

Next Thursday's
Splendid School Tale:

"THE NEW FIRM AT ST. JIM'S."

By MARTIN CLIFFORD.
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TOM MERRY & CO.'S MUSIC- HALL!

By

MARTIN CLIFFORD.



A Splendid, New, Long,
Complete School Tale
of Tom Merry & Co.,
Figgins & Co., and
Jack Blake & Co.
at St. Jim's.

Sidney Drew's Grand
Serial Story,
"WINGS OF GOLD!"
Starts on Page 23.

CHAPTER 1.

No Admittance for Fags!

"Gussy, old man—"

"Weally, Wally—"

"Hold on a minute, Gussy," said Wally, otherwise D'Arcy minor, of the Third Form at St. Jim's. "Hold on!"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, of the Fourth, had to hold on, as Wally termed it. His cheerful minor was standing in the doorway of Study No. 6, in the Fourth Form passage, and he had a hand upon either doorpost, barring egress from the study.

Arthur Augustus halted.

"Weally, Wally, I am in a frightful huiwuy!"

"Bad form to be in a hurry," said Wally. "I want to speak to you; it's important."

"I'm goin' to a meetin'—"

"You can go to the meeting afterwards. I suppose it's only one of your giddy Fourth Form meetings," said Wally.

"You see, I've promised to stand a feed to some fellows in the Third, and I find that the cash has run out."

"You are an extwavgant young wascal, Wally. How-eval, aftah the meetin'—"

"Blow the meeting!"

"Are you coming, Gussy?" It was the voice of Jack Blake from the staircase. "You'll be late for the meeting, you ass! Herries and Dig have gone in."

"I'm comin', Blake!"

"Hold on, Gussy!" said Wally persuasively. "Your giddy old meeting will do any time, but Jameson and Curly are waiting for me. Suppose—"

"Pway let me pass, Wally!"

"Rats! Suppose you hand me—"

"I have just changed my clothes, Wally, and my cash is in the other pockets. Aftah the meetin'—"

"I don't mind waiting while you look for it, Gussy. I could make seven-and-six do, if you can't spring half-a-quid," said Wally cheerfully. "Now, I don't want to rumple your beautiful clothes, but you're not going out of this study till you've settled up. I can't put off important affairs on account of your duffy Form meetings."

"Weally, Wally—"

"Shell out, old son!" said Wally. "I— Ow, ow, ow!" A hand that seemed to grip like a vice seized Wally by the back of the collar, and he was lifted off his feet and swung back into the passage. He whirled round, and found himself looking at the cheerful, smiling face of Tom Merry, of the Shell.

"Ow!" gasped Wally. "Leggo! Look here—"

"No time to talk," said Tom Merry cheerfully. "Important meeting. Gussy, are you going to be late?"

"I am quite weady, Tom Mewwy. I will speak to you aftahwards, Wally."

"Look here," roared Wally. "Ow!"

Tom Merry gently lifted the fag off his feet, jerked him into the study, and plumped him down breathless into the armchair there. Wally gasped for breath, and glared at the hero of the Shell. Tom Merry shook a warning finger at him.

"Don't you interrupt fellows going to important meetings," he said. "Come on, Gussy! Buck up, or the New House chaps will be there first."

And Tom Merry linked his arm in Arthur Augustus D'Arcy's, and rushed him away down the passage at a speed that took his breath away.

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—"

"Buck up!"

"Weally— Oh!"

D'Arcy was rushed downstairs, to the open doorway of the Hobby Club-room. Tom Merry rushed him into the room, and bumped him against the table, and released him.

Next Thursday:

"THE NEW FIRM AT ST. JIM'S!" AND "WINGS OF GOLD!"

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"There you are!" he gasped.

"You uttah ass!"

"Eh?"

"You have wumped my jacket, you silly ass, and thrown me into quite a fluttah!" exclaimed the swell of St. Jim's, groping for his eyeglass. "I wegard you as an uttah ass!"

"That's the kind of gratitude a fellow has to expect from Gussy," said Monty Lowther, of the Shell. "We might have left him out of the meeting."

"I should have wufused to be left out of the meetin'."

"Are we all here?" said Tom Merry, looking round the room, into which juniors were dropping in ones and twos. "Now—"

"I was speakin', Tom Mewwy," said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, with a great deal of dignity.

"Yes, I know you were, Gussy," said Tom Merry, with a nod. "You generally are. I think the meeting can open now. The most important chaps are here—myself—"

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—"

"And Manners and Lowther. We're letting you Fourth Form chaps into this thing, but of course we expect you to behave yourselves. The New House chaps haven't come yet. If they don't turn up soon, we shall have to leave them out."

Tom Merry took his place at the head of the long table in the Hobby Club-room, and picked up a stump, and rapped on the table. The rap on the table was intended to impose silence, but it did not have the desired effect. There was a buzz of voices in the room. Blake, Herries, Digby, and Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, the chums of the Fourth, seemed to be in a somewhat warlike mood. The meeting in the Hobby Club-room had been called by the Terrible Three—Tom Merry, Manners, and Lowther, of the Shell—and the Fourth-Formers had come without knowing what it was about, and quite undecided as yet whether they were going to take part in the meeting, or to act the part of hecklers. They were equally prepared for either course. Study No. 6 was generally "up against" the Terrible Three, though they joined cordially enough with Tom Merry & Co. in conflicts with the fellows of the New House at St. Jim's—the common enemy.

"Look here—" began Jack Blake.

Rap, rap!

"Order!" called out Tom Merry. "As chairman of this meeting—"

"Who made you chairman, bedad?" inquired Reilly, of the Fourth.

"Yaas, wathah! Who made you chairman, Tom Mewwy?"

"I called the meeting, didn't I, fathead?"

"I wufuse to be called a fathead!"

"Order!" shouted Lowther and Manners; and Kangaroo, of the Shell, joined in with his stentorian voice, "Order!"

"I wufuse to ordah—I mean—"

"The meeting is now open," said Tom Merry. "I have called this meeting—"

"Undah the circs, I considah—"

"Order!"

"But what's the blessed meeting about?" demanded Jack Blake. "Is it a jape against the New House?"

"Certainly not!" said Tom Merry loftily. "At a time like this, little things like House rows sink into insignificance."

"Into what?" howled Blake.

"Insignificance," said Tom Merry defiantly. "We have now reached an important and momentous epoch—"

"A which?" gasped Digby.

"Epoch. We stand upon the threshold—"

"Rot!" said Herries. "What on earth are you talking about? We're right in the room. Young Wally there is standing on the threshold."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Ass!" said the chairman witheringly. "I was speaking in a figurative sense."

"Can't see much sense in saying we're on the threshold, when anybody with half an eye can see that we're not," said Herries obstinately.

"We stand upon the threshold of a new period—"

"Where did he get those words from?" gasped Blake.

"I believe he's made that speech up, and learned it off from memory."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Don't interrupt!" said Tom Merry, turning rather red.

"We have now reached an important and momentous epoch—"

"We've had that before."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Epoch," continued Tom Merry, unheeding, "and we stand upon the threshold—"

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—"

"Look here, I can't wait while you talk this tosh," said Wally, coming into the room. "If you can make it seven-and-six, Gussy—"

"Kick that fag out!" shouted the chairman.

"Pway wettie, Wally, deah boy!"

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"Turn that fag out!"

"Fags not admitted!" bawled Monty Lowther.

"Clear out, you young rascal!"

Wally snorted.

"I'll clear out when I— Oh! Oop!"

"Chuck him out!"

Kangaroo and Blake seized Wally by the shoulders. Fourth and Shell might have their private disputes, but they were agreed upon one point, that the Third Form had to be kept strictly in its place.

"Outside, you young bounder!"

"Ow, ow, ow! Yow!"

Wally went whirling through the doorway. At the same moment, three juniors came along the passage. They were Figgins, Kerr, and Wynn, of the Fourth Form—New House fellows. Wally met them without intending it, and with a terrific crash.

"Yoo-op!" roared Figgins.

"Oo-ow!"

"Oh!"

Fatty Wynn sat down, and Figgins went spinning across the passage. Kerr dodged just in time. Wally fell across Fatty Wynn, and there was a grunt of anguish from the Falstaff of the New House.

"Ow! Gr-r-roo! Draggimoff!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Jack Blake jerked Wally off the prostrate Fourth-Former, and rolled the fag along the passage. Figgins & Co., looking very flushed and excited, came into the Hobby Club room. Figgins pushed his cuffs back in an extremely suggestive way.

"Now, then, who threw that fag at me?"

"Order!"

"Accident, old chap!" grinned Kangaroo. "Quite unintentional. Lock the door, somebody, or that young bounder will be coming back."

Digby locked the door. The next moment Wally was hammering on the outside of the thick oaken panels.

"Open this door, you duffers!"

"Buzz off!"

"No admittance for fags!"

"Wun away, Wally, deah boy!"

And D'Arcy minor, finding that there was indeed no admittance, bestowed a final terrific kick upon the door, and walked away in great wrath.

CHAPTER 2.

The Great Wheeze.

"GENTLEMEN—"

"Hear, hear!"

"Gentlemen," said Tom Merry, rapping on one table—"or, rather, I won't call you gentlemen, I know you so well—"

"Bravo!"

"Weally, Tom Mewwy, I object to that wemark. If you mean to imply that the gentlemen pwesent are not gentlemen—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I see no cause whatevah for wibald laughtah," said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, jamming his eyeglass into his eye, and surveying the assembly. "I wegard Tom Mewwy's wemark as tactless in the extweme. I call upon him to withdraw it."

"Hear, hear!"

"Order!"

"Sit down!"

"I wufuse to sit down."

Rap, rap, rap, rap!

"Gentlemen, this meeting is called—"

"We know that," observed Blake. "Get to bizney."

"Yaas, wathah! But—"

"We have now reached," said Tom Merry, "an important and momentous epoch, and we stand upon the threshold—"

"We've had that!"

"Twice!" said Digby.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Come to the point!"

"Order! We have now reached an important and momentous epoch, and we stand upon the threshold of a new period. The New Year brings changes in its train—"

"Go hon!"

"The end of the season ruled by King Football approaches—"

"He's wound up," said Blake, in a stage whisper. "He will go on like this till he comes to the end of the record."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"And ere long," pursued Tom Merry, "the summer will be upon us, and the green meadows will resound with the merry click of bat and ball."

"He's made all that up," said Figgins. "I jolly well

heard him deliver that speech before, at the end of the summer, but he had it the other way round."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Tom Merry turned red.

"If you New House chaps interrupt the proceedings, you will be chucked out," he said warningly.

"I'd like the chucking out to begin," said Figgins aggressively.

"The cricket season will soon be upon us," pursued Tom Merry, "and the merry click of bat and ball will meander in the resounding meadows!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"The record's getting mixed," said Blake, with a shake of the head.

"Come to the point," yelled Herries—"come to the point or shut up! I've got to go and feed my bulldog!"

"Well, to make a long story short," said Tom Merry, after a moment's pause for a vain endeavour to remember the speech he had committed to memory, "the cricket season will be here in a few weeks, and we ought to be ready for it. Nothing like taking time by the forelock, you know!"

"My hat!" said Blake. "He's called a meeting to tell us that the cricket season comes after the football season! Is there any chap here who didn't know it?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I've got a big idea!" roared Tom Merry. "I haven't really started yet, you silly asses! How can a chap explain when a lot of silly owls keep interrupting him? I've got a dodge for raising funds for the cricket season, so that the Junior Cricket Club can start its bizney for the season with plenty of capital in hand."

"Now you're talking!" said Blake.

"Hear, hear!"

"I don't suppose there's any sense in it," went on Blake, "but we'll hear it. Go on."

"Shut up, then! You chaps know, I suppose, that there are places in London, and Manchester, and other towns, called music-halls?"

"I believe I've heard somebody speak of 'em," said Figgins sarcastically.

"They have shows and things—songs, and dances, and all sorts of turns," said Tom Merry, "and they rake in piles of money. They say that the music-halls are knocking the theatres into a cocked hat, and I dare say they are, for of course nobody would go to see a rotten modern play when he could see a good turn at a music-hall cheaper."

"Hear, hear!"

"Well, this is where the wheeze comes in. We've got a stage society in the junior Forms, and we've given performances—some of 'em good. But when we play Shakespeare, nobody will come in unless he has a place in the cast, and you can't run a successful and paying stage on these lines—all actors and no audience. When we give a concert, fellows who can't sing insist upon singing, and nobody wants to listen. I've come to the conclusion that if we want to give an entertainment to raise cash, we shall have to follow the modern movement, and give a music-hall show."

"Bai Jove!"

"Of course, we should give a very high-class and refined show," said Tom Merry hastily. "Music-halls ain't what they used to be, you know. We should have good songs, refined dances, good music, and so on, and I really think that if we did the thing well we should rake in a lot of gate-money. At such a time as this, little things like House rows fade into insignificance."

"Speech again!" murmured Blake.

"Order!"

"Therefore, I call upon all the fellows to back me up, and help me form a committee to manage the show. New House and School House ought to stand shoulder to shoulder, to—to make things hum, you know," said Tom Merry. "My idea is to run a really good show, and charge for admission. We'll make the prices low to the fags—temper the wind to the shorn lamb, you know—and charge good prices for good seats to the seniors. If we run the show for a week, twice nightly—"

"Twice nightly!"

"My hat!"

"Certainly!" said Tom Merry firmly. "That's how the music-halls rake in the cash, you know. You give the audience good stuff, and let 'em get out before they're fed up, and let in a fresh lot. It's a ripping idea, and I don't see why we can't work it. If it can be done in London, it can be done here. You know that what St. Jim's thinks to-day England thinks to-morrow."

"Hear, hear!"

"We might even work in some improvements on what those London Johnnies do," went on Tom Merry, waxing enthusiastic. "We've got brains here, you know, and if we all work together, and think things out, we shall really knock 'em!"

"Yaas, wathah! I don't mind offewin' to give a selection of tenah solos—"

"That would bring the house down!" remarked Lowther.

"Quite so, Lowthah!"

"Roof and all!" added Lowther.

"Weally, you ass—"

"There will have to be a committee to draw up the programme, of course," said Tom Merry. "Fellows who think they can do things, and can't, will have to be gently but firmly suppressed."

"Hear, hear!"

"If you are wewefwin' to me, Tom Merry, I wegard it as my duty to state that I look upon you as a feahful ass!"

"Gentlemen—"

"Bravo!"

"A committee should be appointed," continued Tom Merry, "containing a representative of every section of public opinion."

"Speech again!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I suggest myself first, and Manners, and Lowther, as the originators of the idea; and Blake as a representative of Study No. 6—"

"Hear, hear!" said Blake.

"And Figgins to represent the New House."

"Good egg!" said Figgins.

"Five is a good working number for a committee of ways and means," said Tom Merry. "The meetings of the committee will be held in my study. Gentlemen desirous of giving performances in the programme are invited to draw up a sketch of what they can do, and submit it to the committee. The committee will give a fair and unbiased opinion on the same. How's that?"

"Goal!" said Kangaroo.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Hands up in favour of the Cricket Club Music-hall, twice nightly!"

"Hurray!"

Every right hand in the room went up. There was no doubt that the idea of giving a show in aid of the cricket funds appealed to the juniors of St. Jim's. Whether the scheme could be carried out was another question, and there was likely to be warfare when the committee of selection came to details. But there was at all events plenty of enthusiasm to begin with.

"Gentlemen," said Tom Merry, "the meeting is over. The committee will be glad to consider sketches of turns for the entertainment in my study."

"Hear, hear!"

"Time we had tea, too!" remarked Digby.

"And I've got to go and feed my bulldog," said Herries.

"I can bring Towser on the stage in a bulldog turn when we give the show. That's a ripping idea, isn't it?"

"Weally, Hewwies—"

"Towser can do all sorts of tricks," said Herries thoughtfully. "I can get a chap to play a tramp, and Towser can hang on to his bags."

"I object to Towsah! That beastly bulldog has no respect whatevah for a fellow's twousahs!" said D'Arcy severely.

"Oh, rats!"

"Weally, Hewwies, deah boy—"

"Hallo! What's the matter with this blessed door?" said Kerr, tugging at the door-handle. "It won't come open!"

"Let me try," said Blake. He gave the handle a tug, and uttered an ejaculation: "It's fastened on the outside!"

Through the keyhole came the sound of an unmistakable chuckle:

"This is where I score, you rotters!"

It was the voice of D'Arcy minor, of the Third.

CHAPTER 3.

Wally on the Warpath.

THE meeting in the Hobby Club-room of the School House crowded round the door in wrath. It was past tea-time, and the juniors wanted their tea—especially Fatty Wynn. In the keen interest and excitement of the meeting, they had forgotten all about Wally. But Wally, evidently, had not forgotten them, or his summary ejection from the meeting.

"The young bounder!" said Tom Merry. "He's locked the door on the outside!"

"Bai Jove!"

Figgins hammered on the door.

"Open this door, you young ass!" he bawled.

There was no reply.

"Weally, Wally, you young wascal, if you don't immediately open this door, I shall give you a feahful thwashin'!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy through the keyhole.

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Wally chuckled.

"This is what comes of slinging a chap out of a meeting," he remarked. "I'm going to detain the whole gang of you for an hour as a punishment."

"Bai Jove!"

Five or six juniors hammered furiously on the door. The rest would have hammered, too, if there had been room for them to get at it. Kerr wrinkled his brows thoughtfully, and crossed towards the window. It was a good drop to the ground outside, but it was evidently the only way out of the difficulty.

"Yaas, wathah!" said D'Arcy, following Kerr. "That's the only way, deah boy. I shall wegard it as an impewative dutay to thwash that young wascal! Pway open the window!"

"My hat!" said Kerr, as he opened the window and looked out.

In the dusky quadrangle a crowd of Third Form fags could be seen waiting under the window. Wally came round from the doorway and joined them. He had the key of the Hobby Club-room door in his hand, and he waved it at the juniors at the window.

"Come on!" he said cheerfully. "Drop out! We'll catch you!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Jameson. "Come on!"

"Bai Jove!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, surveying the crowds of fags through his monocle. "This is wathah wotten!"

The juniors crowded round the window inside. At the most, two or three of them could drop out at a time, and nobody was wildly anxious to drop out into the grasp of two dozen fags.

Wally was on the warpath, and under Wally's leadership the Third-Formers could be quite troublesome customers to tackle. In fact, since D'Arcy minor had come to St. Jim's it was an undoubted fact that the Third Form had quite failed to keep their proper position as fags, and had put on all sorts of airs of being quite on a footing with the Fourth, and even the Shell—which was a simply intolerable state of things, from the point of view of the Fourth and the Shell.

Tom Merry looked out of the window.

"Now, you kids buzz off!" he exclaimed.

"We're waiting for you," said Wally.

"If I come down to you—"

"That's what we want you to do!" said Wally cheerfully.

"Yes, rather!" said Curly Gibson. "We're yearning for it! I should like Gussy to come first. I've got some chalk here for his chivvy."

"Weally, you young wascal—"

"Jump out, Tom Merry!" said Blake encouragingly.

