and see the Old Country again; and when I had Lowther's letter I determined to come at once. I'm here to take you in hand, my lad."

"Oh, uncle!"

"I'm going to settle enough cash, sir, upon you to keep you on your feet," said Mr. Poinsett. "I shall look after Miss Fawcett, too, but without allowing her the control of the money. She might invest it again, you know." He smiled. "Do you want to come back to St. Jim's, Tom?"

Tom Merry's eyes danced.

"Oh, uncle!"

That was all he could say. But his tone, and the look upon his flushing face, were eloquent of what he felt.

Mr. Poinsett smiled.

"You haven't begged my pardon yet, Tom."

"For—for what, uncle?"

"For not cabling to me instantly you lost your cash."

Tom Merry smiled.

"I beg your pardon, uncle."

"I guess that's all serene, then," said Mr. Poinsett, satisfied. "Now, I'm taking you in hand. I expected to find you starving in some blessed slum in London instead of watching a prize-fight in a Form-room here. I've talked to the Head already, and it's arranged. You start again in the Shell to-morrow morning."

"Oh, uncle!"

"You like the idea?"

"Oh, it's ripping! It's splendid! What a row the fellows will make when I tell them!" said Tom Merry, his eyes dancing.

"Good!"

"You'll stay here a bit, uncle? You're going to let us see you now you're in England?" Tom Merry exclaimed eagerly. The rancher laughed.

"Dr. Holmes has asked me to stay the night," he said.

"Hurrah! We'll have a celebration—a feed in the study in the old style!" Tom Merry exclaimed enthusiastically. "You'll come, uncle?"

"I guess I will; but you mustn't feed me up to the chin. Dr. Holmes has asked me to dine with him."

"Never mind! Tea comes before dinner, and we shall have first innings!" said Tom Merry, laughing.

"Now, you show me round the place for a bit," said the rancher. "I guess it's an interesting old show, Tom."

And Tom Merry, in the gayest humour in the world, showed his uncle up and down the old school till the time for the dismissal of the classes came and the boys poured out into the quadrangle in shouting crowds.

"Manners! Lowther! Blake! Gussy! Figgins! Kerr! Kangy! Here you are! Here's my uncle! I'm coming back to the Shell!"

"Hurrah!"

"My hat!" exclaimed Lowther.

"Gwreat Scott! You wemembah me, I suppose, sir?" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, shaking hands with the rancher. "You wemembah what a wippin' time you gave us on your wanch in Awizonah, sir?"

"What-ho!" exclaimed Wally, coming up cheerfully. "You remember me, sir? What?"

"And me, sir?" said Skimpole, blinking at the rancher through his huge spectacles. "Some day, sir, I hope to come out to Arizona again, and start a Socialist community, sir, on the prairies. Suppose there are two men on an island—"

"Oh, ring off, Skimmy!"

"Yaas, wathah! I wefuse to allow Mr. Poinsett to be bored."

"My word!" said Fatty Wynn. "We're going to stand a jolly good feed to celebrate this. This is a time when it's a case of all hands on deck! Where are we to have the feed, Tom Merry?"

"In my study, Fatty!" said Tom Merry, laughing.

"Right-ho!"

"Yaas, wathah! I'll come with you to the tuckshop and help ordah the things," said Arthur Augustus. "I've just weceived a fivah frowm my governah, and—"

"Come on, Gussy!"

"Oh, good!" exclaimed Mr. Poinsett, his bronzed face beaming with pleasure. "Have all the lads I know, Tom—all who came to visit me at the ranch, and Buck Finn, too, who came back to St. Jim's with you. Let them all come."

"Yes, rather!" said Tom Merry.

And they all came.

And Tom Merry, needless to say, was the gayest of the gay. "Mr. Merry" was a dream of the past; and Tom Merry was his old self again.

And for long, long afterwards Tom Merry remembered that as the happiest day of his life.

THE END.

Next Thursday.

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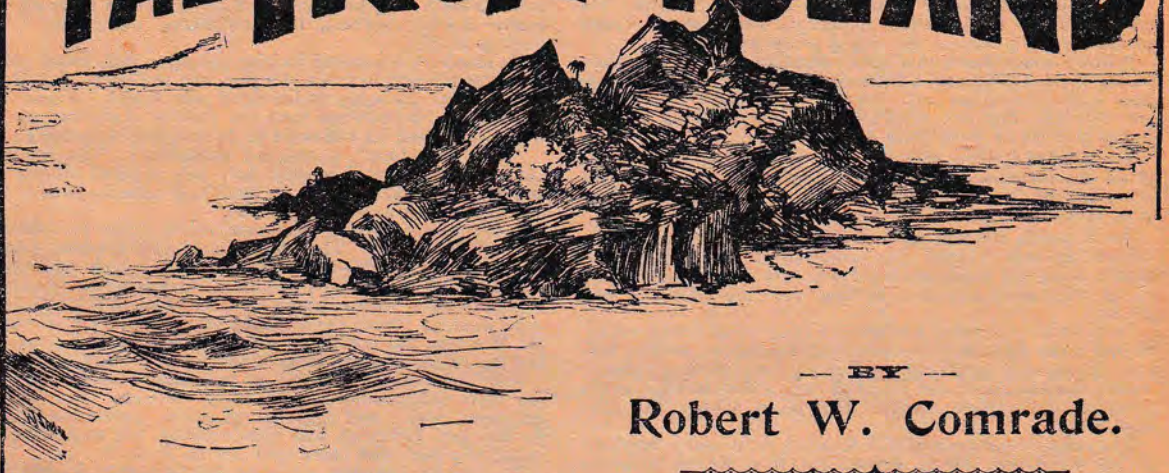
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THE IRON ISLAND



— BY —

Robert W. Comrade.

THE FIRST CHAPTERS BRIEFLY RE-WITTEN.

Philip Graydon is a young Englishman, who for eight years was marooned on an uncharted island in the Pacific—the Iron Island—by a criminal society called the Brotherhood of Iron, of which he was once a member. A lucky chance brings to his aid Dolores de las Mercedes, a beautiful Parisian actress, who has incurred the displeasure of the French Government. Graydon escapes from the Iron Island, and lands in England with Dolores. As Frank Kingston and Miss O'Brien, the two begin a secret campaign against the pernicious Brotherhood. With amazing ingenuity, and remaining himself wholly unsuspected, Kingston brings about the ruin of Don Sebastian, Detective-Inspector Caine, and Sir Robert Gissing, all Inner Councillors of the Brotherhood. Out of regard for Gissing's little daughter Ivy, however, Kingston effects the escape of the ruined baronet from Cragmoor Prison by means of kidnapping Colonel Marsden, the governor, and then impersonating him. Kingston sails for New Zealand on board his yacht, the Coronet, having with him Dolores, Sir Robert Gissing, who is travelling as Malcolm Coates, and his little daughter Ivy. There is also on board a wonderful submarine, in which Colonel Marsden is confined under the charge of Fraser, Kingston's assistant.

Having landed Ivy and Sir Robert Gissing in New Zealand, where the latter intends to make a fresh start, the Coronet gets under steam again, and after some days land is sighted in the distance, which Kingston knows to be the Iron Island. He makes no sign, however, and the island is soon out of sight again.

(Read on from here.)

Don Sebastian Receives Visitors.

With tropical fierceness the sun beat down upon the white decks of the steam-yacht Coronet. The steady beat of the engine never altered its note, and a wake of white foam marked the course of the vessel.

On all sides stretched the vast Pacific, transparent and sparkling, a gentle breeze causing the surface to be slightly ruffled. Overhead the sky was cloudless, while on the promenade deck Frank Kingston and Dolores sat in deck chairs, an awning above them as a protection from the sun.

"Yes," said the former, in a quiet voice, "it was the Iron Island right enough. But we mustn't act hurriedly, Dolores. Before I see about getting the submarine ready, the island must be right out of sight. Morrison must be kept absolutely ignorant of the true facts."

He looked over the expanse of water, and the black smudge which had been so distinct a few minutes previously had almost vanished.

"Nobody realises more than I do the necessity for extreme caution," said Dolores. "We do not know what kind of men the crew are. They certainly seem honest enough fellows, but they must have no opportunity of learning the real facts of your connection with the Iron Island."

"Of course not. At first glance, it would appear as if I were a criminal, and to defend myself I should be forced to tell the whole story of the Brotherhood. And that is what I wish to avoid, for until the last member is dealt with I shall not rest. The society is a blot on fair England, and I consider I am doing what is right in exterminating it."

"You are serving your country as bravely and as nobly as any soldier has done," said Dolores enthusiastically, "for the risks are constant and the work more than hard."

"Yet you, who owe the Brotherhood no grudge as I do, are assisting willingly and eagerly to attain the end I am striving for! If anything, you are the braver, Dolores; you are the nobler!"

She laughed.

"How can you say such a thing?" she exclaimed. "Why, I have done practically nothing! But the time is going. What are your plans?"

"Well, in a few minutes I shall stroll on to the bridge and tell the captain it's just struck me I want to have a run on the Dart. The vessel will be stopped, and I shall depart, and make straight for the Iron Island. The Coronet will remain stationary until I return."

Dolores looked serious, and her large eyes—no disguise could alter the beauty of these—were concerned and thoughtful.

"I don't like it, Mr. Kingston," she said slowly. "Now it has actually come to it, it seems terribly dangerous to me to travel all that way in such a frail craft. Suppose anything happened, and the submarine sank?"

Kingston rose to his feet.

"I assure you, Dolores, it is as safe as the Coronet herself," he said. "The boat is a little marvel; and, after all, the distance is only slight. The island is only just below the horizon."

"How long will you be gone, do you think?"

Kingston glanced at his watch.

"It is not yet one," he exclaimed, "so there are many hours of daylight left. The speed of the Dart is close on twenty knots an hour under water, and reckoning all goes well, I should be back again long before dark."

Kingston turned and strolled languidly along the deck, his gaze fixed on the dull-painted plates of the little submarine, which hung from the davits on the port-side. Captain Morrison was in the chart-house, and saluted as Kingston entered.

