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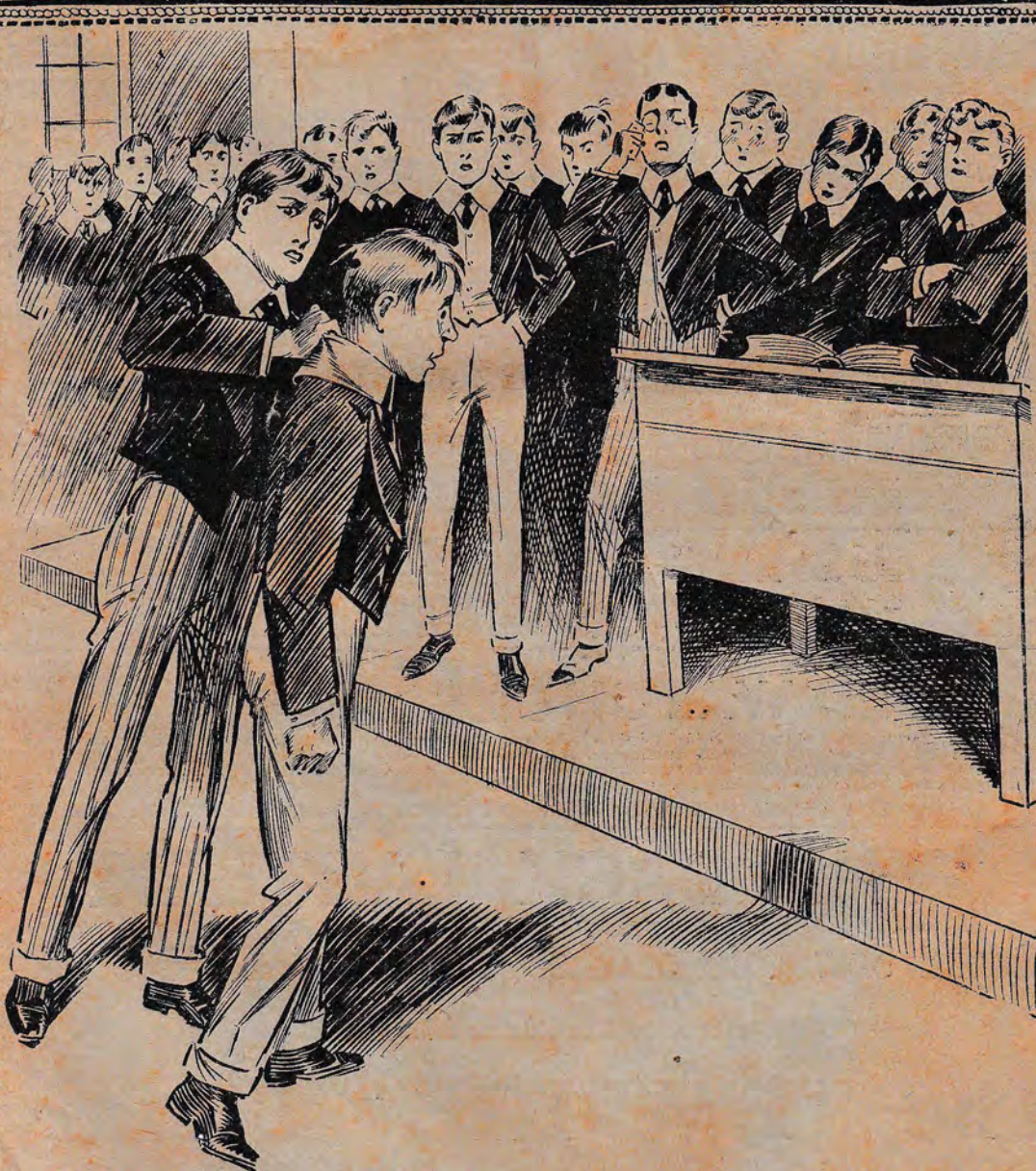


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The Turncoat ... of ... The Fourth.

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

— BY —

MARTIN CLIFFORD.

CHAPTER 1. Too Much Philpot.

"I'm thinking!"
Jack Blake, of Study No. 6 in the Fourth Form passage, made this important announcement in an impressive tone.

"I'm thinking!"
Digby and Herries, two of Blake's chums, started—or pretended to start—in great astonishment.

"You're whatting?" asked Herries, staring.

"Thinking, ass!" repeated Jack Blake.

"What with?" inquired Digby anxiously.

Blake glared.

"Look here, Dig, you ass——" he was beginning wrathfully, when Digby interrupted him with a grin.

"It's all right, old man, don't get ratty about it. I dare say you'll get over it. What were you thinking about—anything serious?"

"No! Yes—I don't know!"

"You seem somewhat vague to say the least of it, old chap," said Digby, wiping his somewhat greasy hands on his trousers as he spoke; he was engaged in greasing his football boots.

"It's about that chap Philpot."

"Philpot! Nothing worse than that?" said Herries, in surprise.

"Philpot! Why he's not worth the paper he's written on—metaphorically speaking," was Digby's comment.

"I know all that, fatheads; but all the same he worries me," said Blake.

"I've noticed he has been buzzing round us a bit lately, but——"

"You've got it, Dig! That's just the point!"

"What is?" asked Digby vaguely.

"Why, don't you see, he wouldn't be doing it without some reason. Why does he follow us about like a giddy tame cat?" demanded Blake somewhat excitedly.

"I don't know—don't care either!" said Digby carelessly.

"Well, you jolly well ought to, then. He's got some little game on, that's about it."

"Well, if you're so keen to get rid of the chap," suggested Herries, "why don't you tell him gently but firmly that he's not wanted?"

"You've struck the blessed nail again," said Blake. "I can't get rid of him."

"What do you mean?"

"What I say—he won't be got rid of. I've tried dozens of times to snub him off, but he won't be snubbed," said Blake indignantly.

Herries sniffed.

"Well, if you can't get rid of him like that, tell him straight."

"I suppose I could do that," said Blake thoughtfully. "But, after all, although he's a bit of a bounder and a bit of an ass, he can't help himself. I don't want to hurt his feelings more than I can help. But he worries me, because if he hadn't some little game on he wouldn't come near us, after we've all of us as good as told him to git."

"I suppose you're right. I never thought about it before," said Digby thoughtfully.

"Hallo! Who's this? I bet it's Philpot!"

The study door opened, and the elegant figure of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy walked into the room. An eyeglass in his eye, a flower in his buttonhole, a beautiful waistcoat, and perfectly fitting jacket, all contributing to making the fourth occupant of Study No. 6—the Swell of the School House as he was called—look more like a walking fashion plate than a schoolboy.

"Hallo, dummy, why don't you knock at the door when you come in?" queried Blake cheerfully.

"Weally, Blake——"

"Now, then, no excuses!"

"Pway don't intewwupt," said Arthur Augustus, with a dignified wave of his hand. "I wefuse to knock at the door of my own study."

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"Your own study!" said Blake, with a grin. "Why, you dummy! The only part that you have any right to is the mat, and we only let you lie there out of the kindness of our hearts."

"Ho, ha, ha!" chuckled Herries and Dig.

"Weally, Blake, if you mean to compawe me to an ordinawy dog—"

"Not I! I'm fond of dogs," said Blake. "However, we'll let you sit on a chair if you'll promise not to talk."

"I wufuse to talk—I mean—"

"Good! Now we can get on with the washing."

"Did I hear the name of Philpot uttached as I came into the woom?"

"You did, miford!"

"How extremely funnaw! I was just thinkin' of him as I came along."

"What an honour for him."

"I was thinkin' how we markawly curiowly he has been behavin' lately."

Blake and Digby exchanged glances.

"Why, what do you mean, Gussy?" said Blake.

"I mean, he has been so we markawly friently to all of us."

"Well, that is funny, because that's exactly what I was sayin' a second ago, wasn't it, kids?"

"Yes—absolutely."

"What a vewy curiow coincidence," said Gussy. "So you noticed it, too?"

"Couldn't very well help it, old boy, he's always here."

"Quite so, deah boy, and to tell you the twuth, the boundah gets on my nerves; we weally must take steps to get wid of him."

"Why, Gussy, what's the matter with the chap?" said Blake argumentatively, forgetting that he had expressed much the same sentiments a few minutes before.

"There isn't exactly anything w'ong with him, Blake," answered Arthur Augustus, with a puzzled expression. "But he is weally so fearfully friently that he boahs me."

"My deah ass, you can't dislike a chap because he's friently."

"I am vewy well aware of that, Blake," answered Gussy, with dignity. "But there are severaw degwees of friendship, and this fellah Philpot is much too much so for me. Besides, he's always contwadietin' himself in the most absurd mannah."

"I've noticed that, too. He always agrees with whatever you say. He's like a blessed weathercock!"

"That expresses him exactly, deah boy," said D'Arcy. "I wegard that as a vewy clewah we mark."

"You don't say so! You overwhelm me!"

"In fact, I considah that it would be a we markawly clewah nickname for him."

"What would?"

"Why, Weathercock, deah boy; always turnin' the way the wind blows."

"Not bad for you. Hallo, there's someone coming down the passage!"

"A cough-lozenge to a diamond that it's Philpot!" said Digby.

And it was!

CHAPTER 2.

More of Him.

PHILPOT was an obscure junior of the Fourth. He had been at St. Jim's for three terms, and he was hardly any better known now than he was the first day he came. His main object in life up to the present had been to get through the term with a minimum of work, to break a few insignificant rules, and if he happened to be caught, to escape punishment by some means, be they fair or foul. He was an ardent supporter of the saying "The end justifieth the means."

But of late a nobler ambition had stirred his mind—an ambition to be a leader. He was not really quite clear what he wanted to do as "leader," but he wanted to make himself known—to do something which would send his name down to posterity. In order to bring about this object, he had set himself to think of a way. His mind, though undecided and continually changing, was by no means devoid of cunning, and it had undoubtedly served him well in this case. For he had decided that the best plan was to attach himself to the present leader of the junior school. He would thus gain publicity by being seen in the company of so noteworthy a person, and, at the same time, he would be gaining knowledge which would be very useful to him.

Then another difficulty assailed him. Who was the real leader—the real head of the juniors? Tom Merry, Jack Blake, Harry Noble, Figgins? Each of these four presented himself to his mind, and for a long time he was undetermined whom to "take up with." At last he decided on Blake—not without some misgivings—but he was certainly leader of Philpot's own Form—the Fourth—and he therefore knew more of him than of the other three. Also he consoled himself with the reflection that he would not be irretrievably bound to

Blake for the rest of his school life. His was a very easy conscience to satisfy.

Thus with this ambition stirring his whole mind we see him now entering the study of—in his opinion at any rate—the leader of the juniors of St. Jim's.

"Can I come in?" asked Philpot.

"You can as far as I can see," answered Jack Blake. "But it really depends on your walking powers."

"I meant—"

"Bad habit. Give it up."

"I just came in for a chat."

"Well, now you're here, you'd better stop, I suppose," said Blake, not too cordially.

"If you don't want me to, I'll go," answered Philpot, making a move towards the door.

"As I was saying, Dig," said Blake, taking no notice whatever of his visitor, "I wonder who'll be playing in the match against East Hyde next week?"

"We shall have a jolly good team in any case," said Digby. "I wouldn't give much for their chance of beating us."

Philpot, finding no serious opposition to his remaining, had sat down during this conversation. He was quite well aware that he was not wanted, but he was determined to stop.

"Look here, you kids," said Herries suddenly, "I'm blessed hungry!"

"So am I!" chimed in Digby.

"I'm blessed if I'm not a bit peckish, too," said Blake.

"I'm feelin' we markawly hungwy myself, deah boys," aided D'Arcy.

"Well, the obvious thing is to have some tea."

"I wegard that as an excellent suggestion," said Arthur Augustus.

"Well, look here, Dig, just run down and get something to eat at Mother Murphy's, and we'll make some tea up here while you're gone," said Blake.

"Right you are! Hand over some oof—I'm stony," replied Dig readily.

"Phew! So am I!" whistled Blake.

"Come on Gussy! Out with it, then!" demanded Dig.

"Weally, Digby, I exceedingly wegwet that I am at pwesent in sewious financial embawwasmment."

"You're our last hope, Herries," said Blake, turning to the fourth of the famous company as he spoke.

Herries, by way of answer, turned his pockets inside out. The lining was brought into view, but nothing more valuable.

"Well, here's a rotten game, not a blessed ha'penny between us!" said Blake, in some dismay.

"I wonder if we could raise any from Study No. 1," Digby remarked thoughtfully.

"We must try, anyway. They're often in funds."

"All right. Come on, kids," said Blake. "Turn on your sweetest smiles, and mind you don't call the kids kids, that's all."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Philpot, during this conversation, had been chuckling to himself. Here was a chance, and a good one, of getting into Blake & Co.'s favour.

Philpot had received that morning a money-order from his father.

"I say, you chaps," he began. "Half a shake before you go—"

"Hallo, here's Philpot!" cried Blake, in mock surprise. "How are you, old chap?"

Philpot smiled deprecatingly.

"Look here, Blake, if you want a bit of tin, I can oblige you."

Blake hesitated. He did not care to borrow money as a rule, from any but the most intimate friends.

Philpot certainly did his best to be friendly, but still—

"Thanks. I think we can manage—" he began, when Philpot broke in.

"You won't get any from the Shell fellows in No. 1, anyway," he said. "Of course, Tom Merry's generally got lots of tin, now that he's got all his money back again, but I happen to know that they're stony too, at present. I heard Tom Merry borrowing from Kerr of the New House this morning."

"My hat!"

"Well, I'm quite willing to lend this tin," said Philpot. "And my money's as good as anyone else's, I suppose? But of course, if you don't think so—"

"Don't be an ass, Philpot; of course it is, but—"

"But you won't borrow it," said Philpot, looking hurt. "You don't want to be obliged to me, I suppose. Very well."

"Weally, Blake," put in Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, "I think it's wathah wough on Philpot, you know, deah boy! I should considah it a sewious weflection upon my dig, if a chap wufused to bowwow from me, when he was in a beastly awkward posish. I pwopose, therefore, that we bowwow his tin with many thanks."

Blake hesitated. But his resolution melted as he saw Philpot's

hurt air, which had evidently touched the soft-hearted D'Arcy also.

"I agree with Gussy," said Digby. "Besides, I'm blessed hungry!"

"So'm I!" said Herries.

That settled it.

"Right-ho, then!" said Blake, speaking as heartily as he could. "We accept your offer, Philpot, and thanks very much. Hand over the tin, and Dig will cut down to the shop and get the grub, and we'll have a good spread, for once!"

Philpot, with an air of triumph, which the chums could not help noticing, produced some money which was handed over to Digby, who immediately set out for Mrs. Murphy's emporium, the school tuck-shop.

The others proceeded to make tea. Soon the water was boiling, and Blake sung out to D'Arcy to bring the teapot over to him to be warmed.

"All wight, deah boy," answered Gussy. "Don't be in such a beastly hawwy!"

"Come on, dummy, and don't talk so much!"

"I refuse to be called a dummy!"

"Well, do the other thing, only do buck up with that teapot."

D'Arcy held the teapot out to Blake, who began pouring some hot water in, and gradually raising the kettle higher and higher "to get a head on," as he said.

"Pway be careful, deah boy!" cried Gussy, and in his alarm moved the teapot slightly.

The water splashed right on to the pot, and the unfortunate Gussy received a heavy shower of pretty hot water on his hands. He dropped the teapot with an agonising yell.

"Ow—you clumsy wottah!" he shrieked. "You have tñjahed me most severely!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You have wuined my twucks as well," went on Gussy, waving his hands around. "I wegard you as a careless wuffian."

"Ha, ha, ha!" shrieked Blake. "Sorry, Gussy, only it wasn't my fault!"

"I fail to see any weason for your widulous mewwiment, said D'Arcy, recovering himself somewhat.

"You'd make a blessed owl laugh, Gussy!" gasped Blake, the tears running down his cheeks. "You're better than any pantomime!"

"I refuse to be likened to a pantomime," retorted Gussy, indignantly. "I shall refuse to wegard you as a fwend until you have offahed me an apology!"

"But, my dear Gussy, you don't seem to realise that it was entirely your own fatheaded fault. You moved the giddy teapot!"

"Bai Jove, I nevah thought of that! Did I weally?"

"Yes, of course you did, ass, and I think you ought to apologise to me for breaking the teapot."

"Bai Jove, deah boy, I'm weally vewy sowwy," said D'Arcy penitently, gazing down at the shattered article. "I'll go and twy and bowwow anothah!"

So saying, D'Arcy left the room, returning a few minutes later with a large-sized one which he had borrowed from Gore, whose study was in the same passage.

D'Arcy was not entrusted with the teapot again, lest a similar disaster should occur. It was placed on the table, and Blake poured the boiling water in with more or less success.

"In a few minutes, Digby returned with a sufficient amount of food to satisfy any ten ordinary persons. The assembled company noted the fact with much satisfaction.

"Now then, kids," said Blake, "come and spread the stuff out!"

Philpot was in the room still, rather undecided what to do. He had provided the tea, but they had not asked him to partake of it. As a matter of fact, Blake, in the excitement at the unexpected turn of events, had quite forgotten to ask him to stop, although it never occurred to him that he would go. And the cunning Philpot was determined to stop.

"I say, you chaps, I think I'd better be moving, now," he said, turning towards the door. He knew perfectly well that one of them, at least, would not fail to ask him now. Blake understood this perfectly, but he saw that it was impossible to let him go.

"Don't be an ass, Philpot," he said. "Come and have some tea."

"We should wegard it as vewy unfwriendly," added D'Arcy, with a touch of sarcasm in his voice. "If you refused to stop, after having tempowawly accommodated us with the where-withal to get the gwub!"

"It's jolly decent of you!" answered Philpot, with an ingratiating smile. "I shall be awfully pleased to stop, if I sha'n't be in the way!"

"That depends whether you stop where you are," said Digby. "At present, you are stopping the traffic between me and those jam tarts."

Philpot laughed, and sat down on the coal-scuttle, as that was the only seat left.

There was not much conversation during tea, as the whole party were very hungry. After a very short time, the table was

relieved of most of its burden, and the juniors looked much happier.

D'Arcy was the first to speak after they had finished.

"Gentlemen!" he began, in his stately way.

"Ear! Ear!"

"Pway don't intewwupt! Gentlemen, before we wise fwom this we-markably good feed, I considah that a vote of thanks ought to be passed to the provider. Has anyone any objection to a vote of thanks being passed to our learned fwend Mr. Philpot?"

No one spoke.

"Then we may considah it passed unanimously."

"Hear, hear!" came from one and all immediately, if not very enthusiastically.

The juniors were very much obliged to Philpot for lending them the money, as was only natural, but they did not quite like the way he had done it. He distinctly gave them the impression that they were placing themselves under an obligation to him, and that he was not likely to let them forget it.

However, they had no proof, and the loan had come at a very convenient moment, so that they did not wish to appear ungrateful.

It was not long before Philpot took his departure.

He was well pleased with his afternoon's work; indeed, he had accomplished more than he had dared to hope.

"Look here, kids," said Blake, when he had gone, "we must jolly well hurry up and pay back that tin, and get rid of the fellow somehow. He worries me, somehow, as I've said before."

"I agree with you entirely, deah boy! He's wathah a bosh!"

"Why?" asked Herries, suddenly.

D'Arcy looked at him for a moment.

"I weally don't know!" he said at last.

And the chums set about their prep. in a thoughtful frame of mind.

CHAPTER 3.

A Terrible Catastrophe.

CRASH!

The door of the Terrible Three's study burst violently open, causing the inmates to leap to their feet.

"My only aunt! What's up?"

"Been struck by lightning, Gussy?"

"Got a spot of ink on your waistcoat?"

For no less a person than the swell of St. Jim's had broken thus unceremoniously into the study of the famous Co. And, moreover, he was followed by his three chums, all with expressions of suppressed merriment on their faces. D'Arcy's countenance was a mixture of horror, surprise, and supreme indignation.

"Speak, oh speak, my little Gussy!" broke out Tom Merry, in tones of feigned anguish.

"The suspense is horful!" murmured Lowther.

"Bai Jove, deah boys!" panted D'Arcy, and then broke off, overcome altogether with his emotions.

"For goodness' sake, don't stand there like a lot of boiled monkeys!" said the practical Manners. "If there's anything the matter, out with it. If not, git! We're busy!"

"He's lost his—" began Blake.

"What, not his—" broke in Lowther.

"Yes, that's it. His—"

"His giddy eyeglass!" finished Herries.

"My only hat! Gussy's lost his eyeglass!" gasped Lowther dramatically.

For a moment there was a breathless silence, and then suddenly the room rang with peal upon peal of laughter.

Only Arthur Augustus remained solemn, and he surveyed his friends with a haughty glance.

"Weally, you do not appeah to appreciate the gwavity of the situation," he said at last, when the merriment had somewhat subsided. "I have lost my eyeglass, it is true, but in no ordinary way. It has been taken!"

"Ho, ho!" said Tom Merry, assuming a more serious air.

"This makes it different! How do you know that, Gussy?"

"I have extwemely stwong evidence," said D'Arcy with dignity, "which leaves no doubt in my mind, that it was gwossly stolen, with malice aforethought!"

"But whatever could anyone in their right mind want with an eyeglass?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Gussy surveyed the speaker with a cold look.

"I considah that we-mark to be wathah insultin' to my mental powers, Tom Mewwy," he said, with gravity.

"Let that pass," said Tom Merry generously. "Why should anyone want to take the old thing?"

"On the contwawy, I had only bought it quite wecently! It was absolutely new!"

"He's spoilt my nice new rattle," quoted Manners.

"Well, look here, old chap," said Tom Merry. "Granted

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it was stolen, with malice aforethought, and anything else you like, what's the game in coming to us? Do you think we've got it?"

D'Arcy looked steadily at Tom Merry.

"Weally, Tom Mewwy, I nevah suggested such a thing! If you had taken it, I pwesume you would have returned it by now!"

"Look here, Gussy, what are you jawing about? We haven't got the beastly thing!"

"I'm vewy glad to hear it, Tom Mewwy," answered D'Arcy. He was evidently absolutely serious. "As a mattah of fact," he added, and then seemed to hesitate.

"Well, what is it? What do you want to say now?" Tom Merry was serious too. He began to guess that D'Arcy suspected him of having purloined his precious monocle.

"Well, look here, I tell you what it is, Tom Merry," broke in Blake, seeing Gussy still undecided. "We have been rather led to believe that you three had something to do with it, but—"

"Oh, you have, have you?" exclaimed Merry, with a spice of annoyance in his voice. "May I ask who told you? Who am I to give a jolly good licking to?"

It was a question which the hero of the Shell would probably not have put if he had stopped to think a moment; but he was annoyed—annoyed at the thought that the chums of the Fourth suspected him, and also that anyone should be so petty as to say such a thing of him.

"I should have thought that you knew me well enough, Tom Merry," answered Blake, "to know that you aren't likely to get an answer to a question like that."

"Quite right, Blake," said Tom Merry. "I'm sorry; I said it without thinking. However, I'm sorry you should suspect me of having done this, and I can't say any more than that I've not got it."

"Then, of course, the matter is at an end," said Blake. "Sorry we troubled you."

"By the way, Tom Mewwy," said D'Arcy, as they moved towards the door, "before I go I should like you to understand that I don't care a bwass farthin' for the actual loss of my monocle, but I wesent the wotten way in which it was wemoved."

"Exactly, Gussy. Good-morning!"

After the occupants of Study 6 had departed, the Terrible Three looked at each other for some time, without speaking.

It was Lowther who at last broke the silence.

"It almost looked as if those asses meant to pick a quarrel with us, eh?" he said, glancing at Tom Merry.

"Very curious, I must say," remarked the latter. "However, if they have the cheek to suspect us now, let 'em."