"As chairman of the meeting, you naturally take the lead!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Go it!" said Figgins.

"The meeting's over," said Tom Merry hastily. "I don't want to run the whole show, either. I'll leave this to you, Blake."

"Rats!" said Blake promptly.

"I think the whole committee ought to go," said Kangaroo, with a grin. "We're in the hands of the committee, you know."

"Hear, hear!"

All the fellows who were not included in the list of the committee shouted approval. The committeemen looked disconcerted.

"Look here—" began Manners.

"Buck up!"

"All five of you go at once!" said Digby. "You'll scatter the fags in no time—or, you can tackle them, at any rate, and keep 'em going while we get out!"

"Yaas, wathah! I twust you fellows are not going to hang back."

"Oh, rot!" said Figgins.

Wally & Co., grinning below the high window, were waiting. Several of the fags had pieces of chalk and charcoal in their hands, evidently intended for the personal adornment of the juniors they should capture.

"They're funky," said Wally. "Now, I'll tell you what, you chaps. If you like to let us into the game—"

"I twust you have not been listenin' to the discush here, Wally," said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy severely.

Wally grinned.

"I don't see how I could help it when you were all bawling at the top of your voices," he retorted. "Everybody in the School House knows the wheeze by this time—from the Head down to the boots. They could hear you in the kitchen."

"You young ass!"

"I think that music-hall idea is a good one," said Wally. "And if you like to apportion a share of the takings to the Third-Form cricket club, we'll take a hand in the proceed—"

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ings, and help you to make the thing a big success. I can't say fairer than that."

"Certainly!" said Jameson. "What you will require is some real talent, and we're quite ready to provide that."

"You cheeky young bounders!" said Tom Merry, laughing. "We're not thinking of exhibiting a bear-garden twice nightly. Fags are barred!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Buzz off, you kids!" said Figgins. "I shall really have to come down to you."

"Come on, then!" said Wally invitingly.

"Ahem!"

"We're going to have a hand in the music-hall, anyway," said Wally grimly. "If we're not in the show we shall be up against it!"

"Yes, rather!" chorussed the fags.

"And in that case," said Wally, "we shall feel it our duty to muck it up."

"What-ho!"

"So you'd better be warned in time."

"I say, I'm frightfully hungry," said Fatty Wynn pathetically. "I think you chaps ought to jump out on those young bounders."

"Yaas, wathah! We're waitin' for you, Tom Mewwy."

Tom Merry and the rest of the committee exchanged glances. They did not relish the task. But the other fellows were determined that they should undertake it. Gore was already suggesting that if they did not drop out they should be dropped out. It was a question of active or passive.

"Come on!" said Tom Merry resolutely.

He swung himself out of the window, and dropped to the ground, and rolled over. Instantly the grasp of the fags was upon him, and grimy hands were rubbing charcoal into his face.

He struggled and spluttered and roared, but he could not get away, and in a few seconds he was in a state closely resembling that of a nigger minstrel made up for the performance.

Blake and Figgins followed him, and then Manners and Lowther. They would not stay behind when their chief had led the way. As fast as they landed, they were grasped by the fags, and bumped over and charcoaled, amid yells of laughter. But by the time there were five of them on the spot the fags had their hands full, and Wally & Co. were kept very busy to hold them.

"Groo! Rescue! Groo!" spluttered Figgins.

"Ow! Help!"

"Yaroop! Come on you slackers! Rescue! Yowp!"

Kangaroo and Digby and Herries came scrambling out of the window, with Kerr and Glyn and Gore after them.

"Cut!" yelled Wally.

There was a sudden flight of the fags. By the time the reinforcements had landed, and picked themselves up for action, the Third-Formers had vanished. Five grimy, black faces looked up from the ground, and the juniors in the window yelled with laughter.

"Bai Jove!" ejaculated D'Arcy. "You look awf'ly funnay, deah boys. Ha, ha, ha!"

"You ass!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I'll smash those fags!" grumbled Manners. "Groo! I've got some of the stuff in my beastly mouth. Groooooh!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Let's go and get a wash for goodness' sake!" gasped Tom Merry. "Never mind the fags now. Groo! Buck up!"

The five committeemen hurried off to the doorway. As they ran into the School House, Mr. Railton, the House-master, met them face to face. Tom Merry & Co. halted in dismay, as the Housemaster raised his hand.

"Boys, how dare you go about in public in this state!" exclaimed Mr. Railton.

"If—if you please, sir—"

"Take fifty lines each!" said Mr. Railton severely. "And go and clean yourselves at once! Not a word! Go at once!"

And they went!

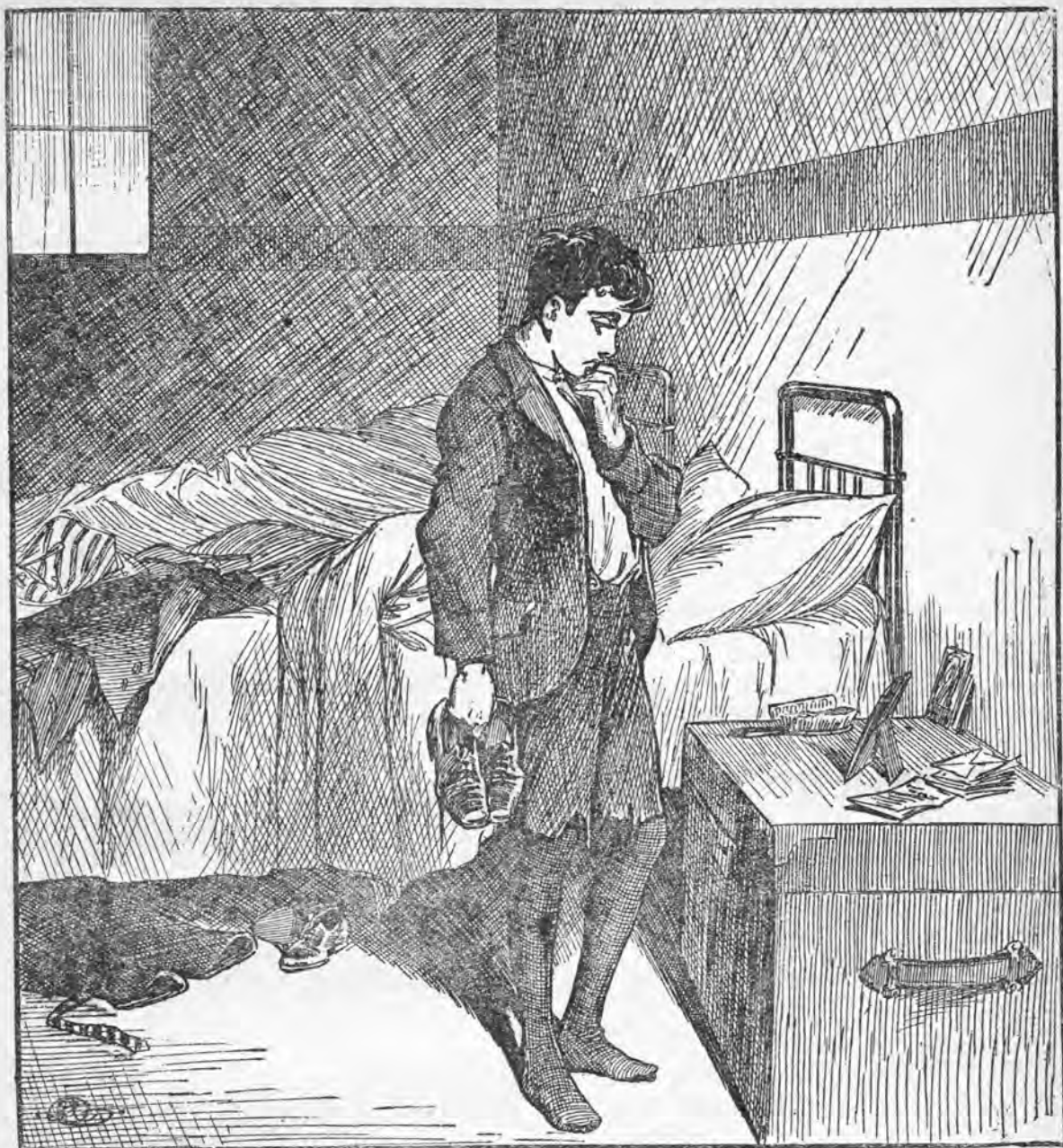
CHAPTER 4.

Not Popular!

FIGGINS came into his study in the New House with a shining face and a clean collar. He had had a wash in the School House, and he came back to his own quarters newly swept and garnished, so to speak. Kerr and Wynn were there, getting the tea. There was a very appetising smell of frying bacon and eggs, Fatty Wynn's favourite dish, and Figgins sniffed appreciatively.

"That's something like!" he remarked.

Fatty Wynn turned a ruddy face from the fire.



As the last stroke of midnight died away, Bolsover minor, got up, and dressed himself in the tattered clothes which he had worn formerly when he was a London newsboy. His resolution was taken! He could not remain at Greyfriars—he could not go home. Only his old life was open to him! (For the above incident see the grand, long, complete tale of Harry Wharton & Co., at Greyfriars, entitled "BOLSOVER MINOR'S LAST SACRIFICE," which is contained in this week's issue of our grand companion paper "The Magnet" Library. On sale at all newsagents. Price One Penny.)

"Yes, I thought I'd get it ready in time," he remarked. "Done to a turn. After all, there's something in having tea a bit late, you know. It gives a beautiful edge to a fellow's appetite."

Figgins grinned.

"So it does," he agreed, as he sat down at the table.

"And you are a lovely cook, Fatty. If we could do a cooking turn in the music-hall bizney you would bring down the house."

"Wnat-ho!" said Fatty Wynn. "Try the toast. It's really good! I wish we could have had sosses, too, but the funds wouldn't run to it. My idea is that sausages should always be cooked with bacon!"

"About that music-hall," said Kerr thoughtfully. "It's

a good wheeze, and I'm quite surprised at its coming from a School House chap!"

"Just what I think," said Figgins, with his mouth full.

"But, of course, we shall have to make the thing go. That's where we come in."

"Exactly! We want to get up a really good turn, and show the whole school what the New House can really do. What do you think, Fatty?"

"Perhaps a trifle more," said Fatty.

"Eh?"

"A fraction more would have made it perfect!"

"What are you talking about, you ass?"

Fatty Wynn looked up in surprise.

"The bacon, of course," he replied. "If it had been done

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just an atom more I think it would have been an improvement."

"Fathead! We're talking about our turn in Tom Merry's music-hall," said Kerr. "I don't think you could do better than a clog-dance, Figgy."

"Certainly!" said Fatty Wynn. "A chap with big feet—"

Figgins turned a freezing look upon his fat chum.

"A chap with what?" he inquired.

"Big feet," said Fatty Wynn innocently. "That's where you score, you know, when it comes to clog-dancing."

"If Wynn's going to talk rot—"

"Yes, shut up, Wynn, old man!" said Kerr. "Still, I think that clog-dancing is just in your line, Figgy, and the fellows like it."

Figgins hesitated.

"That's all right, of course," he said. "Only I've done a lot of that, and I was thinking of givin' 'em something new."

Kerr looked a little uneasy.

"What sort of thing?" he asked.

"Well, you see, there will be plenty of song and dance turns, and a lot of comic bizney," said Figgins. "Why shouldn't I give a serious turn? You want something in the show to give the thing a tone, you know."

"H'm! Chaps won't listen to recitations," said Kerr doubtfully. "Everybody hates a recitation, except the fellow who's doing it."

"I wasn't thinking of a recitation. When a chap's got a good baritone voice I don't see why he shouldn't give a good baritone song."

"That's a good idea," said Fatty Wynn, looking up from his eggs and bacon again. "If there's a chap in the New House with a good baritone voice, I think we ought to find him out and buck him up for the show. It's a good idea."

Figgins glared.

"I was speaking of myself," he said.

"Oh!"

"What price the 'Toreador Song' from 'Carmen'?" said Figgins.

"It's jolly difficult," said Kerr. "Difficult for a beginner!"

"I dare say; but I'm not a beginner," said Figgins, with some heat. "You fellows have heard me trying the 'Toreador Song.' What did you think?"

Kerr sipped his tea, and Fatty Wynn made a fresh attack upon the bacon. Common politeness prevented them from telling Figgins what they thought. Figgins was a good forward in the junior eleven, and he could play back with distinction, and he was a reliable half. On the cinder-path, too, he had few rivals, and his performances in the gym were a source of pride to the whole study. But there, as Kerr and Wynn would have confessed, Figgins's accomplishments ended. Nobody is without his little weaknesses, and Figgins's idea that he could sing the "Toreador Song" from "Carmen" had to be numbered among his weaknesses.

"I shall sing to the piano, of course," said Figgins, as if the matter were settled. "But for practice here, you can tune up on the fiddle, Kerr. I'll go through it after tea, and you fellows can tell me what you think."

Without danger of a serious rift in the harmony of the study, Kerr and Wynn knew that they could not do that. But they nodded.

Figgins was finished tea first. He was very keen to get to work. He looked out his music, and discovered his somewhat tattered copy of the song under the table. He dusted it, and opened it, and hummed over the tune, while he waited for Kerr to finish. Fatty Wynn was not likely to be finished yet for some time.

"I'll listen while I eat," said the fat Fourth-Former genially. "I think I always appreciate music more when I'm feeding."

"You ready, Kerr?"

"Ye-es, Figgy," said Kerr.

"Then we'll begin."

"Right you are, Figgy!"

"Gimme my note!" Figgins cleared his throat. "Now, then! I'll go over the chorus first, and get into the swing of it, and then tackle the verses."

"Just as you like."

"Toreador, en garde!" began Figgins, and stopped to cough.

"Bravo!" said Fatty Wynn.

Figgins re-started.

"Toreador, en ga-ah-ah-ah-a-h-de, Toreador! Toreador! Et sahnjer bong, et sahnje ong, congbatong—"

"Ain't you going to sing it in French like the original?" asked Fatty Wynn.

Figgins paused with a deadly look.

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"I am singing it in French, you utter ass!" he said.

"Oh! I—I didn't notice—"

"Well, shut up. Et sahnje bong, et sahnje ong congbatong," pursued Figgins, "qu'un wile wah te regarde—"

The door of the study opened, and Thompson of the Shell looked in. Figgins broke off, and glared at Thompson of the Shell.

"You fellows having a row?" asked Thompson.

"No, you ass!"

"I thought I heard somebody shrieking," explained Thompson. "It's all right."

And he withdrew.

Figgins was crimson.

"These silly asses don't understand music," he said. "If a fellow howled 'Alice, where are thou?' or 'Sing me to Sleep' they'd like it."

"Try again, Figgy!"

"For thee a fond heart waits," said Figgins. "I—I mean, et que l'amour t'attends, To-oh-oh-ray-ador! L'amour, l'amour, t'attong."

There was a rap on the study wall from the next room, and the voice of Pratt of the Fourth was heard.

"Shut up! I'm trying to do my prep."

"Blow your prep!" roared Figgins.

"Yah!"

"Now I'll tackle the verse," said Figgins. "It's surprising how soon one gets into the swing of these things. You can't beat a good baritone solo for entertaining chaps. If the F is a bit too thick for me, Kerr, you can play the accompaniment in a lower key, can't you? Lucky you know how to accompany."

"I'll do my best," said Kerr.

"Here goes!"

Fatty Wynn rose to his feet. The eggs and bacon were finished, and the last fragment of toast had disappeared.

"I—I remember now I was going to lend French a book," he said. "You don't mind if I run off for a minute?"

He quitted the study without waiting for a reply. Figgins did not heed him. He was tuning up.

"Vot're toast, je peux vous le rong-ong-dre, senores, senores—" He broke off. "Was that a bit flat, Kerr?"

"Just a bit," said Kerr, wondering whether Figgins would be offended if he stopped his ears. "Go it! Try again!"

"Vot're toast, je peux vous le rong-ong-dre, senores—"

The door was flung open, and Monteith, the head prefect of the New House, glared into the study with an angry brow.

"Stop it!" he shouted.

Figgins jumped.

"What do you mean, Monteith?"

"Take fifty lines," said the prefect; "and if there is any more row in this study you'll hear from me. I can stand a reasonable amount of noise as well as anybody, but when a silly duffer begins shrieking for nothing at all it's time to draw a line."

"Look here, you ass!" bellowed Figgins, forgetting in his wrath that Monteith was a prefect. "I was singing—"

"Singing!"

"Yes. That was the 'Toreador Song' from 'Carmen.'"

"Was it?" said Monteith, grinning. "I didn't recognise it. I thought you were trying to howl the roof down."

"Look here—"

"Mind, no more of it!" said the prefect, with a warning gesture. "You'll get a licking if there's any more of it. We can hear the frightful row in the Sixth-Form passage, and the fellows are all complaining. I shall expect those lines before bedtime."

And Monteith retired. Figgins looked at Kerr, and Kerr tried to look sympathetic. He had a guilty feeling of being rather grateful to Monteith.

"Fellows don't understand real music in this House!" said Figgins bitterly.

Kerr nodded.

"I suppose it won't do to go on," he remarked. "Perhaps the clog-dance will be better after all, Figgy."

"Blow the clog-dance!"

And Figgins sat down to do his lines.

CHAPTER 5.

A Declaration of War.

THERE was no doubt that Tom Merry's idea had caught on among the juniors of St. Jim's, especially in the School House. Dramatic performances were not at all uncommon among the juniors—they had played Shakespeare, and they had even given French plays. But something in the music-hall line was new, and it was quite certain to be popular. As Kangaroo remarked, there would be a chance for everybody. A performance of only one hour would give room for at least six fellows, with ten minutes each, and some of the turns might be shorter. Indeed,

Kangaroo said that the shorter the turns were the better, if D'Arcy was going to give tenor solos and Herries was going to bring on his bulldog.

The Terrible Three had quite a number of callers in their study that evening, which considerably interfered with their prep. But preparation was a minor consideration at such a time as this, as Tom Merry said nobly.

As the majority in the committee of selection, the Terrible Three had most of the managing in their hands, and they found that there would be no lack of offers of support. Indeed, it was surprising what a large number of juniors there was who imagined that they could do the very thing that was required to "fairly knock" the audience. If Tom Merry had accepted all the generous offers made him, he would soon have enlisted a company of entertainers far more numerous than any audience he was likely to get.

But Tom Merry spoke quite plainly on the subject. Only good turns would be considered, and a rehearsal would have to be inspected by the committee before anything was accepted. Skimpole's offer of a lecture on the subject of geology, to last three hours and a half, was declined without a rehearsal.

"Of course, we shall have to give the gist of the thing ourselves," Tom Merry remarked to his chums in the study. "That was really understood from the first. But it's only fair to give the Fourth Form and the New House a chance. It will make our turn all the more striking by comparison."

"Just so!" agreed Manners.

Tap!

"Another of 'em!" said Tom Merry, with a sigh. "We shall never get our prep. done, and Linton will be ratty in the morning. He won't understand the worries of a committee. Come in!"

D'Arcy minor of the Third came in.