"I want you to heaven-to, Morrison!" exclaimed the latter. "It struck me, being such a fine day, that it would be a first-rate place for a trial."

"You mean the submarine, sir?"

"That's it, Morrison. It seems a pity to miss the opportunity. Just give orders for the boat to be lowered. I expect my man is about sick of waiting."

The skipper hurried out of the chart-house, and very soon the Coronet was gliding through the water with idle propeller. On deck several sailors were busy attending to the

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work in hand. Fraser, showing evident signs of excitement, was leaning out of the conning-tower watching the proceedings.

"Everything in readiness for a trip?" asked Kingston, looking up.

"Yes, sir; enough stores an' fuel to last four days if necessary," replied Fraser eagerly.

"We shall hardly make a trip of that length," laughed his master. "An hour or two will be enough for to-day."

The Dart, ridiculously small, was lowered overside, the greater bulk of her becoming submerged immediately. Down in the water, however, she looked more business-like.

"Don't move from this spot, Morrison," said Kingston, tilting his yachting cap a little further back. "I don't suppose I shall be gone long. Anyhow, if I don't return, you can conclude that the submarine has exceeded its requirements and dived lower than intended."

He laughed lightly, raised his cap to Dolores, and stepped down the accommodation-ladder. The whole crew, with the exception of the engineers and stokers, were leaning overside, vastly interested in the proceedings.

As Kingston stepped on to the tiny deck of the Dart the submarine sank visibly. Nevertheless, it was steady, and with a clang the manhole shut down. At the same instant, a slight commotion was seen in the rear—the propeller had started.

In quite a remarkable manner the little vessel swung round, darted away from the Coronet, and headed across the blue sea. Then, with surprising suddenness, her nose dipped below water, the conning-tower vanished, and a few bubbles and a swirl on the surface marked the place where she had disappeared.

The officers and crew of the Coronet were really surprised at the exhibition, for it showed the Dart to be a really serviceable little boat. Dolores was more interested than anybody, and looked at the transparent blue water rather apprehensively. It seemed so risky to trust oneself to a frail little shell like the Dart.

On board the submarine things were going smoothly. The engine was running sweetly, and the other apparatus—diving and steering—were working to perfection. Fraser, at the engine, was in his element, and enjoyed the experience immensely. Kingston was steering, and by the large compass in front of him, held the Dart true to her course.

The electric lights gleamed brilliantly, and the interior of the submarine was delightfully cool. The door of Colonel Marsden's cupboard-prison stood wide open, and the governor himself watched his immobile captor as he held the boat to its course.

Marsden was, of course, bound to his chair, and his thoughts were very bitter as he sat there. Yet he was looking forward eagerly to the time when he would be landed on the Iron Island. During the weeks he had been confined on the submarine his life had been a misery. Unable to move an inch, unable to make a sound, he had been watched over by Fraser night and day.

Fraser enjoyed the task—enjoyed seeing every discomfort Marsden suffered. Not that Fraser was a cruel man. No; he only knew the colonel deserved everything he was being subjected to—that the punishment Kingston had mapped out for him was too light.

"Gum, sir, but she's a rare good little craft!" exclaimed Fraser enthusiastically. "This motor's a treat to look after. An' the speed too!"

"Yes, Fraser. Old Captain Wynne is a clever man. When I return to England I mean to boom this boat. If any invention deserved success, it is this."

"Rather, sir. Do you think we're far enough away to rise to the top?"

"Not yet, Fraser. With a glass the conning-tower could easily be observed, and I want Morrison to think we've been in the opposite direction. We'd better proceed under water for another ten minutes."

Down in the submarine the speed she was travelling at could hardly be estimated, but the Dart was fairly cutting through the water like a gigantic fish. For ten minutes longer she remained fifty feet below the surface, then Kingston touched a lever.

In a second the boat answered, and shot to the surface, where she continued her course at an even greater speed. Leaving the wheel, Kingston mounted the steps into the little conning-tower, and looked out of one of the windows.

"By Jove!" he exclaimed.

The Coronet had passed clean out of view, and quite close, within five miles, could be seen the menacing cliffs of the Iron Island, that lonely rock on which Kingston had lost eight of the best years of his life.

The Dart was nearing it from the south side, the little bay, with the treacherous reef across the mouth, being directly

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ahead. Eagerly Kingston looked for any sign of life. The scene was as familiar to him as the Strand was to Fraser.

Nothing seemed altered. The mighty banyan-tree stood near the little strip of beach, the home-made boat still lay on the sand, and, further inland, the roof of the bullion-shed—now empty—could be just seen, surrounded by palms and other trees.

"Just the same!" murmured Frank Kingston. "Gad, but the sight brings back memories! Those terrible years of solitude seem long past now, but I can picture them all over again—the hopelessness, the impotence, everything comes back to me."

He stood for a moment looking out upon that scene, unable to bring himself back to the present; unable to banish the multitude of thoughts which filled his brain. Then, suddenly, a figure came out from the shadow of the banyan. It was a man, and he appeared to be carrying something.

"Don Sebastian," murmured Kingston. "So he's still alive and kicking? I wonder how he's enjoyed himself this last few months? He has at least had time to ponder over and realise the extent of his sins."

A few moments later Kingston called down to Fraser to shut off the power. The Dart was rapidly drawing near to the treacherous reef—those jagged fangs which had caused the wreck of the ill-fated Sunbeam—and Kingston meant to negotiate them with extreme caution. For, if the submarine were disabled there, there would be no hope of deliverance, for Morrison did not know where his master had gone, and Dolores might hesitate to give the necessary information.

With just enough way on her to enable Kingston to steer, the little submersible passed safely between two of the dangerous rocks, and then darted swiftly across the lagoon. So far, Don Sebastian had seen nothing, but now Kingston raised the door and clambered out on deck.

He had no sneering smile on his features; it was not Kingston's way to gloat over an enemy—that was a contemptible trick, and one Don Sebastian had delighted in. No, Kingston merely looked stern and unbending. The sleepy expression was conspicuous by its absence, and in its place there was a hard glitter.

He watched, waiting for Don Sebastian to see, and could hardly help smiling at the antics the Spaniard performed when he caught sight of the Dart, with Kingston standing on the deck. First of all he staggered back with his hand to his head, then, with wildly-waving arms, he capered down the beach, dancing high in the air in his excitement.

Kingston could see his face now. His beard, once neat and pointed, was now straggling and untidy; while his hair, although not flowing, had grown to a considerable length. But the expression on his face was one of uncontrollable excitement. Evidently he had not recognised his visitor.

"Stop your engine, Fraser," said Kingston, down the conning-tower. "She'll drift ashore now."

He looked ahead again—right into the face of Don Sebastian. The Dart was barely twenty feet from the shingle now. And as he looked so the Spaniard's expression changed, for the shock was a considerable one.

The excited look gave place to one of disappointment and chagrin, this rapidly changing to malicious fury. For a second Don Sebastian lost control of himself. The high hopes he had had when first sighting the submarine had been dashed to the ground, and his discovering that his visitor was none other than Frank Kingston—none other than Graydon, the man who had so neatly turned the tables on the Spaniard months before.

"You?" he cried, with an oath. "And I thought—"

In his fury his words became unintelligible, and in a second he had bent down and grasped a handful of stones. Before Kingston could divine his intent he had flung one with stunning force at the Dart.

Kingston had no time to dodge, and the stone—a large one—struck him heavily on the chest. Strange to say, it apparently had no effect, for it rebounded and splashed into the sea. As a matter of fact it had bruised Kingston considerably. He could see that his position was rather precarious, so he resorted to a severe measure.

Crack!

A revolver-shot sounded, and Don Sebastian dropped his stones as though they had been red-hot. The bullet from Kingston's revolver had shaved a piece of skin clean off the side of the Spaniard's left wrist, as Kingston had intended it should. The aim must have been marvellous.

"One more stone, my friend, and you'll get that arm broken," he said sternly, as he moved towards the conning-tower. "Fraser, bring out the prisoner. Perhaps our friend here will be pleased to see him!"

"Fraser!" cried Don Sebastian. "The man I was to see killed at Rio. You fiend, Graydon—you—"

Kingston let him speak on without interruption. He was glaring at the Dart in a perfect frenzy of rage. Suddenly

he started forward nearly to the water, his bare feet—presumably his boots were worn out—sinking deeply into the sand. The colonel's head appeared over the rim of the conning-tower.

"Marsden!" shouted the Spaniard. "Great heavens, what are you doing here? You are—you are—"

He guessed the truth, and went off into an hysterical yell of laughter. The tension had been too much for him. It had all happened in a few seconds; before Kingston could land, in fact.

The shock of seeing Kingston had been staggering, but the appearance of his one-time colleague and fellow-councillor, Marsden, was a bigger surprise than all.

Kingston did not waste a second. He had decided now not to even land; there would be no object in doing so. Marsden, released, free to stretch his limbs, had jumped off the submarine in a second, and now stood on the shore, shaking Don Sebastian by the hand. He had, of course, known of the Spaniard's presence on the island beforehand.

"Now, then, Fraser," said Kingston sharply, "up with those cases! I don't intend staying here a second longer than is necessary."

Fraser handed up four cases of concentrated foods—milk, beef, etc.—and Kingston, with seemingly no effort, flung them high up the beach. His two prisoners were still talking together, Don Sebastian turning his scowling countenance towards Kingston unceasingly.

The latter stood for a moment watching them; realising that here, on this isolated rock, they were ten times as secure as within the walls of Cragmoor Prison, surrounded by warders. Suddenly he turned and stepped into the conning-tower; Fraser, who had come up to have a look round, descending rapidly.

"Swing her round, Fraser!" said Kingston quickly. "There's no reason why we should remain here. I've nothing to say to them, and it is cowardly to fling taunts and abuse!"

And the Dart, with a swish from her propeller, swirled round—even in the shallow water near the beach—and headed her nose for the open sea, for the world and civilisation.

But behind, on the little strip of beach, stood two men, two villains, who were feasting their eyes for the last time for many months on a fragment of the outer world. They themselves were exiles—the exiles of the Iron Island!

A Perilous Mission.