"And so say all of us," remarked Manners, looking up at Lowther for corroboration of his statement.

"Right you are," replied that youth thoughtfully, and then he added in a somewhat apologetic tone of voice, "by the way, Thomas, no offence, old chap, but you haven't been playing one of your little games with Gussy, and been and gone and taken his blessed window-pane, have you?"

"No, you giddy ass, of course I haven't," answered Tom Merry shortly. "I told 'em so, didn't I?"

"No, you didn't," retorted Monty Lowther. "You said you hadn't got it."

"Nearly the same thing, isn't it?"

"Not quite, though," said Lowther, more to himself than anyone else.

Meanwhile, no sooner had Blake & Co. reached their study, than Blake pointed out with emphasis to D'Arcy, that he (D'Arcy) had made a silly duffer of himself; which statement D'Arcy much resented.

"Weally, Blake, I wergard you as the person to whom this wemarrk should be addressed."

"Oh, you do, do you?" retorted Blake warmly. "At any rate," he continued, "we managed to annoy those Shell-fish, which is rather annoying."

"That's obvious," said Digby. "They wouldn't be annoyed if it wasn't annoying."

"Ass! Don't try and be funny," said Blake, giving Digby a sharp push in the chest, which caused him to stagger back several paces, and finally collapse in a chair on the other side of the room. "This is a most serious matter."

"Heah, heah, deah boy!" assented Gussy heartily. "I weally don't know how I shall pwceed with my studies until I get my eyeglass back."

"Dummy! I didn't mean that," said Blake, "I'm not troubling myself about you."

"Weally, Blake!"

"Oh, ring off, Gussy. Can't you realise that this is very serious?"

"I wpeat that it is a tewwible catastwophe. I feel quite in a fluttah without my monocle."

"Gussy, you'll drive me silly soon, you chump-headed lunatic," said Blake, exasperated with D'Arcy's persistence. "Can't you see I don't care a ha'penny about your old bit of glass? What I want to know is, have Tom Merry & Co. had anything to do with the taking of it?"

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"Well, at any rate, they said they hadn't, and Tom Merry isn't the chap to tell a lie," put in Herries.

"I should jolly well think he isn't," said Blake warmly. "He had a great admiration for Tom Merry at the bottom of his heart. But I happened to notice that he avoided saying he hadn't taken it. I don't know whether he did it on purpose, but all he said was that he hadn't got it."

There was a difference between the two. Monty Lowther was quite right.

"Bai Jove, deah boy, now I come to think of it, he didn't actually deny having taken it. It didn't stwike me at the time."

"In spite of it having escaped your notice, fathead, it remains a fact."

"I quite agwee, Blake! But I wish you would wefrain from addressin' me in such a diswepwctful mamah!"

"I'll think about it, Gussy. But I've got too much on my mind at present."

"But look here, Blake, do you really think they have got the eyeglass?" asked Digby seriously.

"They certainly haven't got it, because Tom Merry said they hadn't, but whether they took it is another thing."

"Well then, do you think they took the rotten thing?"

"I don't know. But the evidence seems rather against them," said Blake thoughtfully.

CHAPTER 4.

Trouble in the Air.

WHEN Arthur Augustus D'Arcy first missed his historic eyeglass, he had been starting out for a walk with Blake. He had, of course, immediately returned to his study to fetch it, as he most clearly recollected having left it on the table, but to his surprise and disgust, he found it had disappeared. Having searched high and low, he was proceeding to go and inform Blake of his loss, and as luck would have it, he had encountered Philpot in the passage.

Forgetting himself somewhat in his annoyance at having lost this valuable article, he had addressed Philpot hastily.

"Bai Jove, Philpot," he exclaimed. "I am all in a fluttah. I have lost my monocle."

"That's a pity," replied Philpot. "Can I do anything for you?"

"I pwesume you have seen nothin' of it?" inquired D'Arcy, fixing his gaze upon the junior.

"I? No, I haven't seen your eyeglass," said Philpot. "At least, never out of your eye."

"Well, I'm afraid then you can't be of much help," said D'Arcy, and ran out to tell Blake, who was in the quad, waiting. Philpot followed him, not knowing quite why.

"What have you been up to, you dummy?" commenced Blake, but seeing Gussy was somewhat excited, he added,

"anything particular up?"

"A most serious catastwophe," said D'Arcy. "My eyeglass has been taken from the study."

Blake snorted.

"Blow your eyeglass. Come on!"

"Weally, Blake, whatevah shall I do?"

"Come without it, you ass! Can't you see to walk?"

It was at this moment that a brilliant idea seemed to strike Philpot. He approached the two juniors with a casual air.

"I say, D'Arcy," he began, "I believe I can tell you who took that eyeglass from your study."

"Weally, deah boy, I shall be immensely obliged if you can."

"Well, of course, I can't say for certain, but I saw someone go in your study and come out again, just after you'd left."

"Bai Jove!" exclaimed D'Arcy. "May I inquire who this intwudah was?"

"Look here, D'Arcy, then, don't you go and give me away." Arthur Augustus drew himself up.

"A membah of the house of D'Arcy is not in the habit of doin' such things," he said with dignity.

"Sorry. No offence. Only Tom Merry isn't a nice chap to fall foul of," said Philpot, with a significant grin.

"Tom Merry!" cried Blake.

While all D'Arcy could manage to ejaculate was "Bai Jove!"

"Yes," answered Philpot. "I saw him go in just after you had left, D'Arcy, and then he came out hurriedly and went back to his own study."

This was perfectly true. Tom Merry wanted to speak to Blake on some matter, and had walked in without knocking, as he often did. Finding no one there, he had shut the door and come away again, and it so happened that Philpot saw him coming out of the study.

"Well, I don't believe old Tom would have taken it," said Jack Blake. "But it looks as though he had, just for a jape, you know."

"If it is meant to be a jape," said D'Arcy indignantly, "I call it a jape in wemarrkably bad taste. I shall take the first opportunity of informin' Tom Mewwy that he is a boundah and a wuffian!"



The door of the Terrible Three's study burst open with a violent crash, and Arthur Augustus D'Arcy stood on the threshold, his countenance a mixture of horror, surprise, and indignation. "My only hat! Gussy's lost his eyeglass!" gasped Monty Lowther dramatically. (See page 2.)

"Look here, you chaps," put in Philpot uneasily. "I've only told you that for what it's worth. I'm not accusing Tom Merry of taking the thing."

"We quite understand," said Blake somewhat coldly. With this reassuring remark, Blake and D'Arcy resumed their interrupted walk, and Philpot was left to his own thoughts.

He was not quite sure why he had given information against Tom Merry. He had not the slightest reason to suspect him, but he somehow thought that if Tom Merry did turn out to be the culprit, which, after all, he thought quite possible, he would have gained some favour in the eyes of Blake & Co.; whereas, if he turned out to be absolutely innocent of all knowledge of the affair, he, Philpot, would have done himself no harm.

As Blake and Gussy were turning out of the yard, they happened upon Figgins, the New House leader, and his chums. "Hullo, Gussy, where is your eyeglass?" said Figgins facetiously.

This remark, under the circumstances, was not calculated to produce a very pleasing effect upon the swell of St. Jim's.

His reply was somewhat sharp therefore. "It is missin'." I do not regard that as any affair of yours, Figgins!

"Keep your hair on, old son!" replied Figgins coolly. "I thought I might give you a hand in recovering it."

Blake's suspicions were somewhat aroused by this remark.

"Why, do you know where the blessed thing is?" he inquired as unconcernedly as possible.

"I haven't yet aspired to the post of Gussy's eyeglass-keeper," said Figgins, with heavy sarcasm.

"Ass!" was Blake's comment.

"I must say, Gussy, I am very sorry for you," remarked Kerr, who was with Figgins. "You'll possibly get a cold in your eye!"

"All the same, you can't expect anything else in the School House!" put in Fatty Wynn. "They're all a lot of burglars! Eh, Figg?"

"Rather! Come to the New House for real good quality," grinned Figgins.

"I regard that remark as a direct insult to our chawacters, Blake, and unless they immediately withdraw it, I considah we shall be justified in givin' them a feahful thwashin'!" said Arthur Augustus, in his most stately tone.

"I agree with you, Gussy," answered Blake.

"Now then, you chaps, ten seconds to withdraw that remark—"

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"Rats!" said Figgins & Co. with unanimity.

"Five now!"

"More rats!"

"Three, two, one! Look out, then!"

Blake made a dash at Figgins, and seized him round the middle. They were equally matched and for some time they struggled fiercely.

D'Arcy was more formal.

"Pway put up your fists, Kerr, deah boy," he said, doing so himself.

"I don't want to hurt you, Gussy," said Kerr generously. "But if you insist!"

"Of course I insist! I am goin' to give you a most fearful washin'!"

"Come on, then, dummy!"

Kerr seized D'Arcy round the body, and as the latter was totally unprepared for such a move, the sturdy Scottish junior had not much difficulty in overcoming the elegant D'Arcy, whom he deposited on the ground with some violence.

"I wogard you as a wottah and a wuff boundah!" said D'Arcy, rising painfully to his feet, purple with wrath. "I was pwepawin' to fight you in a pwopah fashion, and—"

"Never mind, old chap, it did just as well!"

Meanwhile Figgins, with the aid of Fatty Wynn, had almost disposed of Blake, who was at the moment on the ground, panting under the weight of the enormous Welshman.

While the scuffle was thus at its height, the thin figure of Mr. Ratcliff, the New House-master suddenly appeared.

He looked sourly at the scene.

Fatty Wynn immediately removed his weight from Blake's chest, and the latter, who had not seen the New House-master, leapt to his feet and was on the point of renewing the attack.

"Cave!" whispered Figgins, in a hoarse whisper.

Blake checked himself.

"Really, this is disgraceful," began Mr. Ratcliff acidly. "I am surprised at you, you young hooligans. It is bad enough to fight at any time, but when you choose for your battlefield a place like this, entirely open to the public road, it is worse than ever!"

"Please sir, we weren't fighting. We were only——" stammered Blake; but he got no further.

"Not fighting?" repeated Mr. Ratcliff severely. "Then what in the world were you doing?"

"Just a friendly little scuffle, sir," said Figgins boldly.

"Well, if this is what you call a friendly little scuffle, you must confine them to less public places. You will each do me five hundred lines of Virgil by to-morrow evening!"

"Please sir——"

"That will do. Now go to your houses and make yourself presentable. You all look more like gutter boys at present!"

Mr. Ratcliff strode away.

The unfortunate combatants looked at one another in dismay.

"You fathead!" growled Blake.

"You giddy lunatic!" said Figgins warmly.

"It was all your rotten fault!"

"You started the blessed fight!"

"Well, you might have known Ratty would come out!" said Blake crossly.

"I'm not a giddy thought reader!" retorted Figgins heatedly.

"Well, at any rate, it's no good fighting now! We shall only get another lot of lines stuck on the top," said the matter-of-fact Kerr.

"Quite wight, deah boy. Five hundred is quite sufficient."

D'Arcy had up to this time, been trying to get the dust off his rousers and coat and generally make himself look respectable. He had succeeded only partially.

"All right, you chaps," said Blake, "we'll call a truce for now, and finish at a more favourable opportunity."

"Right-ho!"

"Until then, pax!"

"Good."

The juniors parted, and directed their steps to their respective houses, according to the instructions of Mr. Ratcliff.

At the entrance to the School House stood the everlasting Philpot.

"Hallo! Been gardening?" asked that young gentleman, noticing the bedraggled condition of the juniors.

"Go and eat coke!" growled Blake, in an unpleasant voice.

"All right, keep your wool on," replied Philpot mildly. "I was only taking a friendly interest in your doings."

"You seem to take a jolly sight too friendly interest in us!" snapped out Blake, almost before he knew what he had said. He was very annoyed with the world in general, and Philpot tarred on his nerves.

"Oh, so that's it, is it?" said Philpot to himself, musingly, as they disappeared into the building. "They're sick of me, are they? Well, I'll just show 'em that I can get on without them, whether they're the leaders or not. I'm getting rather fed with them myself! And now I come to think of it, I'm not

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so jolly sure they are the leaders. Tom Merry & Co. are just as good as they are. And what about the New House lot? I'm hanged if I can decide what to do. However, there's one thing certain, and that is that I've done with Blake & Co."

And Philpot walked away with the air of one who has come to a momentous decision.

CHAPTER 5.

The Turncoat Tries Another Tack.

"SAY, you kids, what do you say to a bit of footer practice before tea?"

It was Tom Merry who spoke to his chums, Manners and Lowther, who were with him in his study.

"Not bad."

"I'm game."

"Right you are. We'll go and change."

Five minutes later the Terrible Three assembled in their study in full warpaint. Tom Merry looked a bit undecided.

"What's the matter, Tom?" inquired Monty Lowther.

"I say, are those bounders down there before us?"

"What bounders?"

"Why, Blake & Co."

"I don't know. Why? What does it matter?" asked Lowther, in some surprise.

"Oh, I don't know! I don't want to have to practice with them and their everlasting Philpot!" said Tom Merry rather shortly.

"Oh, let 'em rip, Tom, old chap," put in Manners cheerfully. "We'll go down to the Shell field instead. It's a bit farther, but that doesn't matter."

"Right you are, Manners, we'll do that," said Tom Merry, at once.

"Got a footer, anyone?" inquired Lowther, casually.

"Blow me if we have," exclaimed Tom Merry in dismay. "You couple of asses!"

"What about yourself?" retorted Lowther.

"I left it to you two, of course," retorted Tom Merry.

"Ditto me!" said Manners.

"And me also!" said Lowther.

"Well, has anyone got one?" asked Tom impatiently.

"I haven't," said Lowther.

"Mine's bust!" added Manners.

"And mine's not come back from being mended yet," said Tom, with a whistle. "Never mind, I'll bet I borrow one inside of three seconds. I know Mellish's got one."

So saying, Tom Merry led the way to Mellish's study at a run, and burst in, without waiting for an answer to his knock.

Mellish jumped up.

"Can't you come into a chap's study a bit more quietly?" said the cad of the Fourth, irritably. "Can't you see I'm busy?"

"Won't keep you long, so calm down," answered Tom Merry peaceably. "I came to borrow a footer."

"Well, git. I haven't got one."

"Well, what's that there?" asked Tom Merry, pointing to one which was lying in a half-open cupboard. A glint of something bright on the top shelf of the cupboard also caught his eye, and he started.

Mellish flushed.

"That isn't mine," he said lamely. "It belongs to someone else!"

"I don't want to borrow your beastly football, you outsider!" cried Tom Merry in disgust. "I wouldn't touch it on the end of a barge pole!"

"Then what did you come in here for?" snarled Mellish.

"Because I thought there was a respectable chap in here, and not a cad!" cried Tom Merry. "That's plain English, Mellish!"

"Look here, Tom Merry——" began Mellish, rising.

"Don't come near me, you rotter! I wouldn't trust myself if I got within arm's length of you!" cried Tom Merry, thoroughly roused.

He slammed the door and went out.

"Hallo! What's up now?" asked Lowther, noting his chum's flushed face.

"That beast Mellish!" said Tom, shortly.

"What! Won't he lend us his footer?"

"No! He says it's someone else's, but it's a lie. I know it's his, as I recognised it."

"What a beast!" said Manners. "All the same, I'll see if I can get one. In your present state you couldn't be civil, could you, Tom, old man?"

"Quite right, Manners, I couldn't!" said Tom, with a faint smile.

Manners scudded off and came back a minute later with a football under his arm. He had borrowed it from Kildare, the captain of the school, whom he had fortunately met in the corridor.

"Come on, you chaps! We're all right at last!" he cried. The three juniors dashed out, and were soon hard at work with the footer on the Shell ground.

It will be seen from parts of the foregoing conversation that the two chief School House companies were not now on the best of terms; indeed, they had seen very little of one another since the episode of the eyeglass. It was not only this that had ruffled the Terrible Threes. They had understood that someone had given information against them, and they were inclined to think that this informer was Philpot, as he had been so much with Blake & Co. lately; and the fact that the Fourth Formers suspected them on the evidence of such a person as Philpot, the weathercock, the turncoat, was extremely annoying to them.

And then they could not understand why Blake allowed Philpot to be so friendly. However, they were soon to learn.

It was quite late in the afternoon before Tom Merry & Co. returned, ruddy and glowing, from their footer practice.

Having rubbed down, and changed, they again assembled in Study No. 1.

"Hallo! What's this?" said Monty Lowther, in great surprise.

"What's what?" asked Tom Merry.

"Why, someone's been in here!"

"What do you mean?"

"Why, can't you see? The giddy kettle hasn't put itself on the fire," said Lowther, staring round.

"By Jove!" whistled Manners.

Tom Merry frowned. A junior's study was his castle at St. Jim's, and Tom resented any intrusion in Study 1 in the absence of the owners.

"I wonder who's had the sauce to come in here and mess about with our things?" he said.

"Why, I have!" said a voice at the door.

It was Philpot!

Tom Merry looked at him coldly.

"What cheek!" he said quietly.

"What's cheek?"

"Why, your coming in here when we aren't here."

"Well, I saw you come in from footer, and as I was passing your study I thought I'd put your kettle on," said Philpot, in his smoothest tones.

"Well, I'm blessed! Philpot's turned a philanthropist, or something near it!" gasped Lowther.

"Oh, really, Lowther! It only just struck me it would save you a bit of time, you know," smirked Philpot.

"Very thoughtful indeed, Philpot. We are overwhelmed with gratitude," said Monty, with a low bow.

"Well, now you're here, you'd better stop to tea, I suppose," said Manners, with a glance at his chums.

"No thanks, I'm afraid I can't. I'm 'bidden forth' already, so to speak," said Philpot.

"Oh, I see, you're in great demand," said Lowther. "Been putting other people's kettles on as well?"

Philpot turned away with a smile and left the study. He thought it would not be diplomatic to press himself too much on them at first; also he was cute enough to see that they were not a bit keen on having him there. His first move, too, had been fairly successful.

"I'm blessed if I know what to make of it," said Tom Merry when Philpot had departed. "What's his little game?"

"He seems to be trying to oblige us, but what for I don't know," said Manners.

"I suppose he's got sick of those other chaps," said Tom Merry, a little bitterly.

"What other chaps?" asked Lowther.

"Blake & Co., duffer!"

"Well, I hope he's not going to glue himself on to us," remarked Manners.

"He'll have a gay time if he does!" said Tom Merry grimly. "I'm not going to stand any of his little games!"

At this point Philpot removed his ear from the keyhole of the study door. He had heard quite enough, and his mind was made up—for the time, at any rate.

"That settles them!" he mused as he walked down the passage. "People who say things like that couldn't really be decent leaders of any Form. It strikes me that the chaps I want don't hang out in this House. I'll sound the New House next."

And the Turncoat walked on in a thoughtful mood.

His mind was recalled to worldly things by a faint crash and the tinkling of broken glass. He looked up, and saw Mellish at the bottom of the stairs engaged in picking up a small article which had apparently slipped from his grasp.

"Hallo!" cried Philpot. "Had a slight accident, I see."

The cad of the Fourth glanced up.

"Go and boil yourself, Weathercock!" he replied angrily. Philpot had come to be generally known by that name now—"and mind your own beastly business!"

Philpot stared.

"I'm really very sorry," he replied. "But I can't help it if you will drop things in front of my nose."

"You'll find something else dropping on your nose if you say anything about it!" growled Mellish threateningly, and then he disappeared into his study.

Philpot turned away with a glint in his eyes. Mellish's sudden anger about apparently nothing, his evident annoyance that Philpot should have been a witness of an apparently trivial accident, set Philpot on to a new train of thought. He began to suspect what he soon knew to be a certainty—namely that Mellish had purloined D'Arcy's eyeglass for an ill-natured trick, and did not want the fact known.

Philpot pondered deeply.

Meantime the kettle was boiling cheerfully in Study 1, and Tom Merry & Co. were enjoying their tea immensely after their hard work in the football field.

There was a pause in the conversation, and then Tom Merry broke the silence.

"I say, you chaps, I've made a discovery," he said.

"Where? In your teecup?" asked Lowther facetiously.

"No, fathead! But in Mellish's study."

"Ho, ho! Anything interesting?" asked Manners, interested at once.

Tom Merry looked rather grave.

"Well, it's a rotten thing—"

"I hope it's nothing like Mellish. I couldn't stand two bounders like that!" put in the irrepressible Lowther.

"It's nothing alive, Monty," said Tom, with a smile. "It's not animal, and it's certainly not vegetable, so I suppose it's mineral."

"Look here! This isn't a game of clumps or anything. Out with it!" demanded Lowther.

"Get it off your chest!" added Manners.

"Well, this is what it was," said Tom Merry impressively, and he made a gesture as if to fix something round in his eye.

"You don't really mean to say—"

"Not really—"

"Yes; Gussy's long-lost and late lamented eyeglass! None other!"

"What an out and out rotter and cad that chap Mellish is!" burst out Manners.

"Absolute outsider!" said Lowther, with conviction. "He ought to be boiled!"

"And shot!"

"I've not the slightest doubt that he ought," said Tom Merry, with a smile. "But unfortunately that can't be done at the present time."

"I don't know," suggested Lowther. "If we tell Blake & Co. I don't think they'll stop far short of boiling him in oil."

"No, I don't suppose they would," answered Tom Merry.

"But why should we tell Blake?"

Manners and Lowther stared at him.

"Why, Tom, surely you are going to—"

"You're never going to keep it from them?"

"Why not?" retorted Tom Merry hotly. "They suspected us, and they do now, of pinching Gussy's beastly eyeglass, and on grounds on which I shouldn't even think of suspecting young Joe, with all his bad up-bringing and utter lack of proper training. I think they are behaving like cads, and I'm very sorry to see it."

Manners and Lowther looked at their chum in silence during this passionate outburst. There was no doubt that the period, brief as it was, during which Tom Merry had fought the world, single-handed, on his merits alone, and when he had at times nothing but his honour left to him, had left its mark upon his sunny nature. Having been without friends, he now valued friendship all the more; and his honour was, if possible, dearer to him than ever. To cast the slightest suspicion of a slur on it he seemed to construe as an act of bitter enmity on the part of one who could never really be his friend.

Manners and Lowther knew that their chum was magnifying what was really a temporary falling out of good friends, far

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beyond its true importance. But they felt that this was hardly the time to point this out, and they backed Tom Merry up heartily, as always.

"You're right, Tom Merry," said Manners slowly. "If they're silly enough to think that we've taken Gussy's eye-glass, let them go on thinking till they find out their mistake of themselves."

"That's what I say, too," put in Monty Lowther.

"Well, that's agreed then," said Tom Merry. "We'll keep our mouths shut—for the present, at any rate."

"Right you are!" said the other two, glad to let the subject drop for the present.

CHAPTER 6.

St. Jim's v. East Hyde.

PHILPOT had not yet fulfilled his ambition of becoming a leader amongst his fellows, but he had succeeded in making himself somewhat of a public character.

In his perplexity as to who was the leader of the junior school he had sought advice from his friends. He had not succeeded in eliciting any real information from them—one thought one Co., and one another, as was only natural—but he had succeeded in raising the question in their minds. Most of them had never thought about the matter, not being fired with the same stirring ambition as Philpot, but when they were confronted with it it occurred to them that it was a very open question. Consequently there had been many sharp skirmishes, both in words and in arms, between the upholders of the four different Co.'s who were in the running. These were Tom Merry & Co., Blake & Co., Figgins & Co., the New House representatives, and Cornstalk, otherwise Noble & Co. the Australian contingent, and each had their ardent supporters.

Now, as it happened, all four leaders of the four above-mentioned Co.'s were playing for the junior football team of St. Jim's in the forthcoming match against East Hyde, and therefore the match was looked upon as being of even greater importance than usual.

It was, as it were, tacitly agreed that the fellow who made the best display in this important match would be accounted the leader of the junior school for some time to come.