Tom Merry half rose from his seat. There were still traces of charcoal in the roots of his hair. But Wally held up a somewhat grimy paw pacifically.

"Pax!" he exclaimed.

"That's all very well—" began Monty Lowther.

"Of course it is!" Wally agreed. "But I haven't come here to listen to you—I want to talk business."

"No time for that," said Tom Merry. "We've had duffers here on and off for the last hour. Run away and play."

"It's about this music-hall bizney," Wally went on, unheeding. "I've already offered you the assistance of myself and the Third Form."

"Thanks!"

"Declined!" murmured Manners.

"Much obliged, all the same," said Lowther blandly; "but we're not giving a baby show!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Wally crimsoned.

"It's for the sake of putting some talent into the show more than anything else that I'm willing to take a hand," he exclaimed warmly. "Look here, the Third Form decline to be left out of this thing!"

"Sorry, but there's really no room for fags!" said Tom Merry soothingly. "You see, we've got more offers now than we know what to do with, and if we let kids in every chap we decline would get his back up."

"You ought to take talent wherever found," said Wally.

"That's what we're doing," said Lowther; "but we don't expect to find any in the Third Form. But I'll tell you what we will do."

"What's that?" asked Wally suspiciously.

"We'll let the Third in as audience if they pay for admission," said Monty Lowther sweetly. And Tom Merry and Manners chuckled.

"There are a lot of things we can do," said Wally. "I'd give a jiu-jitsu turn with pleasure. That always takes an audience."

"Takes a patient audience, you mean—to stand it," suggested Lowther.

"Or I'd give a song and dance—"

"We might put him on to clear the hall after the show's over," suggested Manners, in a thoughtful way.

"Look here," bawled Wally, "I'm fed up with your rot! Are you going to let the Third Form into the show or are you not?"

"As audience?" said Tom Merry.

"Rats! We're not likely to come as audience unless it's to shy things at you," said Wally, with a snort of contempt. "How many turns are you thinking of having?"

"Seven or eight."

"Well, the Third Form would be satisfied with two out of them."

"I dare say they would, but I'm afraid the people in front wouldn't be satisfied," Tom Merry explained. "That's what I'm thinking about."

"Oh, don't be funny! Are we coming in?"

"No, you're going out!" said Monty Lowther, jerking his thumb towards the doorway. "There is the passage."

Wally glared.

"Then I've got something to say to you conceited duffers. The Third Form refuse to be ignored."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"And if we don't have a fair whack in the show," went on Wally impressively, "we're going to declare war on the whole wheeze, and muck it up from start to finish."

The Terrible Three roared. They did not feel very much alarmed at D'Arcy minor's threat. Wally looked as if he were inclined to rush upon the chums of the Shell on the spot.

"Now, what do you say?" he demanded.

"Rats!" replied the Terrible Three together with one voice.

"You refuse?"

"What ho!"

"Then look out for squalls!" said Wally truculently.

"The Third Form won't allow this show to take place!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Considering the rot you are putting on, I should think you would be glad to get a decent turn or two," snorted Wally. "I passed Study No. 6 just now, and my major was talking about shoving in a tenor solo."

"Was he?" grinned Lowther. "If he does it will jolly soon get shoved out again."

"We're willing to buck the whole thing up for you—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"It's buck up or muck up," said Wally; "and you can take your choice. We're quite willing to help you out, and you—"

"We're willing to help you out!" grinned Lowther. "Collar him!"

"Leggo!" roared Wally, as the grasp of the Terrible Three fell upon him. "Ow! Ow! Leggo!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The struggling fag was lifted from the study carpet and carried out into the passage bodily. There he was gently bumped upon the linoleum, and the Terrible Three returned into their study and closed the door.

The door was burst open the next moment, and a dusty and crimson face glared in. The hero of the Third shook a grimy fist at the chums of the Shell.

"Look out for squalls!" he roared.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"There's going to be trouble!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You frabjous asses—"

The Terrible Three made a movement towards the door. Wally slammed it and fled, leaving the three juniors roaring with laughter. The hero of the Third tramped downstairs with a deep frown upon his face and considerable dust upon his trousers where they had come into rough contact with the linoleum of the Shell passage.

A crowd of fags were waiting in the Third Form-room for him, and a general yell of inquiry greeted Wally as he tramped in. He shook his head.

"All right! It's war, then!" said Jameson. "We'll muck up the whole show, and make those rotters sorry for themselves."

And the Third Form yelled approval.

CHAPTER 6.

A Lesson in Self-Denial.

"WALLY, Blake—"

Blake raised his hand.

"Silence for the chair!"

"But you are not chairman, deah boy—"

"Well, I hereby elect and appoint myself chairman of the meeting," said Blake. "I suppose that's enough for you."

"But—"

"Don't cavil, Gussy!"

"I am not cavilling. But—"

"Shut up, then!" said Blake. "Now, I think it's really a good idea to have different turns done by the different studies. Of course, the Terrible Three are pretty certain to make a terrible hash of it—"

"Yaas, wathah! I quite agree with you there."

"And Figgins & Co. will muck up their turn—"

"Most-likely," agreed Digby.

"So it really falls to Study No. 6 to pull the whole thing out of the fire," said Blake thoughtfully.

"Hear, hear!" said Herries.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"From a sense of duty to the House," said Blake, "we must do our best. Under the circs., as Gussy says, every member of the study ought to pass a sort of self-denying ordinance, and make up his mind to play for the good of the game and not on his own bat."

"Right ho!" said Herries.

"I hope you chaps agree with me," said Blake, looking round.

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"Quite!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Very well! Now, Gussy was thinking of doing a tenor solo."

"I wegard that as a jolly good ideah. I could do 'Let Me Like a Soldier Fall,' or 'Mein Lieber Schwan,' fwom Lohengwin."

"It would be enough to make a low 'un grin, or a high 'un, for that matter," Digby commented.

"If Dig is goin' to talk like a silly ass—"

"I think that self-denial is the thing," said Blake firmly. "Gussy ought to deny himself, for the general good; so tenor solos are barred!"

"Hear, hear!" said Digby and Herries very heartily.

"You uttah asses!"

"Play the game!" said Blake. "You agreed to the self-denial idea, and you can't back out of it now."

"But weally—"

"Order! I'm surprised at you, Gussy!"

"I am very much surprised!" said Digby solemnly.

"You fwightful asses!"

"Is it agreed unanimously that we bar tenor solos?" asked the chairman.

"Yes, rather!"

"I do not agwee—"

"You are in a minority, and you have to kow-tow," said Blake severely. "Now, as to Digby's wheeze of imitations of—"

"Weally, Blake—"

"Order! As to Digby's wheeze of giving imitations of celebrated actors, I think that that will fall flat."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Very likely!" agreed Herries, in a thoughtful way. Digby turned red.

"Look here!" he began hotly.

"Order! Imitations of actors have been done to death. And besides, how many actors have you seen? Besides, the fellows haven't seen them, and they won't know whether the imitations are any good or not."

"I think—"

"You agreed to the self-denying wheeze," said Blake obstinately. "I think that imitations of famous actors ought to be barred. But I leave it to the meeting."

"Barred!" said Herries and D'Arcy, with great unanimity.

"You chaps don't know a good idea when you see it," said Digby, with a snort.

"Now, Herries has a wheeze of bringing Towser on the stage—"

"Jolly good dodge! Don't you think so?" said Herries.

"Bai Jove, I wegard it as a wotten ideah! Towsah has no wegard for a fellow's twosahs. I object!"

"Yes, rotten!" said Digby cheerfully.

Herries sniffed.

"If you fellows want to bar Towser—" he began.

"Self-denial is the order of the day," said Blake firmly. "Chaps have to give up rotten ideas for the general good."

"But it isn't a rotten idea," said Herries rather excitedly.

"It's a jolly good idea. I know it will bring the house down. Towser—"

"Wats!"

"Towser is a—"

"Well, I leave it to the meeting," said Blake resignedly.

"Towser or not? Yes or no."

"No!" said Digby and Arthur Augustus simultaneously.

"There you are, Herries."

"Oh, rats!" grunted Herries.

"But we must do somethin', you know," said Arthur Augustus thoughtfully. "If we can't have a tenah solo, I am willin' to—"

"I'm coming to that," said Blake graciously. "Now we've cleared the ground, so to speak, I'll tell you my idea."

Blake's generous offer was not received with the gratitude he might have expected. In fact, three separate and distinct glares were bestowed upon him by his usually faithful retainers.

"Oh!" said Digby, with a sniff.

"Weally, Blake—"

"Look here!" began Herries.

Blake rapped on the table.

"Silence for the chair!" he said severely. "Now, my idea is this. We've got to concentrate the whole strength of the study upon a single turn."

"Well, that's not a bad scheme; but—"

"I've got it all mapped out in my mind," said Blake, in an airy way. "All you fellows have got to do is to back me up."

"Oh, that's all, is it?" said Herries, in rather a warlike tone.

"Yes, that's all," said Blake firmly. "My idea is that one fellow—me, you know—should give a song and dance—"

"What!"

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"And you three chaps can come in as chorus."

"Bai Jove!"

"It will simply knock them," said Blake, with growing enthusiasm. "I shall give practically the whole show myself, and you chaps will chip in as chorus when required. It will go with a bang."

The three juniors looked at Blake. If looks could have annihilated, Jack Blake would have disappeared from the earthly globe at that moment. But he hardly noticed the looks of his chums. He was very keen on his idea.

"Perhaps a couple of songs would be better," he said, in a reflective way. "I will manage to work in some chorus work in each, so that you fellows can have a show. And when I am doing my dance, you fellows can wave your hands and so on, to keep time, or something of that sort."

"Can we?" said Digby, in a deadly tone.

"Certainly!" said Blake, with magnanimity. "I shouldn't think of leaving you all out in the cold. I'll think out the songs at once."

"You needn't trouble," said Digby warmly. "You see, this is where the self-denying dodge comes in strong. I think your idea's rotten!"

"Same here!" said Herries, with much frankness.

"Simply piffle!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Now, look here, don't play the giddy goat!" remonstrated Blake. "We've got to give some sort of a show, and I've suggested a good one."

"Put it to the vote," said Herries.

"Rats! As chairman, I have a casting vote, and I cast it in favour of my idea," said Blake obstinately. "I hope you fellows are not going to muck up a really ripping idea, out of personal conceit."

"Weally, Blake—"

"Now about the songs."

"Blow the songs!" shouted Herries. "Look here, Blake—"

"Now, don't talk out of your hat, Herries!"

"I'm going to give my imitations," said Digby.

"I'm goin' to give my tenah solo."

"I'm going to bring Towser on."

Blake rose to his feet.

"If you fellows are going to talk tosh, the sooner this meeting breaks up, the better," he said. "I'll select the songs and begin to practise them, and when you chaps are in a more reasonable frame of mind you can come in and practise the chorus."

"You uttah ass!"

"Look here—"

"Oh, bump him!" roared Herries, jumping up. "We shan't get anything settled till that silly ass is bumped."

"Heah, heah!"

Blake backed away.

"Look here!" he exclaimed. "As chairman of this meeting—"

"Bump him!"

"You silly asses! You—ow! Oh! Yarcooh!"

Bump!

Three pairs of hands had fastened upon Blake, and he was whirled off the floor and bumped down upon the carpet with a force that made the dust rise from it in little clouds.

"Ow! Yow!"

Bump!

"Yarcooh!"

"There!" said Digby. "Now, you chaps, come and talk it over with me in the common-room, and when Blake is willing to be reasonable he can come and talk it over."

"Yaas, wathah!"

And Herries, Digby, and D'Arcy walked out of the study. Blake remained sitting on the carpet, gasping for breath.

"Ow—ow—ow!"

The meeting of Study No. 6 had broken up, and the leader of that famous study was feeling very much as if he had been broken up, too.

CHAPTER 7. Getting Ready.

THE next day there was but one topic among the juniors of St. Jim's, and that was Tom Merry's music-hall. Even football faded into comparative insignificance.

St. Jim's had lately suffered from bad weather and thick mists, which had considerably interfered with the usual football practice, and the juniors had greeted a return of fine weather and sunshine with great keenness to play the game again. But football had to hide its diminished head now. Fellows in the Fourth and the Shell were thinking of their intended turns which were to astonish and dazzle St. Jim's twice nightly for a week, and incidentally to "rope in" huge sums for the benefit of the Junior Cricket Club.

The committee of ways and means had plenty to do. They thought the matter over—to a great extent in the class-room—which brought them to grief sometimes. Form-masters, with no mental capacity beyond the borders of irregular verbs, did not understand the importance of the idea. When Tom Merry planned out the programme instead of working out problems set on the blackboard by Mr. Linton, that gentleman waxed wroth, and descended, Jove-like, in thunder. When Arthur Augustus, in the Fourth Form-room, commanded to construe Caesar, unexpectedly and absent-mindedly broke out into "Take a Pair of Sparkling Eyes," Mr. Lathom was amazed and indignant, and he gave D'Arcy two hundred lines upon the spot.

Fellows began to rehearse everywhere.

Going along the passages, masters and prefects would be startled by top notes or sonorous lines from Shakespeare proceeding from mysterious corners. Fellows would rehearse at one another in couple and threes, everybody spouting and nobody listening. The effect was sometimes quite curious. When D'Arcy was practising "Take a Pair of Sparkling Eyes" in Study No. 6, and Blake was conning over a thrilling recitation which he was getting ready as an encore, and Digby was practising interpretations and imitations of famous actors, then Study No. 6 became a fair representation of what Babel must have been like when confusion of tongues fell upon the inhabitants thereof.

"Take a Pair of Sparklin' Eyes!" sang Arthur Augustus.

"Into the valley of death!" roared Blake.

"I'll have my bo-hond! Speak not against my bo-hond!" bawled Digby, in the well-known voice of a great London actor. "I've sworn an oath that I will have my bo-hond!"

"Weally, you fellows—"

"You chaps like to see Towser go through his tricks?" asked Herries, looking into the study.

And Blake, Digby, and D'Arcy ceased rehearsing for a moment, to glare at Herries, and say things to him.

Never had there been such an outbreak of rehearsing at St. Jim's, and it was almost as bad in the New House as the School House.

Meanwhile, Tom Merry was much exercised in his mind as to the place in which the music-hall was to begin its twice-nightly performance.

As a rule, the juniors gave amateur dramatic entertainments in the Form-room, or on rare and special occasions they had been allowed to use the Lecture-hall.

But the Lecture-hall, of course, could not be booked for the evenings of a whole week, and it was extremely doubtful whether the Head would give permission for a music-hall entertainment there, in any case.

The Form-room was barred, for much the same reason. Although the juniors generally had the use of it, it was not always free to them, and besides, if the performances were at all noisy, they were liable to interruption by irate masters and prefects. The roars of applause which Tom Merry & Co. confidently anticipated would probably disturb the seniors in their studies, to say nothing of the masters. And unpleasant prefects like Knox would take a pleasure in coming down on the juniors and spoiling the show, if they had even the shadow of a pretext.

For these reasons, and others, Tom Merry decided, after much earnest cogitation that the music-hall would have to be outside the school building.

There was a meeting of the committee to decide exactly where, and there were many suggestions, few of them of a practicable nature.

Blake's suggestion of the loft over the stables was unanimously frowned upon. Figgins thought that an al fresco show would be ripping, but the uncertain state of the weather forbade anything of that sort. It would be no joke, as Monty Lowther explained, if a heavy downpour of rain interrupted the proceedings. It would doubtless be a very comic effect, but not quite the comic effect they were after.

"What about the wood-shed?" said Manners, after long thought.

Figgins sniffed a little.

"Rather a come-down for the amateur dramatists of the school, performing in a giddy wood-shed!" he said.

"And the wood and things would be in the way," said Blake.

"We could get Taggles to move them," said Tom Merry thoughtfully. "The wood-shed is really a big building, if the partition is taken down, and the stuff stacked there is taken out."

"Taggy won't do it."

"He will if he's paid for it. Taggy will do anything but give up drink, if you pay him," said Monty Lowther.

"Something in that," said Figgins, with a grin. "We shall want seats, you know."

"Planks arranged over boxes and things," said Tom Merry. "It will be as good as the seats we get in the circus that come to Rylecombe."

"We really want something a bit better got up than a travelling circus," Blake observed.

"But we can't get it, you know, so we'd better be satisfied with what we can get," said Tom Merry. "We must take things as we find 'em. We can hang the walls of the shed inside with chintz or something, and make it look quite home-like. The seats can be covered with something or other, and we can decorate the rafters somehow or other, and shove something of some sort on the brick floor, somehow."

"Very lucid, I must say," commented Blake. "What I admire about Tom Merry is his splendid grasp of detail."

"Well, it's no good making difficulties," said Merry warmly. "We've got to give the show somewhere, and we've already arranged to begin on Monday, for a week's run. It's getting to be rather pressing about the location."

"Quite so, but—"

"Hands up for the wood-shed, gentlemen!" said Manners.

Four hands went up, and Jack Blake's followed after a moment. He had no better suggestion to make, and he gracefully yielded to the opinion of the majority.

"Very well," he said. "There will have to be a lot of alterations carried out, that's all. Suppose Taggles cuts up rusty?"

"We shall have to manage him. We shall want a hall-porter, you know, on the nights, and we can have Taggles, and give him half-a-crown an evening out of the proceeds. I expect the takings will be very large."

"Enormous!" said Figgins.

"All expenses will be paid, and there will be a handsome profit left over for the junior cricket club," said Tom Merry. "We may as well strike the iron while it's hot, and go and see Taggles about it now."

"Good egg!"

And the committee of ways and means strolled down to the lodge of the school porter. Taggles was sitting in his little window, with his pipe at his mouth, and a glass of hot gin-and-water just out of sight. He looked at the juniors with a far from amiable expression, and their gentle smiles did not tend to remove his distrust. Taggles was generally on ragging terms with the juniors, and when they were specially nice he feared some jape. Like the Trojan gentleman of old, who feared the Greeks when they came with gifts in their hands, Taggles did not trust wholly to appearances.

"Good-evening," said Tom Merry genially.

"Hevenin'," said Taggles.

"Been a really nice day."

"If it wasn't for the rain, ho yes!" said Taggles sarcastically. Tom Merry had forgotten the rain in his determination to be nice and civil to the school porter. "Wot larks are you hup to now, Master Merry?"

"My dear Taggles—"

"None of your soft sawder with me, Master Merry," said Taggles. "I ain't to be took in."

"Of course not, Taggles," said Blake, quite warmly. "Let me see the chap who tries to take you in, and I'll—I'll—"

"Punch his head," said Figgins.

"Yes, rather."

Taggles sniffed.

"The fact is, Taggles, we want you to help us," said Tom Merry confidentially. "I dare say you've heard that we're giving a music-hall performance soon, twice nightly, after the style of the London Empires. They forgot to put up an Empire when they built St. Jim's—"

"It was an oversight," remarked Monty Lowther.

"So we want you to help us out. When we give the performance, we want a really able, reliable man—a man respected by the whole school—to stand at the door for us, and we are going to allow him half-a-crown a night out of the takings."

"Ho!" said Taggles.