Frank Kingston stood in the conning-tower as the Dart speeded across the unruffled lagoon, gazing back on the shore he knew so well.

The door of his old banyan-tree house stood wide open, so evidently Don Sebastian was using it as his own. He stood now, with Colonel Marsden by his side, looking out to sea. Kingston saw they were talking together—probably heaping curses upon the head of the man who was responsible for their banishment.

They knew how hopeless their case was, for the island had, in fact, been chosen by them, and their colleagues, as the loneliest and most remote in the whole Pacific. None other was so far from land, or so far from the route of ships. And as the Brotherhood itself had finished with the Iron Island, there could be no hope of escape from that quarter.

In perfect safety the submarine passed out through the reef, and directed her bows towards the Coronet. In a few moments the little bay was growing indistinct, the steep, jagged cliffs standing out in prominence of all else.

"Remain above water till we sight the Coronet's funnel," said Kingston. "I will let you know."

"Very good, sir," replied Fraser. He could see his master was in a serious mood—that the sight of the Iron Island had stirred up memories of the past.

Kingston's eyes were gleaming with satisfaction. Ever since he had left the island, disguised as the Don, he had gone straight ahead with his campaign against the infamous Brotherhood. There had been no hitch—nothing but success all along the line.

And the way in which Kingston made his plans practically obviated the possibility of failure or discovery. He was working from the background, striking hard and unawares. The Brotherhood had no inkling as to who would be singled out for punishment next—as a matter of fact, Lord Mount-Fannell had not guessed so far that anybody was working against the Inner Council. But he would soon; the members were falling out with significant regularity.

Had Kingston been known to the Brotherhood as an enemy he would have been helpless—he would have been murdered within a week. But Kingston was of no account—only a senseless dandy, who bored any and everybody. And as he stood in the Dart he realised how very secure he was, and

how powerful were the weapons he held—the secrets of the Brotherhood.

"Send her under now, Fraser!" he called, as the masts of the Coronet came into view. An ordinary person could certainly never have distinguished them at such a distance.

With a swirl the submarine disappeared below the surface. Kingston did not move, for he was still steering. By the aid of the compass he took the submarine quite a mile past the Coronet, then brought her round in a wide circle.

"To the surface, Fraser," he said. The beat of the motor was so noiseless that the words were plainly audible, although Kingston did not raise his voice.

"Ah, as I thought," he added, as the conning-tower rose into the sunlight. "The Coronet's right ahead, and we are approaching from the opposite direction to the Iron Island."

He looked at the yacht, and saw the crew all gathered against the rail forward. On the bridge Morrison and the first officer were pointing towards the Dart. The promenade deck was occupied by Dolores, who, as the nurse, "Miss Beck," took care to show no special interest. Nevertheless she was sitting in her chair gazing at the fast-approaching submarine through binoculars.

"We've had a great trip!" cried Kingston, a few moments later, as he ran up the accommodation-ladder. "The boat's better than I imagined, Morrison. She's a little beauty, and no mistake!"

"You were coming along at a rare speed, sir!" exclaimed the captain, in tones of surprise. "I didn't know she could move like that!"

"No; I couldn't let her go her fastest in the Thames," replied Kingston. "Leave her where she is, and Fraser will attend to the tow-rope. As long as it's fine there's no necessity to have her aboard."

Dolores gave him an expressive look when they met, and he nodded reassuringly. When observed by any officer or member of the crew, Kingston treated her politely, but off-handedly, as if he didn't care a jot about her.

But in the saloon, where they met some time later, he was very different. Dolores herself was eager to hear his story, and put him numerous questions. He told her everything.

"And it's a good piece of work completed," he finished. "Marsden is done with, and Don Sebastian will have a companion in his solitude. Not that he deserves one. Nevertheless, I don't think either of them will enjoy themselves very much."

"It is marvellous how you've managed it, Mr. Kingston," said Dolores thoughtfully—"how you have brought the governor all the way from England and landed him on the island without anybody on the ship being the wiser. It would seem impossible at first."

"It is the submarine I have to thank. Without that I could never have accomplished the feat. And it will come in useful again."

"You mean in connection with the Night Hawk affair?"

"Precisely."

"But I don't see how you are going to carry out your plans. You have no idea as to where the ship is at the present moment, or at which spot she will meet the Colston."

"On the contrary," drawled Kingston, "I have a very good idea on the whole matter. I was present as you know at the meeting on which the robbery was discussed. The pirate ship—for it can be called by no other name—is not two hundred miles from us at this moment."

"How do you know that?"

"Well, it's only a matter of calculation. It was arranged that the Night Hawk should sail for a certain latitude, and remain there until the Blue Star liner came along, for, as you know, these steamers keep to the same course almost to a mile."

Dolores nodded.

"Well, the Night Hawk will reach her stopping point at about noon to-morrow—provided, of course, that she has a favourable passage. And the Colston, coming in the opposite direction, will pass the spot some hours later. You will have noticed that I timed our own yacht to arrive here on this date, so as to be ready for the fray."

"Really, Mr. Kingston, I cannot help admiring the way in which you have arranged things," she said. "Nevertheless, a steamer—especially a Pacific boat—is scarcely like a railway train. They cannot be timed to a minute."

"I fully agree with you there, Dolores, and I admit that my calculations may go wrong somewhere. But even if they do, I have provided for a miscarriage. The Dart is capable of storing enough petrol, oil, food, etc., for a four days' trip. I shall set out early to meet the Night Hawk, and if I arrive at the arranged place before she does I shall simply wait. While I am waiting there is no fuel being consumed, and as the boat is made to carry three passengers, and there will be only two aboard, it will be an easy matter to store enough provisions to last eight or more days."

"So in that way it will be possible to remain in the sub-

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marine for well over a week," said Dolores. "It is hardly possible the two ships will be so late, is it?"

"It is more than improbable. And if a storm arises I shall be as safe as I am now—safer, perhaps, for the Dart can remain fifty or more feet down and miss the worst."

"Nothing escapes your attention," she cried. "But if you are away more than four days Morrison will conclude you have gone to the bottom, and even I shall begin to fear."

"No, you mustn't do that, Dolores. I assure you the Dart is as safe as the Coronet. If I am a long while gone you will know that I am simply waiting."

"But how will you act when you meet the Night Hawk?" asked Dolores curiously. "How can you foil the Brotherhood's plans?"

Kingston's languid glance met her inquiring one.

"That," he said, "I am not quite clear on myself yet. You may rest assured, however, that I shall attain my end somehow. The Brotherhood is certainly not going to win."

Kingston's method was really very simple. Captain Morrison was considerably surprised when he heard his master's instructions; to him the scheme was a mad one. But, of course, Morrison was given to understand that Kingston was only going on a long pleasure trip.

So the next morning the Dart was in readiness for immediate departure. She lay alongside the large yacht, almost a toy. Morrison, on the bridge, wore a worried expression. He didn't like the idea at all; it was almost suicidal, in his opinion.

In the saloon Kingston shook Dolores warmly by the hand. She, too, was looking rather serious. Kingston could not deceive her; she was well aware that his mission was about as perilous as it could possibly be.

"Good-bye, Mr. Kingston," she said quietly, her large eyes fixed gravely on his own; "and may Heaven grant you a safe return. I don't like to think of the grave risks you are running."

Kingston laughed reassuringly.

"Really, Dolores, there's not so much danger as you imagine. Personally, I shall thoroughly enjoy the encounter, so I beg of you not to worry yourself. I shall turn up again in a day or two, very similar to a bad penny."

She could not help smiling at his absolute coolness and indifference. From his manner one would think he was off for an afternoon's fishing expedition in the Thames.

"Well, whatever you say," she exclaimed, "I shall worry about you both. I should be callous indeed if I did not."

"I can only repeat my former assurance," he said quietly.

They shook hands again, and Kingston lounged out on deck. He was attired in spotless white yachting clothes, and seemed in no hurry.

"I don't like the idea, sir," persisted Morrison. "It's too dangerous, to my way of thinking. In that eggshell—"

"My dear Morrison, the boat is no more of an eggshell than you are. All I want you to do is to remain at this spot until I come back. Stop a month if necessary."

"Of course, sir, I can do nothing but obey your orders, but—"

"That's right, Morrison," smiled his employer. "I thought you'd come round. Don't look like that; I'm only giving the boat a testing. Good-bye!"

"Good-bye, sir!"

Morrison shook hands reluctantly, and his expression was rather gloomy as the Dart turned and scuttled away across the transparent water—in the reverse direction to that which Kingston really intended going. Again it was only as a safeguard.

The sun shone brilliantly, and the wind still remained in the same quarter. The glass was high, and one of those spells of uninterrupted fine weather seemed to have set in. Kingston, with his expert knowledge of the atmospheric conditions, could see no sign of a change for days, and was confident the adventure would be marred by no storm or other disturbance.

"Well, Fraser, we're off!" he cried. "I wouldn't tell Miss Dolores of my plans, because she would immediately say I am running into danger."

"And, beggin' your pardon, sir, she wouldn't be far wrong," exclaimed Fraser, bending over the smoothly-pulsating engine. "If you ain't on a jolly risky game this time then I never knew one."

"Nonsense, Fraser! You look upon it too seriously. Personally, I shall enjoy myself immensely."

"Well, I don't reckon I shall, sir," growled Fraser. "Not while you're aboard that craft, leastways. It seems too much like cuttin' your own head off to me, sir."

"My head, my dear Fraser, was not made to be cut off," laughed Kingston. "Everybody seems to think I am doing my best to commit suicide. I'm surprised at you, Fraser, especially. You're not nervous, are you?"

His companion straightened himself quickly.

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"Nervous, sir?" he cried. "Not likely! I know it's silly o' me having these fears, but, after all, it ain't a baby show we're goin' to, is it, sir?"

"It's something more exciting than that, I am glad to say. The liner Colston, with scores of lives aboard, must be saved, and if I don't do it, who is to? I cannot attain my object openly—I cannot warn them, for that would give the whole game away."

Fraser scratched his head thoughtfully.

"So it would, sir. An' you're riskin' your life for the sake of others—you're doin' it to save the Colston?"