The match day dawned bright and frosty, and everybody was in high spirits.

Punctually at a quarter to three the teams lined up. It was noticed that the East Hyde fellows looked, on the whole, somewhat heavier than their opponents, but the St. Jim's eleven quite made up for their lightness by their wonderful fitness. One would have to go a long way to find eleven fitter-looking juniors than Tom Merry's selection for this match.

The team consisted of Tom Merry himself, Jack Blake, Figgins, Manners, Herries, Noble, D'Arcy, Kerr, Kerruish, Reilly, and Fatty Wynn in goal.

The whistle blew, and Tom Merry kicked off for St. Jim's against the wind.

For a time the St. Jim's eleven failed to get together, and the East Hyde eleven made the most of their opportunity. Quite early in the game Fatty Wynn was called upon to save two really good shots from the East Hyde centre-forward.

His efforts were rewarded with a burst of applause from the spectators, and a few remarks from some excited juniors.

"Well saved, Fatty, old boy!"

"That's right! Keep 'em out!"

"Wales for ever!"

Fatty had conceded a corner in making his last save, but Figgins, at right-back, cleared with a magnificent volley right up the field.

"Follow it up, forwards!" shouted Tom Merry, setting a good example himself.

The East Hyde centre-half trapped the ball, but Tom Merry was too quick for him, and in a trice he was tearing down the centre of the field, with the ball in front of him. The East Hyde left-back checked him a little, and Tom Merry took a difficult shot from a fairly long range. The ball hit the upright with a resounding thwack, and rebounded into play. Before the hero of the Shell could reach it again, the other back had got it right away.

There was a chorus from the ropes.

"Bad luck, Tom Merry!"

"Well tried, sir, indeed!"

"Buck up, St. Jim's!"

"Now's your chance! Pass it out!"

And Blake did pass it out! He was playing centre-half, and he sent a beautiful forward pass out to the right wing, not so far that the opposing back could reach it first, but just far enough for the wing man to rush down on it, and get right past.

"Centre!" shouted Tom Merry.

D'Arcy was playing outside-right, and that elegant youth made no mistake. A beautiful dropping centre, a thud as Tom

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Merry's foot met the ball before it reached the ground, and the East Hyde goalkeeper was picking the ball out of the net. It was a fine piece of work, beautifully planned and executed. Tom Merry had sent in a stinging shot high up in the corner, which the goalkeeper had no chance of saving.

There was a roar.

"Bravo! Well done, St. Jim's!"

"Well shot!"

"Centre, sir!"

"Another one, St. Jim's!"

"Stick to it!"

The enthusiasm was tremendous. It was not often that the fellows on the touch-line were treated to such a display of skill.

The East Hyde team looked determined. This reverse had put them on their mettle, and they played up all the harder, after the kick-off. And their efforts were rewarded with success, for about ten minutes from half-time, their inside left dashed through and scored a goal, beating Fatty Wynn, who ran out to meet him. The East Hyde forward, unfortunately, could not stop himself, and ran into the Welshman, and the next moment he was lying on the grass in rather a dazed condition. Fatty Wynn had stood like a rock, and the rushing forward had made no impression on him. If he couldn't stop the ball, he stopped the player!

St. Jim's smiled at the sight of the solid Welshman, as he stood looking at his victim lying before him. But they looked sad again when they saw the ball at the back of the net.

"Never mind, School!"

"Play up, St. Jim's!"

"Now or never!"

With these and sundry other encouragements, St. Jim's kicked off again, and just before half-time, Figgins ran up the field himself, with a beautiful piece of dribbling, evaded the opposing backs, and scored with a low shot, amidst roars of applause. Then the whistle blew for half-time, with St. Jim's leading by two to one.

The St. Jim's team gathered together in a little group, and sucked lemons vigorously.

"That was a remarkably fine shot of yours, Tom Mewwy!" remarked Gussy, who looked as unruffled as though he had never moved the whole game, whereas he had really been playing hard and well.

"My dear Gussy, it was your centre that did it! I had nothing to do but to put it in!" answered Tom Merry cheerfully.

"Wats, deah boy! I vegard yours, as a weally wonderful shot!"

"Quite right, Gussy! It was ripping, Tom!" said Blake heartily.

"Old Figgins was ripping, too!" remarked Fatty Wynn, who was demolishing his fourth piece of lemon, in spite of the fact that, being the goalkeeper, he had exerted himself least of all.

"Rather! It was first-class! We ought to have 'em on last now, with the wind with us!" said Blake.

"Yes, if we stick to it, we'll pull it off all right!" said Tom Merry. "I say, Blake," he continued, lowering his voice, "stick to their centre-forward. He's a nailer!"

"Right you are! I won't let him move!"

"Good! Now, then, kids, keep it up!"

The whistle blew again, and the two teams again prepared for action.

St. Jim's had the wind with them this half, so they expected to do even better than before.

The game re-opened very dramatically. By some very good play the East Hyde forwards worked the ball right up the field straight from the kick-off. Then the outside-right centred.

The ball soared high into the air. At the same moment a sideways gust of wind caught and bore it straight and true into the top corner of the goal!

It was the East Hydians' turn to applaud now.

"Well shot, Wingfield!" shouted the captain, while a roar of applause rang out from the ropes.

Wingfield, the outside-right, who had made the wonderful shot, smiled to himself.

He turned to his inside-right as they walked up the field again.

"That was meant for a centre!" he remarked.

"I don't care! It was a jolly fine shot, old chap!" answered his fellow winger.

"A giddy fluke, more like!"

"Rats! We're two all, now! We may beat 'em yet!"

"Rather!"

The game started again, and it seemed as if the St. Jim's team had gone rather to pieces.

Their play lacked dash, and they did not combine as they had been doing hitherto.

Their opponents were not slow in taking advantage of this. They played with the greatest dash and fire, and the St. Jim's eleven, though they played up gallantly, began to feel the weight of the heavier metal against them.

Time after time, Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was knocked

flying by the big East Hyde backs, and things began to look less bright for St. Jim's.

Slowly but surely the ball worked its way up towards the St. Jim's goal again.

Fatty Wynn was called upon to save several times, and altogether the home defence was having an anxious time.

Then a terrible catastrophe occurred.

One of the East Hyde forwards sent in quite a soft shot, and Herries, the left back, who was standing in front of his goal, took a kick at the twisting ball, very nearly missed it, and the next moment the thing had screwed into the very corner of his own goal.

A gasp went up from the assembled multitude.

Three goals to two in favour of East Hyde, and only fifteen minutes more to play!

The situation was critical.

Could St. Jim's make a final effort, and score two more goals?

The general run of opinion was rather against this feat being accomplished, as the home side was not playing at their best.

Tom Merry, however, did not despair.

"I say, kids, this is awful!" he said, as they walked to the centre again. "We can't be beaten! Buck up! Only two more goals!"

Two more goals, and only fifteen minutes to play! It was a hard task, but the St. Jim's team set about it with a will.

This last reverse seemed to waken them up, and they began to play as if the match had only just started.

Once D'Arcy got right away on the right wing, but the referee's whistle blew just as he was about to centre.

"Offside!"

"Weally—"

"Offside!" repeated Monteith, the New House prefect, who had the whistle.

"Yaas, wathah, but—"

"Don't argue with the referee, D'Arcy!" said Monteith, sternly.

Arthur Augustus turned red.

"Weally, deah boy, I was not arguin'! I was only goin' to say—"

"Well, say it afterwards!" said Monteith; and blew his whistle for the free kick.

Arthur Augustus grew crimson. He was only going to apologise in his polite way for being offside; but Monteith actually believed him to be guilty of the unpardonable offence against good form, of arguing with the referee!

The spectators on the ropes evidently made the same mistake, or affected to, and several comments were made.

"That's right, Gussy! Stick up for your rights!" shouted one.

"Why don't you have a whistle of your own to blow when you think you're offside, Gus?" called out Wally, D'Arcy's younger brother.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Pway don't be absurd," said Gussy, in his most dignified way.

The East Hyde back took the free kick. The ball sped straight for D'Arcy, who was walking away from it. He was so much engaged with his own wrongs that he did not realise that the game had restarted. Consequently, the ball took him absolutely unawares—on the back of the head.

There was a thud, and the swell of St. Jim's fell flat on his face with a loud gasp.

There was a fresh yell from the ropes.

"Well headed, sir!"

"Bull's-eye that time!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Ow—the howwid boundah!" Arthur Augustus murmured, as he picked himself up. "I should like to give him a feahful thwashin'!"

The game, however, went on without this terrible wish being fulfilled, and at last the efforts of the St. Jim's fellows who had been playing with furious energy, were rewarded, Noble, playing inside-left, scored, with a long, low shot.

Three all, and four minutes to play!

The excitement was intense, and after a frantic burst of applause for Noble's shot, silence reigned over the field.

The two teams were now playing with terrific energy and determination. The game surged up and down the field, and neither side seemed to have the advantage. Then Blake passed to Tom Merry, who received it well.

He dashed up the field, passed the back, and then shot. The ball hit the upright, low down, and bounded back.

Blake, who was following well up behind Tom Merry, did not hesitate. He shot with every ounce of strength he had in him. The ball flew towards the goal.

The goalkeeper made a frantic effort, and got his hands to the ball. But its impetus was too great, and his hands were knocked aside.

The whistle blew almost as the ball passed between the posts. St. Jim's had won by four goals to three! The St. Jim's juniors nearly went mad with delight. They swarmed on to the field,

and patted the perspiring team on the back until they nearly choked.

Tom Merry, Figgins, Noble, and Blake, the four leaders in the junior school, had distinguished themselves equally. Each had scored one goal in fine style; so that the match, a magnificent game as it had been, did not help the junior school to come to a decision on the respective merits of the four rivals.

"Blake, you're a giddy hero!" said Herries, as they walked into the School House together.

"Rats!"

"You ought to have a statue put up to you for that shot!"

"More rats!"

"And engraved on it: 'The man who did the trick against East Hyde.'"

"Fathead! It was only a blessed fluke!"

"Go and tell your grandmother that!" retorted Herries. "It was an absolutely genuine shot!"

"Of course it was!" chimed in Digby, who joined them at that moment.

"At any rate, anybody could have done it!" said Blake.

"Well, I got in a good shot," remarked Herries, "only it was the wrong goal."

"Never mind, old chap," said Digby, "you played jolly well!"

"Rot! Shooting a goal against your own side—that's good play, isn't it?" grunted Herries discontentedly.

"Jolly bad luck, that's what I call it!" said Digby consolingly.

"Never mind, old chap," said Blake, as they arrived at the School, "we won."

"Rather! St. Jim's for ever!"

CHAPTER 7.

A Shock for Gussy.

A PARCEL for Master D'Arcy!"

It was Toby, the new buttons, who spoke, as he stood at the door of Blake's study. Binks, the late page of the school, was now a millionaire.

D'Arcy looked up.

"Thanks, deah boy!" he drawled. "Pway accept this twidle!" He slipped a coin into the hand of the grinning boy.

"Thank you, sir, kindly," murmured Toby, and retired.

"I strongly suspect," remarked D'Arcy, "that these are the monacles I ordered the other day."

Blake looked at the parcel.

"From the size of the thing, I should say it was a grand piano!"

"Pway don't be absurd!" retorted Arthur Augustus with dignity. "I natuwallly want a few to choose from."

"Are they so very different?" said Herries, feigning extreme interest.

"Yaas, deah boy, they vawy gweatly. I'm afraid I shall nevah get one to suit me as well as my formah one!" said Arthur Augustus, sighing deeply.

"Don't take it to heart so, Gussy dear," said Blake. "Be a man, and take your griefs bravely."

"I'm trying to, Blake, but I feel vewy stwange and unhappy without it."

"Yes, Gussy, you don't look the same without your old eyeglass," agreed Digby.

"Not quite such a dummy, eh?" said Blake.

"Weally, Blake—"

"Not at all! Don't mention it!" answered Blake blandly.

"Now do buck up and open the parcel and try 'em on."

"All wight, deah boy, no huiwvy!"

Arthur Augustus proceeded to undo the parcel slowly. A tinkling noise proceeded from the packet as he undid the inside wrapper.

"Seems as though they aren't packed very well," said Digby.

"I agwee with you, deah boy," said D'Arcy anxiously; "but I hope nothin's wrong!"

By this time a fair-sized wooden box had been brought to view, and as D'Arcy gently shook it the tinkling noise was repeated.

"It weally seems as though some were broken!" observed Arthur Augustus, looking worried.

"Well, open the trunk and see, ass!" said Blake.

The swell of St. Jim's removed the lid, and as he did so a cry of dismay came from his lips.

"Bai Jove! How twly howwible!" he exclaimed, in quite a heartbroken voice. "They're broken!"

"Every one!" corroborated Digby sympathetically.

"Bad luck, Gussy! You'll have to use the glass of your watch, after all," remarked Blake, taking the catastrophe with commendable fortitude.

"This is no match for joking!" exclaimed the swell of St. Jim's, who had somewhat recovered his composure. "It's vewy sewious!"

And, indeed, it was very annoying for Gussy. For all that

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NEXT THURSDAY: "FATTY WYNN'S NEW WHEEZE."

A Splendid, Long, Complete Tale of The Chums of St. Jim's. By Martin Clifford.

the box contained was a jumbled mass of broken glass and cotton-wool and paper.

"We fully realise the awfulness of your position, Gussy," said Herries solemnly.

"Weally, I don't know what I am to do now!" said D'Arey helplessly.

"You'll have to borrow some spectacles," suggested Blake gravely.

"Pwaj don't jest, Blake! It's a vewy sewious mattah! As a mattah of fact, I think it is vewy remarkable that evewy one should be so completely destroyed."

"Exactly, Gussy," put in Blake. "Somebody's done it on purpose."

"Do you weally think so?"

"I do! Somebody's done it to annoy you. I don't care a blow for the actual eyeglasses!"

"Weally, Blake—"

"But it's a rotten trick, all the same!" continued Blake warmly, disregarding the interruptions.

"Well, I must send for some more immediately."

"Well, look here, kids," suggested Blake, "let's have young Toby up here, and see if he knows anything."

"Good idea! I'll get him." Herries disappeared from the room like a flash. A few moments later he returned, dragging the red-headed page-boy after him.

"Now, stand there, Toby, and don't be a young ass!" said Blake authoritatively.

Thus admonished, Toby, who was firmly convinced that he was in for a rowing, trembled visibly in every limb.

"Now, don't be a funk, Toby; we're not going to row you, but only want you to answer a few questions. Who gave you that parcel you brought up just now?" said Blake, taking upon himself the duty of cross-examiner.

"Oo guv' it me?" answered the page-boy vaguely. "Why no one; leastways, except the postman."

"You young fathead!" exclaimed Blake. "Are you trying to be funny?"

"I ain't tryin' to be funny!" answered Toby, his lips twitching nervously.

"Well, what's the matter with you?" asked Jack Blake, looking at the boy curiously.

"Looks as though he's seen a ghost," remarked Digby.

"Or eaten something that didn't agree with him," said Herries.

"I weally believe the boy is off his wockah!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arey in surprise.

Toby was apparently undergoing terrible pain during these comments. He first stood on one foot and then on the other, rolling his eyes and screwing up his face. Finally he burst into floods of tears.

"Here, chuck it, Toby!" said Blake, in alarm. "What's up?"

"Boohoo, boo-hoo!" was the unfortunate buttons' only answer.

"This wathah confirms my belief that the poor fellah is off his wockah," said Gussy, looking pityingly at the weeping lad. Blake took the boy by the shoulders, and shook him gently.

"Pull yourself together, and turn off that water!" he exclaimed. "We're not going to eat you!"

"Boohoo! It weren't my fault!" stammered Toby, between sobs.

"What do you mean? Who said it was your fault?"

"I dunno! It was that other young genelman! Boo-hoo!"

"Speak out, and don't be a silly young ass!"

"I wegard that fellah as completely devoid of any intellect."

"Now, look here, Toby," said Blake, changing his hitherto commanding voice to a gentler one, "what's the matter? Do you know who broke up the things in that parcel?"

"Y-yes, sir! Leastways—"

"Well, who was it?"

"I daren't tell you! He'd kill me!"

"Look here, Toby, don't talk rot!" cried Blake impatiently. "We won't let any of the chaps hurt you, so you can speak out."

"Now then, deah boy, out with it!" put in D'Arey. "You can surely trust to Blake's honah?"

"Won't yer really let him hurt me?" inquired Toby, looking a little relieved.

"No, we promise you we won't!" said all four juniors at once, with one exception; and he said "promise."

"Well, if yer promise, I'll tell yer."

"We have promised—" began Herries. But Blake motioned him into silence.

"It were that fellah—"

"Well?"

"Mellish! Boo-hoo! Don't let 'im hurt me!" broke out the unfortunate Toby, overcome with terror at what he had disclosed.

"Mellish!" Blake & Co. repeated in one breath.

"What a feahful wottah!"

"The villain!"

"The wank outsidah! I shall wegard it as my sacred duty

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to inflict upon him a most feahful thwashin'," said Arthur Augustus, looking very warlike.

"But I say, you chaps—"

"What?"

"We've been suspecting Tom Merry!" said Blake seriously.

"Bai Jove! So we have!"

"I thought old Tom wouldn't do such a cad's trick!" said Digby, in a tone of relief.

"It looked jolly well as though he had sneaked the eyeglass in the first place," said Blake slowly.

"Yes; but he didn't!" put in Herries.

"Of course not! It was that cad Mellish!"

"By Jove! We'll let the beast have it!"

"Yes, by Jingo, and now, too!" exclaimed Blake hotly.

"Wight-ho, deah boy!"

"Come on kids, we won't wait a second!"

"Right-ho!"

The four juniors left the study, raced down the passage, and drew up in front of Mellish's door.

Thump! Thump!

No answer.

Thump! Thump!

"Who's there?"

"I just want to speak to you a moment, Mellish," said Blake, with a stern note in his voice.

"Well, go and eat coke!" came the answer from within.

But, instead of carrying out Mellish's kind instructions, Blake burst the door of the study open, and the four avengers marched in.

"What d'you want?" asked Mellish, looking up angrily, and looking a little frightened.

"I just wanted to ask you if you happened to open a parcel of D'Arey's—"

Mellish turned pale, but attempted to bluster.

"What d'you mean? I—I—I—" he stammered.

"If you happened to break its contents, or anything like that?" continued Blake calmly.

"Get away, you rotters!" said Mellish furiously. "I don't know—"

"Oh, you don't, don't you? You blessed skulking, howling cad! You don't know anything about sneaking an eyeglass from our study either, do you?" cried Blake hotly.

"Look here, you Shell rotters!" retorted Mellish, who was recovering himself somewhat. "Get out of this room!"

"We're not going till we've settled your hash, you rotten coward!" answered Blake. "Did you, or didn't you, bust those eyeglasses?"

At Blake's determined tone, Mellish's courage broke down. He made a ghastly attempt to smile.

"Well, you see, I—I—I—"

"Then you did do it?"

"Ye-es, I—I—I—you see, it was only a—a joke—I—I—I—"

"Oh, cut the lies!" broke in Blake contemptuously. "We're going to give you the licking of your life for playing a dirty trick, and letting other people be suspected! Now, chaps!"

Then, with one accord, the four juniors fell upon the miserable cad of the Fourth.

It was some time before Blake & Co. left Mellish's study, and when they did so, they left a very different person behind to the one they found there. In fact, "his own brother would hardly have known him," as Herries remarked, with satisfaction.

"That's vewy satisfactory!" remarked D'Arey, as they returned to their study. "I don't think Mellish will give us much trouble in the future!"

"You're right there, Gussy!" agreed Herries.

"Ah, here's Toby still," said Blake. "We'd rather forgotten you in the passing excitement of the moment!"

D'Arey slipped his hand into his pocket, and produced half a crown.

"Pwaj accept this small remuneration for your services, deah boy!" he remarked gracefully.

"Thank 'ee kindly, sir!" said Toby, who was quite calm now. "I hope 'as 'ow you 'aven't quite killed that there Mellish—"

"Not quite, old chap!" laughed Blake. "I dare say he'll recover!"

And Toby grinned, and departed.

CHAPTER 8.

Blake & Co. Apologise.

"IT is satisfactory to have found the offendah, but I am still in the unfortunate, not to say feahful, posish, of having no monode!" remarked Arthur Augustus D'Arey sadly, gazing at the shattered remains of what had once been a valuable consignment of those useful articles. "I weally wish the wottah had left one unbwoken. I would weah it, even if it were a feahful fit!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Weally, deah boys, your laughtah at such a time is unfeelin'!"

"Ha, ha! Never mind, Gussy! We quite realise your awful position," said Blake, with a grin. "In fact, we can't sleep o' nights for thinking how cold you must be without your window-pane!"

"Ha, ha! That's so!" chimed in Herries and Digby in chorus.

"Weally, deah boys——"

"Therefore," continued Jack Blake gravely, "I have much pleasure in presenting you, Arthur Augustus De Vere Fitz Montmorency St. Clair D'Arcy——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Weally, Blake——"

"With this very elegant eyeglass!" finished Blake, handing a natty, gold-rimmed eyeglass, which he extracted from his waistcoat pocket, to the amazed and delighted swell of St. Jim's. "It's true, it's only a second-hand one," added Blake, "but what else can you expect in these hard times?"

D'Arcy's whole face lit up with an expression of keen delight. "Bai Jove, Blake, you are a wippah!" he exclaimed joyfully. "And it's my old one, too! Where did you get it from?"

"I noticed it behind a photo on that cad Mellish's mantel-piece!"

"Ah!" said D'Arcy, jamming his monocle lovingly in his eye, and surveying himself with evident delight in the study mirror. "At last I feel my old self!"

"Good old Gus! You look happier than I've seen you for days!"

There was a pause, and then D'Arcy turned round with a serious air.

"I say, chaps——" he began.

"Well, what's up? Indigestion?"

"No, deah boy! I was thinkin' we must go and apologise to Tom Mewwy——"

"By Jove, yes! We must do something!" said Blake gravely.

"For havin' suspected him!"

"Yes, I certainly think we must!"

"All the same," put in Digby, "it wasn't our fault exactly!"

"No. But, still, we must go and apologise!"

"Come on!"

Once again the four juniors left their study, but this time with a more peaceful mission.

They knocked at the door of Study No. 1 in the Shell passage.

"Come in!"

Blake opened the door.

Tom Merry was alone, writing.

"Hallo!" he exclaimed, looking up. "What's up?"

"We've come," said Blake, the spokesman of the party, "to apologise for suspecting you——"

"Oh!" said Tom Merry, apparently not taking much interest. "What of?"

"Of taking Gussy's eyeglass from our study!"

"Well, I told you I didn't, so you ought to have known better!" answered Tom Merry, colouring.

"Well, you never actually told us——"

"Oh, don't quibble! I said it plain enough!" said Tom Merry shortly.

"Weally, Tom Mewwy, we all vewy much wegwet that our suspicion was directed against you, but——"

"Oh, that's all right!" answered the hero of the Shell.

"We'll let that pass! Have you found out who did it?"

"We have," said Blake grimly. "If you go and look in Mellish's study, you won't have to ask again!"

Tom Merry smiled.

"Good!" he said. "Well, good-bye, you chaps! I'm rather busy."

"Oh, all right!" said Blake, a little nettled. "Sorry to have disturbed you!"

"Don't mensh!"

Blake & Co. returned to their study with mixed feelings. Their apology had not been accepted quite in the way they expected.

However, they had done all they could under the circumstances—as D'Arcy put it, "One gentleman weally cannot do more than apologise to another!"—and it was clear that their relations with the Terrible Three would still be rather strained for some little time to come, at least.

CHAPTER 9.

A Challenge.

PHILPOT was standing at the gate of St. Jim's, alone and with no fixed occupation, looking down the road. It was snowing hard, but Philpot did not seem to notice that. He was thinking deeply.