"We thought of you," said Manners.

Taggles was pleased. He could not help being a little pleased at being selected for this honourable and lucrative post.

"Ho!" he said again, a little more amiably.

"And we want to use the wood-shed for the performance," Tom Merry explained, coming to the point after the ice had been thus delicately broken.

"Ho!" said Taggles, in another key.

"Yes. Of course, we'll help clear it out, and stack the things somewhere else," said Monty Lowther. "We shouldn't think of giving you a lot of trouble."

"Rather not!"

"Ho!" said Taggles, with a shake of the head. "It would be impossible, young gents. I'd like to let you 'ave my wood-shed, but the things couldn't be stacked anywhere else. Bless you, there's piles of faggots, and the lawn-mower, and the hose, and the rakes and spades, and the garden-roller—"

"We could move them all out for you, Taggy. We'd stow

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them in the stables, or the yard, or somewhere—anywhere you like, in fact."

"It'd be worth ten bob to any man, to take all that trouble," said Taggles meditatively.

The juniors exchanged glances.

"We'll make it ten bob," said Tom Merry, after a pause.

"And arf-a-crown a night for keepin' the door," said Taggles reflectively. "Of course, I shall 'ave to find the time somehow."

"Done!" said Tom Merry. "Half-a-crown a night out of the takings."

"Ho!" said Taggles, who was evidently a business man. "Suppose there ain't any takings, Master Merry?"

Master Merry laughed confidently.

"My dear Taggy, the money will simply roll in. We are expecting to net a handsome sum for the Junior Cricket Club."

"Quite certain the money will come in, sir?"

"Not the slightest doubt about it."

"Then you won't mind agreeing to pay the arf-crown in advance, afore the takings come in?" suggested Taggles.

"Ahem!"

"You see, it's all the same to you, as the takings are so certain to come in," Taggles explained.

"Ye-es," said Tom Merry; "of course. Look here, we'll place the money in Kildare's hands, to be handed to you whether we score or not. That all right?"

"That's all right," said Taggles.

"Then you'll begin clearing out the wood-shed at once?"

"Yes, suttingly," said Taggles. "Ten bob, I think you said."

"Ahem!"

"My principles," said Taggles, "is cash down. I know you young gents mean well, and I'd trust you nearly as far as I can see you, but boys 'ave a way of spendin' their cash and not 'avin' any left. I've noticed that. I was a boy myself once."

"Were you?" exclaimed Monty Lowther, in astonishment. "It must have been a jolly long time ago, Taggy!"

"Shut up, Monty!" said Tom Merry warningly. "Don't mind him, Taggy; Lowther can't help being funny. Shell out, you chaps, and raise the tenner."

The shelling-out of the juniors realised, unfortunately, only the sum of three shillings and sixpence. Tom Merry handed it to Taggles.

"You'll take that on account, Taggy," he said, "and—"

"Certainly, Master Merry," said Taggles, transferring the odd collection of coppers and small silver coins to his trousers pockets; "and—"

"And you'll begin clearing out the wood-shed—"

"Suttingly."

"Immediately, I suppose?" hinted Tom Merry.

"Immediately I get the other six-and-six," said Taggles cheerfully.

And Tom Merry & Co. smiled a sickly smile.

"Let's go and look for Gussy," said Blake.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, with great foresight, had already telegraphed to his noble parent for a fiver, and it had arrived, and D'Arcy, with his usual courtesy, was willing to place the whole of it at the disposal of the Music-Hall Committee of Ways and Means. In ten minutes Taggles was satisfied, and the committee were satisfied, too. The work of preparing the St. Jim's Empire had begun.

CHAPTER 8.

Music Hath Charms.

AFTER morning lessons on the following day there was a rush of juniors to see how the new Empire was getting on. Tom Merry & Co. surveyed the interior of the wood-shed with considerable satisfaction.

Taggles had kept his word. The lumber had been cleared out, and the partition had been taken down, and there was, as D'Arcy expressed it, quite a spacious hall. The erection of benches for the audience had commenced, and Taggles had already placed the trestles which were to support the stage.

"Bai Jove!" said Arthur Augustus, surveying the scene through his eyeglass. "I wathah think this will be weally wippin', you know! We can wig up a curtain acwoss there, weady to waise and lowah, and a gween-woom behind, you know. And we shall be able to seat sixty people, at least."

"Quite enough for one house," said Tom Merry. "We've got a second audience for the second performance, as we're having it twice nightly."

"Yes, rather!"

"What about the orchestra?" said Figgins.

"My hat! I'd forgotten the orchestra! Of course, we shall have to have an orchestra," said Tom Merry, with a wrinkle in his brow. "Music-halls always have orchestras. It wouldn't be a music-hall without music."

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"Wathah not!"

"Every chap who can play an instrument will have to keep off the stage, and go into the orchestra," Tom Merry decided. "Kerr plays the violin—"

"I'm willing," said Kerr. "We can't have the piano out here, and we must get all the instruments we can."

"Blake plays the banjo—"

"But I'm giving a turn on the stage," said Blake. "I'm going to give a series of comic songs, and Herries and D'Arcy and Dig are coming in as chorus."

"Wats!"

"No fear!" said Dig, with emphasis.

"Now, look here, you fellows, it's a question of the general good, and individuals have to sacrifice themselves," urged Blake.

"Exactly," said Tom Merry. "I quite agree with Blake, so far as that goes. He's going to sacrifice himself, and stick in the orchestra with a banjo instead of going on the stage."

"I—I didn't mean that—" began Blake.

"I think it's a good idea," said Digby. "After all, your turn wouldn't have amounted to very much, you know, Blake."

Blake glared.

"Wouldn't it, you ass—"

"Pwobably not," said D'Arcy. "Besides, you play the banjo all wight, and we simply must have an orchestwah."

"Herries plays the cornet," said Monty Lowther, with a wink at the roof. "We want to make the orchestra as strong as possible—"

Herries shook his head decidedly.

"I'm giving a turn on the stage with Towser!" he said.

"Weally, Hewwies, you know that I have always objected to Towser. He has no respect whatevah for a fellow's twousahs—"

"I'm giving a turn with him—"

"Can't be did," said Tom Merry. "We want you in the orchestra, Herries. It's your own fault, for being such a— a splendid cornet player."

"Well, if you put it like that—" said Herries.

"I do," said Tom Merry solemnly.

And the rest of the music-hall committee backed Tom Merry up on that point, with singular heartiness. Like Brutus of old, who did not love Caesar less, but loved Rome more, they did not so much want Herries's cornet in the orchestra, as they wanted to keep Towser off the stage.

"Oh, all right," said Herries. "I don't mind! I want to make the thing a success; and a cornet solo will be worked in for me, of course."

"Ahem!"

"I shall want a solo."

"Well, last item on the programme, perhaps," said Tom Merry.

"Good!" exclaimed Monty Lowther. "We shall want some dodge for getting the audience out quick, to make room for the second house—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You ass!" said Herries. "If you put it like that—"

"Oh, don't mind Lowther!" said Tom Merry hastily.

"He was born funny."

"Only got to look at him to see that," grunted Herries.

"Why, you ass—" began Lowther.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Order, my sons!" said Tom Merry chidingly. "We didn't come here to rag. It's settled that Herries goes into the orchestra, and we give him a solo if the audience will stand it—I mean, we give him a solo. We shall have three instruments—banjo, violin, and cornet. I think the orchestra will be all right. You three chaps will have to do some rehearsing together, so as to play in tune as much as possible."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"We must get carpet or something laid down here, and curtains, and so on," said Tom Merry thoughtfully. "We can hire them in Rylcombe. We shall have to be prepared to shell out the cash, of course; can't run a thing like this without a little initial expense. The takings at the box-office will cover the expenses, and leave a handsome sum for the cricket club."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"We had better get the tickets for the reserved seats printed at once," said Blake. "The sooner we sell them off the better."

"Standing room at the back, a penny a time," said Manners; "that will suit the fags. We can't have any boxes—"

"We ought to have a Woyal box," said D'Arcy. "Ewvery self-respectin' theatwe has a Woyal box."

"Can't be did!"

"Suppose the Head comes—"

"Ha, ha! The Head isn't likely to come. Never mind the boxes—"

"I considah that we ought to have a Woyal box."
 "Oh, rats! I'll buzz down to Rylcombe on my bike before dinner, and order the curtains and stuff," said Tom Merry. "You three fellows can practise music together. Better—"
 "Better practise in Kerr's study," said Lowther.
 "Rats!" said Figgins promptly. "Practice ought to be done in the School House."
 "Now, look here, Figgins—"
 "I tell you—"

"You can practise here in the wood-shed," said Tom Merry pacifically.

And that was settled. Herries fetched his cornet, and Kerr his violin, and Blake his banjo, and then the other fellows left rather hurriedly. The orchestra began to practise. Kerr was a good player, and he would elicit wonderful music from his violin; and Blake rather prided himself upon his gift as a banjo artist; while Herries had no doubts whatever of his powers on the cornet.

But the trio taken together did not make for harmony. It was pretty clear that they would want concerted practice. Kerr offered to conduct, and give the other fellows some tips about keeping in time; but his offer was received with rudeness, and ingratitude.

"If you think you can give me tips—" began Herries.
 "If you want a thick ear—" said Blake.
 "But somebody will have to conduct the orchestra," said the unhappy Kerr, whose musical ears had been tortured for the last ten minutes. "You fellows must really listen to reason—"

"Haven't heard any yet to listen to," said Blake gruffly.
 "Still, I don't mind conducting the orchestra while I play the banjo."

"I could conduct, as far as that goes," said Herries.
 "Oh, draw it mild!"
 "Look here, Blake—"
 "Well, let's get on," said Kerr resignedly. "We ought to try to get the overture in tune, anyway. This is a simplified version of the march from 'Carmen,' and it will sound ripping as an overture, if we play it."

"The cornet part will be all right," said Herries.
 Kerr made a grimace.
 He had written out the overture himself from the score, some time before, for violin and piano, on the occasion of some performance in the New House, and he could easily arrange it for violin and cornet, with a chance for Blake's banjo.

But Herries had an idea that the cornet should perform the greater part of it, and Blake was firmly of the opinion that the banjo ought to be audible all the time. Kerr jabbed at the music with his pencil, making many alterations to suit the band. But it was not likely that either of his colleagues would ever be fully satisfied.

After nearly an hour of it, the three juniors were getting excited. The improved version of the music was played by the three, and Kerr, slowing down and speeding up at various times with great skill, tried to keep level with Blake and Herries. But if he succeeded in overtaking the cornet, the banjo lagged behind, and if he slowed down to accommodate the banjo, the cornet would go ahead with powerful blasts. Sometimes, however, Blake would put on speed with the banjo; but these bursts of energy came without adequate warning, and threw the other players into confusion.

"We shall want a lot of practice together," said Kerr, at last.

"You will!" said Herries.
 "My only Aunt Jane!" exclaimed a voice at the door, as Wally looked in. "Is this a private asylum?"
 "Get out!" roared Blake.
 "But what are you up to?" asked D'Arcy minor curiously.

"We're practising."
 "Oh! Is that music?"
 Blake did not deign to answer the question. He strummed upon his banjo, and the cornet and the violin joined in. Wally stared.
 "I didn't know you played Sousa," he remarked.
 The players turned almost purple.
 "Sousa!" yelled Blake. "You utter ass! This is Bizet."
 "Well, you sound busy," said Wally, unconsciously making a pun. "I thought it sounded something like Sousa, and something like Elgar, and something like cats on the tiles."

"You young duffer! Get out!"
 "But what is it?"
 "'Carmen,' you chump!"
 "My only Aunt Jane!" ejaculated Wally, in astonishment. "Is it?"

Blake jumped up, and the fog departed hurriedly. The

orchestra continued their practice till the bell rang for dinner. Blake laid down his banjo.

"You fellows will want a lot of practice yet," he said.
 Herries snorted.
 "Yes, it needs practice, to play while you're strumming on that thing," he assented.
 "Look here, Herries—"
 "Br-r-r-r!" said Herries.
 And the orchestra broke up.

CHAPTER 9.

Wally's Little Joke.

TOM MERRY came in to dinner looking very ruddy and cheerful. His visit to Rylcombe had been quite a success; he had succeeded in hiring the articles required, at a reasonable rate for a week. When they came to the school, the wood-shed was to be fitted up. The goods were to be delivered during the afternoon, and after school the music-hall committee and their many helpers were to set to work.

During afternoon school, much thought was given to the subject. Lines fell in the Shell and Fourth Form-rooms like leaves in Vallombrosa, but little did the enthusiastic Empire-builders care for lines. There was a time, as Blake remarked, when fellows rose above lines.

After school, the work was to go on. First there was a meeting in Tom Merry's study, to discuss the programme, which it was time to settle. Many of the items had been already arranged. Figgins had been gently but firmly persuaded to leave baritone solos alone, and to stick to the clog-dancing.

The praises lavished upon his performances with the clogs quite won him over. Tom Merry said that they wanted to give the audience something really good, so Figgys must really give a clog-dance. Blake said that a good turn would be wanted to buck up the show, considering the piffle that some fellows would give, so Figgys must really give a clog-dance.

Lowther remarked that baritone solos were a drug in the market, and he called upon Figgins to give a clog-dance. Digby observed—with a side glance at Arthur Augustus D'Arcy—that there would probably be rotten solos enough, and that Figgys must really give a clog-dance.

Many opinions were expressed upon the subject; but they all ended the same way, that Figgins must really give a clog-dance.

Figgins was amenable to reason.
 "I dare say you chaps are quite right," he said, "I really think I can give a decent clog-dance, and I feel very much flattered at the way you put it. I'll give a clog-dance with pleasure, and a baritone solo as well."

The committee looked at one another with sickly expressions.

"Ahem!" said Tom Merry.
 But Monty Lowther came to the rescue.
 "Can't give one chap two turns," he said. "The time won't be long enough. We have heaps of performers, and one chap one turn; that's fair."

"Yaas, wathah!"
 "But—" began Figgins.
 "But I'll tell you what," said Tom Merry thoughtfully, "any turn that is very much encored can have a better show in subsequent performances. If a chap goes down well, we give him an extra turn in the second house."

"Good!" said Figgins. "I'm agreeable to that!"
 And so that important point was settled, and the committee breathed again.

"I must remark that Figgay has weally taken a vewy sensible view of the mattah," said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy graciously; "but, of course, there must be some solos. I have always noticed that an audience will simply wise to a good solo. Do you fellows think I ought to give my tenah solo in English, Fwench, or Italian? I can do it in all three if necessary."

"It's not likely to be necessary," remarked Lowther.
 "They'd kill you after the first one."

"Weally, Lowthah—"
 "We don't want serious songs," said Tom Merry. "Audiences are very good-tempered, and they will stand a fellow singing 'Songs of Araby,' and even 'Killarney.' But I don't believe in imposing on an audience's good temper. Audiences are only human, and their feelings ought to be considered."

"Hear, hear!"
 "I can give 'A Pair of Sparklin' Eyes,'" said Arthur Augustus calmly. "Gilbert and Sullivan are always popular, you know. But a tenah solo fwom an Italian opewah would be bound to go down; audiences like things they don't understand. Suppose I give them 'Sono Poeta,' fwom 'La Boheme,' or 'Ora e per sempre,' fwom 'Otello'? Puccini and Verdi are both vewy popular."

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"THE NEW FIRM AT ST. JIM'S."

"You wouldn't add to their popularity," remarked Manners.

"Weally, Mannahs—"

"Above the audience's heads," said Tom Merry. "You see—"

"Then I can give 'Mein Lieber Schwan,' from 'Lohegwin'—"

"German would be too thick."

"Say the 'Flowah Song,' from 'Carmen,' then, in—"

"Too-too-too good, you know."

"My deah chap," said D'Arcy severely. "It is a common mistake to undahwate an audience. I believe the people in front would simply wise to it."

"Or fall down!" murmured Lowther.

"Weally, you ass—"

"Better bar solos altogether, I think," said Figgins.

"Wats!"

"Now, look here, Gussy—"

"I am willin' to sing in English, but I insist upon a solo," said D'Arcy.

"My dear ass—"

"I wefuse to be called an ass."

"A comic song might—"

"I wefuse to sing a comic song. It is beneath my personal dignity as a tenah," said Arthur Augustus. "A fellow must considah his dig."

"Oh, blow your silly dig—"

"Weally, Figgins—"

"I've got an idea," said Lowther. "If Gussy must sing a serious song, let's have a modern one. I know a' ripping one that would suit him, and he's the only chap I know who could do it real justice."

"That sounds pwomisin', I must wemark. I am quite willin' to be weasonable," said Arthur Augustus. "A fellow must stand up for his wights, that's all."

"What's the song?" asked Blake suspiciously.

"Give Me Back My Seven-and-Six," said Lowther seriously.

"My hat!"

"That doesn't sound like a sewious song to me, Lowthah," said Arthur Augustus, turning his eyeglass upon the humorist of the Shell.

"I've seen tears rolling down people's faces when that song was sung, Gussy," said Monty Lowther.

"Bai Jove!"

"I've got the music, too," said Lowther. "The chorus is very taking, and sounds quite—quite operatic, and will suit you splendidly. It goes:

"Give me back my seven-and-six.

Don't you see, I find

I have changed my mind,

Mr. Registrar, hand me back the fee.

I'm going to keep a dog, you see;

So give me back my seven-and-six."

Arthur Augustus fastened a freezing glare upon Monty Lowther.

"Is that a serious song?" he asked.

"Awfully serious," said Monty Lowther. "It's on a serious subject, you know. Chap is going to be married, and recovers at the last minute—"

"You ass—"

"And buys a dog instead."

"You fwabjous ass—"

"It's a ripping song, and will suit your voice splendidly," said Monty Lowther. "A voice like yours ought to be shown off to the best advantage."

"Well, there's somethin' in that."

"And the orchestra will be able to accompany you all right. What sort of a job do you think they would make of the accompaniment to 'Ora e per sempre,' with a banjo, a violin, and a cornet?"

"Yaas, but—"

"We'll all hear you rehearse it, Gussy," said Blake. "In fact, I'm looking forward to it. Bring the music into our study after tea, Lowther."

"Certainly!"

"But weally, Blake—"

"It's settled, old chap. Now let's go and get to work in the wood-shed—I mean the St. Jim's Empire."

"Very well. But—"

"Come on."

And Arthur Augustus was hurried out of the study. The committee made their way to the wood-shed, and Tom Merry pushed at the door. It did not open. He turned the handle again, and pushed harder, but the door did not budge.

"That ass Taggles has locked the place up!" he exclaimed.

"It isn't locked," said Blake, looking at the door. "Something's got in the way—"

"My hat!"

"What's the matter?"

"Look!"

Tom Merry pointed out the head of a screw in the wood-work. There was a general exclamation of wrath.

"Screwed up!"

"Bai Jove! Wally!"

CHAPTER 10.

Floury!

"WALLY!"

"The young bounder!"

"Those Third Form worms!"