"Partly for that, Fraser, and partly because it is work against the Brotherhood of Iron, because another member of the Inner Council is to meet with his deserts!"

Aboard the Night Hawk.

Frank Kingston sat in the easy chair Colonel Marsden had so lately occupied, with a large chart in front of him. He had been in this position some little time, and was reckoning out the Dart's position.

"Well, Fraser, we are as nearly as possible on the exact spot where the Night Hawk has arranged to stop. As there is no sign of her, we can only presume that she has been delayed."

Fraser was standing in the conning-tower, keeping a sharp look-out. The submarine lay stationary, heaving gently to the roll of the water. The sun sank now, and the atmosphere was clear and transparent. On all sides stretched the vast Pacific, no sail of any description breaking the monotony."

"I suppose, sir, she will come?" began Fraser.

"That is almost certain. At any rate, we can do nothing but wait. It is only a few hours' journey to the Coronet, and after three or four days of waiting we can easily get back. But the Hawk will be here before then. The Brotherhood are not going to let such a haul as the Colston carries slip through their fingers."

"Hardly likely, sir. Still, there's plenty of time yet. Don't you think it would be best to cruise around an' see if she's stopped anywhere else?"

"I shall certainly do so if no sign appears before to-morrow morning. At present, however, I intend to take the deck chair, a magazine, and enjoy a quiet read on deck."

And Kingston rose leisurely to carry out his object. Fraser thought a lot, although he said nothing. How his master could give his attention to magazine-reading at such a time was a mystery to him.

The air outside was delightfully cool and refreshing, and the little waves splashing against the Dart's side made the possibility of a storm seem almost impossible. That beautiful sea appeared incapable of becoming a raging waste of foam-capped rollers. Kingston sat there, wholly engrossed in a short story. For the time being he had banished all else from his mind.

The night was spent in three-hour watches. While Kingston slept for three hours Fraser stood in the conning-tower, keeping a sharp eye open, and vice-versa. It amazed Fraser how his master dropped off to sleep within thirty seconds of lying down, and awoke at the precise expiration of three hours. And, strange to say, he showed no sign of having slept.

The dawn was clear and magnificent. But no sign, so far, of the Night Hawk, had been seen. Kingston was on the look-out, and his keen eyes did not fail to notice a slight haze—a mere smudge—to the west as the sun rose higher and higher. And as the minutes passed the smudge grew more pronounced.

"Smoke!" murmured Kingston. "If this doesn't prove to be the Night Hawk I shall be very much surprised."

Shortly afterwards the masts and funnel of a steamer rose into view. Kingston closed the manhole, awoke Fraser, and in a few moments the submarine was darting along at a depth of fifty feet towards the approaching steamer.

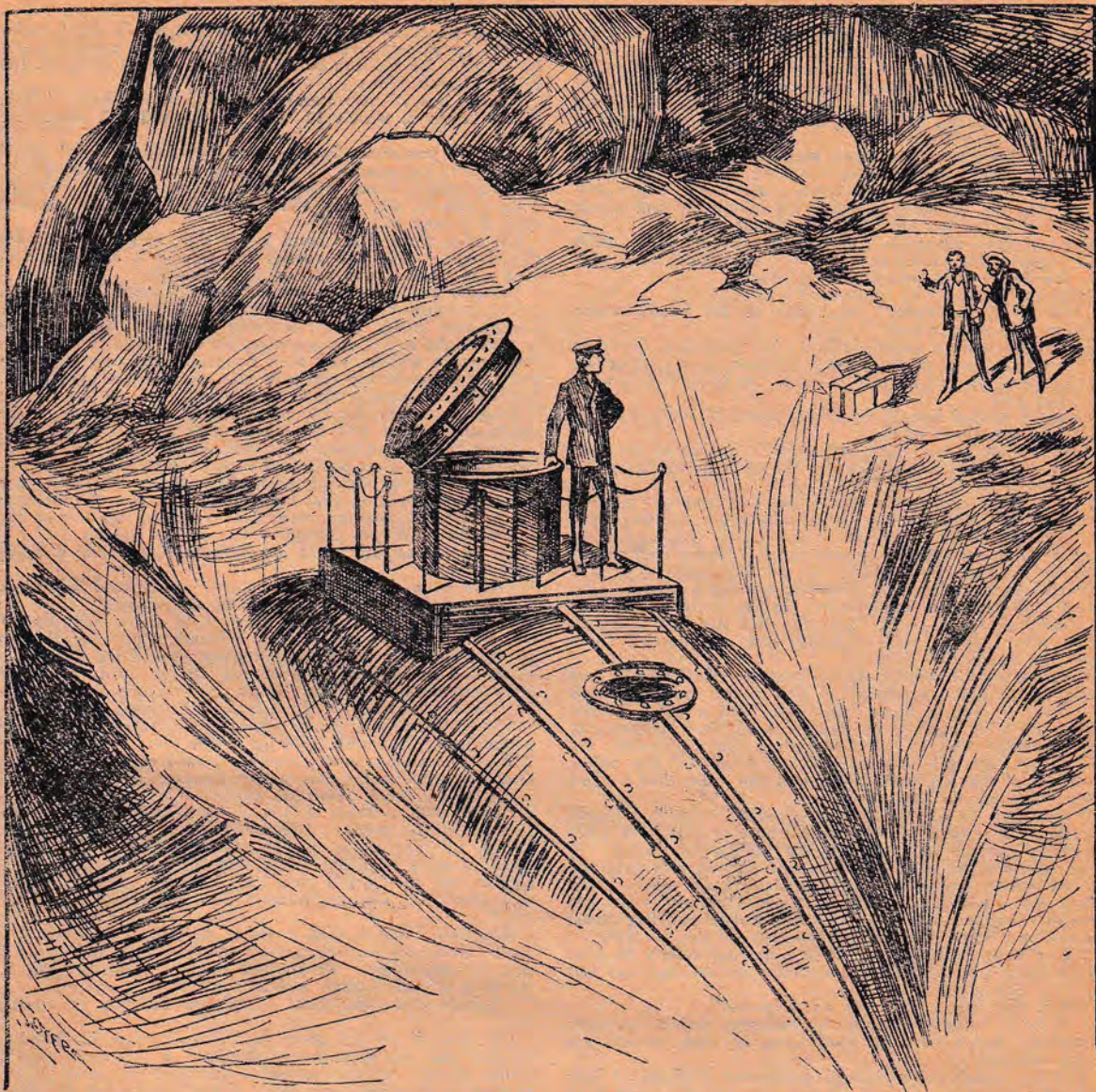
After a short run Kingston shut the power off and raised the vessel until she was within six feet of the surface. Then he touched a lever; something clicked, and a view of the surface of the water was before him.

The thing was an invention of Wynne's, the designer of the submarine. The action of pulling the lever had sent a long, telescopic shaft upwards—a periscope. But the extremity—that part which protruded above the water—was, to even a close observer, a piece of wood. Thus the submarine could lie quite close to another vessel, see everything that was going on, and remain herself unseen.

Kingston smiled as he glanced at the reflection.

"There you are, Fraser!" he exclaimed. "It's the Night Hawk sure enough. Evidently she is not stopping just yet. Start your engine up, and run it at full power. There's not a moment to waste."

He lowered the periscope again—for it would snap off like a twig once the submarine started—and grasped the steering-



With a swish of her propeller, the Dart swirled round and headed for the open sea, leaving the two men standing on the little strip of beach—exiles on the Iron Island.

wheel. Round the Dart swept, and presently was leaving the Night Hawk behind her rapidly.

"Now," directed Kingston sharply, when they were out of sight, and the Dart lay on the surface, "the time has come for action! Out with that boat; the Hawk will be within view in a few minutes."

The little, collapsible boat was quickly brought on deck, opened out, and floated alongside. Then Kingston placed inside it a few ship's biscuits and a keg of drinking-water, three parts empty. Meanwhile, Kingston was below, changing. When he had finished he was attired in crumpled, sea-stained reefers, collarless, and with no boots. His hair was ruffled, and he looked every inch a shipwrecked sailor.

"Now, Fraser," he said, "exactly what is going to happen next I cannot say. I shall have to act as I think best. You may rely, however, on my coming out alive. All you have to do is to remain behind my boat until the Night Hawk comes up, then follow her like a shadow. Never be less than fifty yards behind, and try not to be seen. Keep a sharp watch while you are stationary, for I may appear at any moment."

"Don't forget the sharks, sir," began Fraser warningly.

"You are quite right, Fraser; I must not forget them, for they certainly wouldn't forget me. However, I shall give

them no opportunity to indulge in a free meal, I assure you. Ah," Kingston added, gazing at the horizon, "I must be quick, for the submarine must on no account be seen."

He shook hands heartily, and the next moment took his seat in the little boat, and pulled off. Without a moment's delay Fraser disappeared inside, and lowered the submarine.

Left alone, the little collapsible boat seemed a mere dot on the surface of the water, too small to sustain the weight of its occupant. Kingston was behaving in a manner most strange; he was standing upright in the boat, waving his coat frantically over his head. It was hardly possible for those on the Night Hawk to see him yet, but Kingston believed in doing things properly or not at all.

The work was hot and exhausting, but Kingston kept it up; he wanted to exhaust himself. It was his intention to get aboard the enemy's ship, and find out the exact course they were going to pursue. They could hardly fail to pick him up, if only for the curiosity of ascertaining where he came from.

Gradually the large yacht grew nearer and nearer, and Kingston, realising that he was probably being observed through more than one telescope, continued waving his coat excitedly, wearing the while an expression which completely

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disguised his own features. The manner in which he controlled his muscles was remarkable.

"Good!" he murmured to himself, as his exceptionally keen eyes saw a boat being prepared for the water, "they mean to see who I happen to be. It'll be risky work once I'm aboard, but the Colston's got to be saved. She may be appearing at any time."

He laid the coat down now, and waved his hand. The boat was in the water, and approaching him at a spanking pace. As if exhausted he sank down and raised the water-jug to his lips, drinking greedily, as though he had never been able to quench his thirst previously.