"Blessed if I've got much forrader!" he was saying to himself. "I don't seem to have much notion who's the juniors' leader yet! I must think of some way of finding out, really!"

As he was meditating on this knotty point, a small boy hove

in sight, coming round the bend of the road. As he approached, Philpot examined him rather closely.

"Where did I see that kid last?" he asked himself. "Somewhere, I know, and not long ago!"

He was quite right.

The boy was an East Hyde fellow, who had come over to St. Jim's as a spectator on the occasion of the East Hyde match.

He turned in St. Jim's gates, but he had not gone very far before he turned round again and approached Philpot.

"Do you belong to this place?" he inquired, pointing to St. Jim's.

"Looks like it, doesn't it?" answered Philpot, trying to recall his face.

"Well, will you do something for me?" asked the boy again.

"All depends," said Philpot. "Where d'you come from?"

"East Hyde."

"Were you over here the other day?"

"Yes; and we ought to have won, only——"

"Stow that, kid! I knew I'd seen your grimy chivvy before!" retorted Philpot genially. "What d'you want?"

"Well, look here. You might deliver this note for me!"

"Who's it for?"

By way of an answer, the East Hyde fellow handed Philpot the note in question.

"Oh, it's for the 'Leader of the Juniors, St. Jim's College,' is it?" said Philpot, more to himself than the messenger.

Then he added:

"Well, who's that?"

"How do you suppose I know? I don't bother my head about rotten schools like this!" said the East Hyde fag cheekily.

"Look here, young fellow, you're going the right way to get a thick ear!" said Philpot warningly.

"Well, will you do it for me?" asked the small boy, quickly changing the subject.

"If you ask me very nicely, and address me as 'Sir,' " said Philpot, with a judicial air.

"Go and eat your hat!" retorted the East Hydian rudely.

Philpot frowned at the small urchin.

"What's it about?" he grunted.

"It's a challenge to a snowball fight on the next suitable half-holiday," answered the bearer of the missive.

"What d'you want to get squashed again?" grinned the Turncoat of the Fourth.

"Rats!" said the fag promptly. "We just want to show you that——"

"That you can take a licking——"

"That we can settle your hash if we really want to!" finished the small East Hydian indignantly.

Philpot laughed.

"Right you are, my young buck!" he said. "I'll deliver it! Now you can get!"

"Thanks! So long!"

The messenger from East Hyde had long disappeared round the bend before Philpot made any attempt to carry out his promise.

"I believe I've got it now!" he said at last, and proceeded to make his way back to the school.

Just as he was passing the door of the New School House, Figgins & Co. dashed out, and Figgins—who was leading—very nearly took the unsuspecting Philpot off his feet.

"Here, steady!" said the School House boy mildly. "Where are you coming to?"

"I'm not coming; I'm going somewhere!" answered Figgins.

"Besides, you shouldn't loiter about outside respectable houses like this!" put in Kerr, the Scottish partner in the famous New House Co.

"I wasn't loitering!" protested Philpot. "But look here, you chaps," he added, "I wanted to see you!"

"Well, we charge for being looked at!" said Figgins.

"You don't often get the chance of seeing such a fine lot of chaps!" observed Fatty Wynn.

"Well, look here, you chaps," continued Philpot hastily, "I've got a letter——"

"How interesting!" said Figgins sarcastically.

"Yes, but——"

"How truly delightful!"

"H'm! Let me finish! It's addressed to 'The Leader of the Juniors!'"

"Hand it over!" said Figgins unhesitatingly.

Philpot grinned.

"Why should I?"

"Because you generally give a letter to the person it's addressed to, I suppose, don't you?"

"Yes. But how do I know you're the leader?"

"Obvious, my dear forehead!" answered Figgins. "I'm the leader to the New House juniors, aren't I, chaps?"

"Rather!" responded the "chaps."

"Well, it follows that I'm the leader of all the juniors!"

"I don't see it!" remarked Philpot.

"You must be remarkably thick, then!" said Figgins.

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"The New House always was streaks ahead of the musty old School House—"

"Rats!" murmured Philpot.

"And so the leader of the New House juniors must be the leader of the lot!"

"That's logic!" observed Kerr, nodding his head.

"Well, I shouldn't like to give it to you till I've seen Tom Merry!"

"Tom Merry!" exclaimed Figgins. "Well, I should think he's got enough sense to agree with me, but I'm not sure!"

"Well, we'll see!" said Philpot.

"Who's the beastly note from, anyway?" asked Figgins carelessly.

"East Hyde! A challenge to a snowball fight!" answered Philpot over his shoulder, as he walked away towards the School House.

"What sport!" exclaimed Figgins, with interest.

"We'll give 'em socks!" remarked Kerr.

"And the losers ought to be made to stand a feed," added Fatty Wynn.

"That's right, Fatty! Never forget your bread-basket!"

"Well, a chap must live—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"And I always feel extra hungry this cold weather."

"You don't say so, Fatty!"

And Figgins, grinning, led the way to the footer ground at a run. Meanwhile Philpot had encountered Blake & Co. at the entrance of the School House.

"You're the very chaps I wanted to see!" he remarked.

"Well, there's no charge," answered Blake.

"At any rate, then, you're better than Figgins!" said Philpot, with a grin. "He wanted to charge me!"

Blake stared.

"Well, they have some funny faces in the New House, anyway," he said. "They're worth a small fee to look at—and laugh!"

"Yaas, wathah! I wegard that as a vewy funnay weimark, Blake! Hah, hah, hah!" chuckled D'Arcy.

"Chuck it, Gussy! What d'you want, Weathercock?" said Blake.

"I've got a letter for the leader of the juniors."

"Well, why don't you give it to me?" demanded Jack Blake, in astonishment.

"Because I'm not sure—"

"My dear ass, you don't mean to say you don't know who the leader is?"

"Well, I—"

"It's absolutely obvious, isn't it, kids?"

"Rather!" responded the "kids," without any hesitation.

"Pway don't be so absurd as to hesitate, Philpot, dear boy!" remarked D'Arcy. "I flattah myself—"

"Very vain of you, Gussy! You're getting beastly excited!"

"Weally, Blake—"

"Come on, Philpot!" said Blake, not heeding D'Arcy's protest. "Hand it over!"

"Well, I'm not going to till I've seen Tom Merry! Besides, it doesn't really matter much," added Philpot. "It's only a challenge from East Hyde to a snowball fight!"

"All right, Turncoat, you can go and see Tom Merry if you like! I don't care!" said Blake, in a lordly tone. And the Fourth Form Co. walked away with their noses in the air.

CHAPTER 19.

Still Undecided!

PHILPOT walked on to Tom Merry's study with a sly grin. As before, he explained that he had promised to deliver a note to the leader of the juniors. The result was the same. Tom Merry, of course, claimed the leadership, but Philpot pointedly refused to give him the note in the absence of a satisfactory proof of Tom Merry's claim.

The same thing happened when the wily Turncoat visited Cornstalk & Co., and he finally went down to the junior common-room with the note still in his pocket. He found several juniors gathered in the room, and he determined to enlist their co-operation in the matter.

"I say, you chaps," he began, addressing no one in particular, "what d'you think of this?"

He held out the note for their inspection. Several juniors crowded round him and read the address.

"Faith, an' I should think you'd better get rid of it as soon as possible!" said Reilly, the Irish junior.

"Who shall I give it to?" asked Philpot.

Reilly hesitated a moment.

"Sure, Tom Merry," he said at last; "or else Jack Blake."

"I should think Blake would be the right one!" volunteered Hancock.

"Why not Noble?" said Bernard Glyn, the St. Jim's inventor.

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

"It's pretty clear to me that Figgins ought to have it!" said Pratt, of the New House, who happened to be in the common-room.

"Well, I don't know who to give it to," said Philpot. "I've been round to the lot, and they all say they ought to have it!"

"Don't blame 'em, either!" remarked Kerruish, the Manx lad.

"Sure, and why don't you split the difference, and give 'em a quarter ayehe?" suggested Reilly.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Well, what am I to do?" asked Philpot.

"Go and eat coke, as long as you don't disturb us!" said Kerruish, returning to his occupation of roasting chestnuts.

"I'm busy!"

"Hear, hear!"

Philpot sniffed, and returned to his study still undecided what to do with the challenge. He sat in deep thought for some time, then he suddenly jumped up, as though he had had an inspiration.

"I know what I'll do," he said, to himself.

He turned his footsteps once again to Tom Merry's study, and knocked at the door.

"Come in!"

Philpot entered, and Tom Merry looked up from the book he was reading.

"Here again already?" he remarked. "Anything I can do for you?"

"Yes. It's about this beastly note!"

"Nothing newer than that?"

"Well, I can't make up my mind who to give it to, and I want you to help me, Tom Merry," said Philpot, with an air of great frankness.

"Certainly! By taking the note, I suppose?" said Tom Merry good-naturedly.

"No, not that," answered Philpot. "I want you to get a decision as to who's leader."

"How?"

"By having a meeting of sorts."

"What d'you mean?" asked Tom Merry, staring.

"Why, call a meeting of the various candidates, and decide for yourselves!"

"H'm!" said Tom Merry thoughtfully. "I don't know. I suppose you want us to have a fight about it?"

"I don't care what you do," answered Philpot, with great candour, "as long as you decide on something!"

"But look here, fathead," said Manners, who had just come in with Lowther, "you seem to be making a lot of fuss over nothing!"

"Just what I think!" chimed in Monty Lowther. "As it's a challenge, I don't see that it matters who gets it!"

"I dare say!" retorted Philpot warily. "But I'm not going to give it to anybody but the right person!"

"In other words," said Tom Merry keenly, "you want to find out who the leader is yourself?"

Philpot looked confused for a moment.

"Perhaps I do," he mumbled. "But—but that's not the point now."

"Well, look here, Weathercock," said Tom Merry, chuckling to himself, "if you like I'll call a meeting of Blake, Figgins & Noble, and we'll see what we can do. They're the only candidates in the running besides myself, I suppose?"

"Good! I wish you would," said Philpot, in a tone of relief; and without saying another word, he retired. Tom Merry laughed aloud as soon as Philpot had left the room.

"What a joke!" he said. "Did you see how-flustered the ass got?"

"Rather!" answered Manners. "I believe that's what he's been driving at the whole time."

"I'm pretty sure of it," said Lowther.

"Well, look here, kids," said Tom Merry, "we'd better concoct a sort of circular to send round to these other bouncers. It'll be rather sport to have an election, or something!"

"Right you are! Things are a bit dull just now!" said Lowther. And they immediately set to work.

After much joint labour, the following effusion was produced:

"Whereas there seems to be some doubt in the minds of certain of the junior members of the school as to who holds the position of junior leader, we, the undersigned, have deemed it necessary to call a meeting of several responsible persons to decide this weighty question.

"Your own and your Co.'s presence is earnestly desired at 5.30 p.m. to-morrow (Thursday), in the undersigned's study:

"TOM MERRY.

"M. LOWTHER.

"H. MANNERS."

Three copies of this were made, and were immediately dispatched—one to Blake, one to Figgins, and one to Noble.

CHAPTER 11.

The Committee Meeting.

PUNCTUALLY at 5.30 the leading lights of the junior school arrived at Tom Merry's study. It was only with the greatest difficulty that they squeezed themselves in, but it was managed at last.

Everything that could possibly accommodate a person was occupied, even down to the top of a bookcase which stood against the wall of the room. When everyone had settled down Tom Merry rose.

"Gentlemen," began the hero of the Shell, "you all know from the circulars which you have received, what we are having this meeting for. We're here to decide who's the leader of the juniors. But before we begin, someone must be elected chairman of the meeting."

At this point Blake rose, and proposed Tom Merry as chairman; D'Arcy seconded the motion, which was carried unanimously. Whereupon Tom Merry rose again.

"I beg to thank my honourable friends for their great kindness in electing me chairman. I hope I shall fulfil the duties imposed upon me to the general satisfaction!"

This remark was greeted by enthusiastic cheers, and a voice from the background, "How long did you take to learn it?" The author was hastily suppressed by being sat upon by several of his friends.

Tom Merry then continued speaking as follows:

"As I said before, we all know what we've got to do to-night. It seems that a letter has come, addressed to the leader of the juniors, and the person who has the letter at present is apparently unable to decide whom to give it to—a not unusual state of mind, I believe, for the said person to be in (loud laughter). Well, the whole object of this meeting is to make up his mind for him, in fact, to let him know which way the wind's blowing. This allusion to Philipot's nickname tickled the audience mightily, and it was some minutes before order was restored."

"Well," continued Tom Merry, after the noise had ceased, "we are now prepared to hear suggestions for deciding this question, and any person desiring to give his opinion is requested to do so now."

Immediately Blake, D'Arcy, Figgins, and Noble sprang to their feet, and each began, "Gentlemen," and then stopped short.

"Mr. Blake has the preference, as his name begins with a B," said the chairman.

"I beg to state," drawled the swell of St. Jan's, "that my name weally commences with A, and—"

"Rats!"

"Sit down!"

"Weally, deah boys—"

"Order! Order!"

"Will Mr. Blake continue with his speech?" said the chairman.

"Weally, Tom Merry—" began D'Arcy, in offended tones; but before he could say more, Herries and Digby had pulled him into his seat again, and jammed a handkerchief over his mouth, only removing it when he had promised, more or less in dumb show, that he would remain quiet.

"Gentlemen," said Blake, "it's my opinion that the best thing we can do is to put the question to the vote, now, at this meeting."

"But who are the candidates?" asked Figgins.

"Why, everybody, ass!" answered Blake.

"Order! Order!" shouted Kerr.

"I beg the honourable member will not use such offensive terms," said the chairman, sternly.

"All right! Only these New House bounders—" began Blake, offhandedly.

There was a perfect uproar at this remark from the New House fellows present, which was only stopped when Blake ungracefully apologised for his "unparliamentary" term.

No sooner had order been restored than there was a fearful crash, as Clifton Dane, of the Cornstalk Co., who was perched on the bookcase, came down headlong among the mass of juniors beneath. There was a terrific commotion at this unlooked-for accident, and a chorus of yells and howls broke out.

"Ow! You clumsy ass!"

"Order! order!" cried the chairman.

"Yow! Oh, you've broken my leg!"

"Help!"

"Gerrof my chest!"

"Leggo my ear!"

"Ow! Oh!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Order!" howled Tom Merry. "Get up, Dane, you dangerous ass, if you haven't broken your neck! Get up, you chaps, and shut up!"

"Hear, hear!" chimed in Blake, who did not happen to be one of the injured ones. "Shut up, and let's get on with the washing!"

"That's all very well," grumbled Fatty Wynn, on whose capacious waistcoat Dane had alighted. "I'm hurt! Ow!"

"Rats! Get up, Falstaff!"

"Order! Order!"

After a considerable time peace was again established, and the discussion was resumed.

Several fellows got up and gave their ideas on the subject, and, last of all, D'Arcy rose, amid loud cheers.

"Gentlemen," he said, "as I endeavoured to remark some time ago, I have a suggestion to make which I flattah myself is far snepwior to any yet offahed!"

"Swank!" murmured Figgins.

"It is this," continued Arthur Augustus, loftily ignoring Figgins's audible comment, "let us wefer the subject to a genewal meetin' of all the juniors of the school, and then we shall not have the entiall wespensibility of electin' a leader ourselves."

There was a momentary pause after this speech; and then Tom Merry spoke:

"I beg to second that notion; in fact, I was going to suggest it myself if no one else did!"

Blake got up, and said he thought it was an excellent idea, as the question would then be decided without any ill feeling among themselves.

And so it was settled.

The following notice was therefore drawn up after much and heated discussion:

"A general meeting will be held in the Fourth Form classroom to-morrow evening, at 5 o'clock, when Mr. Tom Merry will take the chair."

"Every Shell and Fourth Form junior's presence is earnestly desired."

"Agenda—To be announced at the meeting.—Signed:"

Then followed the signatures of the self-appointed committee.

Agenda was Blake's word. He remembered having seen it on a notice his father had received once, and he was very proud of it.

The notice was given to Figgins to pin up on the notice-board, as he passed it on his way to his House; and the meeting broke up. Figgins stayed for a few minutes' chat with Tom Merry, and was the last to leave, Kerr and Fatty Wynn going on in front.

CHAPTER 12.

Rough on Skimpole!

THIS chat with Tom Merry over, Figgins hastened out of the study, note in hand, and hurried down the Shell passage.

The long-limbed New House junior, sturdy as he was, had no idea of lingering longer than was necessary about the corridors of the School House, where a New House fellow was always liable to sudden violent attacks from the rightful inmates of the House. Figgins himself looked upon a School House fellow, found in the New House, as fair game to be "snatched bald-headed" without delay. So he knew that he might have to put up with a rough time if he fell in with a gang of hostile Shell fellows in their own House corridor. Therefore Figgins hurried.

He hurried down the Shell passage, he hurried round the corner near the top of the stairs, and he hurried right into the youth who happened to be coming round the corner just at that moment. There was a loud crash, and several yells.

"Ow!"

"Oh!"

"Wow!"

"Yaroo!"

The youth with whom Figgins had collided hurled his arms round the New House junior, and held on like a leech.

Figgins staggered back, and staggered against the wall with a bump.

"Leggo! You chump!" he gasped.

"Oh!"

"Leggo, ass!"

"Oh, dear!"

"Will you let go, duffer?" howled Figgins, struggling so violently that his captor loosed his hold at last, and staggering back sat down on the passage floor with a resounding bump.

"Oh! Ow!"

Figgins glared at the recumbent figure.

"So it's you, is it, Skimpy?" he growled. "I might have known you were just the silly chump to get in the way as I was coming round the corner!"

Skimpole—for the fallen junior was none other than the genius of the Shell—blinked up at Figgins through his huge spectacles, and gasped painfully.

"Really, Figgins—"

"You silly fathead!" said Figgins.

"Really—"

"You dummy!"

"I—I—"

"You chump and cuckoo!"

Skimpole blinked indignantly at the wrathful Figgins, and rose painfully to his feet.

"I admit that the circumstances are somewhat trying," he

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marked, with a groan: "but I see no reason for indulging in vulgar abuse, Figgins!"

Figgins grunted.

"I'm hurt, ass!"

"So am I!" protested Skimpole mildly.

"You nearly winded me, you—you blessed lunatic!"

"The impact also caused me considerable pain," said Skimpole, rubbing his aching bones. "You ought to be more careful in proceeding round corners, Figgins."

"I don't expect to find a silly dummy round every corner, waiting to be run into!" retorted Figgins, somewhat unreasonably.

"My dear Figgins," said Skimpole seriously, grasping Figgins's coat firmly with his skinny hands, in the objectionable way that he had. "My dear Figgins, is it possible that you believe that I was waiting for you to run into me?"

"Oh, rats!" growled Figgins, trying to shake off Skimpole's grasp, but in vain.

"I assure you, Figgins, that nothing was further from my thoughts," went on Skimpole, earnestly. Skimpole, Socialist, Determinist, and every other "ist," always was earnest. "I did not dream that you would come charging round the corner like a demented bull!"

"Cheese it, ass!" grunted Figgins.

"It is a fact, I assure you," said Skimpole, now fairly wound up. "Is it likely that I should be thinking of you at all? My friends—I mean Figgins—I do assure you that my wonderful mind is too much occupied in compassing——"

"In whatting?" said Figgins.

"In compassing!" said Skimpole blinking. "In compassing the welfare of the toiling millions. It is too much occupied, I say, to give thought to every worm——"

Figgins gave a jump.

"Every what?" he roared.

"Ha, ha, ha! Railton's a jolly good Form-master, ass!" grinned Figgins.

"You would not have said so if you had witnessed his utterly illogical behaviour just now," said Skimpole, "I was just explaining to him that I had not had time to do his imposition, as I have not yet finished my great work on Socialism, when he refused very rudely to listen to my very reasonable arguments, and actually was tyrannical enough to make use of that barbarous instrument, the cane!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Figgins. "Good old Railton!"

"He gave me two on each hand," continued Skimpole indignantly, "in spite of my strong protests."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Under Socialism, of course, all canes will be nationalised, and juniors will have as much right to them as Form-masters."

"Ha, ha!" yelled Figgins. "Seems to me you get all the cane you want without the aid of Socialism, Skimmie! Ha, ha, ha!"

Skimpole blinked at the now almost hysterical New House junior with great disapproval and indignation.

"My dear Figgins——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"My dear fellow——"

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled Figgins.

Skimpole shrugged his shoulders.

"Such brainless, nay idiotic, babbling and cackling is doubtless directly traceable to the combined influence of heredity and environment," he remarked, apparently addressing space. "Foolish and lunatic parents, a neglected childhood amidst vicious surroundings——"

Figgins suddenly stopped laughing.

"Eh?" he ejaculated, looking grimly at the genius of the Shelf.

"I was saying that your behaviour was only natural,

LOOK OUT FOR FATTY WYNN ON NEXT WEEK'S COVER!

"Every worm!" repeated Skimpole firmly. "Compared with the great destinies of the people which exclusively occupy my great mind, you cannot possibly be considered as anything but a worm, Figgins."

Figgins glared at the enthusiastic genius in great wrath. As a matter of fact, he had a great mind to commit assault and battery upon him on the spot.

But Skimpole did not seem to realise what was passing in Figgins's mind. He continued to grasp his coat and blink at him, in apparent amazement as to why he was angry.

"I've a jolly good mind to dot you on the nose, you cheeky young ass!" snorted Figgins.

"I cannot conceive why," said Skimpole in amazement. "If I have said anything with which you do not wholly agree, Figgins——"

"If!" murmured Figgins. But Skimpole went on unheeding.

"If I have done so, Figgins, then I am quite open to fair argument. Violence——"

"Here, let me go, you—you dummy, else there will be some violence in a minute!" exclaimed the exasperated Figgins, trying to get away from the greatest bore at St. Jim's. But Skimpole held to his grasp tenaciously.

"Violence," he went on, "is no argument, as I was explaining to Mr. Railton just now."

Figgins grinned in spite of himself.

"Oh, so you've been arguing with Railton, have you?"

"Yes, and I am sorry to say that he proved himself a very inferior arguer," said Skimpole sadly.

"What did he do?" grinned Figgins.

"I regret to say that he was ignorant enough to resort to force," said Skimpole. "It is a great scandal that such ignorant men as Mr. Railton should have the authority of a Form-master over enlightened citizens such as—such as myself, for instance."

Figgins," explained Skimpole, "Any child of foolish or lunatic parents——"

"W-what?"

"Criminally neglected, no doubt, in its childhood——"

"W-which?"

"And dragged up amidst vicious surroundings——"

"M-my hat!"

"Any such child, I say," pursued Skimpole, warming to his subject—a favourite one with him—and apparently quite unconscious of the effect his remarks were having upon Figgins. "Any such child could not reasonably be blamed for such behaviour as you have been indulging in."

"My-my only aunt!"

Figgins gasped for a moment while Skimpole went calmly on.

"Therefore, I do not for one moment upbraid you, Figgins," said Skimpole, smiling genially. "Of course, with your limited brain power you cannot be expected to realise that the use of force is no argument whatever, and that——"

"Ow!"

Skimpole broke off suddenly with a howl of pain and dismay as Figgins's huge fist crashed on his chest.

He let go of the New House junior's coat and sat down on the passage floor again, much more violently than before.

"Ow! Ow! Yow!"

"You giddy ass!" breathed Figgins wrathfully. "You bubbling gramophone! You cackling chump! You cheeky lunatic!"

"Yow! Yaroo!"

"You dunnified ass!"

"Wow! Oh!"

"Scat!"

And Figgins stamped off to the notice-board, growling under his breath.

Herbert Skimpole sat on the floor, too dazed to know whether



"Can I come in?" asked Philpot.

"You can as far as I can see," answered Jack Blake. "But it really depends on your walking powers." (See page 2.)

he was on his head or his heels. An expression of bewilderment and dismay that was almost idiotic was on his face.