The committee raged. While the discussion had been going on in Tom Merry's study, Wally & Co. had evidently improved the shining hour. The door of the wood-shed had been screwed up with a special selection of long and strong screws. "I'll—I'll squash that young rascal!" exclaimed Tom Merry wrathfully. "This is because we won't have fags in the company."

"The awful young wastah!"

"We can get in at the window," said Blake, "and Taggy can come and take out the screws afterwards."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"The window's screwed up, too," said Tom Merry, examining it. "The awful young bounder! It will take hours to get those blessed screws out."

"We'll bump him!"

"The young rotter!"

"We'll raid the Third Form-room—"

"We can do that afterwards," said Tom Merry. "We've got to get the screws out now, and we shall have to tell Taggles to keep an eye on the shed in the future. Buzz off, and collect up all the screwdrivers you can!"

There was no help for it. The juniors hunted for screwdrivers, and four or five were found, and brought upon the scene. Figgins remarked that he would go through some rehearsing while the other fellows were getting the screws out, and Blake and Dig and Herries and Lowther all made the same remark at the same moment. Some of the others had the same thought in their minds; but it did not seem any use to utter it after that. Tom Merry burst into a laugh.

"We'll take it in turns with the screws," he said. "Begin."

And they began.

Wally was rather distinguished as an amateur carpenter; and so far as driving in screws went, he was certainly quite an adept. He had not only driven in the screws with great thoroughness, but he had hammered the tops of them so that it was exceedingly difficult to get any purchase on the screw-driver to unwind them. The juniors laboured upon the screws savagely, and the things they said about Wally were not blessings.

The last remains of daylight faded away, and the juniors were still busy upon those obstinate screws.

"Bai Jove!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, after ten minutes of it, handing his screwdriver to Figgins. "Pway take a turn, deah boy. I wegard this as wotten."

"We'll squash that young imp!"

"We'll pulverise him!"

"I think the door's going at last," said Tom Merry. "The young villain must have put in two dozen at least. My hat!"

The door creaked. The juniors bumped upon it, and the last screws began to jerk out.

"Another shove, and it's open," said Manners.

Bump!

The door flew open at last.

Within, all was darkness. It was deep dusk over St. Jim's by this time, and the remains of the daylight had passed without anything being done for the Empire. The juniors were tired and furious.

"Well, we can rig up the place by candle-light," said Tom Merry. "Some of you buzz off and get bicycle-lamps."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"There are some candles here, too," said Tom Merry. "We can light them to go on with. Mind you don't tumble over anything."

"Pway be careful, deah boys."

The juniors trod carefully into the darkened wood-shed. But they were not prepared for a cord stretched across the floor a few feet inside the doorway.

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Tom Merry caught his foot in it, and plunged wildly forward.

"Ow! Look out!"

"Bai Jove! Ooop!"

"Yaroooh!"

Crash!

Something, evidently suspended from the ceiling and in connection with the taut cord across the floor, crashed down upon the juniors as they stumbled forward, and burst.

A thick white cloud filled the air, and the juniors began to cough and sneeze violently.

"Grrrrrrrooo!"

"Yowowowowoooooh!"

"Garr-r-r-rah!"

"Bai Jove!"

"Flour!" yelled Tom Merry. "Ow! Ooooo!"

"It's a b-b-b-booby trap!"

"Groooooh!"

Monty Lowther, who had not yet entered, struck a match. The flame flickered upon a startling scene. Tom Merry and Blake and D'Arcy were sprawling upon the floor of the woodshed, and they were simply smothered with flour.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Lowther.

D'Arcy sat up.

"You frightful ass! What are you cacklin' at?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Gwoooooh!"

"Ow! I'm ch-chook-choking!"

Lowther yelled. The aspect of the three juniors was decidedly funny. But it did not seem at all funny to the victims. They staggered to their feet, white as snow from head to foot, and sputtered out flour. Flour was all over them, from head to foot. Flour was in their hair, and their eyes, and their mouths, and their collars. They looked like ghosts in the dimness of the woodshed.

"Bai Jove! The young wottah! Ow!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"There's nothing funny in this, you ass!" yelled Blake.

"Ha, ha, ha! You look a sight!" shrieked Lowther.

"Wally must have spent a couple of bob on that flour. The young boulder! Ha, ha, ha!"

"You silly ass!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"If it's so jolly funny, you can have some of it!" roared Blake, and he rushed at Monty Lowther and clasped him round the neck, and hugged him as if he were very fond of him indeed.

"Yaroooh!" yelled Monty Lowther, yelling in quite a different manner. The humour of the situation seemed quite lost upon him now. "Ow! Gerroff! Yowp! Stop it! Draggimoff!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled Blake. "Have some more! Wally must have spent a couple of bob on this flour!"

"Gerroooooh! Gerroff!"

"And you can have a bob's worth of it!"

"Bai Jove, serve you wight, Lowthah, you ass!" gasped D'Arcy. "Bai Jove, my clothes are quite ruined, you know! It's simply howwid!"

"There!" gasped Blake, leaving the unhappy Lowther when he had rubbed off a good half of the flour upon the humorist of the Shell. "Is that just as funny?"

"Yow! You silly ass! Yow!"

Taggles came through the dimness towards the woodshed. He gave quite a jump at the sight of the ghostly figures.

"My heye, it's the gin again!" he muttered. "I knew I didn't orter 'ave 'ad that seventh glass. It must be the gin!"

"Taggles, deah boy!"

"It's his g-g-ghost!" gasped Taggles.

"You uttah ass!"

"My heye," gasped Taggles, realising that it was D'Arcy, "you shouldn't go for to get yourself up like that, Master D'Arcy, to frighten a honest man!"

"You fathead, do you think I did it on purpose!" howled D'Arcy. "You have allowed the fags to lay a wotten booby twap in this shed!"

"And a booby was caught in it!" grinned Digby.

"I wegard you as an ass, Dig! I wegard you as an un-utewable, unspeakable ass!"

Tom Merry gave a snort.

"We shall have to get this stuff off!" he growled. "You fellows can get the things into the shed, while I go and clean up. Taggles, if you see any fags near this shed again, you're to kill 'em on sight, do you hear?"

"Yes, Master Merry," said Taggles, with a rumbling chuckle.

"What are you cackling at, Taggles, you ass?"

"Nothin', Master Merry. Haw, haw, haw! But you do look funny, you know. Haw, haw, haw!"

"You uttah ass!"

"Haw, haw, haw!"

Taggles was still chuckling when the floury juniors made their way towards the School House to clean off the flour. In the lighted doorway of the School House, a crowd of fags had gathered in evident anticipation. There was a roar as the floury heroes appeared in the light.

"Here they come!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"What price the Third now?"

The floury juniors tramped in furiously. They made a rush at the fags, who scattered promptly, and yelled back laughter as they fled.

"Bai Jove, you know, they have weally scored this time, deah boys!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, as he peeled off his floury garments in the Fourth Form dormitory. "Pew-waps—"

"Perhaps what, ass?"

"I decline to be called an ass. Pewwaps it would have been bettah to let the fags into it, aftah all," said Arthur Augustus thoughtfully. "Wally is quite a dangewous young animal when he gets his ears up."

"He'll get his ears pulled for this!" growled Monty Lowther.

"I don't know whethah I could allow you to pull my minah's eahs!"

"I don't see how you could stop it!" said Lowther.

"Weally, Lowthah—"

"Br-r-r-r! Go and eat coke!"

"I wefuse to eat coke, I—"

The door of the dormitory opened, and Wally looked in with a cheerful grin.

"Have you decided to give the Third Form a show?" he queried.

Whiz! A pillow flew towards the door, and Wally slammed it and fled.

CHAPTER 11.

The Programme.

IN spite of all difficulties, and the manful opposition of the Third Form, the preparations for the opening of the St. Jim's Empire proceeded steadily. The woodshed was looking quite unlike its old self before the end of the week. Taggles had agreed to keep his eye on it for a further consideration in the way of tips, and he had even moved his mastiff's kennel to the shed in order to keep away intruders. Wally's efforts in that direction had to be suspended to some extent, but the scamp of the Third was still on the warpath, and the Committee of Ways and Means had to be on their guard.

Inside, the woodshed was growing quite palatial. The floor was covered with hired carpet, and rows of chairs and benches had been arranged to seat an audience of at least fifty. The front seats were numbered and reserved; the back seats, cheaper, were unreserved, and there the audience would be expected to sit tight. Behind the seats was a space for standing room, which the committee agreed unanimously would be quite good enough for the fags, if they came.

The stage was really a triumph. Wooden trestles had been arranged, and boards were laid across them for a flooring, and the flooring was covered with linoleum. The wings were screened in, and the curtain arranged nicely, and it was quite possible to pull it up, and lower it, without a hitch. Which was rather a record in school theatricals.

Meanwhile, the rehearsals went on incessantly.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, being solemnly assured on all sides that his magnificent tenor voice was specially suited to that touching song, "Give Me Back My Seven-and-Six," agreed to sing it; on the condition that if he had an encore, he should sing something really operative. To that the committee agreed: on the principle that if the audience encored D'Arcy, they would deserve all they got.

When the stage was finished, on Friday evening, the juniors surveyed it with pardonable pride. If it was trodden upon too recklessly, there was a perceptible tremor in it; but Tom Merry cautioned his company to be careful.

"Better test it by stamping on it," Herries suggested.

"Might go through," said Monty Lowther. "Better leave well alone."

"But what about Figgins's clog-dance?" said Kerr. "That will give the stage a bit of a shake, you know."

"Well, we could cut that out."

"Could we?" said Figgins unpleasantly.

"Last item on the programme, then," said Lowther blandly. "If the stage goes through after the performance is over, it won't matter so much."

"You ass!"

"Oh, rot!" said Tom Merry. "The stage is strong enough. I think we'd better have a full dress rehearsal here to-morrow afternoon, instead of the footer. We've got to make sure of getting the bizney in working order. By the

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way, I think I'll put on my gramophone for one turn. Gramophones are popular now."

"Good! Gramophone turn first," said Blake. "Nobody wants to be first turn. Something rousing on the 'phone will start the show beautifully, and bring in the audience—like the electric orchestra in a circus. Gussy can come second."

"The orchestra's getting in tune now, too," said Kerr. "I really think we can play together without making anybody shudder."

"Time we got the bills out, too," said Tom Merry; "and we've got to sell the tickets. I've had some offers already. The tickets will be delivered after tea to-day, and we can go round the place selling them."

"Yaas, wathah!"

And after tea that day the St. Jim's fellows gathered round the notice-board in the school hall to read the announcement of the opening of the St. Jim's Empire.

It was a large sheet, written out in red and black by Tom Merry, with the assistance of the committee.

NOTICE!

On Monday, the St. Jim's Empire will open its doors for a Refined and High-class Music-hall Entertainment, for the run of a week.
Twice Nightly!

Splendid Attractions! Corruscations of all the Talents!

The Principal Items of the Programme will be:

1. "War March of the Priests" (Mendelssohn)—
Gramophone Solo.
2. Song, "Give Me Back My Seven-and-Six"—
A. A. D'Arcy, Esq.
3. Clog-Dance G. Figgins.
4. Humorous Recitations and Imitations Arthur Digby.
5. Comic Sketch, "The Sixth-Form Greek Play"—
T. Merry, M. Lowther, H. Manners.
6. Territorial Song, "What's the Matter with England?"—
H. Noble.
7. Song, "The Widow Moriarty" G. Reilly.
8. Cornet Solo, "Alice, Where Art Thou?" G. Herries.
9. Topical Song, "Who'll Stick the Stamps?" Fatty Wynn.
10. God Save the King The Orchestra.

TWICE NIGHTLY! TWICE NIGHTLY!
TWICE NIGHTLY!

Roll up in your Thousands! Roll up in your Millions!
Roll up in your Motor-Cars!

Tickets: Reserved Seats, Stalls, 2s.; Pit, 1s. Unreserved
Seats, 6d. Standing room, 1d.

Tickets may be had of the Committee, No. 1, in the Shell
Passage, and at the Doors.

TWICE NIGHTLY! TWICE NIGHTLY!
TWICE NIGHTLY!

The committee surveyed that poster with great satisfaction. It attracted a great deal of notice in St. Jim's. Fellows of all Forms stopped to read it and chuckle.

Mr. Raiton, the Housemaster of the School House, read it and smiled. Perhaps he did not think that the run of a week would come to pass; but he had no objections to make to the inauguration of the St. Jim's Empire, evidently, for he said nothing upon the subject.

Some of the fellows found fault with the programme.

Lefevre, of the Fifth, who had offered his services free, with a splendid bass solo from Handel, which would have taken him twenty minutes to deliver, sniffed when he read the programme. Levison, who had volunteered a conjuring turn, snorted. Many other fellows, whose generous offers had been unavoidably declined, expressed the opinion that it was all rot.

But the committee went their way smilingly.

When the bundle of tickets arrived from the printers, the sale commenced. If any of the tickets remained unsold, it would not be for want of manifold efforts on the part of the committee.

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Kildare's study was visited first. Kildare had Darrel and Rushden, of the Sixth, to tea with him when the committee presented themselves. Tom Merry knocked at the door, and five juniors marched cheerfully into the captain's study. Kildare met them with an inquiring stare.

"Can you spare a minute, Kildare?" asked Tom Merry. "Well, no, as a matter of fact, I can't," said Kildare politely. "Shut the door after you."

"Ahem—"

"Good-bye!"

"Ahem—"

"The fact is, Kildare—" began Blake.

"You see, deah boy—"

"Dry up, Gussy! I'm going to explain to Kildare."

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—"

"Order! You see, Kildare, we're starting an Empire at St. Jim's. You remember what Mr. Chamberlain said, about all patriotic Britons rallying to the support of the Empire—"

"You young ass," said Kildare, grinning, "he wasn't referring to that kind of an empire!"

"Well, I suppose one empire's as good as another," said Tom Merry, "and we have all British talent in our show, you know, so I think it can justly be described as a British Empire."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Some of the items will be really good—"

"Yaas, wathah! I'm doin' a solo—"

"Dry up, Gussy!"

"I wefuse to dwy up! I am goin' to do 'Mein Lieber Schwan' for an encore, Kildare."

"You're going to do what?" asked Darrel.

"'Mein Lieber Schwan,'" said D'Arcy. "It's a song fwm Wagnah, you know, fwm his opwah 'Lohengwin.' I wanted to give that as my item, but I have agweed to give it as an encore. It's a wippin' song, you know, and it's fwm one of Wagnah's simplest opewahs. Of course, anythin' fwm the 'Wing' would be above the heads of the audience."

"Thank you!" said Kildare gravely.

"Not at all, deah boy. I should not like to come down too heavy on you chaps, who haven't studied good music," said D'Arcy innocently. "'Lohengwin' is a wippin' opewah, and has some wippin' good songs in it. I will give you a specimen, if you like."

"Don't trouble."

"No twouble at all, deah boy." Arthur Augustus cleared his throat. "It's Lohengwin's song to the swan, you know, that he sings when the swan has dwagged in his boat."

"Nun sei bedankt, mein lieber schwan,
Sie durch die weiter Fluth zuruckt."

"Take him away!" said Rushden.

"Weally, Wushden, deah boy—"

"Shut up!" roared Monty Lowther. "You can't expect Kildare to stand it. We've come to sell the tickets, Kildare. You can have—"

"Stalls at two bob!"

"Pit for a bob!"

"Special seats of honour for distinguished members of the audience!" said Tom Merry. "How many stalls do you take Kildare?"

"I'll take one, on condition that you buzz off at once!" said Kildare.

"Good! Cash down, please! One for you, Darrel?"

"Yes," said Darrel, laughing.

"Did you say you'd have one, Rushden?"

"No, I didn't!" said Rushden.

"You can have one, all the same. Stalls two bob!"

"Rats!"

"Pit one shilling!"

"More rats!"

"Standing room a penny!"

"Clear out!"

"Now, look here, Rushden! You can't afford to miss a thing like this, you know. It's the first thing of the sort ever attempted at St. Jim's. I am certain that the St. Jim's Empire will go with a bang!"

"You'll go with a bang if you don't clear out sharp!" said Kildare.

"Ahem!"

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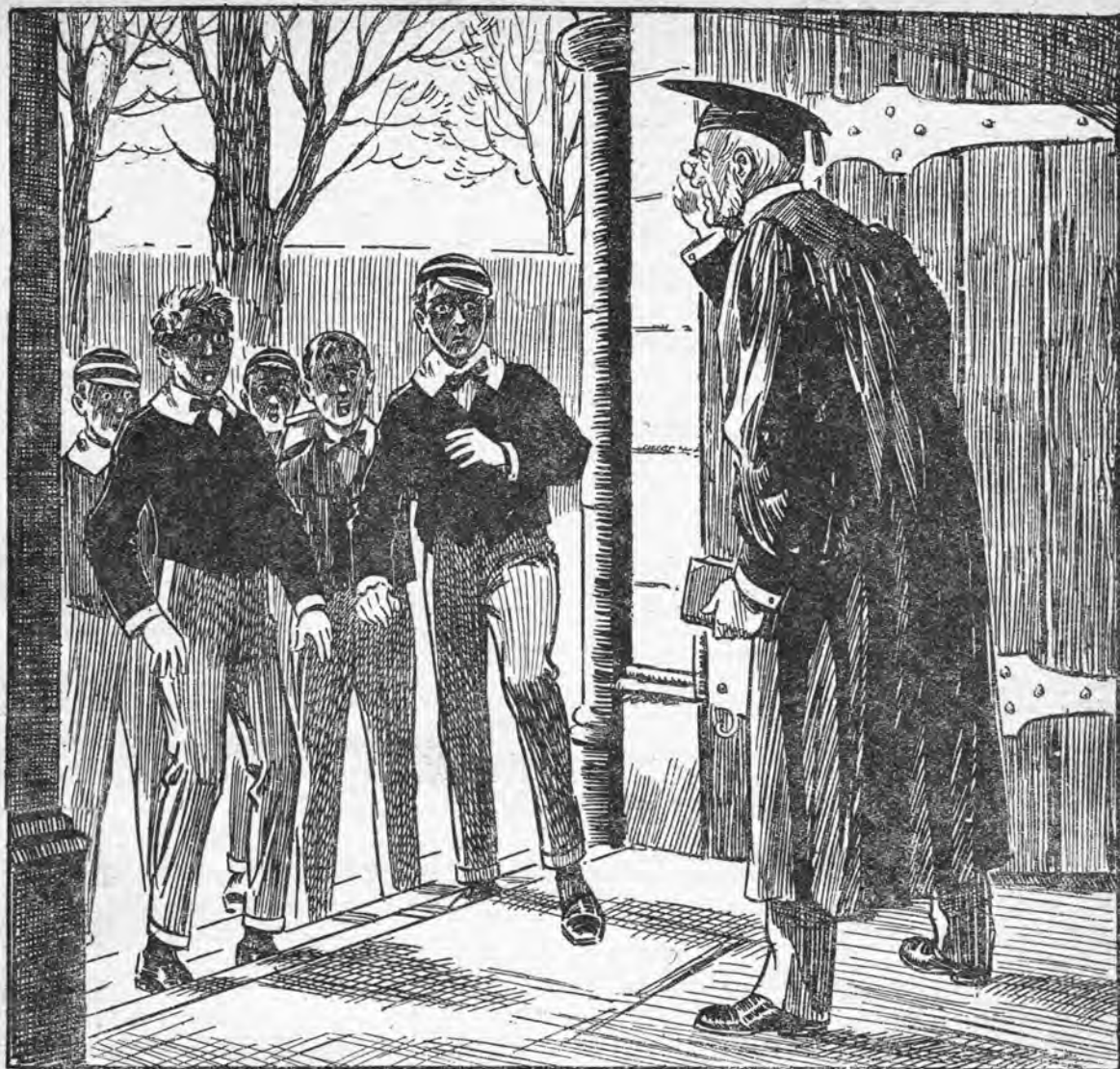
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"Boys!" exclaimed the master severely, gazing at the dismayed committeemen. "How dare you go about in public in this state? Take fifty lines each, and go and clean yourselves at once!" (See Chapter 3.)