The boat drew alongside, its occupants looking at Kingston with considerable curiosity. He lay with half-closed eyelids, his hands twitching and trembling.

"Thank 'Eaven!" he murmured audibly.

"It's all right, mate," cried one of the boat's crew; "you're safe enough now."

The sailor winked expressively to his comrades, for they all knew that this man could not live to return to civilisation, that he might as well have been dead. At least, that is what they thought.

Kingston roused himself up at the sound of the voice, and looked wildly about him.

"Now, then, men," cried the officer in charge of the boat sharply, "get that towline fixed. We can't do anything for the fellow here. He seems done up."

In a moment Kingston's little collapsible boat was secured to the stern of the other, and the sailors were pulling back to the Night Hawk. Kingston, although he appeared to be lying with closed eyes, saw everything; nothing escaped his attention. The Night Hawk, as she lay there, looked a powerful enough ship, and certainly not extra large.

Not that she was a small boat. On the contrary, she was of good size for a yacht; but the ship she was going to attack, the Colston, was twice her size, and carried three times the number of lives.

Kingston rose unsteadily as the boat grated alongside, and managed, with the assistance of one of the crew, to reach the deck. Captain Shaw was there, and a little further back, with a big cigar in his mouth, stood Herr Bruckmann, the councillor who was superintending the enterprise. He was a big man, tall and thick-set, and one of the oldest members of the Brotherhood—old in the sense that he had been a member as long as anybody.

"Take him to one of the spare cabins," directed Shaw, "and give him some brandy. And where's Curtis? Where's the little brat got to? Ah, here's a job for you, boy!"

He addressed an individual Kingston had scarcely expected to find among this gang of cut-throats. It was a boy, a lad whose age could not have been above fourteen. He was dressed in ragged clothes, and his face wore a half-frightened expression. Shaw grasped him roughly by the shoulder.

"You're to go below with this man and attend to him. Don't leave him. Anything he wants you can call out for. Do you understand?"

"Yes, sir; only I ain't had no sleep—"

"Sleep be hanged! Get along with you, unless you want a hiding. You'll have to work here, my lad, or else get slung overside."

The boy didn't reply, but Kingston saw a gleam of hate enter his eyes for a second. Two men assisted Kingston to the cabin, and laid him roughly on a bunk, another bringing a glass of brandy, which he gulped down greedily. He coughed a little, and passed a hand before his eyes.

"That's better!" he muttered hoarsely, looking at the men with burning eyes. "Where am I? This is a British ship, ain't it, mates? I thought I was gone, then I spotted yer. I thought for a minit yer wasn't goin' to stop—"

Kingston paused as the door opened and Bruckmann appeared. The sailors saluted hastily and departed; evidently they held the German somewhat in awe. Curtis, however, was standing beside the bunk, looking at the newcomer with no sign of fear.

"You're an Englishman, eh?" said Bruckmann, looking at Kingston curiously. "How did you get in that boat? Did your ship get in storm, or what—"

"Ship?" muttered Kingston, as if puzzled. "I don't know—I don't remember; yet it seems as 'ow— No, I'm 'anged if I know wot 'appened!"

He sank back on to the blankets, looking bewildered. Herr Bruckmann, who had known Kingston years ago, before his exilement on the Iron Island, gave no sign of recognition now. Indeed, such a thing would have been impossible, for Kingston's features were entirely transformed.

"You don't know?" repeated the German. "What you mean, eh? You not know what happened to your ship? How you get in that little boat? You know who put you there?"

Kingston raised himself on his elbow again. He was feigning loss of memory because it was quite possible the

German would, when he had heard Kingston's story, order him to be thrown overboard. And Kingston wanted time; he wanted the Colston to appear; he wanted to learn the Night Hawk's plans.

"Little boat?" he reiterated, looking at the floor. "Yes, I was in there, wasn't I? But I'm blowed if I remember —"

"Where you come from—where you bound for?" asked Bruckmann impatiently. "You know that, yes? Australia?"

"Australia? Gum, that name seems kinder familiar! Yes, that's it, sir, only I'm 'anged if I can tell you wot craft I belong to. Ah!"

Kingston pressed his hand to his side, and lay back with closed eyes. He had roused the German's curiosity, and that was all that was necessary, at present.

"Quick, boy, give him some brandy!" cried Bruckmann.

The youngster rapidly poured out a glass of the fiery liquid, and gently forced it down Kingston's throat. He stirred slightly, but did not open his eyes. For five minutes the German waited, and then departed, ordering Curtis to tell him immediately the sick man opened his eyes again. Until then he was to watch by his side.

Kingston could hardly help seeing the humour of the situation. Here was this man, who actually knew him, waiting until he regained consciousness, when he was as healthy and as alert as he had ever been in his life.

Kingston's eyes certainly seemed tightly closed, yet he was observing everything that transpired. He saw the German leave, and, incidentally, saw the boy shake his fist at the closed door. Why? Kingston was rather curious.

He stirred slightly, and his attendant gave him a quick look.

"Give us a drop o' water, mate," whispered Kingston. "Not that there brandy; it's too blessed strong."

The lad did as requested, then stood for a moment undecided. Kingston sat upright, evidently very much better. He felt somehow as if this youngster could be trusted, as if he had nothing to do with the Brotherhood. Certainly his presence on the Night Hawk was puzzling.

"Oo was that cove?" he asked. "Furriner, ain't 'e?"

"Yes; German, I think. You seem a sight better all of a sudden," said Curtis, looking at the door apprehensively. "Ere," he added, in a whisper, "now I've got the chance. Don't say a word, but this 'ere ship's a wrong 'un."

"A wrong 'un? What do yer mean?"

"Don't talk so loud; I 'ave to let Mr. Bruckmann know as soon as you wake. But I thought I'd better tell yer; they're all pirates, or somethink, on this ship. It's right, mate; I ain't swankin' yer. They're goin' to kill me, I believe, an' they'll kill you, too. There's mischief o' some sort afoot, an' I'm frightened; I'm frightened out o' my life."

Kingston listened with growing surprise. Who was this boy? Evidently an honest one, who had used his eyes and ears to advantage. It showed he was generous, too, by warning him of danger, and letting him be prepared.

"What's this ship, then? An' 'ow did you git aboard 'er?"

"I stowed myself away in 'er weeks ago in London, thinkin' she was an ordinary steamer. I was discovered in a day, though, an' the captain swore to throw me overboard as soon as the 'job' was over. I don't know wot 'e meant, but they're all bad 'uns, mate. I suppose they're goin' to do some dirty work I shall split on, an' as you're 'ere now, an' they 'aven't done it yet, they'll kill you as well."

Kingston made up his mind quickly. This lad would come in useful; he was not lying. Kingston could tell in a moment that the facts were exactly as he had stated them. He was smart, too, that was very evident.

"What's your name?"

"Tim Curtis."

Kingston raised himself up still further, and held his hand up warningly.

"Is there anybody about?" he whispered.

"That's just what I'm afraid of," answered the lad, glancing at the door. "If anybody comes in an' finds me talkin' to you, I shall git 'arf killed."

"I'll chance it. Can I trust you, Tim?"

"Trust me? Course you can. I ain't in with this lot o' murderers; 'cos that's wot they are, I think."

"Then listen here; I'm going to tell you something which will surprise you. I'm not a shipwrecked sailor at all, and I'm as strong as anybody. I've been shamming, Tim!"

Frank Kingston Makes an Exchange.

Tim Curtis opened his eyes wide in amazement. Kingston had released his features until they were in their normal shape, at the same time altering his voice to his usual refined drawl.

"What do yer mean?" gasped Tim. "Who are yer?"

"Not so loud; you'll be heard," warned Kingston. "You were telling me just now that the men on board this ship were murderers. Well, young 'un, you were quite right, and they certainly intend killing both you and I. I know everything, and have come aboard to foil their plans. I can't tell you anything further now, but if you will trust me I will do my best to get us both out of this fix."

"But where did yer come from, sir?" whispered the lad, in amazed tones. "In that there little boat—"

"That was nothing to judge by, Tim. What I want you to do is to let me know the instant another big ship is sighted, and to give Bruckmann and Shaw the impression that I am very ill, and that I have some important news to communicate. Will you do this?"

"Like a shot, sir! But I'm fair flabbergasted. You know the captain's name, and—"

"I know everything, Tim. To satisfy your curiosity, I'd better tell you that the Night Hawk is the property of a gang of scoundrels, and that she is going to hold up another ship and rob it."

"Just what I thought, sir!" said Tim excitedly. "I knew they was wrong 'uns!"

"Well, it is my intention to foil their game, and if you will help me, the task will be all the easier. It is getting on in the day now, and the Colston may appear at any moment. Now, I want you to go to the door and shout for somebody—say I am restless."

"But what for, sir?" Tim was clearly puzzled.

"I shall be unconscious when somebody arrives, and it will give them the impression that I am really bad. Therefore, they will probably leave you with me all the evening alone. That is the time I shall want to act."

Kingston turned over in his bunk, and his face resumed its former expression. Tim Curtis stood for a moment looking at him, then turned and opened the door of the cabin. There was a sailor on duty a dozen yards away—placed there specially—and Tim called him quickly. The man approached.

"Go an' tell Mr. Bruckmann," cried the boy, "this chap's gettin' his senses agin."

The man hurried off, and in a moment returned with the councillor. Bruckmann looked at Kingston quickly, but the latter was lying with his face the other way, breathing heavily.

"You send for me," said the German sharply. "What for—eh? The man's not conscious."

"He was just now, sir. It was only for a minute, though. He turned over and said something I couldn't understand, though it seemed urgent. Then he laid back agin, like 'e is now."

The German grunted. He pulled Kingston roughly and gazed into his face. It looked hot and feverish, but there was no sign of consciousness whatever.

"Looks as if he'll not wake for a long time, sir," began Tim. "He's seems to 'ave gone right off agin. It may be hours—"

"That will do, boy!" snapped Bruckmann, giving Tim a heavy cuff. "And be quick next time!"

He walked heavily out of the cabin. It was some little time before Kingston moved. When he did he merely turned his face round and smiled at the youngster, who, now he had got over the shock, was grinning hugely.