His weighty arguments, sound as they appeared to him, did not appear to have convinced Figgins any more than they convinced Mr. Railton; and for the life of him Skimpole could not think why.

Dimly, however, he began to realise that force is not always an argument to be despised, after all.

CHAPTER 13. The General Meeting.

AT 4.45 the next evening the Fourth Form class-room presented an animated scene.

The desks had all been cleared away to the sides, and the forms had been ranged all down the middle of the room.

At the top end, on the master's platform, a big chair had been placed, with several chairs on either side of it.

There was an enormous crowd of juniors already present, and they were passing the time away in chipping one another and in shouting and skylarking about generally.

Wally, D'Arey's younger brother, was, of course, in the thick of every disturbance, though he belonged to the Third Form, and was therefore not one of the invited.

He had managed to get hold of a sort of catapult, and he was shooting large paper pellets all over the room.

"You see that cad Mellish," he whispered suddenly to Curly Gibson, who had managed to get in with him. "Now, you watch."

He stretched the elastic to its full and then let go. The pellet went straight and true, hitting Mellish on the cheek.

The latter leapt up with a wild yell.

"Ow! Oh! You little beast!" he shouted, making a dash for Wally.

However, Wally was too quick for him, and as he came blundering along, Curly neatly tripped him up.

"Hallo, Mellish!" Wally shouted from a safe distance. "Find it cooler on the floor?"

"You little brute!" snarled the cad of the Fourth. "I'll smash you when I catch you!"

"Oh, please don't!" moaned Wally, in mock terror. "I'll never do it again!"

"As for you, you little beast!" cried Mellish, suddenly turning his attention to Curly and seizing him by the scruff of the neck. "You tripped me up, didn't you?"

"I tripped you up!" repeated Curly, looking very surprised and innocent. "Mellish, how could you think I should do such a thing?"

"Take that, you cheeky young cub!" snarled Mellish. "Ow! Yow—"

He broke off with a howl, as Wally, who had cautiously crept up, butted him violently in the chest, having previously placed his foot behind him. Mellish fell with a crash, catching his elbow a resounding thwack on a form.

He was just getting up, white with rage and pain, when there was a cry of "Order! Order!" from those standing round the door. So he was reluctantly compelled to postpone his revenge until a later date, and retired to a dark corner, murmuring fearful threats against all "cheeky young kids," and one in particular.

There was a solemn silence, as the self-appointed officials of the meeting marched up to the chairs in procession.

First of all came Horries and Digby, who cleared a way for the rest of the procession. Then came Tom Merry with the German master's gown on. He had been able to get this as he had previously ascertained that Herr Schneider was going to be out all the evening. Manners and Lowther were holding up the skirts of Tom Merry's gown, and the rest who had attended the committee meeting followed.

Tom Merry took the central chair on the platform, and the others grouped themselves about him.

All this was done amidst absolute silence, and with intense solemnity.

But when they had taken up their positions on the platform there was a shout of laughter.

"Get your hair cut!" shouted one facetious youth from the back of the room, though there were no ostensible grounds for his remark.

"Where did you get that dressing-gown?" cried another junior.

Then Blake, who was sitting on Tom Merry's right, rose with a commanding gesture.

"We haven't come here to listen to a lot of silly duffers making fat-headed remarks, so—"

There was a considerable commotion at these words, and several enthusiastic juniors endeavoured to eject the "hecklers," but without much success.

"So you might listen to a few remarks from the chairman," continued Blake, when he could make himself heard again.

"I beg to second that notion," drawled Arthur Augustus D'Arcy without rising from his chair.

"Nobody asked you!" shouted someone.

"Get up when you speak!" shouted another.

"Weally, you fellows—" began D'Arcy, indignantly, turning pink and rising from his chair.

"Go and eat coke!"

"Your hair isn't parted straight!"

There was another uproar threatening, so Blake got up again.

"Don't be a giddy lot of litherds," he said pacifically.

"And let Tom Merry speak, if you want to get done to-night."

Then, in a loud whisper, he added to D'Arcy, "Sit down, and don't be a silly dummy!"

"Weally, Blake—"

"Ring off!"

"I refuse to wing off."

At this point Arthur Augustus was forced down on to his chair by ready hands, and was finally persuaded to be silent, and to let the meeting proceed peacefully.

Tom Merry was greeted with loud cheers when he rose.

"Gentlemen," he began, "I hope you don't mind my being chairman"—cries of "No, no!" and "Rats!"—"but I thought I might as well be as anyone else." "What about me?" from Wally.

"I'll go to the point immediately, and it's this. You probably all know—" "No, we don't!"—"that one among us to-night has a challenge in his pocket to a snowball fight, from East Hyde. At any rate, you know now, if you didn't before, because I've told you."

"Hear, hear!"

"Well, this blessed challenge is addressed to 'The Leader of the Juniors,' and the question seems to be, whom to give it to. I, of course, have my own opinion—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"But there seem to be some people who think differently—"

"Hear, hear!"

"No, no!"

"Well, we want to decide to-night who is the leader, principally because the aforesaid person who has the challenge refuses to give it up, and we can't answer it till we've seen it. So what we want to find out is, who is really the leader?"

"You've said that before!"

Tom Merry laughed.

"I'll say it again if you like"—"No, no!"—"Well, as far as I can see, the best way is to put it to the vote, and with your permission, that's what we've decided to do. I've only one

thing more to say, and that is that I hope you'll all vote for the right person."

"Hear, hear!"

"We will!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Has anyone any objection to having an election of a leader?" added Tom Merry.

No one seemed to have.

At any rate, no one said so. So Tom Merry rose again and said that the motion was passed nem con.

Very few of the juniors knew what that meant, but it satisfied them.

Preparations were then made for the election.

A large chessboard was put up on its edge at one end of the desk, so that people could not see what the voter was writing.

A large number of small slips of paper had been prepared beforehand, and a box was provided to put the paper in after the voter had written a name on it.

Tom Merry rose and explained what they had to do.

"Look here, you chaps," he explained. "You've got to come up here one by one, and write your choice on a piece of paper, and drop it into this box. Don't burgle up all at once, or you'll spoil the whole show."

It was wonderful what influence this curly-headed, frank-faced lad had over the juniors of the great school. There seemed to be no question about doing what he said, and with a few little exceptions, the whole thing was carried out with no disturbance to speak of.

Since Tom Merry had left St. Jim's for a time, while he was learning the terrible meaning of abject poverty in the stern world outside the haven of St. Jim's, he had unconsciously become dearer to his schoolfellows than ever, and his influence over them, always great, had insensibly increased.

When the last boy had dropped his paper into the ballot-box, Skimpole, who had been selected as an unprejudiced person, proceeded to count the votes.

He made a little pile for each of the names written on the slips of paper, and when he began to count how many there were in each pile, the excitement began to be intense.

After carefully counting them over twice, he leant across to Tom Merry, and whispered something.

The latter looked up in surprise.

"Well, at any rate, we must announce the results," he whispered back.

"Certainly. Kindly do so," said Skimpole, with a nod.

CHAPTER 14.

A Startling Result.

TOM MERRY cleared his throat.

"Gentlemen, I beg to announce the result of the poll. Forty-six chaps voted altogether, and their votes are divided as follows:

"Kangaroo ten, Blake twelve—"

Loud cheers from Blake's supporters.

"Figgins twelve—"

Loud cheers from Figgins's supporters.

"And myself twelve!"

Perfect shrieks from Tom Merry's supporters.

A dead heat between three of the four candidates! And so the meeting was all in vain, and they were no forwarder than they had been before.

When the shouting and cheering at last subsided, the juniors looked at one another in silence, and no one seemed to know what to do next.

At last Tom Merry spoke again.

"Well, you chaps, we don't seem to be much forrader," he said. "What are we going to do now?"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy rose slowly to his feet, glanced round, and then, having fixed his monocle firmly in his eye, addressed the meeting.

"Well, deah boys, we seem to be in wathah a fix. I am afwaid that I am at a loss, and I wogwet that I can make no suggestion to solve the knotty problem—"

"What's the good of you, then?" shouted Wally.

"Pway don't interwupt me, Wally. Since I fail to see any way out of the difficulty, I think it vewy improbable that any one else can—"

"Oh, oh!"

"But I wathah think that the best course we can take is to ask the athuah of all this twouble to help us out of the difficulty himself."

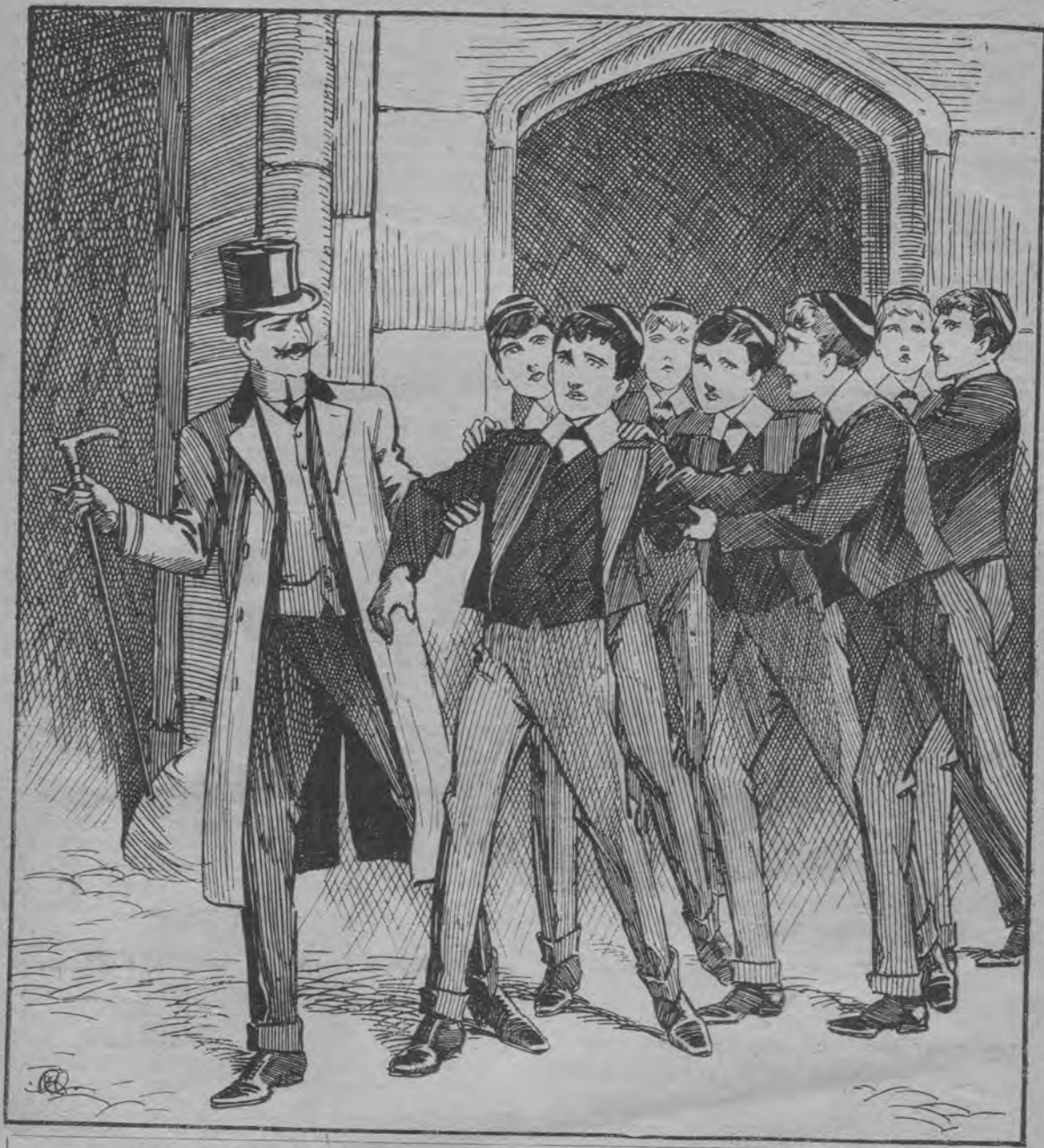
"Hear, hear!"

"Where is he?"

"Author! Author!"

"If you will not interwupt me so widely," went on the Swell of St. Jim's loftily, "I will tell you who he is. His name is Philpot, and I hereby call on the honourable gentleman to address the meetin'."

Philpot had been turning paler and paler during this speech.



"Let my cousin go!" exclaimed Lucas Crane, pulling John Bull by the arm. "Let him go, or I'll—!" Rats!" replied the juniors, keeping a firm hold on John Bull junior. (See the grand long, complete school tale of Harry Wharton & Co, at Greyfriars, entitled, "The Tempter," by Frank Richards, in this week's "Magnet" Library. Price One Penny.)

for he had foreseen something of this sort. But when the swell of St. Jim's mentioned his name, he would have given his right hand for the earth to open and swallow him up.

An uproar greeted D'Arcy's suggestion.

"Make that blessed weathercock speak!"

"He's caused all the trouble!"

"Where is the boulder!"

And Philpot was immediately surrounded by an excited crowd. There stood the wretched youth shivering in his shoes.

Tom Merry addressed him sternly:

"Now, you blessed Turncoat, what have you got to say for yourself?"

"I—I—I—only—" gasped the Turncoat.

"Well, what's up? Can't you speak?" demanded Blake.

"I—I—" the wretched youth managed to blurt out at last. "I—I—only wanted—wanted to know—to know—"

"Well, what did you want to know?" howled Figgins.

"Well, I wanted to find out who really was—the Leader of the Juniors," said Philpot desperately.

"Oh, you did, did you? What for?" demanded Blake ominously.

"Because—because—" stammered the unfortunate Turncoat.

"Well, it seems to me," interrupted Tom Merry, not waiting for Philpot to answer, "that you've caused a lot of trouble for nothing."

"I don't see—"

"You don't see!" said Tom Merry sternly. "Well, we must make you see. You have set half the school by the ears just to satisfy your rotten curiosity, and to shove yourself forward a bit. Bring him here, Blake!"

Blake did not wait to be asked a second time. He leapt from the platform and seized the unresisting Philpot by the scruff of the neck and dragged him forward to the edge of the platform.

"Now, Philpot, give me the challenge, and we'll open it and answer it," said Tom Merry. "But first of all, we'll dispose of your own case."

Philpot fumbled in his pocket and produced the letter which

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 156.

A Splendid, Long, Complete Tale of The Chums of St. Jim's. By Martin Clifford.

NEXT

THURSDAY:

"FATTY WYNN'S NEW WHEEZE."

had given him so much trouble, and which had brought disaster upon him.

Tom Merry took it and put it on the desk.
"We'll attend to that later," he said. "Now, gentlemen, I will put it to you. What do you think is a fitting punishment for this bounder, who has given us the trouble of two meetings, and has caused a lot of ill-feeling amongst us, all for his own rotten ends?"

There was a howl.
"Lynch him!"
"Scrag him!"
"Something with boiling oil in it!"
"Tar and feather him!"
"All very good suggestions, but a bit too drastic," said Tom Merry.

"How about making him run the gauntlet down the room?" suggested Blake.

There was an instant yell of approval.

"Ripping!"

"Make him run the gauntlet!"

"Come on, kids, knot your handkerchiefs!"

The juniors quickly ranged up in two lines down the long class-room with their handkerchiefs all ready knotted.

Then Blake started the luckless Philpot with a lusty kick, "to set the ball rolling," as he expressed it.

Thwack! Thwack! Thwack! went the handkerchiefs as

the wretched Philpot rushed between the long rows of excited juniors.

"Ow! Yaroo! Yow!" he yelled.

Thwack! Thwack!

"Ow! Yaroo! Help!"

At last the luckless Turncoat reached the end of the line, and fled out of the door with a last terrific howl.

With an air of having thoroughly done their duty, the meeting then returned to business.

The letter from East Hyde was opened, and an answer, accepting the challenge was written and signed by Tom Merry, Jack Blake, Figgins, and Kangaroo, amidst the cheers of the company.

The meeting was then adjourned and the juniors dispersed, Tom Merry & Co. and Blake & Co. going off arm in arm, the best of friends again.

Philpot was entirely cured of his ambition for public life, and sank back into the obscurity from which he had risen so short a time before.

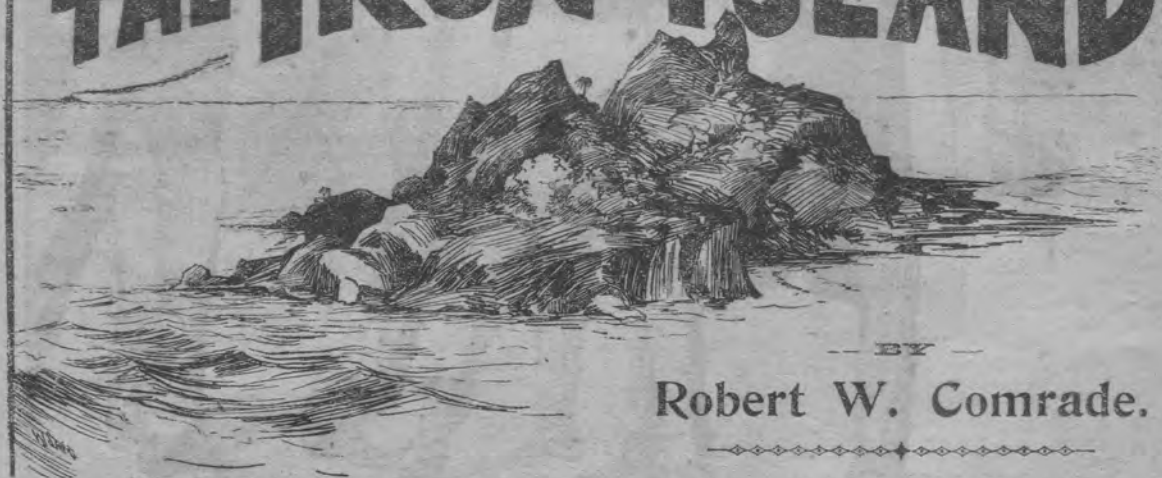
It was many a long day however, before he could live down the title by which he was now generally known—namely, the Turncoat of the Fourth.

THE END.

(Another splendid, long, complete tale of Tom Merry and Co. at St. Jim's next week, entitled "Fatty Wynn's New Wheeze," by Martin Clifford. Order your "GEM" Library in advance. Price 1d.)

A Powerful Adventure Story.

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.

Five prominent members of the Brotherhood of Iron are brought to book, and then, having obtained the assistance of Carson Gray, detective, Kingston determines to bring about the ruin of another member of the Brotherhood in Dr. Charles Anderson.

Sir Christopher Rowe, suffering from a weak heart, and believing himself to have no relations, makes a will in favour of the doctor. Anderson finds that a nephew of Rowe's is on the way to England, and sets out to hasten the old man's death before the nephew should arrive.

To this end he determines to play ghost and frighten the old man to death.

Kingston, accompanied by Gray, arrives at Sir Christopher's place a little while before the time for Anderson to commit his foul deed. The detective keeps Anderson in conversation while Kingston enters the old man's room by means of a secret panel. There he persuades Rowe to enter an adjoining room, and assists him to do so.

(Read on from here.)

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 156.

"THE RIVALS OF ST. WODE'S."

A Grand New School Tale, by Charles Hamilton, is in the "EMPIRE" Library this week. Price One Halfpenny.

The Downfall of Dr. Charles Anderson.

"If you will remain in this dressing-room, Sir Christopher," said Kingston quickly, "you will see everything. The door will be left open for your benefit. No doubt the whole affair seems bizarre and remarkable to you now, but I assure you everything will be explained presently. The next thing I have to ask you is to be allowed to don your dressing-gown which hangs on the door yonder."

"I am helpless," replied the baronet. "You can do as you like, for, somehow, I seem to feel you are honest, and are doing this singular action for my good."

Kingston slipped the dressing-gown on over his macintosh, and turned his back for a second.

"Don't be startled," he warned, without turning, "but be prepared for a slight surprise, sir."

The next moment the old gentleman uttered a cry of amazement, for in place of the clean-shaven man who had a moment ago been speaking to him, there stood what seemed to be a precise copy of himself. Dressing-gown, hair, nose, whiskers—everything was the same. In the dim shadow of the old room Kingston was the exact counterpart of Sir Christopher Rowe.

In a strong light the deception would have been discovered in an instant, but under the present circumstances it was impossible to detect the difference.

"Good gracious!" ejaculated Sir Christopher, as Kingston advanced towards him. "What is the reason for this?"

"Don't you see, Sir Christopher? I am taking your place for a short while, so that the doctor will be deceived. He

will take me for yourself, and will carry out his programme under your very eyes. After that, when we have actual proof of his villainy, Mr. Gray will arrest him and end his career of crime. You would now have been strong and healthy had you been in charge of the local medico. But it is unwise to carry the conversation further. See, the time is a quarter to twelve."

Kingston led the old man into the adjoining dressing-room, seating him in a huge arm-chair before the door. Having wrapped him securely up in a couple of thick rugs, he closed the door till it was only a few inches ajar, then went back to the chair Sir Christopher had originally occupied.

The fire was low, and only a faint light illuminated the apartment. Sitting there, huddled up in his dressing-gown, Kingston looked the baronet to the life. He affected to be half asleep, sitting with partially lowered eyelids, hardly stirring.

So far, everything had passed off smoothly. Sir Christopher, being unable to help himself, had proved very little trouble. Carson Gray's name impressing him somewhat. Kingston had proclaimed himself an assistant, because he himself did not wish to be connected with the affair in any way whatever.

The manner in which he was trapping Anderson was almost certain of success. The doctor, totally ignorant of his impending exposure and degradation—unconscious of the fact that Sir Christopher had had his eyes opened and knew him for the scoundrel he was—would carry out his programme as originally planned, and walk, unwittingly, into a trap from which there was no escape.

In the room itself both Kingston and the aged baronet would see him exposed, while in the secret passage Carson Gray would be waiting to complete the arrest. Anderson was absolutely hemmed in on all sides, for the fact of his attempting this murder, and of having withheld the news of the nephew from his patient, was enough to prove his true character.

The minutes ticked by slowly, the noise of the clock on the mantelpiece sounding considerably in the silent room. Kingston did not move an inch, and he seemed heavy and sleepy. Notwithstanding this, however, his nerves were all on the stretch, and his ears keen and sharp. And while he was listening intently, his eyes were fixed on the face of the clock.

Three minutes to twelve!

Ah! What was that? No ordinary man would have noticed anything, but Kingston plainly distinguished a soft rustle, as if somebody had passed close to him. He knew, however, that the sound had been caused by Dr. Anderson as he walked along the secret passage. He had come, and was waiting for the stroke of the hour before allowing himself to be seen.

The tension just then was great, and Kingston knew that before many more minutes had passed much would have happened. His glance was still on the clock, and now the hands were level, one covering the other. A soft little whirr made itself heard, and the timepiece commenced striking the hour of midnight.

One! Two! Three—

Without a sound the panel slid back, and there stood at the far side of the room that terrible spectacle Kingston had seen on the previous night. But here, in the utter silence, the object appeared unreal, a thing of no substance. It advanced a few paces, seeming to float upon the atmosphere. Anderson certainly played the part well, for not a sound did he make.

Kingston started up as the clock struck and shivered a little, bending forward to poke the fire up. Then he turned his head slowly, and gazed with horror-stricken eyes at the ghastly apparition on the other side of the room.

He started back with a cry of horror, staggering drunkenly, holding both his hands out as though to ward the terrible thing off.

"Good heavens," he moaned, with quivering lips—"good heavens—Ah, no! Don't come near me—don't come near me!"

His words ended in a stifling shriek, and the look of terror on his face was a masterpiece of acting. Kingston covered his face with his hands, spun round, and fell prone in the easy-chair, face downwards. There he lay as still as death.