"If a chap doesn't take a ticket, we're going to get Gussy to sing a tenor solo outside his study," said Lowther.

"Weally, Lowthah, you uttah ass——"

"Buzz off!" said Rushden.

"Well, after all, we don't want Rushden," said Blake.

"We shall have to be rather particular whom we admit, as we're going to keep the thing select."

"Why, you young sweep!" shouted Rushden, jumping up.

"Come on you chaps!"

And the committee departed rather hurriedly.

CHAPTER 12.

All Serene.

UPON the whole, the sale of the tickets satisfied the committee. They did not go exactly with a bang, but they sold off very well. Many of the seniors bought stalls in a good-tempered, patronising sort of way, but the committee did not care in what way they bought them, so long as they did buy them. That was the main point. If a good many of the tickets remained on the hands of the committee, the juniors consoled themselves with the reflection that there was certain to be a rush at the doors on the opening night. As for the standing room that was sure to be filled. No other Empire ever offered a really splendid entertainment at the low price of one penny. The fags would be bound to come, if only to boo. And the committee were

willing to run the risk of the fags booing, if the fags paid for that privilege.

All the members of the cricket club were bound to come, in support of their own club, and most of the Fourth and the Shell were in the club.

"It'll go like hot cakes!" said Tom Merry.

"Yaas, wathah! But there ought to be some special notice up about comin' in early," said Arthur August. D'Arcy thoughtfully.

"What for?"

"In case any of the fellows should miss the second item on the pwogwamme, you know. It would be wotten for a chap to pay his money, and miss the good part of the performance."

"Oh, that's all right!" said Fatty Wynn cheerfully. "My turn comes at the end."

"I was not thinkin' of your turn, Wynn. I was thinkin' —"

But nobody stayed to hear what the swell of St. Jim's was thinking.

On Saturday there was a rehearsal in the wood-shed, and the juniors were satisfied with it. The lighting arrangements in the Empire had been entrusted to Bernard Glyn, the inventor of the School House. Glyn was an expert in all electrical matters, and he had run a wire to the wood-shed for the supply of electric light from the School House itself.

Glyn arranged the row of Osram lamps along the front of the stage, which were to serve as footlights, and a series of electric lamps round the shed, which gave a brilliant illumination when they were all turned on, and dazzled and fatigued the eyes of the victims after the manner of the brilliant illuminations in real music-halls.

Bernard Glyn had certainly done his work well, and the committee thanked him warmly for it. As Blake remarked, the electric footlights were better than a row of paraffin lamps, like a gang of giddy barn-stormers. Monty Lowther hinted that amateur electrician's work was unreliable, and suggested that it would be rather rotten to be plunged into darkness in the middle of the performance by means of a short circuit, or some dodge of that kind.

"Bai Jove, yaas!" said Arthur Augustus. "I wegard it as vewy thoughtful indeed of Lowthah to think of that! We had bettah have a supply of lamps on the spot, in case they are needed, deah boys!"

"They won't be needed," said Glyn, rather truculently.

"No—no, of course not," said D'Arcy pacifically. "But in case of accidents—"

"There are no accidents when I rig up electric wires," said Glyn.

"Certainly not!" said Tom Merry. "But we'll have the lamps handy in—in case anything should go wrong with the—electric light company."

"Yaas, wathah!"

Tom Merry looked round the glorified wood-shed. Nobody would have recognised it as a wood-shed now. The transformation was really wonderful.

"I weally think we have weason to be satisfied with the place, deah boys!" Arthur Augustus D'Arcy remarked.

"And with the performance we're going to give, too," said Tom Merry.

"Yaas. Some of it, at any wate."

"All excepting the second item seems to me to be good," said Monty Lowther blandly.

"You uttah ass!"

"The orchestra will go almost in tune, I think," said Kerr. "It's a pity we can't have some more instruments. Reilly's offered to make a fourth and play a paper and comb, but we've declined the offer."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Well, it's all serene now," said Tom Merry, and the chums went to bed that night in a satisfied frame of mind. It really looked as if the St. Jim's Empire was going to be a big success. More than half the seats had been sold, and many fellows who had not bought seats had announced their intention of coming.

Whether St. Jim's would furnish audiences sufficient for two shows a night for a week was a question. But Blake was of opinion that fellows would come and come again. If they liked the turns, they would come twice and three times, or four and five times, and changes could always be made in the programme to make something new.

"Yaas, wathah!" Arthur Augustus remarked. "I would give 'Mein Lieber Schwan' or 'Sono Poeta' instead of 'Give Me Back My Seven-and-Six' at any time."

"We shouldn't want you to punish the chaps for coming twice, Gussy," said Digby.

"I wegard that wemark as simply asinine, Dig."

And the Fourth Form went to bed.

It was, as Tom Merry said, all serene now. All was ready for the opening of the Empire, and the next day—Sunday—was a day of rest to the hard-worked committee and their helpers.

On Monday morning there was much suppressed excitement among the juniors. After morning school, Wally dug Tom Merry in the ribs as he came out of the Shell-room.

"So you're going ahead?" he exclaimed.

"Yes," said Tom Merry cheerfully.

"And you're not letting the Third in?"

"Yes, in the audience, if you wash yourselves."

Wally glowered.

"There'll be trouble," he announced.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The Terrible Three laughed, and passed on. Wally thrust his hands deep into his pockets, and tramped away. He joined Jameson and Curly Gibson, Frayne and Fane, of the Third Form, in the quadrangle.

"We've got to make them hop now," said Wally, in a determined voice. "I've given Tom Merry his last chance. Even at this late hour, we'd be willing to take over a fair third part of the show, and make it a success."

"Certainly!" said Jameson. "But if those conceited bounders think they can run it without the Third—"

"They're making a big mistake," said Curly Gibson.

D'Arcy minor nodded emphatically.

"Just so! We've given them fair warning, and it's war to the giddy knife. We're going to muck up the show."

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"How?"

"Anyhow! Instead of giving it twice nightly, I reckon they won't give it once nightly for one night," said Wally. "Tom Merry says it's going with a bang, and we shall have to manage a regular bang for it! Let's put our heads together."

And the young rascals put their heads together, and plotted a plot.

CHAPTER 13.

Quite Unavoidable.

AFTERNOON school, so far as Tom Merry & Co. were concerned, was a farce. The fellows walked through it, as it were.

They were glad, and so were the Form-masters, when the dismissal came. The juniors crowded out of the Form-rooms in high spirits, in great anticipation.

In the hall of the School House the red and black notice was still in a prominent position. A few lines had been added to it by way of improvement. Tom Merry had rather anticipated that Wally & Co. would add something on their own; but the fags were keeping off the grass very carefully. The impression of the music-hall committee was that the opposition of the Third would be confined to a little booing in the wood-shed, and if a few prefects were present that would soon be put down.

Immediately after school, the music-hall committee made their final preparations. The "first house" was to begin at half-past six and last till half-past seven. The "second house" was booked from a quarter to eight to a quarter to nine. That would certainly leave the juniors scant time for their preparation. But, as Lowther remarked, if either the show or the prep. had to suffer, it was better to sacrifice the less important of the two.

Everything was ready by the time the juniors returned to their houses for a hasty tea. After tea the cast repaired to the wood-shed once more, and then all was ready. At half-past six the audience were expected to come pouring in, and Tom Merry was determined that the performance should begin on time.

In the dressing-room arranged behind the stage, the juniors dressed themselves for their turns. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was quite resplendent in evening clothes. He wore a diamond stud which gleamed wonderfully. His expanse of shirt-front was simply beautiful. The orchestra took their places, the only occupants of the auditorium so far.

They tuned up.

The tuning up was not tuneful, and perhaps it was just as well that the audience were not there. Tom Merry planted the gramophone on the stage, ready for the opening number.

"Better try it over," said Manners.

"Oh, the record's all right!" said Tom Merry.

"But it won't do any harm to try it," said Lowther.

"You never know."

"Oh, all right!"

Tom Merry turned the gramophone on. "The War March of the Priests" was one of his best records. But it did not sound very well now. The music began, and there was a sudden snapping and scratching. Then it went on, then again snapping and scratching.

Tom Merry looked amazed.

"What on earth's the matter with the record?" he exclaimed.

Figgins grunted.

"It's a rotter!" he said.

"But it was one of the best—"

"Oh, stop it, for goodness' sake! It's weird."

Tom Merry stopped the gramophone, and looked at the record with a puzzled brow. Then he gave a yell of wrath.

"Some ass has been tampering with this record. It's cut across and across with a knife."

"My hat!"

"Bai Jove! Wally."

"Wally! The young imp!"

"Yaas, it's wotten. This is a twick of his, of course. As I wemarked before, Tom Mewwy, it would weally have been more judicious to give Wally a show. He's a dangerous young wascal, you know."

"Oh, rats!"

"You'll have to cut the gramophone turn," said Manners.

"I could get another record."

"No time to get it. We're booked to start in five minutes now," said Fatty Wynn. "Cut the number; the audience won't mind. It wasn't much of a turn, anyway."

Tom Merry nodded. His records were kept in a case in his study, and certainly it would take considerably more than five minutes to fetch one to the wood-shed. Tom Merry pushed the gramophone away behind the scenes.

(Continued on Page 18.)

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Use it like many of the most successful men of the day—follow the special directions drawn up by Sandow for the guidance of the users of his famous Grip Dumb-Bells, and see during a day or two the difference they will make to you.

In a couple of days a new strength, not only of body, but of mind, will begin to make itself apparent to you.

Your work will seem easier, your pleasure more delightful, and your ideas will be quickened. You will become more manly. In fact, you will realise that you are obtaining a rich supply of those qualities which command success and money for every boy when they commence business life.

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"Dear Sirs,—It may or may not interest you to know that I cured myself of a weak chest by following your system of Physical Culture, and not only achieved perfect health, but such abnormal strength, that I am now earning my living

on the music-halls by performing feats of strength and showing my development acquired.

"Solely by your System of Physical Culture and using your Appliance, having appeared at every large town in Great Britain and Ireland, I would like to lay particular stress on the value of your Grip Dumb-Bells, which I consider the very finest aid to Physical Culture ever invented, and I would not be without them. Previous to my performances every evening, I always warm up with a pair of Grip Dumb-Bells, always going through the Sandow System of Physical Culture.

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TRIAL.....

TOM MERRY & CO.'S MUSIC-HALL.

(Continued from Page 16.)

He looked through the curtain at the orchestra, who were still tuning up.

"Gramophone's gone off song," he explained; "you chaps can play something instead."

"I'll make it a banjo solo, if you like," said Blake.

"A cornet solo might sound better," said Herries thoughtfully.

"Or a fantasia on the violin," remarked Kerr.

"Look here, Kerr—"

"Look here, Herries—"

"Oh, play something together!" said Tom Merry. "Play up that march from 'Carmen,' and hang it out a little somehow."

"Oh, all right!"

"May as well get on to it now," said Tom Merry; "the audience don't seem to be coming, and the music will show them we're ready. They'll hear you from the School House."

And the orchestra started manfully, while the cast, behind the scenes, gave the final touches to their preparations. If the audience was coming in, it was coming in very quietly.

"But I say, it's a very orderly audience, isn't it? They don't make a sound. The place sounds as if it was empty," said Tom Merry uneasily.

"That's because I am first turn, deah boy," said Arthur Augustus, who was putting the last touches to his immaculate evening-dress. "Don't make any bloomahs with my accompaniment, you orchestwa chaps!" he called through the curtain.

"Look through the curtain!"

"Bai Jove! I don't believe there's anybody but the band!"

Tom Merry, followed by most of the chums, turned back the curtain at the sides, to discover that there was no audience in front at all. The seats were entirely empty. Save for the whispering of the chums, there was not a sound in the place.

"What the dickens does it mean?" said Tom Merry.

"We've advertised the thing enough, anyway."

"What's keeping them away?" said Blake, looking up from his banjo.

"Gussy's singing, I expect," grinned Monty Lowther.

"Weally, Lowthah—"

"Oh, chuck rotting, you asses!" said Tom Merry. "Can't you see the audience haven't turned up?"

"They must be thinking it's all a jape," suggested Digby.

"If Gussy went on now, perhaps they'd come crowding in like anything."

"Yaas, wathah!"

Tom Merry took out his watch.

"It's jolly well time they were here," he said.

"But I've heard that the first houses in music-halls are usually thin," said Kangaroo. "They'll come in crowds when they know things are really going."

"Yaas, wathah! I agwee with Kangawoo, deah boys. Pway go on, Blake, deah boy, and stwike up the ovahtuah. I couldn't possibly sing to an empty house, you know."

"Or any other house!" grinned Monty Lowther.

"Weally, Lowthah—"

"Oh, cheese it!" said Tom Merry. "But it would be a good idea, Blake, if you fellows got the band going full blast, as a signal, you know."

"Right-ho!"

"Yaas, wathah! And if there is no audience aftah Blake, Herries, and Kerr have finished, I suggest that they play anothah ovahtuah until the beggars do come in."

Tom Merry & Co. grinned.

"That's what an orchestwa is for, deah boys."

"Better get on, anyway, Blake," said Tom Merry. "The sound of it will remind them, in any case. Buck up, you kids!"

"I say," said Blake, "do you think Taggles is making any mistake at the door?"

"Let's go and see, anyway," said Manners.

And Tom Merry went to the door to interview Taggles.

The school-porter was sitting on his chair outside the woodshed, in imminent danger of falling asleep. The juniors questioned him. He had not taken a single penny. No one had applied for admission. He would be just as useful at home in his lodge, he thought.

Blake, Herries, and Kerr restarted the overture.

Tom Merry & Co. clapped from behind the curtain.

"Make a row, Blake!" he said, popping his head round the curtain. "They can hardly hear that, you know. The School House is too far away from here."

The overture went on, Herries blowing as if he either meant to blow his cornet straight, or bring down the walls, as in the historic case of Jericho. Again and again the juniors applauded. But no one came in.

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The fact that St. Jim's now possessed a music-hall of its own seemed to be entirely forgotten. The overture ended.

"Gussy, first turn!" called out Monty Lowther.

"Weally, Lowthah—"

"Can't you play another overture, you kids?" asked Manners, popping his head out.

"Oh, rats!" said Herries. "You ought to have ten minutes blowing a cornet, and you wouldn't be so cocky about it."

"But we must have the fellows in somehow," said Tom Merry. "I can't understand this. I wonder what's up with 'em?"

"If I may make a suggestion, deah boys—"

"Good egg, Gussy!" grinned Blake. "I knew you'd want to sing after you heard the overture. It's really good of you."

"Yes, that's the ticket! Get on, Gussy!"

"Weally, deah boys, how can I sing without an audience?"

"Rats! Of course you can! We'll be the giddy audience, you ass!"

"Don't you see the idea?" said Blake. "We want to make 'em think the thing is going on, whether they come in or not."

"Keepin' up appeawances. But—"

"Pile in again, kids!" said Tom Merry to Blake, Herries, and Kerr. "Rattle off Gussy's tinkle!"

"I wefuse to have my music wattled off, Tom Mewwy."

"Oh, rats! Get in front again, you fellows!"

Blake, Herries, and Kerr started again, and the orchestra was heard next moment.

"Go on, ass!" said Manners, as the curtain was held back for Arthur Augustus.

"Weally, Mannahs—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I pwefer to make an elegant entwance—"

"Oh, buck up!" said Tom Merry.

Arthur Augustus walked on to applause from behind, as the "pros" say.

"Sing it loud, Gussy!"

"Weally, Lowthah—"

"We're waiting, ass!" snapped Blake from his seat.

"Weally, Blake—"

"What's up?"

"Give me my note, deah boy!"

"Twang, twang; plank-a-plank!"

Arthur Augustus glared.

Monty Lowther winked at Blake from the wings. The orchestra started while the swell of the School House was fixing his monocle.

"Give me back my seven-and-six!" warbled Lowther.

"Give me back my seven-and-six!" sang Manners, taking up the tune.

"Give me back my eighteenpence!" chuckled Blake.

"We must have the song going somehow, ass!" shouted Tom Merry. "Go on!"

Arthur Augustus glared at the captain of the Shell.

"Obey the stage-manager, you dummy!" roared Figgins.

"Now, start with this line. Give me—"

Arthur Augustus hesitated for a moment, then he plunged in, so to speak.

"Give me—" he began.

Blake waited for him.

"Give me back my seven-and-six!" sang the swell of the School House, in real earnest this time. "Give me back my seven-and-six—"

"Twice nightly!" exclaimed Monty Lowther.

"Weally, Lowthah! I'm singin'—"

"Rats! Don't you see the game, ass?" shouted Blake, as he strummed away at his banjo. "We're making 'em think it's a great success."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

And the whole body of juniors began to sing Arthur Augustus's song with a will.

D'Arcy glared in speechless astonishment at them.

"Give me back my seven-and-six!" roared Lowther.

"That'll fetch 'em like anything!"

"You wottahs! I wefuse to have my song murdahed like this!"

"My dear chap, we are only following your own example!" said Monty Lowther, in astonishment. "What are you doing to it yourself?"

"Weally, Lowthah—"

"Give me back—"

"No one coming in, anyway!" said Tom Merry gloomily.

"Go on, you fellows! Keep it up! I'll go and reconnoitre."

"Make 'em come in!" said Figgins. "If they won't come, take the bounders by their necks and drag 'em in!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Give me back my seven-and-six!" roared the juniors, at the top of their voices.

Tom Merry hurried out of the woodshed.

The hero of the Shell was determined to get to the bottom of the thing.

Sprinting to the School House, he looked for someone who could enlighten him.

But the quadrangle was deserted. The fellows were evidently all in their Houses.

"The rotters!" he muttered. "It must be a jape!"

He grinned as he heard the faint sounds of "Seven-and-six" coming from the direction of the wood-shed.

Arthur Augustus was "going great guns" evidently.

Tom Merry hurried into the House.

The first thing that caught his eye was the notice-board, with the notice of the St. Jim's Empire stuck prominently upon it.

He started.

Across the notice of their entertainment sprawled a slip of paper, on which was painted in staring characters:

"UNAVOIDABLY POSTPONED!"