"You seem to be enjoying yourself!" exclaimed Kingston.

"I didn't know wot to think first off, sir, but now there seems a chance of escape, I feel better!"

"You're not frightened?"

"I was when I thought I was goin' to be done in, sir, but I ain't now. Some'ow, if you don't mind my sayin' so, sir, you've given me new 'eart!"

"I'm glad of that, Tim. Now we must be quiet. For myself I am going to steal a little nap; as soon as it's dark I shall be awake agin."

With that Kingston turned round, and before Tim could grasp it was fast asleep. Tim himself was in a whirl; he couldn't realise all that happened. He was a sharp lad, and had soon found out that the crew of the Night Hawk were no ordinary sailors.

The rest of the day passed uneventfully. Kingston slept peacefully, and when Captain Shaw looked in, he found Tim Curtis sitting beside the bunk quietly watching the unconscious man.

It was not until the short twilight had darkened into night that Kingston awoke. He didn't move, but remained just where he was. A little electric light was illuminating the cabin, and from the open port came a splashing sound; all else was still.

"She's stopped," thought Kingston. "The question is, when will the Blue Star boat put in an appearance—"

He lifted his head suddenly as a cry rang out from above.

"Sail to sta'board, sir!"

Instantly the quiet deck became noisy with the tramp of

feet, as Bruckmann and the officers hastened out to see what the sail was.

"Tim!"

"Oh, sir, I didn't know as you were awake," whispered the boy, startled.

"Well, I am, and I want to get out of this; I want to go on deck!"

"But you can't, sir!"

"I must. See here, isn't there a sailor just up the passage?"

"Yes, sir, but—"

"Then fetch him in here at once! Don't waste time, my lad. One moment, though. Is he an old man, or a stout one, or what?"

"No, sir; he's a young chap, of ordinary size—"

"That's enough; fetch him in. Don't stand there; upon my soul, I shall have to teach you a few lessons! Every minute is of importance."

As he spoke Kingston opened his shirt—his clothes had been searched, of course—and ran his finger-nail against a certain part of his chest. It appeared at first sight as though a portion of his skin had been cut through, for a kind of pocket was revealed. As a matter of fact, it was a clever idea of Kingston's own. The material which was stuck to his real skin looked precisely like the genuine article.

In a second he had in his hand a few grains of very fine powder, which he placed in the brandy glass, pouring a few drops of the spirit over the top. The next second he was behind the door.

Only just in time, for as he did so it opened and Tim appeared, followed by the sailor. Before the fellow knew what had happened, before he had a chance to cry out, Kingston held him as in a vice. The sailor couldn't move an inch. His captor's marvellous strength was something which gave him a shock.

"Now, then, Tim," whispered Kingston quickly, "get that glass and pour the contents into his mouth; he won't make a noise."

Tim picked the glass up as directed. He was flushed with excitement and expectation. Kingston removed his hand from the man's mouth for a second, giving him no chance to cry out, and transferred it to his throat.

"Now!" he said sharply.

Tim lost no time, but poured the brandy into the captive's open mouth.

Kingston had stopp'd his windpipe momentarily, so that when the grip was released he gasped for breath. The ruse succeeded splendidly, for not a drop of the prepared spirit was wasted; and almost before the man could complete his breath, he crumpled up and lay limply in Kingston's arms.

"Have you killed him, sir?" muttered Tim, in horror.

"Killed him, my lad? No; in a few hours he'll wake from this trance; it was only a little sleeping draught."

"But what are you going to do, sir?"

"Well, to start with, I mean to strip this fellow of his outer clothing."

With remarkable rapidity Kingston set about his task, and in a very short time stood up in the blue trousers and jersey which the unconscious man had lately worn. The next thing was to slip his own dilapidated clothing on to his captive and lift him into the bunk. Once there, with his face turned away, it would be difficult to detect the change. Of course, if he were turned over, the deception would be discovered in a moment. That would have to be left to chance.

"Now, then, Tim, how do I look?"

Kingston, after carefully studying the sailor's face, had found it impossible to exactly copy it without make-up, but his stooping figure he had got to perfection, and the cap was set at the same angle on his head.

"Gum, sir, you wouldn't tell no difference in the dark," said the youngster, with wide-open eyes. "'Ow did yer do it, sir? You only saw 'im when 'e came in!"

"I admit I was handicapped a little," smiled Kingston.

"However, I'm going to chance my luck. You remain here as if nothing had happened. If anybody comes, tell them the sick man is still unconscious from exhaustion."

Before Tim could reply Kingston was out in the passage. He walked a few paces along, then took his stand on the spot where the other man had been. Fortunately, the place was a dark one. There were cabins on both sides, and a little farther along, the saloons.

On deck he could hear orders being given, and the tramp of feet every now and again. What ship was it which had been sighted? Kingston had not much doubt on that score, for it was almost certain to be the Colston.

The night was dark and oppressive. Even in the open the air was very close, and a gentle wind was the only relief. Kingston stood there uncertain how to act. The main object in his coming aboard the Night Hawk was to find out how Bruckmann intended treating the Colston, and to devise, in

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some way, a method of warning the Blue Star liner. How to set to work, however, was another question.

Suddenly he started as the deck below him commenced quivering, and a gentle thud-thud made itself heard. The engines had been started. For what reason?

Kingston was soon to know.

The Wireless.

He stood there listening to the sounds up above, then drew back up against the cabins. Two men were descending the companion, just in front. They were talking seriously, and Kingston's keen hearing distinguished their words clearly. He made no attempt to hide his presence, but stood his ground stolidly.

"Yes, sir; it's the only way. It's rather fortunate than otherwise that she's come after dark. But she'll have to go; there's no help for it."

"We shall not use violence first, Herr Captain. We shall demand the bullion, and they give it us at once—yes!"

"I'm not so sure about that, sir," replied Captain Shaw. "The skipper of the Colston won't give in tamely. I reckon we shall have to waste a little powder before he comes to our way of thinking."

"Possibly. But it matters not, does it? We shall get the bullion somehow."

"Most decidedly, sir," replied Shaw, opening the door of the saloon and switching on the light. Neither of them took any notice of Kingston, for, after all, there were no secrets about this vessel; they were all members of the Brotherhood.

"Most decidedly. And even if the Colston point blank refuses to hand it over without any fuss, our way is quite clear. We shall simply sweep their decks with the Maxims first, then send a boarding party across, with every man armed. They can do absolutely nothing, sir, against us."

"You will shoot them down, yes?"

"It's the only way, sir. Shoot them down, procure the bullion, and then sink her. If she gives in tamely, it is the same; we shall sink her afterwards. Not one must escape to tell the tale—the Colston must simply disappear."

Kingston had drawn closer, and listened with tightly-compressed lips. So they were going to have no mercy; they were going to treat everybody the same, women and children included. Kingston's eyes looked dangerous.

"It is one or the other," he told himself grimly, "for one must go. Which is it to be, this gang of murderers I am in the midst of here, or that gathering of innocent women and children in the Colston? Which indeed!"

He laughed at the very thought. The crew and officers of the Night Hawk deserved death; yet it was either them or the Colston, for if the Night Hawk remained above water she would assuredly sink the Blue Star boat.

Suddenly Kingston drew back against the wall and caught his breath in sharply. Somebody had switched on the electric light, and the place was brilliantly illuminated. If he were seen he would be discovered in a second! What should he do—

Ah, somebody was descending the companion! Kingston, quite cool, darted a glance round him. Opposite was a little door, and without thinking twice he turned the handle and entered. Wherever he was he found himself in darkness.

The man who had caused his sudden retreat into this apartment walked past quickly, and Kingston breathed a little more freely. He felt about, and his hand found the switch. Should he press it down?

Click!

The place in a second was a blaze of light, and Kingston looked about him quickly. The room was only a small one, and on a long bench were several intricate-looking instruments.

"By Jove!"

Kingston uttered the exclamation under his breath involuntarily. This time he was really disturbed from his customary calm, and his face glowed with sudden excitement.

And there was good reason for this sudden change of demeanour. This room—which he had entered by accident rather than design—was none other than the wireless-room! In a second, Kingston had silently locked the door.

He knew for a fact that the Colston was fitted with a wireless installation, and the solution to the difficulty had solved itself in a marvellous manner. He would communicate with the Colston by wireless! He would warn them in a manner which could not possibly give away his identity—in a manner second to none.

It had been his first object on reaching England from the Iron Island to thoroughly learn all the codes connected with telegraphy, wireless-telegraphy, signalling, &c., and now, for the first time, his knowledge was to prove of practical use; was to probably save every life aboard the Colston!

He did not waste a second. He knew how dangerous his

task was, for he himself was unarmed, while there were scores about him who would shoot him down like a dog. For the present, however, his whole attention was occupied with the intricate instruments; all else was banished from his mind.

In a few minutes he had established communication, with the Colston; they had asked him what was wrong. Kingston rapidly flashed back the message:

"This ship enemy. Will shortly order you to stop and give up bullion. If you refuse, will threaten to blow you out of the water. I am friend. Am sending this message unknown to others. Take no notice of threats; refuse to listen to them. They mean to sink you, in any case."

The reply came promptly:

"Cannot understand. Your message quite amazing. Is it practical joke?"

Kingston ground his teeth, although he knew perfectly well his words did sound like a joke.

"In dead earnest," he flashed back. "This ship pirate. Will threaten, as I say. Take no notice whatever of threats. I will see you come to no harm."

Kingston turned with flushed face. He had attained his object—the Colston knew her danger, yet was unaware as to who had warned her. He switched off the light, unlocked the door, and quietly opened it. The deck outside was deserted, so he quickly stepped out of the room.

As he did so, excited voices were heard above, and Kingston plainly heard the word "wireless" mentioned more than once. It had been seen; the instrument on the masthead had told those on deck what had been happening, and the full significance of it had struck them fully.

Kingston, knowing his life was in his hands now, ran softly along until he came to the door of the cabin wherein sat Tim Curtis. He burst the door open without ceremony. Tim looked up in alarm.