For a second absolute silence reigned, Anderson standing perfectly still, looking at the motionless figure of his supposed victim. As no movement was visible, he stepped forward quickly.

"Good!" he murmured audibly. "The old fool's as nervous as a child! I wonder if he's gone—he certainly—"

The doctor was bending nervously over Kingston's prostrate form, for, although he was callous and strong-minded himself, this business was calculated to try the courage of any man. As he bent over Kingston, his sentence was suddenly cut short.

In one lightning movement the prostrate man had twirled round, thrown his hands up, and grasped Anderson round the chest with a grip like that of a vice. For a second the doctor was too startled to even struggle. The utter unexpectedness of it had deprived him of breath.

But it was only for a second. He realised suddenly that his plans had miscarried—that the game was up, and with a snarl of fury he struggled desperately. It was useless, however, for, strong as he was, he was like a child in Kingston's arms.

"Mr. Gray," called the latter coolly, "your assistance would be rather welcome at this moment. The gentleman I have charge of seems to be getting excited."

"Hang you!" cried Anderson. "Who are you? What is the meaning of this outrage? You are not Sir Christopher Rowe! Let me go, confound you! Your grip is squeezing the life out of me!"

"If you will cease your struggling, the grip will accordingly—Ah, Gray, here is your prisoner!"

The panel had slid back, and Carson Gray stood looking into the dimly-lighted apartment. Suddenly an expression of alarm entered his eyes, and he cried out in warning. His gaze was directed over Kingston's shoulder to the space beyond.

Unseen and unheard in the struggle, Simpson had stolen into the room. Stealthily he crept forward, an expression of hatred disfiguring his countenance. He had a revolver in his hand, and evidently meant business. It was upraised now, and Simpson was advancing on Kingston. The latter, on hearing Carson Gray's shout, spun round like lightning.

Too late!

The butt of the revolver descended with stunning force. Had Kingston remained in his original position, the blow would probably have killed him. As it was, however, it struck him on the right shoulder, for the moment paralysing that organ.

Anderson saw the opportunity, and, with a violent effort, wrenched himself away. He was breathing hard, and his eyes shone with the light of desperation. He knew the game was up; knew that the man he had taken for Sir Christopher was a detective, and that Carson Gray himself was in the room. The blow was a terrible one. All his plans were shattered; in the moment of success had come disaster.

It was a stunning shock to Anderson, and for the moment he lost his self-control completely; all he wanted was to revenge himself and then escape; to kill this man who had ruined all his plans.

"By heavens," he snarled, stepping back like a caged tiger, "you shall pay dearly for this interference! You think you've got me—and, anyhow, what does this intrusion mean? Who are you to—"

"I arrest you, Dr. Anderson, on a charge of attempted murder!" cried Carson Gray, producing his handcuffs. "Come, be calm; there is no sense in denying your guilt. I have seen everything—"

"And you think I am going to be arrested?" cried the Inner Councillor. "You think I am going to be taken? No, I'll shoot the two of you sooner!"

His rage was beyond control, and he whipped a revolver from his pocket, directing its muzzle towards Gray's breast. The incident had happened in a flash, and the detective had no time to even duck.

Crack!

The report rang out loudly in the confined room, and the doctor uttered a sharp cry of agony. For it had not been his weapon that had spoken. Kingston, with marvellous aim considering the comparative darkness, had shot the revolver clean out of Anderson's grip, causing the latter the most exquisite agony from the shock.

"Now, Gray, you've got him!" cried Kingston, turning suddenly on the startled butler. In one second he had Simpson helpless and disarmed. But, being forced to retain his hold, he could not assist Carson Gray. His shoulder was paining him considerably, but in the excitement it passed unnoticed.

Anderson, however, was half-mad with rage and disappointment. For the moment he had the strength of two men. Without waiting for Gray to grapple with him, he turned and flung himself bodily through the window.

"Good heavens!" exclaimed Carson Gray, aghast, as the crash echoed through the room. "He has killed himself! What a mess I've made of it—what a frightful mess!"

"Hold this man!" said Frank Kingston sharply. "Anderson's no more dead than I am! If we're not sharp, though, he'll escape—and that, Gray, is the very last thing that must happen!"

Without another word Kingston released his hold of the butler, and darted across to the shattered window. Only for one second did he pause to look out. His keen eyes saw everything at a glance. In the dim starlight, Anderson was running along one of the paths.

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 156.—

The next second Kingston had dropped to the ground. Although Sir Christopher's room was in the upper part of the house, it was, nevertheless, within a jump of the earth. A soft flower bed lay directly beneath the window, breaking the fall very effectively.

Kingston was off instantly. He did not dash away headlong, but simply gave chase calmly. He was not in the least bit excited, and his nerves were as steady as a rock. The stirring minute which had just transpired had left him utterly unaffected.

He had certainly never expected Dr. Anderson to resist so strenuously, much less dash himself headlong through the casement. Kingston could see him now, on the far side of the lawn, making for a little gate, which evidently led into the rear courtyard of the Towers.

The pursuer covered the distance at remarkable speed, seeming hardly to touch the ground. The fastest champion runner in the world could not have kept pace with Kingston.

He reached the gate hardly three seconds after Anderson had passed through it. For a moment Kingston paused, listening. All was still, except for the rustling of the evergreens, which clung to the walls of the old outhouses. Anderson was somewhere quite close, that was certain. Kingston had made no sound, so he waited, his eyes trying to detect some sign of movement.

Suddenly there was a sharp "ting," like metal to metal, and before the watcher could quite realise it, something moved quickly out into the open from the nearest shed. It was travelling away from Kingston, and making for the outer gate, which stood wide open, giving on to the road.

In a flash Kingston saw what the object was, and drew in his breath sharply. Anderson had secured his bicycle, and was riding off on it. Mounted thus, thought the doctor exultantly, he would be able to get clean away and be concealed in one of the Brotherhood's many retreats before morning.

But would he?

An Amazing Race—Kingston Triumphant.

"By jingo!" thought Kingston, as he saw his quarry riding swiftly away. "Anderson evidently means to make a bid for liberty. Well, I'll give him a run for his money. It's a stiff job, but he's got to be caught!"

And Kingston, cool and collected, whipped the dressing-gown and mackintosh from his shoulders and set off in swift pursuit. To an ordinary man the task would have been hopeless, for an ordinary man could never have kept pace with a desperate man on a cycle.

Not a soul was about to see his splendid effort; alone in the darkness he darted along. The cycle had disappeared into the road, and was now speeding towards Esher.

Kingston exerted every ounce of energy he possessed into that one terrible chase, and he literally flew over the ground. Had there been any onlookers they would have said that Kingston was not human, for no human being could run as he did.

With his head back and chest out he raced after Anderson, his legs moving in wonderfully long, rapid strides. His breath was regular, and he darted onwards untiringly. It was the most unique race that ever was run. Anderson was desperate, and he put every ounce of strength into his machine.

Kingston's face was calm, and the rush of wind almost deafened him. Even he himself had not known previously that he could run as he was doing now. It was the first test since he had left the Iron Island—the first time he had had occasion to exert every ounce of his abnormal strength.

And it was telling: his marvellous stamina powers were proving equal—ay, more than equal—to the speed of the bicycle. Gradually, little by little, he was drawing nearer to Anderson, who was pedalling some two hundred yards ahead as if for dear life. In spite of the terrible inequality of the race the doctor was already tiring, while Kingston came onwards as steadily and as relentlessly as ever.

He knew the race was his—knew that before another minute had passed he would catch up to his quarry. Anderson, in evident consternation, was constantly glancing behind him. He could not understand this remarkable race. It seemed impossible that he, on the cycle, was being overtaken by a runner.

Yet, however ridiculous it seemed, it was so. Just ahead was a short rise, at the top of which the lane joined the main road. To Anderson, tired and winded as he was, it proved fatal, for his speed slackened to half. Kingston, behind, came on without the slightest difference in his speed, and closed the gap between himself and his quarry in a few seconds.

With his left hand he grasped the back stay of the bicycle, Anderson uttering threats in an excited snarl. Quite suddenly

Kingston stopped dead in the road, and with a crash the bicycle and rider fell to the earth.

Anderson lay face downwards for a second gasping for breath. The chase had been too much for him. He was far from being a young man, and now this abrupt crash to earth supplied the finishing touch. He was done—exhausted and helpless.

Without a sound Kingston seated himself beside the doctor, waiting for any sign of the latter rising. He himself was breathing hard—as hard as he had ever breathed in his life. The race had been a terrible strain—a strenuous test. Any ordinary exertion left Kingston as cool as when he started. Now, however, he found that his breath was coming in gasps, and that the perspiration was literally pouring from his face and forehead.

Without question it was the severest strain his iron constitution had passed through for years, and it had stood it magnificently. It was only in the first few moments that he felt the effects to any extent. After that his breath became regular, and he rose to his feet, the better, if anything, for his run. It had eased the pain in his shoulder considerably.

With scant ceremony he kicked the twisted bicycle into the ditch, and grasped Dr. Anderson by the shoulder.

"Come on!" he said sharply. "It is unwise to lie there, you know. The ground's damp, and in your present state of perspiration you'll catch your death of cold."

Anderson drew his breath in with a hiss, and glared up at his companion.

"You fiend!" he muttered. "How did you do it? How did you overtake me? You ran like a deer!"

Kingston did not answer, but with one jerk hoisted the other upon his feet. Anderson was thoroughly exhausted, but, willy-nilly, he had to march all the way back to the Towers with Kingston's hand on his shoulder.

Carson Gray was standing on the front door steps when the two walked up. Kingston had, of course, discarded his disguise, but there was no semblance to Frank Kingston, the top.

"I've got him, sir!" he cried, keeping up the pretence that he was Gray's assistant. "It was a tough job, but he couldn't get away from me!"

"By Jove—er—Benson," exclaimed the detective, in wonderment, "I never saw anything like it! I was looking out of one of the windows when I saw the precious doctor whizzing past on a bicycle. I thought he was fairly gone until you shot past. I didn't know it was possible for any man to run so fast."

"It's training, sir, that's what it is," returned Kingston casually, as Carson Gray snapped the handcuffs over the prisoner's wrists. "Well, everything's gone off first-rate; and there's ample proof to convince any jury of Dr. Anderson's guilt. By the way, sir, where is Simpson? And how about old Sir Christopher?"

"Simpson is quite helpless on the landing upstairs, and the old gentleman is now recovering somewhat from the shock he has received. Upon my soul, it's a wonder he didn't peep out, with all that firing and struggling in his bed-room! He was expecting it, though, so was prepared. It has exhausted him, though, and even now he is agitated from the shock."

"Not unnaturally, sir. What do you intend doing with the prisoners? I must be off at once to attend to the other case."

They had marched Anderson into the dimly-lighted hall and closed the door. Kingston, of course, meant to leave as soon as possible, for he had no intention of being publicly mixed up in the affair. Carson Gray would be left in charge, and would, of course, get all the credit for an exceedingly smart capture.

"Well," said the detective, "as you cannot stop, I shall leave Anderson in Simpson's company and wait until morning, when I will send the stable-hand for the police and the local doctor."

Anderson was remarkably quiet now, probably realising how useless it would have been to resist. His hopes were blighted, his good name and honour ruined for ever. The blow was a stunning one, and the more he thought about it the quieter he became. It was no use fighting now; he had made a bid for liberty and lost. The only one consolation Anderson had was the fact that Carson Gray was obviously unacquainted with the Brotherhood of Iron. That, at all events, was safe.

Upstairs, on the landing, Simpson was found handcuffed to an immovable iron ring which was fixed in the wall. What its original purpose had been for was unknown, but it came

ANSWERS

in very handy now. In a short time the doctor was beside his servant, and Kingston and the detective descended for a moment to the hall.

"Explain everything to Sir Christopher," the former said. "You are well acquainted with all the facts. There is no reason for me to remain; you can manage everything. So far as I am concerned I cease to have any interest in the matter. My work is done. I shall cross off Dr. Anderson's name from the list in my pocket-book, and straightway set about dealing with the next Inner Councillor."

Carson Gray grasped Kingston's hand tightly.

"I admire you, Kingston," he said warmly, "as I admire no other man. You start a thing, and see it right through to the finish without a hitch of any sort. And the way you ran, too! By jingo, but it was amazing! How in the name of all that's extraordinary did you manage to overtake a bicycle? Why, it seems utterly absurd! Anderson was literally shooting along the road."

"My dear Gray," drawled Kingston, the old sleepy look returning to his eyes and his face resuming its normal expression, "if you had lived on the Iron Island for eight years with nothing else to think about but feeding and exercising, you would not wonder at all. The place made me strong—made me what I am."

"Then I'm downright glad I'm a friend," laughed Carson Gray, "for if you were my enemy, Kingston—well, you'd be able to work me in your hands like so much putty."

"Come, come, Gray, it would take a lot to catch you napping! Well, I leave everything in your charge. I shall be interested in Anderson's forthcoming trial, but by the time that comes on I hope to be engaged in overthrowing the next gentleman on my list."

The two shook hands heartily—they were firm friends by now—and Frank Kingston hurried down the steps. Before setting off for the high road he paused for a moment to procure the mackintosh he had discarded so hurriedly. He found it easily, and then set off down the lane at an easy, swinging gait.

One would think, from his appearance, that he was returning home after an extra late visit. As he walked he whistled softly to himself, for the night's happenings had left him with a contented mind. And that whistle, although so carelessly performed, was the sweetest music imaginable. Kingston could have made a fortune out of that wonderful talent had he so chosen.

As it happened, he had only a few moments to wait at the junction of the roads before Fraser drove up. The valet looked inquiringly at his master, and pulled the car up. Tim, too, was eager to hear the news. Somehow, neither of them had expected to see Kingston as his natural self, sleepy-eyed and languid.

"Did the job come off all right, sir?" inquired Fraser. "Beggin' your pardon for askin'—"

"No, Fraser, don't beg my pardon. You are naturally anxious to hear the result of our visit. Dr. Anderson, together with Simpson—a common member—are both keeping one another company handcuffed to an iron ring at Northgate Towers. In the morning they will be handed over to the official police. Sir Christopher is saved, and will, all being well, live a good many years yet."

"Then it came off without a hitch, sir?"

"That's it, Fraser—without a single hitch! And Sir Christopher, did he but know it, owes his life to this lad here. Yes, Tim, it was through your shrewdness that I was enabled to take up the case."

Tim blushed with pleasure.

"I didn't do nothink, sir!" he cried, as Kingston climbed into the car. "When I was in the Council Chamber I 'ad to 'ear everything."

"Well, whatever you did, young 'un, you are smart, and before long there may be work for you to do. At present, however, I don't think we could do better than steer for home, bed, and a somewhat curtailed night's rest."

Her Highness the Princess Kamala.

Frank Kingston sat back in his armchair with a slight smile of satisfaction on his lips. He was regarding the open pocket-book which lay on the desk beside him.

"Number six," he told himself. "Six members of the Inner Council are dealt with. Slowly but surely they are going. I am working now for the good of the country—for the safety of my fellow-creatures."

He sat there thinking—pondering over the weeks that had just passed. Carson Gray knew all his secrets; one of the highest officials at Scotland Yard was also aware of them. Yet Kingston was still conducting his campaign alone, for he was quite capable of it—quite capable of outwitting all the brains of the Inner Council put together. It was only in

cases of emergency that Gray or the police were to be called in. The foiling of Anderson had been such a one.

"They shall all follow!" vowed Kingston to himself. "Don Sebastian was the first. Then came Caine, Gissing, Marsden, Bruckmann, and finally Anderson. But six! What are six out of twenty-five? The greatest task has yet to come. Who the next to fall will be I'm not quite certain. Come in!"

A knock had sounded at the door, and he closed the pocket-book up. In it the twenty-five names were written down, with a thick black line through six of them. Fraser entered the room.

"Miss O'Brien, sir!" he said.

"Ah, good, Fraser!" cried Kingston. "Ask her to step right in, will you? The very person I wished to see."

Kingston rose, and placed an easy-chair before the fire, poking the latter into a cheerful blaze. Outside it was dull and drizzling, while dark clouds sped swiftly across the heavens.

"Good-morning, Mr. Kingston!"

He turned and faced his visitor. Dolores was looking particularly radiant this morning, and he shook her dainty hand heartily.

"It had been my intention to run across and interview you, Dolores," he said. "However, this is equally as good. Sit down there, before the fire. It's a beastly day, if ever there was one."

"Not quite like the Iron Island," she smiled.

"Well, hardly, Dolores," returned Kingston. He was attired in his customary immaculate manner, with that air of foppish about him which made him look such a fool.

"First of all, Mr. Kingston, I want to hear all about the happenings of last night," exclaimed Dolores, making herself comfortable, and placing her tiny feet on the edge of the fender. "It hardly seems possible that you have done anything since I saw you yesterday."

"Yet last night my strength and running powers were tested to the utmost. It was, I may say, the most strenuous night I have spent since I arrived in England."

"Really?" she cried, looking at his languidly reclining form with renewed interest. "Do tell me all about it!"

Kingston, without more delay related the full details of the happenings at Northgate Towers, his fair listener being greatly interested. He told her everything, from beginning to end.

"So Mr. Gray is doing the rest?" she said. "How simple it all seems when it is over! And what a marvellous run that must have been, Mr. Kingston! I remember, on the Iron Island, once seeing you run, and then I thought it startling, considering how terribly rough the ground was."

"It was the only way in which to recapture the doctor. Had I been unable to outpace him, he would assuredly have escaped, for, as you know, the Brotherhood have numerous secret retreats. Once inside one of these, Anderson would have been lost for ever. But the case is over now, so far as I am concerned, and it remains for me to get on the track of the next man. Who he is to be is not quite certain. I shall have to invent some—"

"I hope you don't mind my interrupting, Mr. Kingston," said Dolores suddenly, "but before you come to any decision I have something to tell you. I have not let you know before because you have been so busy, and it was only last night that suspicions came into my head."

"Suspicious, Dolores? Suspicious of what?"

She was looking serious now, and a thoughtful expression had entered her large eyes. Kingston bent forward interestedly, for he knew that when Dolores looked like that she had something of importance to relate.

"I will start from the beginning," she said. "Not quite a week ago a most distinguished visitor came to stay at the hotel, and her rooms are next to mine."

"You are referring, I suppose, to the Princess Kamala of Srimpurdu?"

"Yes. She has come on a visit to England, and, by the way, speaks the language perfectly. Indeed, she is conversant with the English, French, and German tongues. Before she had been in the hotel a couple of days we became acquainted, and now, I may say, are fast friends."

Kingston smiled.

"And who is she?" he asked. "A princess of some little tinpot Indian state? I have never heard of Srimpurdu before, at all events."

"It is a little place in Central India," answered Dolores. "The Royal family, however, are immensely rich, and the princess is most outrageously extravagant. She has a large retinue of Indians to wait upon her, and looks upon the hotel servants as so much dirt. Notwithstanding her peculiarities, however, she is, I am sure, a very nice girl. She is young, vivacious, and extremely pretty, and has a fascination about her impossible to overlook."

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"I have seen the servants in various parts of the hotel," put in Kingston. "although I have never had the pleasure of meeting her royal highness personally. But I can see your news has yet to come. Forgive me for interrupting."

"As I said, we are good friends. Somehow, she seems to have taken to me, and, in spite of her dark skin, I like her very well. She has already visited several noblemen's houses, and all society is talking about her. I myself have had access to many well-known houses, but now, being a personal friend of the princess, nearly all doors are open to me."

"That will come in handy."

"It will, indeed! But to get to the point. Yesterday I received an invitation to a dinner-party—to take place to-night—and find that the princess is also invited. The reason I am telling you of this is because the giver of the party, the host, is none other than the Chief—Lord Mount-Fannell."

Kingston looked at Dolores in silence for a moment.

"You think," he said slowly, "that some mischief is intended?"

Dolores nodded.

"Yes," she replied, "I do. Doesn't everything point to it? Mount-Fannell would hardly give a party purposelessly. It is well known how rich this Indian girl is, and the Brotherhood is sure to have its eyes open, waiting for a chance to gain possession of her fortune."

"It certainly looks suspicious, Dolores. A dinner-party, however, hardly seems the place to do the girl any harm. I presume numerous other high personages will be present?"

"I understand the affair is to be an extra grand one, given in honour of Princess Kamala. Nevertheless, however many people there are present, it will not prevent the Brotherhood from playing some clever trick. I am convinced the whole affair is part and parcel of some plot. What that plot is I cannot, of course, pretend to know."

"There is no time to do anything," said Kingston. "And I agree with you, Dolores; the matter certainly deserves attention. But I have not been invited; you will have to take charge yourself."

"I can do nothing but keep my eyes open and see everything that occurs. It is hardly possible the Chief means to bodily harm the princess. It would, of course, be possible for me to persuade her to stay away—"

"No," interjected Kingston. "don't do that. As you say, they will not dare to harm her. If there is anything behind it, it will be something subtle, something cunningly thought out, which can bring suspicion on nobody. No, let her go, and contrive somehow to sit next to her. If anything serious really does happen, I think I can trust you to deal with it to good purpose. Your nerves are as strong as any man's, and your courage—well, the Iron Island proved the quality of that."

Dolores smiled.

"You are over-estimating my good points," she said quietly. "But I am willing to go and take whatever risks may come. With so many people present it is scarcely possible anything desperate will be done. Of course, it is likely I am making a mountain out of a molehill—that the dinner is simply a harmless social function."

"Mount-Fannell is hardly the man to entertain princesses with no idea of eventual gain. I shall set to work straight away and find out everything I can. This might be the means of delivering another councillor into my hands."

"I sincerely hope—"

Tap!

"Come in!" said Kingston.

The door opened, and Tim Curtis appeared.

"Beggin' your pardon for interruptin', sir," he said, looking at Dolores sideways, "but you told me to bring the first edition of the 'Evenin' News' as soon as it come out."

"Quite right, young 'un! Let's have it!" replied Kingston, rising and taking the newspaper from Tim, who then left the room. Kingston looked at the paper for a moment in silence.

"Friend Gray will be secretly pleased at this," he exclaimed, after a moment. "His praises are sung very highly. Quite a nice little sensation for the public this will make. The whole story is given in detail."

"Not a word of the Brotherhood is mentioned?"

"Not a single word, Dolores. Oh, no, the Chief will simply put this down as a miscarriage. But, pardon me, I'm considerably rude!"

He passed the "News" to Dolores, who was soon interested in the long account. And while she sat reading it before the cosy fire in the Hotel Cyril, thousands of other Londoners were doing the same. Among them was Lord Mount-Fannell. He and several of his colleagues were seated in the Council Chamber under the house in Grosvenor Square, when Mr. Milverton, the barrister, hurried in.

"Anderson's failed!" he said quickly. "He's allowed himself to be captured, and messed the whole game up!"

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The Plot Against Princess Kamala.

"Good heavens!" cried the Chief, rising to his feet agitatedly. "You don't mean to say he's given us away? You don't mean to say—"

Milverton pulled another copy of the "Evening News" from his overcoat pocket.

"No," he said, with a half-smile at No. 1's alarm, "not quite so serious as that, I'm glad to say. Anderson has, however, managed to do for himself. He now lies under arrest, and Sir Christopher Rowe, instead of being cold and still, is as lively as ever. It's rough luck on the doctor, but the Brotherhood's safe enough. Listen, and I'll read the account out."

There were fourteen members present—the remainder being either abroad or too busy to attend the meeting—and they listened eagerly as Milverton read the story aloud. It took some time, and when he had done there was silence for a few moments.

"Pity," murmured the Chief at last—"a great pity! Anderson was a valuable member, but he's lost for ever now. It must be a heavy blow to him."

"Carson Gray seems to have been the cause of it," said a councillor, "though how on earth he got hold of the facts is a mystery. Evidently everything was planned beforehand, for the doctor was caught red-handed, having no suspicion that everything was not right. Can Carson Gray have any knowledge of the Brotherhood?"