There it was, in big black letters, upon the slip pasted fairly across the notice of the St. Jim's Empire, for all the world to run and read, so to speak. Some of the St. Jim's fellows had wondered whether the entertainment would ever come off, and having read that amendment to the notice posted up by the Music-Hall Committee, they could have had no further doubts upon the subject. Only two words, in the big sprawling "fist" of a Third Form fag—but they had been quite enough. From afar came the faint echo of the orchestra of the St. Jim's Empire, working away manfully to play to empty seats, while the fellows were all in the common-room or in their studies.

Perhaps, as Arthur Augustus D'Arcy had averred, it would have been safer, after all, for the Music-Hall Committee to have taken the scamp of the Third Form into the scheme. It would have caused less trouble than leaving him out.

CHAPTER 14.

Very Funny!

TOM MERRY breathed hard through his nose.

Unavoidably postponed!

He understood now why the audience had not turned up. The slip pasted across the notice had done it. Probably the fellows had all expected that there would be something of the sort—amateur theatrical performances seldom started to time.

Tom Merry could guess the author of the slip. It was Wally of the Third. The fags were on the war-path, after all!

Tom Merry was tempted to go in search of Wally and exact summary vengeance there and then. But there was no time. The performance was already late; and if the first house was not to overlap into the second house the affair would have to be got under way immediately. The school had to be informed of the fact that the performance was not postponed, and there was not a minute to lose.

Tom Merry hurried to Kildare's study. The captain of St. Jim's was there, talking football with Darrel. He looked at Tom Merry in surprise.

"Hallo, kid!"

"Come on, Kildare!"

"Come where?"

"The performance is just going to start!" gasped Tom Merry.

"Isn't it postponed?"

"No! No!"

"But I saw on the poster——"

"That was only a jape of young Wally," Tom Merry explained breathlessly. "It's all right! It isn't postponed at all!"

The two Sixth-Formers burst into a roar.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You'll come, won't you?"

"Oh, certainly!" said Kildare. "We'll come at once! Come on, Darrel!"

"I'll buzz off and tell the other chaps," said Tom Merry.

He ran into the junior common-room.

A yell greeted him:

"Isn't it coming off, you ass?"

"What's gone wrong?"

"Won't Gussy sing?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"It's a jape!" shouted Tom Merry. "It's not postponed! It's only a jape of those Third Form worms! Come on, all of you. Some of you go over to the New House and tell the chaps there, and let everybody know. Back up!"

"Oh, right you are!" grinned Gore. "We'll come!"

Tom Merry dashed back to the wood-shed.

Taggles gave him a grin as he ran in. The orchestra were still playing. Having come to the end of the overture, they had started again at the beginning. Tom Merry ran behind the curtain.

"Why don't they come?" demanded Kangaroo.

Tom Merry gasped out the explanation.

There was a roar of wrath from the whole cast.

"The young villain!"

"Bai Jove! The young wascal! I told you, Tom Mewwy——"

"Oh, rats! Go on and begin again, Gussy——"

"Vewy well! Pewwaps, undah the circs., it would be bettah for me to give somethin' weally good to begin—'Mein Lieber Schwan,' for instance——"

"Blow your 'Lieber Schwan'! Get on the stage!"

"Weally, Tom Mewwy——"

"Get on!" roared Tom Merry.

"Oh, vewy well!"

Arthur Augustus went on the stage. The curtain was up in front, and the electric footlights blazed merrily.

The orchestra were nearly through the second edition of the overture. The audience were coming in at last. Kildare and Darrel had taken their seats in the stalls, and Monteith and Baker and North and some more of the Sixth had joined them there. They were all grinning—whether at the jape played by Wally or at the manful efforts of the orchestra cannot be said.

Behind the row of the great men of the Sixth other fellows crowded in. The Fifth were very well represented, and the Fourth and the Shell were there almost to a man. Behind, in the standing room, came the fags, crowds and swarms of them. Wally was not to be seen among them, but Jameson and Curly Gibson and Frayne were very prominent. There was a buzz of ceaseless voices in the standing-room denartment, but the fags did not boo. It looked as if they meant to give the performance a chance.

The overture ceased at last—the cornet getting in first, and the violin coming in a very good second. The banjo lingered behind the other instruments for a minute or so, amid chuckles from the audience.

Arthur Augustus, standing first upon one leg, and then upon the other, waited for the end of it. Then fresh music was handed out, and the band were ready with his accompaniment.

Then Arthur Augustus D'Arcy's beautiful tenor voice rose to the roof of the wood-shed.

"Give Me Back My Seven-and-Six!"

The audience laughed.

Laughter in front rose and rose as the song proceeded, and culminated in a terrific roar as D'Arcy concluded, and the very walls of the St. Jim's Empire seemed to shake.

Tom Merry grinned behind the scenes.

"It's going well!" he remarked.

"Ripping!" said Figgins.

Arthur Augustus came off the stage, looking a little flushed and puzzled.

"The audience seem to take that for a comic song," he said. "I was singin' it in the most sewious mannah poss."

"Hurrah!"

"Encore!"

"'Core! 'Core! 'Core!"

Stamp, stamp!

"Bai Jove! Listen to them!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "Did you evah heah such an awflly enthusiastic encore, deah boys? I must go and take my call."

"Hold on!" said Figgins. "It's time for my clog-dance. My number's been put at three."

"Weally, Figgins——"

"'Core! 'Core! 'Core!"

"Gussy must take his encore," said Tom Merry. "Go in and bow, and come off again, Gussy."

"Weally, Tom Mewwy——"

"Buck up!"

"I am goin' to give them an encore," said the swell of St. Jim's. "That was agweed. Besides, they deserve it, considewin' the piffle they've got to stand latah."

"They deserve it if they ask for it!" admitted Lowther.

"Well, give them the last verse again," said Tom Merry.

"Wats! I'm goin' to give them 'Mein Lieber Schwan,' fswm 'Lohengwin.'"

"Now, look here, Gussy——"

"That was the agweement, deah boy."

"Oh, go on, then!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy returned to the stage. The audience yelled. The orchestra received the music for the encore song, which Kerr had written out in case of accidents. They tuned up, and Arthur Augustus started, letting his voice fairly go:

"Nun sei bedankt, mein lieber Schwan,
Sie durch die weiter Fluth zuruckt——"

"My only hat! What's that?" came a query from the audience.

"He's got a fearful cough!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Arthur Augustus sang on.

"Dahin, woher mich trug dein Kahn—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Apparently the audience mistook the encore song for a comic song also. At all events, the laughter was louder and more continuous than it had been for "Give Me Back My Seven-and-Six." The song was lost in the uproar; but the swell of St. Jim's ploughed on relentlessly to the end.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Hurray!"

"Encore!"

D'Arcy came off rather breathlessly.

"I think that went vewy well, Tom Mewwy," he remarked.

"Yes—wonderful comic effects!" said Lowther.

"Weally, Lowthah—"

The audience were still yelling.

"I suppose I had better take anothah encore, dear boys

"I suppose you hadn't!" said Tom Merry. "You're not going to fill up all the programme for the first house, you ass!"

"It is bettah to give the audience what they want. As a fellow of tact and judgment—"

"Rats! Slide on, Figgy!"

"I'm ready," said Figgins.

"I weally considah that I had bettah give them 'Sono Poeta,' fwom 'La Boheme,'" said D'Arcy persuasively. "Figgy can stand out of the pwogwamme altogethah, you know, to make woom for my encores."

Figgins glared.

"You silly ass—" he began.

"Weally, Figgins—"

"Order!" rapped out Tom Merry. "Get on the stage, Figgins! Shut up, Gussy!"

"Weally, you know—"

Figgins went on the stage.

Some of the audience gave Figgins a cheer. New House fellows meant to back up Figgins, anyway. If he had danced like an elephant the New House juniors would have cheered him enthusiastically all the same.

Clat-clat-clatter!

Figgins's clog-dance commenced.

Then suddenly, without the slightest warning, the lights in the wood-shed went out, and the St. Jim's Empire was plunged into total darkness.

Figgins ceased. The orchestra ceased.

There was a roar:

"What's the matter?"

"Put on the lights!"

"My hat!"

"You silly asses—"

"Bai Jove!" gasped D'Arcy. "I was wight, you see—somethin's gone w'ong with the electwic light!"

And Tom Merry groaned.

The chapter of accidents seemed unending.

CHAPTER 15.

Going with a Bang!

"PUT on the light!"

"Yah!"

Tom Merry groped his way from behind the scenes on to the stage.

"Gentlemen—" he shouted.

"Yah! Where's the light?"

"Gentlemen, please keep your seats! Owing to an unfortunate accident, the electric light has been cut off—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"What price the Third Form now?" yelled a voice from the darkness.

Tom Merry jumped.

He understood.

So did Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. From behind the scenes the voice of the swell of St. Jim's could be heard:

"Bai Jove! It's young Wally! He's cut the wire, you know! I told you it would be safah to let young Wally into it, Tom Mewwy, deah boy!"

The audience yelled with laughter.

"Order! Silence!" shouted Tom Merry desperately.

"Lights will be put on in a minute or two. We were prepared for an emergency."

A strong smell of paraffin backed up Tom Merry's statement. The music-hall company lighted paraffin lamps, and they were placed along the stage, and some were carried out and stuck up on the walls of the wood-shed. The scent of paraffin was not gratifying, and the light was certainly not so good as it had been before. The time, too, was passing, and it was growing evident that, even if the first house came to a successful conclusion, there could be no second house that night. "Twice nightly" would have to remain over for the next evening.

The audience seemed to be very pleased, however, with THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 210.

the performance so far. Voices were heard expressing opinions as to what the next accident would be like. When the lights were going again, Tom Merry scanned the crowd of Third-Formers at the back of the shed, but he could not see Wally. The hero of the Third was probably on the war-path still, and Tom Merry wondered what his next move would be. But there was no time to hunt for him now and call him to account.

There was a buzz of talk and laughter all the time Figgins was doing his clog-dance. But the dance went off very well, and the next item was taken kindly, and the hopes of the Empire-builders rose.

"It's going all right!" said Monty Lowther.

"Going with a bang, after all!" said Manners. "Good!"

Tom Merry nodded cheerfully.

"Yes; and I think our caricature of a Sixth Form play will knock them."

"I don't know how the Sixth will take it."

"Oh, they have a sense of humour, you know!" said Tom Merry. "The Sixth Form play on Speech Day is one of the funniest things going, and our sketch is ripping."

"Yaas, wathah! But the Sixth take their Greek play quite sewiously, you know. Upon second thoughts, Tom Mewwy, wouldn't it be bettah to leave out the sketch?" suggested Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "I shouldn't mind goin' on and doin' anothah tenah solo, instead."

"Ass!" said the Terrible Three together.

"Weally, you know—"

"Shut up! Get ready, chorus!"

"Right-ho!"

"Now, then!"

And the sketch artistes appeared on the stage. Tom Merry was quite right in his opinion that a Greek play given by a senior Form was funny enough. The sketch artistes had made it still funnier for their purpose. They had dressed in exaggerated Greek costumes, and they had made up comic lines in English with Greek inflections, the effect of which was undoubtedly funny. But it was a question whether the great men of the Sixth would fully appreciate that kind of fun; and that was a question which the juniors had not, perhaps, fully considered.

But it was undoubtedly funny. The juniors in the audience roared at the mere sight of the Terrible Three got up as exaggerated editions of Elektra, Orestes, and Ægystheus. If Sophocles himself had been present, he could hardly have helped laughing.

The seniors in the audience looked rather grim. Even Kildare looked serious. But the Shell and the Fourth roared. The play commenced something like this:

Chorus: "The young Orestes returns to the halls of his fathers! Woe—woe! Grooh!"

Elektra: "Yow! Wow—wow!"

Orestes: "Ha! Likewise, ho!"

Elektra: "Yow! Wow—wow!"

Ægystheus: "This is no placeum for meo. I must bunko! Yah!"

Chorus: "Woe—woe! Whoa!"

Orestes: "Who is this damsel who weeps and wails, like unto the catto on the tilum?"

Elektra: "Yow! Wow—wow!"

Exactly how that Greek play would have turned out cannot be said. For at this point there was a perceptible trembling of the stage. Tom Merry, who was about to render another Orestean "Ha!" stopped short, and said, "Oh, crumbs!" instead.

The stage was shaking.

"You fighful asses!" came a voice from behind the scenes. "You haven't fastened the stage up safely, aftah all!"

"It was all right."

"It isn't all wight now."

"Somebody's meddling with the trestles underneath!" roared Figgins.

"Great Scott!"

"Bai Jove! I'll wagah it's young Wally! I told you, Tom Mewwy—"

"Look out!"

"Bai Jove!"

The stage fairly rocked.

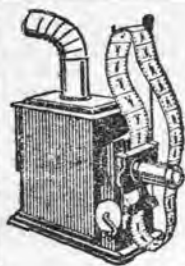
The audience rose in their places, shrieking with laughter. The comic effects introduced by the plot of the Third-Formers beat the intentional comic effects hollow.

Tom Merry clenched his hand with helpless fury.

Under the stage the trestles were secure enough so long as they were let alone. Figgins's clog-dance had not disturbed them. But it was pretty clear what was taking place. Undoubtedly Wally had crept into the place unobserved some time before, and attached cords to the trestles, and now he was outside the wood-shed somewhere, pulling. There was a

(Continued on Page 22.)

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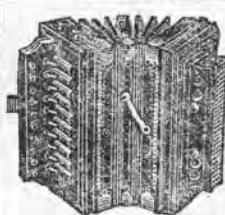
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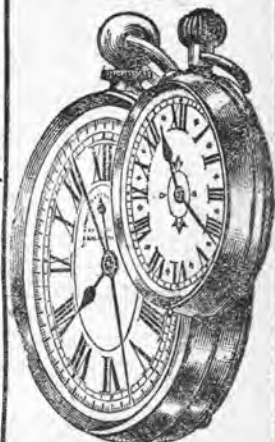
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TOM MERRY & CO.'S MUSIC-HALL.

(Continued from Page 20.)

crash under the stage as one of the trestles went over, and the boards split up, tearing the linoleum.

There was a yell of alarm from behind the scenes, and the whole company rushed into view of the stage in great excitement.

"Look out!"

"Cut!"

"It's going to pieces!"

The audience roared.

"Ha, ha, ha, ha!"

Crash!

Another trestle was gone.

One end of the stage sank down to the floor, and half a dozen of the company rolled over and slid down helplessly to the lower end.

The others bounded off over the footlights, and landed among the orchestra, with disastrous effects.

The bandsmen were bowled over first shot, so to speak, and Lowther landed on Blake's banjo; and that banjo was certainly not likely to be a banjo to be played on again. Blake gave a yell.

"You ass! Look what you've done!"

"Yah!" roared Herries. "Get off my cornet!"

Kerr sprang away with his violin, fortunately in time. Blake threw his arms round Monty Lowther's neck, and began to pommel him. Blake was thinking about his banjo and forgetting everything else in his wrath.

"Order!"

"Stop it!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Go it!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Crash!

The players rolled off the stage among the audience. Two or three fellows rushed to save the lamps. The stage had entirely collapsed with a terrific grinding and crashing. The audience were all upon their feet now, almost in hysterics.

"Ha, ha, ha!" came a yell from the standing room at the back. "It has gone with a bang! Ha, ha, ha! What price the Third Form now?"

"You young villains!" yelled Tom Merry, scrambling to his feet and shaking his fist at the jeering fags.

"Yah!"

"Boo!"

"Ha, ha, ha! This is where we smile!" yelled Wally, coming into the shed, his nefarious work complete now.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You—you—you—"

"What price the Third now?" shrieked the fags.

"Bai Jove!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The music-hall company with one accord rushed upon the fags. In a moment there was a wild and whirling conflict raging in the St. Jim's Empire.

Seats were overturned, chairs went crashing right and left, yells and roars and shrieks and the trampling of feet filled the Empire with din.

"Yah!"

"Sook it to them!"

"Kick the fags out!"

"Give them beans!"

"Buck up, Third!"

"Clear out, all of you!" roared Kildare. "Look after those lamps! You'll have the place on fire if you're not careful! Clear the place!"

The audience, shrieking hysterically, streamed out of the wood-shed. But the stage company and the fags did not stream out. They were rolling over in wild combat among the wrecked seats.

Kildare and the prefects who were present strode among them, shouting and ordering and boxing ears right and left in their efforts to restore order.

Most of the lamps had been blown out for safety, and a dim twilight reigned in the St. Jim's Empire.

In the dimness, fags and players rolled over in furious conflict, and the prefects had a difficult task in separating them and turning them out of the wood-shed.

But they were got out at last.

The Empire was cleared, and Kildare slammed the door and locked it. He shook Taggles out of a fit of chuckling.

"Taggles!"

"Yessir! Ho, ho, ho!" gasped Taggles. "Yessir!"

"Mind that nobody goes into the shed again! The juniors are not to be admitted there. Do you understand?"

"Yessir. Ho, ho, ho!"

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DON'T MISS "BOLSOVER MINOR'S LAST SACRIFICE!"

"Clear all that rubbish out to-morrow," said Kildare, "and keep the door locked."

"Yessir. Ho, ho, ho!"

Kildare strode away.

In the quadrangle dim fighting was still proceeding. But it was over at last, and the damaged heroes of the Empire limped away towards the School House. The fags crowded off with yells of laughter. Most of them had been very roughly handled, but they did not mind. They had triumphed, and that was enough for Wally & Co. They crowded back to their Form-room, still yelling.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy crawled into the Fourth Form dormitory in the School House, and looked at himself in the glass. His white shirt was crumpled up, and his beautiful evening-clothes were in tatters. He had a black eye, and his hair was tousled, and his nose was oozing crimson, and his collar was torn out.

"Oh!" gasped D'Arcy. "Ow! Bai Jove, I feel as if I had been through a beastly mangle! How do you feel, Tom Mewwy?"

"The pwefects will be down on us. We shall have to pay for all the things that have been broken. You wemembah I told you, Tom Mewwy—"

"Shut up!" roared Tom Merry.

"I decline to shut up. You must wemembah I told you so. I warned you that if you didn't let my minah into the company there would be twouble. I—"

"Oh, bump him!" roared Blake. "His beastly minor is the cause of all the trouble. What does he mean by having such a minor? Collar the frabjous ass! Bump him!"

"Weally, Blake—oh! Ow! Oh! Weally—"

"Bump him!"

"Ow! I told you so, and—"

"Bump him for telling us so!"

"Ow! Welease me! I—ow! You wottahs! Ow!"

Bump!