"Come!" exclaimed Kingston rapidly. "It's now or never, young 'un. It's just a chance whether we escape or not. Anyhow, I mean to have a jolly good try!"

He grasped Tim's hand, and together they hurried on to the lower deck.

"Up here, sir!" cried the lad, and in a moment Kingston found himself on deck beneath the clear sky and shining stars. Just across the water the lights of the Colston could be seen.

"To the accommodation-ladder," whispered Kingston, noticing that several men were looking in his direction very interestedly. It was touch and go, and while Tim stood for a moment getting his bearings, a couple of sailors strolled up. One of them, evidently a sharp fellow, cried out in alarm instantly:

"That cove ain't one of us—'e's a stranger, the chap wot done the wireless, sure! 'Ere, come on—"

Before he could get any further, Kingston turned on him, picked him up like a feather, and literally flung him at two others who were approaching at a run. The human missile struck them with terrible force, and all three lay groaning on the deck. Kingston's eyes were glittering in an unusual manner; his fighting spirit was thoroughly aroused.

He knew a score of bullets might come speeding in his direction at any minute. Suddenly he gave a little chuckle. Tim heard it, and wondered what could have come over him. He was soon to know; Kingston had seen a way out.

Directly in front was Herr Bruckmann himself. Without waiting for attack, Kingston rushed at him like a whirlwind, grasped him round the waist, and lifted him high aloft. Even the attacking sailors stood still and gasped, for the feat was a marvellous one—Bruckmann was no light man. Kingston's strength was a thing to marvel at.

"Now, then," he cried, in a ringing voice, "let the first man shoot, and the esteemed Herr Bruckmann will provide a really good meal for the sharks!"

The German roared impotently, and struggled without avail. Then he gave orders that no man should shoot on peril of their lives. Kingston laughed lightly. He saw his way clear now.

"Down the ladder, Tim," he directed.

Tim ran forward, and cool and smiling this most remarkable of men (his face still unrecognisable as Kingston's) followed. The Night Hawk was stationary, and at the bottom of the steps lay the little collapsible boat of Kingston's.

"Now, then, Tim, draw that little craft into the water. Fortunately, the sea is quite calm, so you will have no difficulty."

The boy did as directed, and the tiny boat lay bobbing up and down at the foot of the ladder.

"It would be considerably safer if you searched this gentleman and removed his firearms," went on Kingston, in his languid voice. "Just do so, Tim."

He sat Bruckmann down heavily, and, grasping his arms in a certain position, he held him helpless. Tim rapidly produced a revolver and handed it to Kingston.

"That's the very article I need, young 'un. Now, Herr Bruckmann, I really must say good-night. Kindly remain

just where you are, for if one shot is directed towards me, I am afraid you will be the sufferer. In you get, Tim?"

The boy did so, and Kingston quite coolly sat by his side.

"Now, Tim, that pair of oars was not made to look at; make yourself useful, and start rowing!"

When the boat had progressed away from the vessel's side for a matter of twenty yards a shot rang out, to be followed a second later by Kingston's. Bruckmann roared, and held up his hand, minus one finger. It was a remarkable shot, considering the darkness.

"Let him go!" roared the German, in agony—"let him go! What difference does it make—eh? If he go to Colston he get killed just the same!"

He swore violently, and rushed up the ladder. In a moment all was commotion, the screw commenced churning the water, the men rushed about, and suddenly a great shaft of light shot out, and after hovering about for a moment, settled on the Colston.

Kingston's manner changed now. He was clear—he had escaped! The time to save hundreds of lives had come. In ten minutes, if nothing were done, the Blue Star liner would be boarded, and the officers and men shot down by the dozen. There was only one man who could prevent such a catastrophe, and that man was Frank Kingston. It was either the Night Hawk or the Colston—one had to go. The question was—which?

But how could Kingston hope to do anything in his present position; in a frail little boat, with a mere boy as companion, tossed about by the wash from the yacht's propeller?

How could he possibly defeat the ends of the Brotherhood under such conditions as these?

The Night Hawk's Last Journey.

"Where are we going, sir?"

It was Tim Curtis who asked the question. The lad was sitting in the stern of the little collapsible boat, gazing about him in wonderment and awe. The darkness was intense now, and just across the rippling water could be seen the huge bulk of the Blue Star liner, Colston.

Frank Kingston, however, had his eyes fixed on the Night Hawk. The yacht had steamed in the direct course of the Colston, and now lay in the calm water, motionless. Her brilliant searchlight was directed full on the other vessel, which was progressing at only half-speed.

"Where are we going, Tim?" repeated Kingston, pulling hard at the oars. "Well, that's rather a difficult question to answer. We've succeeded in getting away, and that's something to be thankful for in itself."

"I don't know 'ow you did it, sir, with all them sailors about. And that old German, sir, you lifted 'im up like a feather, sir!"

"That is one advantage of being strong, Tim."

"I don't know 'ow to thank you, sir, blowed if I do," began the boy. "They'd 'ave killed me—"

"My own life was at stake as well as yours, my lad, without mentioning the fact that without you I couldn't have got away. You did splendidly, Tim."

"It wasn't nothin', sir. You could 'ave done just as well without me. But do they mean to 'arm that other ship, sir?"

"Harm her, Tim? They intend sending her and every soul aboard her to the bottom! They are going to rob her first, then sink her!"

Tim looked through the darkness at the Night Hawk in horror. They were much nearer now, and Kingston was making for her stern. The searchlight being directed the other way, the little boat was in darkness.

"But can't they be stopped, sir?" cried Tim. "'Ave we got to stay 'ere and see 'em sink, sir? Can't nothin' be done?"

"Yes, my lad, something can be done. The Colston has got to be saved. There are women and children aboard that boat, and the villains on the Night Hawk would slay them as they would rats!"

"But who's goin' to do it, sir?"

"We are going to do it, young 'un," replied Kingston calmly. "You had better prepare yourself for a big surprise in a moment—Ah, there it is!"

"What, sir?" exclaimed Tim, puzzled. "What can we do 'ere, in this little boat? We 'aven't got no food, nor nothin'."

Kingston did not reply. He was gazing intently at the water over the side of the boat, and although the darkness was intense, he faintly made out the shape of a piece of floating wood. Steering the boat close to it, he bent over the side, and grasped it. After a moment's fumbling, he detached a small portion, and drew it into the boat.

Tim watched in wonderment. He could see that the portion Kingston held in his hand was attached to that on

the water by a kind of string. The next moment the lad cried out in real amazement, for Kingston suddenly started talking into the thing.

"That you, Fraser? Everything all right? Good! I've managed to get clear. Go back about a dozen yards, and then rise to the surface. We've got our work cut out if we mean to be in time."

Kingston replaced the receiver—the thing was, of course, a floating telephone to the submarine—and sank back with a half-smile on his immobile features. Herr Bruckmann thought himself master of the situation, but he was soon to be undeceived; he was soon to find a cleverer man than he was about to take a hand.

Tim was altogether at a loss. What on earth had his strange rescuer been doing? Who had he been speaking to? They were alone—alone on the face of the Pacific, save for those two big steamers ahead.

"What were yer doin', sir?" asked the youngster, in a whisper. "Wot was that there piece of wood? Lummy!"

He uttered the exclamation as, with a slight splash, the glittering body of the Dart rose into view. Tim could only see the main outline, for the darkness hid the rest, but he had sense enough to know what the boat was.

"A submarine!" he gasped. "What's it mean, sir? 'Ow could that thing get 'ere, 'undreds of miles from the shore?"

"The submarine is mine, Tim, and we are now about to board her."

"Are yer goin' to do the Night 'Awk in, sir?" asked the lad eagerly.

"That is my intention, youngster," replied Kingston, as the collapsible boat glided against the side of the Dart, "and I want you to be as quiet as possible. See all you like and hear all you like, but don't ask questions. It's a serious business, and must be taken seriously."

"I won't say a word, sir," cried Tim. "You've saved my life, you 'ave, sir, an' I sha'n't forget it."

Fraser looked at the boy in considerable astonishment when he stepped off the ladder, but said nothing. Kingston then drew the boat in unaided, and folded it up. It was the work of a moment to secure the manhole, and presently the screw twirled rapidly, sending the submarine through the water at a moderate speed.

"Now, Fraser," said Kingston quickly, with a set, determined expression in his eye—an expression Fraser liked to see there—"there's a considerable task before us to-night. There must be no hesitation. The Night Hawk fully intends sending her victim to the bottom!"

"Whether they give up the gold or not, sir?"

"Yes, Fraser, whether they give up the gold or not. To ensure perfect safety, they are going to send to their deaths hundreds of innocent women and children!"

"But you'll save the Colston, sir? You won't let her be sunk?"

"To save the Colston, Fraser, the Night Hawk must suffer. It is one ship or the other; and although it will be taking life, I mean to send every man on the Night Hawk to the bottom!"

"You can't do anything else, sir, can you?"

"Not very well. Nobody can say I have committed a criminal act, for in killing a score or more of cut-throats, I am saving hundreds of good people. It is a question of justice."

"The Hawk's sent more than one ship to her last account, sir, so it'll be doin' good, more than anything. The last one they sunk was the Maratah, a year ago."

"Yes, I remember hearing of it. But raise her to the surface, Fraser. I imagine we are in the right spot now."

The Dart's engine stopped, and she slowly rose. When within six feet of the surface, Fraser released the periscope. Kingston looked at the reflection for a few moments in silence.

"The searchlight is still on," he said then, "and the two ships are now quite close and stationary. I think we can rise in safety, Fraser. It is probable Bruckmann or Shaw will speak through a megaphone; and, if so, I want to hear what they have to say."

Fraser touched a lever, and Kingston ascended into the tiny conning-tower. He threw open the manhole, and looked round him. Not fifty yards to his right was the Night Hawk, while just ahead lay the Colston, a mass of light and commotion. Kingston listened intently, for, as he had supposed, Captain Shaw was speaking through the megaphone.

"If you refuse to give up the bullion," he was saying, "the consequences will be serious. We mean to have it, at whatever cost!"

"I do refuse, absolutely and utterly!" came the voice of the Colston's skipper, in an angry roar. "Who the dickens are you, you scoundrel? You can threaten whatever you like, but you'll never alter my decision!"