"It is hardly likely," said Lord Mount-Fannell. "otherwise he would have laid information immediately. Gray is a clever man, but not clever enough for that."

"Anderson was totally unprepared," put in the barrister. "That dash of his through the window was plucky enough—and clever, when it is realised that he did not cut himself—but there must have been something seriously wrong with that bicycle."

"Undoubtedly. The report must exaggerate when it says that Gray's assistant ran faster than the bicycle travelled, which was at full speed. No man could do such a thing."

"Well, whatever the cause," exclaimed the Chief, "the fact remains that another valuable ally is lost to us. Not that this has any connection with the others, for I don't believe for a moment that it has. It is a pity, for the money the Brotherhood has lost is very considerable."

For a long time the Council discussed the disaster—for such it was to them—finally deciding that Carson Gray knew nothing about the Brotherhood, and that he had bit upon the case accidentally, probably through Sir Christopher becoming suspicious, and informing his lawyers in secret. This was hinted at in the paper, Gray himself seeing Messrs. Harris & Harris, and explaining to them that he wanted the public to think that they had been instrumental in the capture. He told them, of course, that his assistant had gone down to the Towers disguised as one of their clerks.

"Now," said Mount-Fannell at length, "having been considerably interrupted, we will resume the original subject of our meeting. Fortunately we had hardly started when Mr. Milverton arrived, so there will be no need to repeat anything."

"It concerns, I presume," said the barrister, "the dinner-party to-night?"

"Exactly. The matter is one of extreme importance, the opportunity arising through the visit to this country of Princess Kamala, the daughter of some petty Indian potentate. She has, however, an unlimited supply of money, and I mean, if at all possible, to secure a fair share of it before she returns to her native land."

"How?" asked Milverton.

"In a manner, you may be sure, which is practically without risk. The princess is staying at the Cyril, and says she will be delighted to attend the dinner. Now it has come to my knowledge that she carries—like so many of these superstitious Orientals—a small scarab, or talisman, in which she places all her faith. The thing in itself is practically worthless, but to her it is more valuable than all the gold in her possession."

"I'm afraid I can't see why," said a councillor.

"Because of this reason. Without it she would not be a princess—she would lose caste. When she returned to India her people would refuse to recognise her as of royal blood, and would probably kill her. So you see how valuable it is. To an Englishman the idea is ridiculous, but to her it is everything. These Indians are strange and wonderful people, and we shall have to be very careful how we set to work."

Milverton lit a cigar slowly.

"I am beginning to see your idea," he said. "This talisman will have to be stolen to-night."

"Precisely; it will have to disappear. Probably there will be a commotion, but that cannot be helped. Once we have that in our hands we have the princess in our hands. She will give everything she possesses to regain it. But we must take care to guard ourselves. There must be no inkling at



"Good gracious!" ejaculated Sir Christopher, as his double advanced towards him; "What is the meaning of this?" "Don't you see," explained the disguised Kingston, "I am taking your place for a short while, so that the doctor will be deceived." (See page 18.)

to where the demands for money come from. One of us must take charge of the case and also take the risk. And he must do it himself, so that, in case of possible disaster, the matter will seem to be an individual one. Who will volunteer? Of course, the man who sees the thing through will receive a very high percentage."

The councillors glanced at one another doubtfully. The risk seemed to be great, and hardly one of them liked tackling such a job. Indians are uneasy people, with numberless strange and mysterious powers. One man, however, offered almost immediately.

"It seems to be in my line of business more than anybody," he said, with a laugh. "I'll take charge of it, Chief, provided everything's favourable."

"Good, Mr. Lowenwirth!" replied Mount-Fannell. "It is, after all, a blackmailing case, so you will be eminently suited to the task."

Mr. Jacob Lowenwirth, a tall, good-looking Jew, ostensibly practised in the City as a solicitor. In reality, however, he was a very clever blackmailer. The list of ruined lives and homes to his account was a long and terrible one. Outwardly a gentleman; he was vile as the lowest blackguard

of the gutter, a human reptile, who preyed upon his fellow-creatures like a vulture. Happily there are few men in the world so serpentlike in their venom.

"The work will really be very simple," went on the Chief. "All you have to do is to secure the talisman—how, I will explain later—stow it away safely, and make a demand for money. It can be sent to a safe deposit, and a common-member can fetch it away. All that, however, we will discuss afterwards. You will have to see, however, that the princess does not place the matter in the hands of the police."

Lowenwirth smiled.

"I think," he said, "you can trust me to manage that part of the business. To my mind, the affair is simplicity itself. It is quite right what you say; the princess will nearly go off her head when she discovers her loss. It is worth all the diamonds in the world to her, and she will do anything that is demanded of her. It was a smart notion of yours, Chief, and ought to be very profitable. We need a good haul just now to compensate us for the loss Anderson has sustained."

The plot was undoubtedly a simple one, and would have succeeded but for one obstacle—Kingston, or, to be more exact, Kingston and Dolores. Lowenwirth, with a lot of

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assistants to his hand, would have carried off the coup with comparative ease.

The Jew had reckoned without Kingston, for he did not even know of the latter's existence. He was unaware of the fact that, in addition to the superstitious Indians, he had a man against him who undertook a task to see it to a successful conclusion. But Lowenwirth had confidence in himself, and scouted the idea of failure.

Before leaving the Council Chamber he had his plans all cut and dried, and was absolutely confident as to the issue. The Princess Kamala was to him merely an object on which to practise his cowardly and brutal powers. He did not look upon her as a human being—as a fellow-creature with feelings and emotions.

She was delighted with London, in spite of the wet and cold. To her it was a round of enjoyment from morning till night. She only lived for gaiety, and Dolores had never once seen her without a bright smile on her face or a merry sparkle in her eyes.

She had everything in the world she wished for—wealth, health, and beauty—she could afford to be joyful. Never had she known the meaning of the word worry. Slaves attended to her slightest wish, and her money could satisfy any little whim which occurred to her.

All her life she had had her own way, so that now she was as masterful as a man. But, in spite of this, she was kind and thoughtful; her servants loved her, and would have half killed any man who dared to say a word against her.

The idea of the dinner-party delighted her, and several times that afternoon she ran into Dolores' apartments like a joyful child. Somehow she had taken a strange liking to Dolores, and while she treated other people with a touch of royal haughtiness, she was as free and easy as a sister with the beautiful "Miss O'Brien."

Dolores was glad of this, because it made her task so much easier. She was puzzled and worried as to what was to happen at the dinner-party. Lord Mount-Fannell hoped to profit by the grand function, for he was certainly holding it for a purpose. The question was—what?

How could Dolores hope to guess? How could she hope to fathom the motive when she had never so much as seen the talisman—did not even know of its existence? The task was a hopeless one, so, wisely, she gave it up, and decided to wait and watch, holding herself in readiness for any emergency.

The day ended in a regular downpour of rain, but after that the sky cleared a little.

At about half-past seven the door of Dolores' drawing-room suddenly opened noiselessly, and Princess Kamala stepped brightly in.

She was attired in a gorgeous evening-dress, and in readiness to depart.

"Are you ready, Miss O'Brien?" she cried, in perfect English. "We can both go together if you wish. My motor-car is waiting out in the street."

Dolores was ready, and had been waiting for the princess to come. She rose to her feet, looking very charming in her rich evening-dress.

"Yes," she said, "I'm ready, princess. It's very kind of you to wish me to come with you. But—excuse my saying so—you look extra beautiful to-night. What a lovely dress that is, and how well it suits you!"

The princess did indeed look very fascinating. Her skin was a delicate white, while her face, being perfectly oval, almost made one think she was European, until one looked at her hair and eyes. The former was jet black, and smothered in diamonds. The latter Kamala considered her greatest possession.

They were indeed wonderful eyes; large, brilliant, and full of expression. No English woman could have possessed such a pair.

"You like my dress?" she said, in evident satisfaction. "I am glad of that; it is the first time I have worn it, and I was going to ask your opinion. But we will go."

She walked towards the door, and her movements were as lithe and graceful as a panther. Her figure was perfect, and clearly proclaimed her to be an Eastern girl. Two hand-maids were waiting for her in the hall, and a wrap was thrown across her shoulders.

The motor-car outside was a magnificent one, a couple of gorgeously-clothed men occupying the front seats. Kamala said a few words to the driver in a strange tongue, and they started off for Grosvenor Square.

The journey was a short one, and Dolores, looking out of the window, could see that Lord Mount-Fannell's house was a blaze of light. A long stream of cars and hansoms were waiting to draw up to the gateway. As soon as the princess's car was seen, however, a wide gap was made, and the vehicle moved in slowly.

The princess was out almost before the car stopped, and many curious and admiring glances were cast in her direction.

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The crowds recognised her immediately, and a murmur went up.

"How fortunate the rain has stopped," remarked Kamala, as she and Dolores hurried up the wide approach to the front door. "It would have been ruinous to my dress if it had been wet."

"Oh, yes!" replied Dolores, although she had not heard her companion's words. Her thoughts were still busy, trying to fathom the secret of this dinner-party. Somehow, in spite of her resolve to wait and watch, she could not keep her mind off it.

The next minute she found herself in the Chief's magnificent entrance-hall, with a couple of flunkies bowing before her. She and the princess were announced together, and Dolores could not help smiling at the pompous manner in which the man uttered the words.

"Miss Kathleen O'Brien," he said slowly, "and her Royal Highness the Princess Kamala of Srinipuru!"

The Theft of the Talisman.

Lord Mount-Fannell stepped forward, beaming. His dapper little figure was encased in a perfectly-fitting dress-suit, and his breezy manner captivated the princess immediately.

"Ah, your Highness!" he cried. "I'm delighted to see you, and I am sure the other guests will recognise the honour you are paying us by attending this little gathering."

Kamala stood for a moment, flashing her brilliant eyes on the distinguished assembly. Many well-known society people were there, and numberless admiring glances were directed at this beautiful Eastern maiden.

That she had an imposing presence was unquestionable, and very soon she proved herself to be a most excellent talker. She was the leader of all the conversation, and her light, silvery laugh rang out at frequent intervals.

The dinner was a great success, and Dolores, with her eyes and ears wide open, tried in vain to guess what the Brotherhood's plans were. She was seated next the princess on one hand, and a middle-aged nobleman on the other. All around the magnificent table she could see numerous Inner Councillors—men who were regarded by their fellow-diners as upright and straightforward.

Everybody was listening to the princess, and she herself was enjoying the banquet exceedingly. Although all eyes were centred on her, she felt not a little bit self-conscious. She knew very well how pretty and fascinating she was, and liked to see the many admiring glances directed at her; for, to tell the truth, Kamala was more than a little proud.

The banquet proceeded without a hitch. Everybody was bright and merry, and joking and laughter was heard on every side. The obsequious flunkies flitted about noiselessly, and the brilliant electric lamps overhead gave everything the appearance of brightness and gaiety.

At last, towards the conclusion of the repast, when everybody was feeling satisfied and good-tempered, Lord Mount-Fannell made the first move towards securing the scarab. He was sitting at the head of the table, with the princess on his right hand.

"So you like England, princess?" he said, with his genial smile.

The conversation had been turned in that direction. "Oh, yes!" replied Kamala, with a bright smile. "I really think it is the nicest country I have visited."

"No doubt you will find the customs very peculiar," went on his lordship. "When you first arrived, they were, perhaps, difficult to conform to?"

"Well, just a little. Of course, they are vastly different to our ways in India."

"A wonderful country," put in Mr. Milverton—"certainly a wonderful country. The custom, for instance, of a person of high caste—such as yourself, princess—being forced to possess a scarab or talisman seems to us to be extremely singular."

"It is not practised in all parts of India," said Kamala, "although our family have always believed in it. Personally, I consider the custom rather an absurdity. The thing is, all said and done, utterly valueless."

Although Kamala spoke like this, Dolores knew very well that she was deceiving; for only the previous day the princess had informed Dolores that the talisman was to her worth all the gold she possessed.

"She is saying this to make the people believe she is quite European in her ideas," Dolores told herself. "She does not wish them to know that, in spite of her splendid education, she is quite as superstitious and fanatical as the ugliest fakir in India."

The guests appeared surprised as Kamala made her statement, and thought that she had indeed become European in

her views. Mount-Fannell was quick to seize the opportunity he had made for himself.

"We have heard a lot about this strange talisman," he smiled. "Would it be taking a liberty if I asked you to let me see it? As you just remarked, it is worthless."

"Only for a second did Kamala hesitate; then she smiled and nodded her head. Nobody could help noticing the beauty of her lovely, dark eyelashes.

"A liberty!" she cried. "I have not the least objection, Lord Mount-Fannell. The thing is really a piece of stone carved into the shape of a beetle. Hundreds of years ago, I think it came from Egypt, but for ages past it has been in our family."

She paused a moment to disconnect the little article, which always hung on a gold chain round her neck. Dolores, sitting next to her, could see that, in spite of her seeming willingness to exhibit the talisman, she was really very reluctant to do so. But, after what she had said, it was hardly possible for her to refuse.

And Dolores herself was doing her utmost to keep the excitement out of her eyes. She saw everything now—the reason for the banquet and the asking for the talisman. She guessed what was going to happen next. It was obvious—quite obvious. Knowing how valuable the scarab really was to the princess, Dolores needed no telling that the Brotherhood were going to gain possession of it, and extract money from the princess for its return.

"But how?" Dolores asked herself. "How are they going to steal it? With all these people here, the task seems impossible. If one of the members keeps it he will be suspected, having had the thing in his hands last. I shall have to watch closely, for it is practically certain that some ingenious method will be employed."

The talisman was in the chief's hands now, and he was examining it interestedly. It was a tiny piece of dark-coloured stone, no more than half an inch long, carved in a rather rough representation of a beetle. Mount-Fannell passed it on to his left-hand companion, a well-known society man.

"Most unique," he said, "As you say, princess, it evidently originally came from Egypt, which is the land of the sacred beetle. It is hard to believe the little thing is, perhaps thousands of years old. It would be interesting to learn how it found its way into India."

"I cannot tell you that," smiled Kamala, "for I don't know myself. It is so long ago that nobody in our family has records of its coming."

The talisman was being passed round the table, and to anybody closely watching it could be seen that the princess was keeping her magnificent eyes on it unceasingly. She was on tenter-hooks all the time, anxious to have it in her hands again. When it had passed up the table nearly to the far end, however, the Chief engaged Kamala in conversation, so that it was practically impossible for her to follow the talisman's movements.

Not that the princess really was suspicious of anything; everybody present was well known and quite above suspicion. There was nobody at that dinner-table except perfectly honourable ladies and gentlemen—so it was generally thought.

Dolores' wits were extra keen to-night, and when she saw the Chief capture Kamala's attention she suspected immediately that something was to take place while he held her in conversation. So Dolores kept her eyes fixed closely on the talisman as it passed along. It was rather a difficult job, for more than one pair of eyes were on her, admiring her pretty face.

For, in spite of the princess's undoubted beauty, Dolores was, to most people, far more attractive. But she was here, in this gathering, on important work, and that work had to be done. At the end of two minutes she relaxed her vigilance and smiled inwardly.

"Clever," she thought—"decidedly clever!"

The talisman passed on, most people taking no interest in it, being engaged in conversation among themselves. The princess was obviously relieved as it reached the hands of Milverton, who sat two places from Dolores. The barrister appeared very interested.

"As our host remarked," he said, "it is most unique, yet one wouldn't think its age was very great. Why, there is actually a mark here where the sculptor made a slip!"

"A slip?" asked the princess quickly.

"Yes. There is a little portion chipped right away," answered Milverton, examining the scarab more closely.

"But I don't remember it!" cried Kamala, bending forward anxiously. "Let me see it, will you, please?"

She took the talisman quickly, but almost immediately the colour fled from her cheeks, leaving them a pale yellow colour. In a loud voice she uttered some exclamation in her native tongue, and started to her feet, the chair she had been sitting on falling back with a crash.

"Good gracious!" cried Lord Mount-Fannell. "What can be the matter? You are upset, princess—"

Kamala turned on him abruptly, and her eyes were blazing with a dangerous light. All her civilisation had for the moment deserted her, and she was a wild creature, filled with an uncontrollable passion.

"This is not the scarab!" she shouted, her usually melodious voice rising high and shrill. "This is a base imitation, made to resemble the original!"

Everybody started to their feet, and most of them were smiling to themselves at the absurdity of the declaration. The talisman had never been out of sight for a second; and, anyhow, of what value was it to anyone?

"My dear princess, pray calm yourself!" exclaimed the host in distressed tones. "Surely you are mistaken? The scarab cannot have been exchanged. Such a thing would have been impossible. Besides, as you said yourself, the thing is worthless!"

But the princess was far from calm. She dashed the counterfeit to the table forcibly, shattering a beautiful cut-glass dessert dish. Her face was still pale, and her rage was increasing.

"It is a plot!" she cried. "I have been robbed—I have been robbed! That—that thing there is not the one I had in my hands a short while ago—"

Lord Mount-Fannell stepped round to her side.

"Pray don't excite yourself, your Highness," he said gently. "I am sure, if you remain calm, we shall get to the bottom of this unfortunate occurrence. Just think for a moment. Of what use would the talisman be to any of us gathered here? We are all upright folk, and would never dream of robbing you. If the thing really has been changed, it must have been done before you entered my house. Pray consider a moment."

Kamala stamped one of her dainty feet impatiently. "It could not have been changed before!" she cried excitedly. "I have worn it round my neck ever since I entered your wretched country. It has been changed here, and you are responsible, Lord Mount-Fannell. The loss means a terrible lot to me, and I demand that it should be recovered immediately!"

The Chief shrugged his shoulders, and looked at the remainder of his guests. He knew they thought that the princess was mistaken, for there was the scarab on the table.

"Ladies and gentlemen," he said, "I really must apologise for this unfortunate mishap. I am quite sure nobody is playing a practical joke; besides, I think you all agree that the scarab could not have been changed while it was passing round the table—even if one of my guests wanted to steal it, the idea of which is absurd."

"Of course," said one of the ladies, "we are all convinced that her Highness is mistaken. It would have been impossible to exchange it. The thing on the table—in the midst of the broken glass—is decidedly the one I looked at. And I remember it was chipped, too!"

Princess Kamala stood glaring around her, her eyes burning with anxiety, excitement, and passion. Suddenly she flared up again, uttering really wild sentences, and threatening Lord Mount-Fannell with the police.

But she could not demand that the guests should be searched, for, as she had herself said, the thing was valueless. In addition, everybody was thoroughly convinced that if any exchange had been made, it had been done before the princess entered Mount-Fannell's house. The object on the table was certainly the one which had gone round from hand to hand.

"My dear princess," said the host at last, when she had finished her tirade, "just calm yourself for a moment. I am sure you would not meaningfully create this unpleasant scene in my house. I am as concerned as you yourself are at the loss, but really it could not have happened here—"

"It did happen here!" shouted Kamala, seeming very unlike a civilised princess just then. "I have been robbed in your house, and you are responsible. I shall go straight to the police, and tell them everything!"

"But they would do nothing," said his lordship. "They would go away immediately when I explained the incident. I am not a thief, princess; neither is anybody else here. If you will only think—"

She turned her back on him abruptly, and uttered some words in her own tongue. It was impossible for her to act as an English woman would have done. She was for the moment wild with anxiety and anger. For a second she stood undecided, then, without ceremony, pushed her way to the door, her face as black as possible. Dolores stepped up to Lord Mount-Fannell.

"I will do my best to calm her," she said quickly. "At all events, I will prevent her going to the police. The whole affair is most unfortunate."

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 156.

NEXT THURSDAY: "FATTY WYNN'S NEW WHEEZE."

A Splendid, Long, Complete Tale of The Chums of St. Jim's. By Martin Clifford.

"It is, Miss O'Brien, and I am concerned at your having to go off like this. I can only apologise—" "Pray don't apologise!" said Dolores, with a smile. "It is not your fault. These Eastern women are so excitable." Dolores turned and hurried after Kamala, who had passed outside without another word.

Mount-Fannell stood for a second looking after her, then he looked from one to another of his guests.

"I cannot express my regret, ladies and gentlemen," he said, "that this should have occurred to-night. You will all admit that the Princess Kamala is a very charming young lady when she has her temper under control. The exhibition you have just witnessed, however, gives rather a different impression."

"It's her Indian blood, Mount-Fannell," said an old gentleman. "Indian blood, that's what it is!"

"Unquestionably. And the pity of it is that she should flare up over nothing whatever. Her accusation is perfectly ridiculous. Of what value would a little piece of stone, carved very badly into the semblance of a beetle, be to anybody here?"

"I should say none," laughed Milverton.

"Doubtless, when the princess recovers her self-control, she will hasten to apologise for her very unladylike conduct. Miss O'Brien has very considerably accompanied the princess, and tells me she will do her best to dissuade her companion from going to the police."

"Very good of her, I'm sure," said one of the guests. "No one, I should think, wishes an account of this dreadful affair in the newspapers."

"That is the very point I was about to mention," said the host. "I am going to ask everybody here to say nothing. The princess doesn't know what she is doing at present, and it would be unpleasant in the extreme, both for her Highness and for myself, if the matter were bandied about in the halfpenny Press."

The guests agreed heartily. Not one word was to be said. So the incident closed, and every guest—every outside guest who was not an Inner Councillor—went away, certain in their minds that Kamala had created a scene over nothing.

But the princess's actions and words were really justifiable; the scarab had been stolen, and an imitation substituted. When and how? Who had done it? Dolores knew well enough.

Her keen eyes had watched the original's journey round the table very closely, had seen it pass into Lowenwirth's hands, and had seen him, quick as lightning, make the exchange. To an unsuspecting person he merely shook his arm, so the action passed unnoticed except to Dolores. She knew now which member was allotted to carry out the task, however, and very soon Kingston would know.

And then—

The Demand for Ten Thousand Pounds.

Dolores hurried out after Princess Kamala, and found her in the magnificent hall adjusting her wraps. She said no thing as Dolores came, but looked at her a little more favourably than she looked at Lord Mount-Fannell. A couple of flunkies stood stolidly near the door. But they were out of earshot.

"Princess," said Dolores, in a low tone.

"Well?" answered Kamala, between her teeth.

"You are not cross with me, are you?" asked Dolores.

"Have I displeased you in any way?" "No, Miss O'Brien, of course not. But oh, I am so terribly upset! I have been robbed and nobody in there will believe me! I know I made an exhibition of myself, but it cannot be helped. It is terrible—terrible! The talisman has been stolen, and when I return to India— Oh, I haven't thought of it!"

She had cooled down now that she was alone with Dolores, and the latter took advantage of the opportunity without delay.

"It may not be so serious as you think," she said. "The scarab can be recovered, surely. It really has gone?"

"There is no doubt about it, Miss O'Brien. It was hanging on this chain perfectly securely, and I did not like taking it off. But how could I have refused? Yet I ought to have done so. I was a fool to ever let it out of my hands. While it was going round the table it was changed by somebody. But they won't believe me: they think I am making a fuss over nothing. Do you think the same?"

She gazed at Dolores with her large dark eyes shining with anxiety and alarm. The anger had left them. With an effort she had got the better of her wild outburst of fury.

"No," answered Dolores. "If you know the talisman has been stolen, princess, I will believe you. But who could have done it? And for what reason? It is worthless to anyone but yourself."

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 156.

"THE RIVALS OF ST. WODE'S,"

A Grand New School Tale, by Charles Hamilton, is in THE "EMPIRE" LIBRARY this Week. Price One Halfpenny.

"I am glad you believe me," said Kamala. "In that room where everybody was laughing, I could not keep myself in. It must be recovered—it must! I am going for the police!"

Dolores placed her hand on Kamala's wrist gently.