"I think you will," answered Shaw. "We've got guns aboard this ship, and unless you give orders to transfer the

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gold immediately, we'll blow you and your boat out of the water!"

"I am responsible for this cargo and the safety of my passengers, and I point-blank refuse to listen to another word!"

"That is final?"

"Decidedly!"

"The consequences will be serious," megaphoned Shaw. "Remember, we have all the power on our side."

The Colston's captain was as good as his word, for he made no answer, and Kingston, picturing him fuming up and down the bridge, distinctly heard the telegraph signal full-speed ahead. Suddenly the water was churned into foam, and the liner ploughed her way onward again, the passengers one and all gathered against the rail, talking apprehensively together.

Frank Kingston transferred his gaze to the Night Hawk. The searchlight had been cut off, and many shouts and a good deal of commotion was ensuing.

"The boarding-party is being prepared," he told himself. "Bruckmann will probably fire a shot or two immediately to stop the liner. My time has come, though. I'm afraid, my dear herr, you have gazed upon the last daylight you'll ever see!"

He quickly fastened the door, and descended into the interior. Both Fraser and Tim were looking excited, for they knew that much was to happen that night.

"It's brisk action now, Fraser," said Kingston quietly. "Lower her twenty feet, and stop about a hundred yards from the Hawk, exactly on the broadside."

While the Dart was being manoeuvred into position, Kingston busied himself with other matters. In the fore part of the submarine a small torpedo-tube was fitted. There were several of the deadly missiles on board, and Kingston now fetched these out. They looked precisely alike—small and harmless. Yet they were every bit as deadly as those carried on any naval torpedo-boat.

There were two varieties—one quarter charged, and the other fully charged. It was one of the former Kingston now chose, for he did not mean to sink the Night Hawk straight off. No, he would disable her first, so as to give the Colston time to get clear.

"All ready, Fraser?" he inquired tensely.

"Yes, sir," answered his faithful ally.

There was a sharp click, and the next second the weapon of destruction whizzed on its way. Even as it did so, a dull boom made itself heard. The Night Hawk had commenced operations! But almost before the echo had died away, another report sounded, and this time it was a crash, a roar. Kingston smiled grimly.

"That's number one," he said; "and if it hasn't torn a hole in the Hawk's side as large as a house, I shall be surprised. Rise to the top, Fraser; I'm curious to see what is happening."

Everything was in an uproar aboard the pirate. It could be seen at once that her stern was slightly deeper in the water than her fore part. Shouts of terror and alarm floated across the water to Kingston, and he could hear the clank of the donkey-engine as it was set to work the pumps.

The Colston was three or four hundred yards away by now, and was slowing down. Evidently she did not quite know what had happened. Once more Kingston gave his orders, and the Dart scuttled away in the opposite direction.

"They shall have a fully-charged one this time," he said, with terrible calmness. "Fraser, everyone of those men shall perish! They are not fit to live! This is their just deserts for the murders they have already committed, and the world will be the sweeter for their absence!"

Once more there was a click, to be followed, after a breathless minute, by a terrible roar—a roar which even made the Dart quiver and shake. The torpedo must have created awful havoc.

And when Kingston, a couple of minutes later, gazed across the disturbed water to where

had floated the Night Hawk, nothing was visible save a violent vortex of foam, a thousand and one bubbles, and a cloud of steam.

The pirate ship had gone on its last journey!

Frank Kingston Meets Another Inner Councillor.

"The Colston is coming back, Fraser, probably to satisfy themselves that nobody is still alive. The Night Hawk, however, has taken her villainous crew with her. She sank with such rapidity that practically everything and everybody was sucked down by the vortex. It is doubtful if even a piece of wreckage will be found."

"Good riddance to them, sir!" exclaimed Fraser. "Those chaps on the Night Hawk were the very worst in the Brotherhood. But what are you doing, sir?"

Both Fraser and Tim—who was listening to everything in awe and wonderment—looked at their master in some surprise, for the latter was busy before a little hand-glass, carefully disguising his features. In a very short time his own face was unrecognisable, and there stood in the Dart a grimy, common-looking deck-hand. He turned to Fraser, with a smile.

"You ask what I am doing, Fraser?" he drawled calmly. "Well, I am going on a short visit to the Blue Star liner, Colston—"

"To the Colston, sir!"

"That is what I said. It is imperative that I should go, as well as being to my liking. We cannot take Tim back to the Coronet, so I intend leaving him aboard the liner. There are other reasons as well. For one, I wish to give the impression that I was on the Hawk, and that I blew her up myself. There must be no suspicion that any other vessel is in the vicinity, especially a submarine. That would indeed give the whole show away."

"I see, sir. But this boy here? D'you think he'll split?"

"Split!" cried Tim indignantly. "Not likely!"

Kingston smiled.

"Tim," he said, laying a hand on the youngster's shoulder, "I am going to trust you. You cannot understand everything, but I think you know that we are honest men. I have sent the Night Hawk to the bottom, because had I not done so, the better and larger ship would assuredly have suffered. They meant to sink her, Tim, with all the women and children aboard!"

"I know, sir," said Tim eagerly, "an' it jolly well serves 'em right!"

"Well, I want you to remain absolutely mum. For reasons I cannot explain now, my identity will remain unknown, and on no account whatever must you breathe a word about the submarine. No matter how many questions are put to you, don't answer them. You will know later on why I want you to do this. Now, young 'un, can I trust you?"

"Trust me, sir?" cried the lad. "Course you can! You saved my life, you did, sir, an' from what I've seen I knows you must be straight. I'll never say nothin', sir, no matter 'ow they tries to pump me."

"Good! I feel that you will stick to your word, Tim. Here is five pounds in gold. When you get to London, go to the address written on this paper, and wait there till I come."

"Lummy, sir—" began Tim, but Kingston interrupted.

"We cannot wait another second, my boy. Fraser, remain about half a mile behind the Colston, and be on the alert. That is all."

The task of unfolding the boat and floating her was a short one, and before a minute had passed, the Dart had disappeared from view. The liner itself was within a hundred yards, and steaming slowly round in a circle. Not a sign, however, of the torpedoed vessel was to be seen. Everything had been sucked down by that terrible whirlpool.

Kingston stood up in the boat, and shouted lustily.

(To be continued.)

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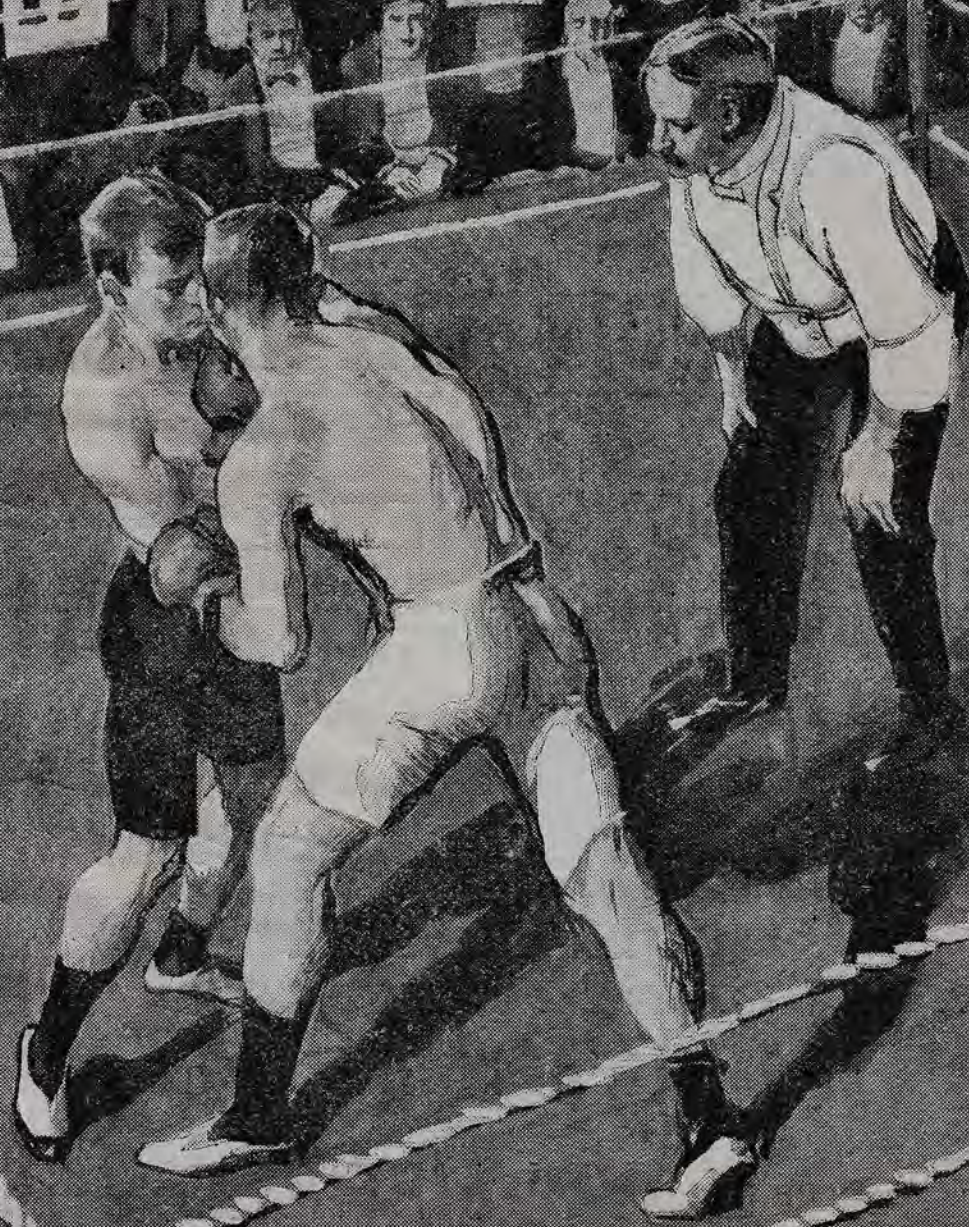
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