"No, don't do that," she said. "Just think for a moment, and you will realise the uselessness of such a course. If the police come here, Lord Mount-Fannell will tell them you have been making a fuss over some imaginary loss, and will send them away. Don't you see that the police would do more harm than good, for the whole affair would be in the newspapers?"

Kamala stood for a moment thinking.

"Yes," she said at last, "perhaps you are right, Miss O'Brien. Perhaps it would be foolish to go for the police. But what am I to do? Who can I go to for assistance? The scarab must be recovered if I spend half my fortune. I am powerless without it; my people in India will refuse to recognise me, and I shall be— But it is no use talking. I dare not go back to India without the scarab."

"I have a friend," said Dolores—"a friend at the Hotel Cyril who will help you. When I explain everything to him, he will set to work in his own way and recover your loss. One of the guests here to-night— But you are ready. We will go."

They left the mansion and walked out into the night. The sky was clear now, and the pavements dry. The princess's motor-car was waiting a few yards behind, and in a couple of minutes she and Dolores were among the cushions.

"As I was saying," exclaimed the latter, "one of the guests to-night took the talisman. I have no doubt my friend will soon get to know who it was, and will secure it for you."

"Who is this friend?" asked Kamala.

"His name is Frank Kingston, and he is a much cleverer man than he looks. Although I am telling you this, princess, I hope you will treat it as confidential, for Mr. Kingston does not like to be thought anything but a young man about town."

Dolores knew it would be safe to tell this to the princess, for she would say nothing to outsiders, especially if it was connected with the talisman.

"If this gentleman really can do as you say, I shall be grateful to him all my life. But I am terribly worried, and would give anything to have the scarab in my own hands again. Ah, if I only knew—"

"Please, princess, remember it is useless thinking of doing anything to-night. To-morrow will be the time. It is already late, so I suggest that you go right to bed and put the matter out of your thoughts for the time being."

"That is impossible, for I shall be thinking of it every minute of the day. It is the more terribly exasperating because we know that one man among those guests has now probably got my property in his pocket. Yet we cannot inform the police for fear of public ridicule. The only possible way is for me to do as you suggest, and let your friend recover the stolen talisman. If he fails to do so, I shall never return to India again. That will be cruelly hard, and all because some selfish man wants it, perhaps, for his private collection. Oh, I—"

She began to raise her voice again in anger until Dolores touched her arm. The latter, even to her own surprise, had become remarkably good friends with the princess; and Kamala seemed to look to Dolores for advice, and take it unquestionably.

At the Cyril neither of them said much more on the subject, but decided, by mutual consent, to postpone all discussion until the morrow. On inquiring, Dolores found that Kingston was out at his club. So she returned to her apartments and retired for the night; there was no object to be gained by sitting up.

She left a note with Fraser, however, telling Kingston that she would call on him at half-past eight the following morning.

Accordingly Kingston was up betimes, and when eight-thirty arrived, had finished breakfast and was lolling in his study before the cheerful fire.

"Ah, Dolores," he cried, as Tim escorted her in, "you are punctual! I received your note last night, and am really anxious to hear how you got on at the dinner-party."

She shook hands, and seated herself in the same chair as she had occupied the previous day.

"There is not very much to tell you," she said, looking into his eyes seriously. "But Mr. Jacob Lowenwirth is the man who we are fighting against now."

"Jacob Lowenwirth?" he repeated, secretly pleased at the "we." "Jove, Dolores, but I'm glad I've got an opportunity to settle that fellow. If any man deserves penal servitude, it is he. Only that wouldn't be severe enough. He is, as you know, the vilest blackmailer in London—a flinty, feelingless scoundrel, who drains his victims to the last

money before he lets them go. So he is doing the job? Well, it will be his last!"

Kingston said the words as if there was no doubt whatever on the matter—as if Lowenwirth were already in the hands of the police. Frank Kingston had no doubt in his own mind. When he set out to attain a certain object, he never rested until his task was satisfactorily completed.

Dolores, speaking in a low voice, told her companion everything that had taken place the previous evening at Lord Mount-Fannell's house in Grosvenor Square. When she had done, he sat for some few moments gently tapping the blotting-paper.

"So that's the game!" he murmured. "Lowenwirth is now, I presume, going to extract money—or try to extract money—from the excitable Kamala? Well, the case is very simple, Dolores. We'll soon get that little blackbeetle back and earn the princess's undying gratitude."

"You intend to see her yourself?" asked Dolores.

"Decidedly. No harm can come if I only tell her I am a sort of amateur detective, and will do my best to get the scarab back without the story becoming public property. She herself will say a word to nobody, and, after it's all over, will merely know that I have managed to get round some unknown person to good advantage."

"When she has her precious talisman back," said Dolores, "she will not care a button how you obtained it."

Kingston laughed.

"I suppose not," he said. "Now, if you will lead the way, we will walk up the passage and ascertain if her Serene Highness is at home. She is expecting us, I believe?"

"I told her that I would bring you in to see her the first thing this morning. She herself arises soon after seven, so I'll be quite prepared to receive us."

They walked along the broad corridor until they came to Princess Kamala's suite of rooms. Kingston knocked at the door gently, and was somewhat surprised to see it open without a second's delay. A swarthy Indian servant stood there, attired in native costume. He looked decidedly out of keeping with the modern civilised surroundings of the Hotel d'Orléans.

"Her Highness is expecting us, I think," said Kingston languidly. "You might tell her Miss O'Brien and her friend have arrived."

"Will you step inside, sahib?" said the man deferentially. "Her Highness told me to take you to her room as soon as you came."

They followed the Hindu into the hall, and he led them to the princess's boudoir. Here another servant stood outside the door. Even in London the princess kept up some of her state customs of India.

"I am glad you have come, Miss O'Brien!" cried Kamala, rising from the cushions on which she had been lying, and taking Dolores' hand. She was still looking very worried, but a smile came to her lips now.

"So this is your friend," she said, looking at Kingston with frank curiosity. "How do you do, Mr. Kingston? I suppose Miss O'Brien has told you of last night's terrible affair?"

"Yes," he replied. "I am well acquainted with the facts, princess, and I beg of you to rid yourself of that worried expression. The case is not so serious as you imagine. I promise you I will obtain the talisman and place it in your hands before three days have passed."

"But I don't see how you can be sure," answered the princess, a little puzzled. "Do you know where the scarab was?"

"I have really not the slightest idea," said Kingston, with a smile. "Nevertheless, if you will leave everything to me, I will fulfil my promise. I quite realise how extremely valuable the little thing is to you, and do not doubt for a moment that it was stolen from the dinner-table last night."

"It was, Mr. Kingston," cried Kamala. "I know it was!"

"There are wicked people among every class, and, as you know, your scarab has been described in one of the illustrated papers. It was stated to be merely a charm, having no value, but the thief evidently knew the contrary."

"He must have done. I feel easier now that I have seen you, Mr. Kingston," said the princess openly. "We Indians can generally judge character very quickly, and I am quite sure you are set on doing your best for me. I cannot thank you sufficiently for coming to my aid, for alone I could have done nothing. If you are successful in recovering the talisman, I shall owe you a lifelong debt."

Kingston smiled as he took a seat. He was a little surprised at the perfect manner in which Kamala spoke English. It was evident she had lived in the company of a British gentleman or companion for some years.

"I think," said Kingston, "that you can rely on—"

Tap-tap!

A soft knock sounded on the door-panel! The princess looked up quickly, and said something in her own language.

The door opened, and one of the Hindas appeared. He salaamed elaborately before his mistress, and handed her a letter which had evidently just arrived.

Kamala tore it open quickly, for something seemed to tell her that its contents were of importance. Kingston, who was watching her closely, although he appeared to be half asleep, saw that it contained a single sheet of paper on which some words were typewritten, and a little key. The next moment the princess gave a cry of excitement, and ordered the Hindu, who had been waiting, out of the room.

"The talisman!" cried the princess. "I can get it! You will not need to trouble, Mr. Kingston. The man who has it says he will return it on the payment of a small sum of money. I will send it immediately."

"May we see the note, princess?" asked Dolores quickly. "Yes, yes, read it. The boy is waiting outside. Fortunately, I have the amount in my desk."

And the princess hurried across to a little mahogany desk near the window. Meanwhile, Dolores and Kingston read the typewritten words through quickly. The latter gave no sign whatever, but Dolores cried out in indignation.

"The scarab you lost last night at Lord Mount-Fannell's is in my possession. It was I who substituted the counterfeit. It is worth nothing to me, but, on the other hand, you value it very highly indeed. If you wish to have it in your hands again, you have merely to send Bank of England notes for £10,000 to Safe Deposit Number 57, Holborn, by the messenger-boy who brings this note. Give him the key and the notes in an envelope. If the safe is watched, the notes stopped, or the police informed of this communication, the scarab will be destroyed without delay. If, on the contrary, you follow these instructions, the talisman will be delivered to you by messenger-boy two hours from the time the notes are deposited."

That was all. Kingston smiled slightly to himself, but it was a grim smile. Lowenwirth meant to take no chances. Certainly he could not have thought of a better way of safeguarding himself. The princess would pay any amount rather than have the scarab destroyed.

"But, princess," cried Dolores, "you are not going to give in—you are not going to pay this money?"

Kamala looked surprised.

"I shall pay it without question," she cried. "The bank notes are here, and I shall send them off without a moment's delay. What is a paltry ten thousand pounds compared with the talisman? The thief has given me the opportunity of recovering my property, and I mean to avail myself of it!"

Princess Kamala Sends the Money—The Result.

Frank Kingston crossed over to the window. "I trust you will not consider it a liberty, princess," he exclaimed, "but may I offer you a word of advice?"

Kamala was counting a sheet of fifty-pound banknotes, and she looked up and nodded. Her eyes were shining with excitement now. All the worry and anxiety had left them. In her innocence she believed the talisman would be returned immediately. The money was nothing to her; ten thousand pounds would never be missed.

"There is not much time to talk," she said. "Every minute the messenger-boy remains here means more delay and anxiety for myself."

"But you surely do not really mean to send the money?" said Kingston. "It is sheer waste, princess. I can get the talisman back for you without the expenditure of a penny."

"No, no. I shall send it. The matter cannot be left to chance. By doing this I shall make certain of it, and it is worth ten times the amount demanded. If it were left to you to regain it, Mr. Kingston, it would mean perhaps another three days' waiting; and possibly you would be unsuccessful."

Kingston faced her for a moment in silence. Dolores' eyes were shining with excitement, for she hated the idea of Kamala paying the demand.

"But does it not seem rather a waste of money?" exclaimed Kingston quietly. "Why should you do this when I have absolutely given my word that I will recover your loss. It is certainly a pity to let this scoundrel of a fellow have even the smallest satisfaction."

Kamala had finished counting the notes, and now she slipped them into an envelope and stuck the flap down.

"I quite realise, Mr. Kingston, that you are willing to do your best for me," she said, with a quick smile; "but you, being an Englishman, cannot judge the terrible urgency of the matter. I would willingly give my right hand for the recovery of the scarab, if necessary."

"And you, princess," returned Kingston firmly, "being an Indian, cannot judge rightly the futility of heeding for an instant the words on that paper."

Kamala looked at him with a flash of her dark eyes.

"I do not understand," she said. "What do you mean?"

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"THE RIVALS OF ST. WODE'S."

"I mean that if you seriously intend sending that money, you might as well throw it in the gutter. For it certainly will not have the effect you contemplate; the talisman will be as far from your grasp as ever."

"Mr. Kingston is right," put in Dolores, laying her hand on the princess's arm; "the scoundrel who wrote that note will not keep faith. The money will be thrown away."

"I do not believe it!" she cried excitedly. "I am going to follow the instructions and get the talisman back immediately. You are mistaken!"

"But what proof have you that the man will deliver the talisman on receipt of the notes?" asked Kingston. "He will have the money, but your property will be as far from you as ever. Don't you see the obvious plan, princess? The villain might send a dozen demands before he gave up the scarab."

"Such a thing is probable, of course," replied her Highness, who was too upset and excited to listen to reason; "but I do not believe it will be as you say. This demand for ten thousand pounds will be the first and last. The sum is a large one to a poor man, and he will be satisfied. I am sure of it; and whatever you say I shall not alter my decision."

"Then it is useless my advising you further!" he exclaimed. "I am sorry, princess, that you should act in this way, but I cannot, of course, do more than I have done."

"The boy is waiting outside." No, Miss O'Brien, please say no more. My mind is made up."

Kamala went across the room, leaving Kingston and Dolores facing one another. The latter was looking chagrined, but Kingston smiled easily.

"It is just as well," he murmured. "The princess is too excited to heed good advice at present. When the talisman does not turn up, however, she will cool down a little."

"It is such a pity," said Dolores.

"I grant you that, Dolores; it is certainly a pity. But she will never miss the money. Lowenwirth has safeguarded himself well. The threat of destroying the precious beetle was quite enough to put a stop to all thoughts of police assistance."

"How are you going to set to work—"

The princess entered at that moment, so Dolores was unable to finish her sentence. For Kingston had decided to let her know nothing with regard to who held the talisman. Indians are peculiar people, with peculiar ideas of right and wrong. If Kamala had known that Lowenwirth had possession of the scarab, she might very likely have sent two or three of her Hindus to secure it. And they, knowing the terrible importance of the matter, would have had no hesitation in quietly slipping a knife between Lowenwirth's ribs.

Kingston did not want that to happen. He was attending to the job, and would set about it in his own way. To tell the truth, he thoroughly enjoyed this work—this detective work—and was never happier than when hot-foot on the track of an Inner Councillor. Lowenwirth should receive his punishment from Kingston, not at the hands of half-civilised Hindus.

So the identity of the thief was withheld from Kamala. She still was excited, and she walked across the room, smiling at her two visitors.

"Well," she said, "I have sent the money, and shall have to curb my impatience until the two hours have elapsed. I must thank you again, Mr. Kingston, for your advice, but could you only realise the state of mind I have been in, you would understand why I would rather pay ten thousand pounds and get the talisman immediately, than pay nothing and wait until you found it."

"I am sorry, princess, that you have acted in the manner you have," replied Kingston gravely, "because you will be disappointed at the result. I did my utmost to dissuade you, but my efforts were useless."

Kamala seated herself among her cushions.

"I have two hours to wait," she said. "Two hours and a half, strictly speaking. I am convinced your suspicions are unfounded, Mr. Kingston. The man who now has possession of my property is undoubtedly a scoundrel, but he will do as he says."

"I have nothing further to say," drawled the other calmly. "I will return before luncheon, however, and ascertain the result of the affair. Until then, princess, I wish you good-evening."

He bowed low before her—this action pleasing her exceedingly—and strolled out of the room. Dolores looked up after him with a smile. She herself meant to stay in the princess's apartments until the two hours had elapsed. Kamala was glad of her company, for the conversation seemed to pass the time away quickly.

Kingston quite realised the state of mind the Indian girl was in. To her the loss was appalling, however trivial it seemed to other people. To return to India without her talisman would probably mean death, or, if not death, degradation. She would lose caste, lose her fortune, and be equal in rank only to a slave.

Therefore, it was quite natural that she should eagerly send the money. Kingston had done his best, and so departed. He knew it was useless watching the safe-deposit in Holborn, for Lowenwirth, in spite of his threats, would certainly not go near the place himself. A common member would be detailed for the work, so that in case of miscarriage no harm would be done.

But Kingston was not idle. He busied himself ascertaining the Jew's London and suburban addresses, his habits, and hours of business. The question as to where he kept the scarab was a puzzling one.

He would scarcely carry it about with him, and it might be risky to hide it in his own office. Fraser was already at work, watching Lowenwirth's City offices from an empty room opposite. In this manner he could judge, comparatively, what hours the solicitor kept—when he arrived, and when he left, etc.

From Kingston's study window he could plainly see the entrance of the hotel, and some little time later he was standing, looking out into the busy Strand, watching for the messenger-boy. For Kingston wanted to be present when Princess Kamala received her reply.

He had not been in his position of observation for more than twenty minutes when a District Messenger stepped out of a motor-bus, and made for the entrance. Several other messengers had entered the hotel while Kingston was watching, but he was convinced the same boy would come with the reply. And he was right, for the lad who stepped off the bus was the one he had seen earlier from Kamala's window.

Kingston left his rooms quickly, and stepped along the corridor to Kamala's. In a moment he was admitted and escorted to her highness's boudoir. She half rose from her seat as he entered. Dolores, too, looked expectant.

"Oh," said Kamala, "I thought it was—"

"The boy has not yet returned, then?" exclaimed Kingston, as if he did not know the fact.

"No; we have been expecting him for half an hour past," replied the princess worriedly. "The time has already exceeded two and a half hours, and I am becoming quite anxious—"

"Unless I am mistaken," interrupted Kingston calmly, "I hear a knock at the door even at this moment. In all probability our young friend has arrived."

"But I heard nothing," said Kamala, in surprise.

"Nor I," put in Dolores.

Kingston smiled. A Hindu entered the room with a letter.

Without waiting for him to salaam, Kamala darted across the room and picked the letter up. Her excited face paled as she felt the smooth envelope. There was no scarab here. Could it be that—

She tore the flap open desperately, Kingston watching her without emotion. He felt certain in his own mind of what the envelope would contain.

(Next week's instalment of this thrilling story describes the part Frank Kingston played in the search for the Princess's Talisman, and how his efforts were rewarded.)

How Do You Do?

WHOM TO WRITE TO—The Editor, "GEM" LIBRARY, 23-9, Bonverie Street, Fleet Street, London, who will be pleased to hear from you.

FATTY WYNN'S NEW WHEEZE.

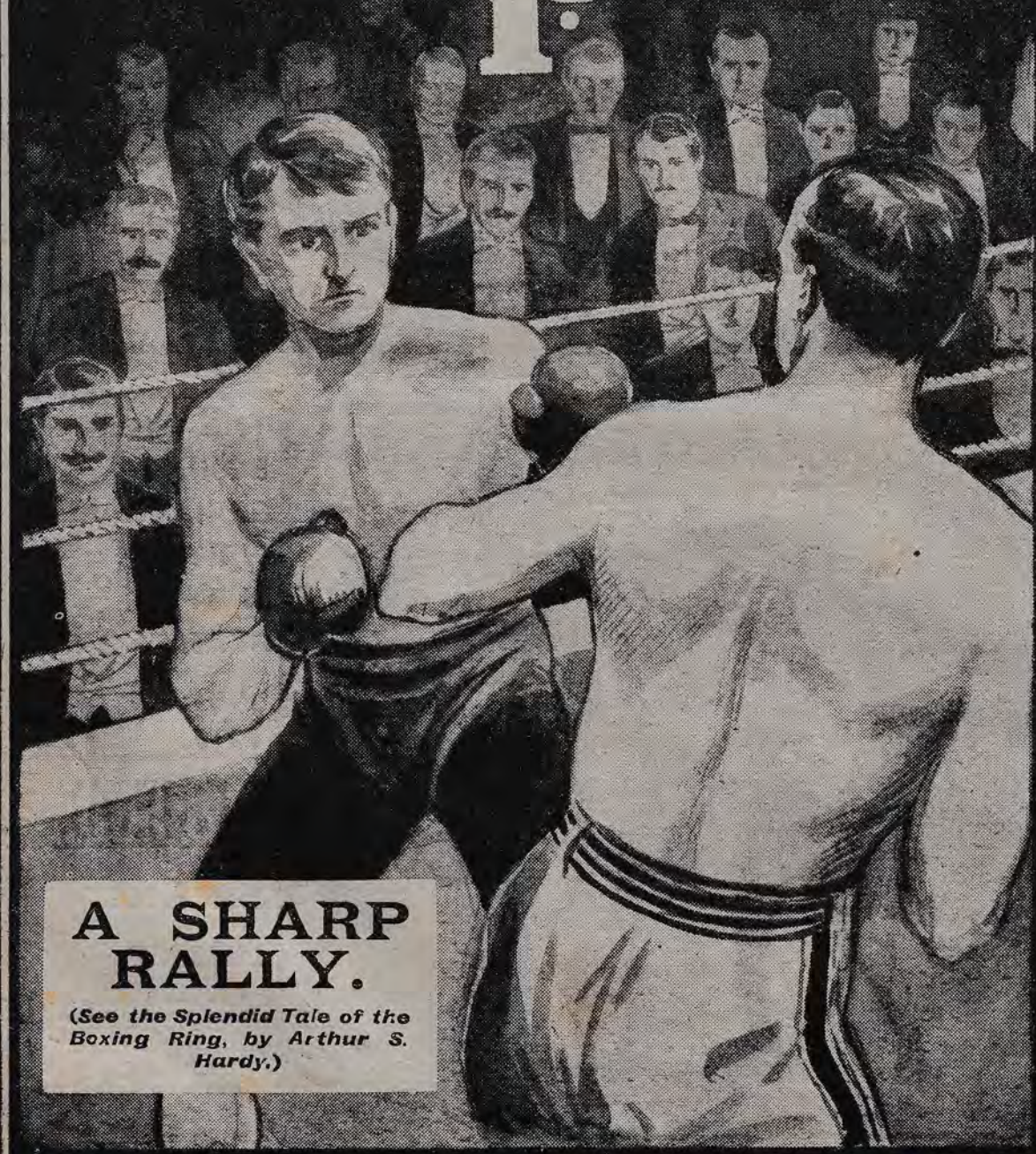
Fired with a sudden desire to reduce his weight and imitate the one and only Arthur Augustus, the Falstaff of St. Jim's—to put it plainly: Fatty Wynn goes in for a regular and vigorous training, with funny results.

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The Editor.

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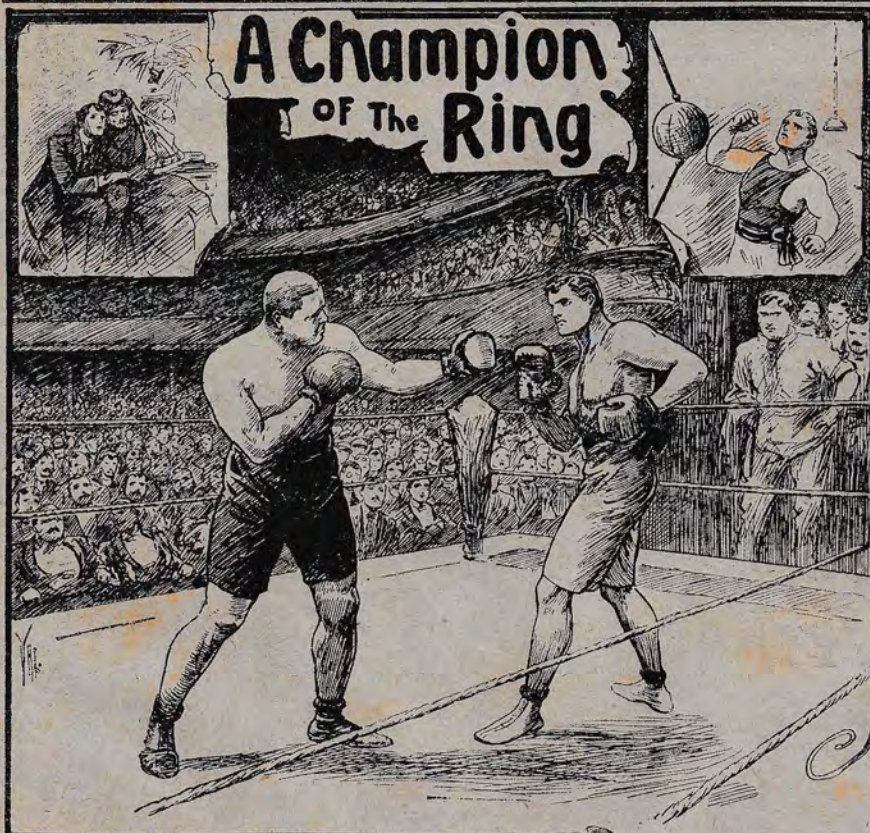
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