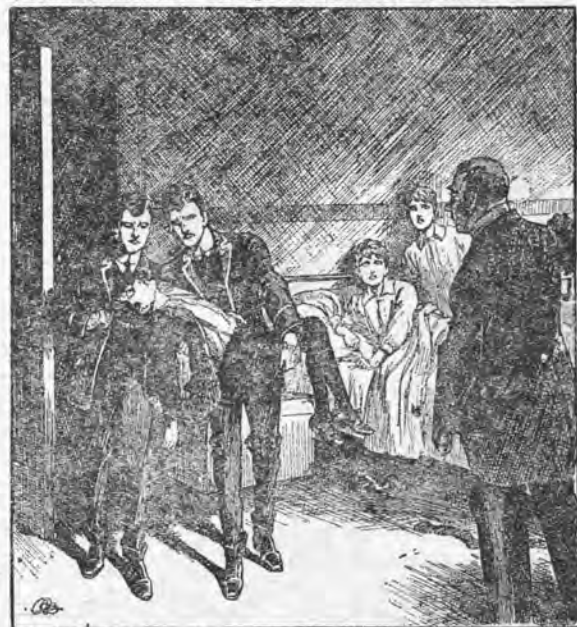
Arthur Augustus D'Arcy's remarks were heard no more. After the enraged players had finished with him he had no breath to make any more. He could only gasp.

But Arthur Augustus was right. After the terrific disturbance on the opening night, the powers came down heavily upon the St. Jim's Empire, and it had to be dropped. The Junior Cricket Club did not benefit to any appreciable extent by the takings of the St. Jim's Empire.

THE END.

(The New Firm at St. Jim's!) by Martin Clifford, next Thursday. Order your copy of "THE GEM" Library in advance. Price, One Penny.)

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OUR NEW SERIAL STORY.

WINGS OF GOLD!

The Story of the Most Terrible and Amazing Journey Ever Made By Man.

Edited from the Notes of Maurice Fordham, Esq.

By **SIDNEY DREW.**

CHARACTERS IN THIS GRAND STORY.

MAURICE FORDHAM and **LANCE MORTON**—Two healthy and wealthy young Britons, owners of the yacht *Foamwitch*.

PROFESSOR LUDWIG VON HAAGEL—The famous German scientist, also noted for his clumsiness.

MATTHEW REDLAND—The talented inventor of a wonderful airship. He is drowned at the entrance of the ice barrier.

JOSEPH JACKSON or **SHOREDITCH JOSE**—A Cockney member of the crew, whose constant companion is a game bantam named the *Smacker*.

TEDDY MORGAN—Ship's engineer.

WILLIAM TOOTER—The hairy first mate.

The *Foamwitch* is on an expedition with the object of exploring the strange land which is believed to lie beyond the barrier of eternal ice near the South Pole. The capture of a curious creature, with golden wings—half bird, half reptile, inside which is found the shell of the extinct ammonite—works those on board the *Foamwitch* up to a pitch of highest

enthusiasm. As soon as the first land is reached, the construction of the aeronef, *Wings of Gold*—which has been carried in pieces on the *Foamwitch*—is proceeded with.

After a period of hard and strenuous work, the aeronef is completed, and the final arrangements are made in its long saloon. The next day sees the commencement of the wonderful voyage of the airship, *Wings of Gold*, into the Antarctic circle.

During the next few days many strange things are revealed to the daring voyagers, who gain some idea of the fearful perils that lie before them. An encounter with some huge and fearful reptile-like birds—which the professor names as pterodactyls—almost turns the explorers from their purpose; but they steer "*Wings of Gold*" ever forwards, and run suddenly into a terrific storm. The airship is powerless against the force of the mighty wind, and is being whirled rapidly towards some mountain peaks, when Morgan, the engineer, manages to direct their course upwards, in the hope of rising above the storm.

(Now go on with the story).

Safe Aground—The First Trip—Fordham Shoots Another Bird-Lizard—In the Mud—Terror and Flight.

Then Morgan, cool and quiet as ever, stepped in. He seized the wheel. She answered. It spun round. Again Maurice shouted. Striking her at an angle, the gale helped to rise her like a kite. And then a great yellow moon hung above them like a lamp, and not two miles away, towering and terrible, the mighty snow-topped mountains tossed their heads against the grey-blue sky.

Saved! The aeronef, a mere speck in space, was moving northward. Below her the gale howled and roared, but she had shaken off its clutch, and floated in a realm of calm and silence, where the only clamour was of her own making. Morgan slackened the speed, and gave Lance the wheel.

"Now, Tooter," he said, as quietly as ever, "I want you. By thunder, that was tiring! We've got to get her flat again, for we're not flies to crawl up walls. Come on, Jackson!"

They followed him, and with scoops and buckets began to remove the mercury. Maurice, Crooks, and Von Haagel lent their aid. Mercury is a nimble and elusive liquid. It was placed in a tank and pumped back into its proper place. A good deal, of course, defied capture, but a judicious moving of the heavier parts of the luggage forward balanced the vessel, and *Wings of Gold* floated again on an even keel.

The work steadied their nerves. There was even some laughter when Professor Von Haagel, who was pursuing on hands and knees a large bead of mercury with a spoon, struck his head against the head of Mr. Crooks, who was doing likewise with a dustpan. Mr. Crooks fixed his eye on the great man and growled:

"Heads was not made for battering-rams. Why not? Some heads is wood, sich is niggers. Why not?"

Then he rubbed his head, and went off to the galley, to return with the coffee and sandwiches.

"Teddy," said Maurice, "you're a king! You're a hero! You've saved us all to-night!"

Morgan grunted, and shrugged his shoulders.

"By thunder," he answered, "we'll call it half and half, sir! It's been engines and machinery with me ever since I entered your father's works when I was twelve years old and fifty inches high. You were in long clothes then, sir. I

know a bit about engines, but I didn't know you could get above the storms. If it was to be done, I knew how to make this vessel do it. You did half and I did the rest. And, by thunder, I'm going to learn a bit of science after this!"

"And you'll beat us all at it when you do start, Teddy, old boy," said Lance.

"Ach, dot is so; dot is true, dear lads," added the professor. "Ach, wonderful! Look, dear lads!"

The air was cold, but very clear. The peaks rose like islands out of a sea of ink. The volcano was hidden. Once more Morgan brought the aeronef round, and drove her gently forward. No one wished to sleep, or wished to talk. Within a mile of the nameless mountains the *Wings of Gold* came to rest. In the silence they remained until the moon grew wan and pale. A flush crept over the white caps, lower and lower, and the pale sun leapt up through the clouds.

The clouds rolled away in two solid banks, and they saw the gleaming, rugged ice and brown slopes shot with vivid green. Von Haagel sprang up and rushed forward.

"Vings of Golt! Vings of Golt!" he shouted. "Ve haf von, dear lads! Hoch! Hurrah!"

In his excitement he flung his cap away, and it went spinning downwards.

"Let's get down, Teddy," cried Lance.

"Very good, sir," said the engineer calmly.

The aeronef began to sink. The green blur became a belt of trees, the dark blotches evolved into gaping caverns and fissures, and then *Wings of Gold* settled down like a feather, and they reached the land unknown.

The crew cheered like maniacs. The aeronef had descended upon a flat spur among the trees. The limit of the ground ice lay fifteen hundred feet below, and the snow line was over five thousand feet above. Von Haagel, boiling over with excitement, would have left the vessel at once, but Maurice and Lance were relentless. They dragged him below, and ordered breakfast. Jackson was given a rifle, and put out as sentry. The visits of the loathsome pterodactyls had made them cautious.

"And look here, dad," said Maurice to the protesting professor, "you'll start off with a bath and a good feed, and then you can get your hammers and collecting boxes, and chip away till you're tired."

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By MARTIN CLIFFORD.
Please Order Your Copy Early.

Next Thursday's Grand, Long, Complete
School Tale of Tom Merry & Co.

"THE NEW FIRM AT ST. JIM'S."

"But, dear lad, I am not hungry!"

"And I suppose you're not dirty, either. Kindly do what you're told, and don't be mutinous! Go and wash!"

"Himmel, but you are a tyrant, Lance!" puffed the professor. "You're a great cruel tyrant! Well, I will go and be obedient. Ach, wonderful and suplime! Pedersen and Sadfern shall eat their words, is dot so? Is dot so, Lance?"

"I'll eat you if you don't hurry!" laughed Lance.

Mr. Crooks laid the table like an expert conjuror, without looking at any of the articles as he put them down, but keeping his solitary eye fixed on the ceiling all the time. The bantam had the honour of first setting foot upon the unknown land. After a few exultant crows he looked round for something to fight with, and finding that nothing answered his challenge, he started to scratch for worms.

During the meal the professor was unusually fidgety and nervous. He spilled his tea, and, in a fit of abstraction, placed his fork, with a piece of kidney on it, into his tea, instead of a spoon. Then he shook the pepper-caster so vigorously that the silver top fell off, and he sneezed in the middle of a cloud of pepper until the tears ran.

"Why will he do these things?" groaned Lance. "It's silly! Surely he didn't want all that pepper?"

"I suppose he takes it to make his hair curl," smiled Fordham. "He has odd tastes, original tastes, in fact. Few people stir their tea with a fork, for instance, and pour it over the cloth to cool. I am sure such a quantity of pepper is too bad for him."

"Atishoo! Atish—is-o-o-o-o-o!" sneezed Von Haagel.

Mr. Crooks, with a toast-rack in his hands, tried to penetrate the cloud with his piercing orb. After a long and careful scrutiny, he hoisted up his voice, and said, with deep gravity:

"If he likes things 'ot, why not? Pepper is 'ot, and will keep the flies away. You can't take pepper without sneezin'. And why not? Because noses is tender, which is how Nature made 'em!"

"Crooks," said Lance, trying to look stern, "we do not want any of your philosophy at meal-times! Please keep your wisdom to yourself!"

The cook put down the toast-rack, and, letting his eye rove round the ceiling, muttered something about pepper being "first-class in pickles," and removed himself to the galley, where Mr. Tooter was busy with a hambone. The cook fished an egg thoughtfully out of the saucepan, and tossed it to his companion.

"William," he said, "what was philosophy? Why not?"

"Blinkin' blackbirds," said Mr. Tooter, deftly catching the egg, "that's easy! It's Russian or Greek, and it means the love of knowledge. Them chaps wiv white whiskers, bald heads, and rusty black suits, and a kind of barmy look about them is philosophers. They write books and sich."

Mr. Crooks pondered deeply, and munched a piece of crust.

"Ah," he said, "you wasn't no philosopher, Bill! Why not? You was all 'air. Thinking makes bald 'eads. You was too 'airy. And why, when razors is cheap, scissors is cheap, and soap is cheap? Bill, I shall write a book about you, and shall be a philosopher. Why not? Bill, you are the missing link!"

"If yer calls me that again," answered Bill savagely, "I'll shy this blessed 'ambone at yer!"

"Not just yet!" growled the cook. "Why not? 'Cos there's 'am on it! You wouldn't shy no 'am away. Ah, me, I knows that saying is wisdom and philosophy. And pickles is soursish. Have some?"

Soothed by the gift and refreshed by the meal, Mr. Tooter cleaned and oiled four rifles, polished up many pairs of pig-skin leggings, and filled four bandoliers with cartridges. Then he overhauled Fordham's double-barrelled ten-bore, for Maurice had selected the bigger weapon in preference to the more orthodox twelve. It was agreed to leave Jackson, Morgan, and Crooks behind.

"Good luck!" cried Teddy. "And don't go very far!"

"Right, old chap!" shouted Lance. "We'll only be away an hour or two."

Von Haagel was on solid ground, whooping and skipping like a schoolboy. All at once he stopped and gazed up at the feathery trees. Then he grasped one of the branches in his hand.

"Dear lads, dear lads!" he screamed. "It is der fern-tree—der true fern-tree! Himmel, it is der true fern-tree!"

And he was right. It was a stunted specimen, but it was there. Lance and Maurice had seen such leaves imprinted on lumps of coal—printed there ages and ages ago, when the great forests of the world shrivelled and sank and were buried. Such forests as the world can see no more.

A little farther on the professor paused again. This time he was staring through his glasses at a tree some forty feet high, and as thick as a man's waist. Fordham and Lance

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recognised it at once. It was the club moss—the common club moss found in any British ditch; the club moss that once grew like a mighty monarch in the steaming, sweltering jungles of long ago.

They stood spellbound. Then, waving his arms and jabbering in German, the professor began to dance round the tree. Mr. Tooter, whose historical knowledge comprised only a few facts, such as the beheading of Charles I. and the defeat of the Spanish Armada, bit off a piece of tobacco, and scratched his beard.

"Blinkin' blackbirds," he remarked, "it's a knock-out! I—"

"By Jove, you're right, William!" said Lance. "It's a knock-out! It's more than that; it's—"

"Look out! Look out! Mark over, sir!" yelled the first-officer.

With a whirr and a scream a mass of glistening gold flung itself upwards. The ten-bore sprang to Maurice's shoulder, and cracked twice in quick succession.

"Bagged!" cried Lance.

Poised on its golden wings, the object came gliding down, dead. It was another specimen of the famous bird-lizard that had set the whole scientific world talking, writing, and wrangling. They were only twenty yards from the aeronef, and the bantam came as hard as he could move on legs and wings, spoiling for a fight. Mr. Tooter laughed until a piece of plug got in his throat, and then coughed until his whiskers threatened to fall off.

"Blessed if that bird wouldn't chase hisself all over a blessed dromedary!" said Jackson, who had pursued his pet. "Nar, just look at him at it! He's a good 'un! Not 'arf, he isn't! What-ho! He'd fight Jack Johnson, Bill Wells, and all of 'em! Nar come off, will yer, an' let 'is features alone! Wot's it all about?"

The bantam was making the golden feathers fly in a cloud. His master seized him, while Tooter took the prize back to the ship. Von Haagel had not even looked at it. He was puffing on ahead, searching for new wonders in that new and wondrous land. Chip, chip, chip! came the note of his geological hammer. Lance hurried after him, and found him, perspiring, in a narrow gully that had evidently been caused by a recent landslip, for the sides were almost verdureless.

"Ach, there are no fossils here, dear lads," puffed the professor, "for it is igneous (fire-formed) rock. But there are metals here, smelted in the great furnace of Nature. Look, dot's gold! I hate der gold and der igneous rock. It tells no tales."

Lance took the fragment, and saw the sparkle. The fire-formed rock, rich in metals, had no fascination for the scholar. If ever it contained fossils, they had been fused, melted, and lost, and it was powerless to add one line to the story of the old-time world that men of learning have built up word by word, letter by letter, into a breathlessly fascinating tale.

Von Haagel flung another flake away, though it was gold—gold that men struggle, lie, thief, and murder to obtain. He wanted what no gold can buy, what is more priceless than rubies—wisdom.

"Come, dear lads, come!" he said. "Der mountains are old, but we must go lower for der fossils anoder day. We must be satisfied wid der flora and der fauna. Ach! Wonderful, superb, suplime! Ach! How I pity Professor Pedersen and dot Sadfern! Himmel! I can feel sorrow for dem—great sorrow!"

"Go gently, then, or you'll break your neck, dad," said Maurice. "We're waiting for Tooter."

Mr. Tooter quickly joined them. They entered a wood of club moss. Then Tooter yelled. A great fly, larger than a sparrow, sailed through the trees with a shrill buzz.

"Kill it—kill it!" shouted the professor.

Lance struck at it with his gun, but missed.

"By Jove, you want a gun with dust shot for those brutes!" said Maurice. "I hope they don't sting."

"Blinkin' blackbirds!" gasped Mr. Tooter, gazing blankly into the green depths. "Was that a fly?"

"I expect so."

"And are the fleas as big as that?" asked the first officer. "If so, I am going to sleep in the meat safe."

They laughed. There were many insects droning in the warm air, but they were small. They caught several, and the professor pronounced them identical with those found in lumps of fossilised gum, which is known as amber.

There was little or no undergrowth, for the trees were too dense. The ground steamed, and the heat was moist and oppressive. No bird broke the silence with its notes. The great trees sighed and moaned a little, and let fall great drops of water.

"It's a bit eerie, Morry," said Lance.

"It's beastly hot," said the more practical Maurice, "and

I sha'n't be sorry to get out. I don't like too much hot-house. We shall get wet through."

"It smells like a lively spot for fever," said Lance. "Hallo, there's water!"

"Water be hanged! There's water everywhere! I've got a quart or two down my back! And, drat it all, here's mud!"

He sank mid-legging deep into the treacherous ooze. They were all floundering. It dropped from their boots as they lifted them in ropy, evil-smelling masses. Of course, Von Haagel missed his footing, and sat down in it. They rescued him, and scraped him down, and chided him. It was useless. He simply puffed, and beamed with good nature.

The ground became a little firmer as they neared the water that flashed and glittered through the stems. It was hard walking over the spongy brown moss that had fallen from the trees, and hotter than ever. The honest light of day had never pierced the grim, green recesses of silence. Insects swarmed, but there appeared to be no other life.

Lance looked at his watch. They had been an hour. "I wager we've not come a mile," he said. "It's as bad as paddling through birdlime, and twice as tiring. I used to hate the ice, but I'd like to lie down on an iceberg for a month to cool off. I'll take the grub-basket for a while, William."

"Thank you, sir!" said Tooter gratefully. "It's beginning to feel heavier than feathers."

They reached the edge of the pool. It was surrounded by unhealthy yellow sedge, and steam curled up from its brown surface. Fordham thrust down his hand. The water was warm. It sent up slimy bubbles that burst with a sickly stench, and set the thick yellow sedge in motion.

"Horrible!" said Lance. "Ugh! We'll all get the malaria. Look at the mud!"

"Yes, look—look!"

Von Haagel extended a shaking hand. On one side was a broad strip of mud. The German parted the unwholesome reeds and raised his glasses. The others needed no such aid. Their eyes were strong and keen, and what they saw made them gape.

Some monster had crossed the mud recently, leaving his footprints behind him, terrible and terrifying. As if by one instinct they cocked their rifles. The footprints of the unknown animal were as long as the average man's forearm from finger-tips to elbow. Little pools of water had formed in them, hiding their shape. At one place there was a water-filled hollow where the brute had wallowed or rested. The prints trended away to reeds.

Von Haagel broke into a heavy trot.

"Come back, you madman, come back!" shouted Fordham.

But the professor kept on. Where science was concerned he did not know the name of fear. Where the mud sloped towards the bank the mysterious footprints were clearer. It is in the slate-beds—once beds of mud—that the impression of these animals are found, and Von Haagel, wild in his enthusiasm, was certain that he would recognise the monster. Fordham, Lance, and Tooter rushed after him.

"Come back—come back!"

Von Haagel took no notice. He stopped at last, and snatched off his glasses to wipe them. Then he knelt on a large stone and beat away the rushes with his hammer. He leaned forward and focussed his glasses. They were up with him, and Lance seized his arms.

"Oh, dad," he said, "you'll drive us—"

The words froze on his lips. The reeds rustled and cracked not twenty yards from where they stood. A grunting scream rang through the wood. The reeds parted. Fordham fired wildly, and the screams rang louder as the report went hammering and thundering through the trees. Then something wriggled out on the edge of the slime, and two dull and hideous eyes glared at them.

They turned and ran, ran as if pursued by demons.

They had seen it. It was a toad—or looked like a toad—speckled, gouty, and hideously blown out. Perhaps their terror had magnified it, but it seemed larger than a donkey. Its awful croaking echoed in their ears. The professor yelled something that they did not hear, and turned as if to go back. Lance and Maurice dragged him along. At last, panting and exhausting, they paused for breath.

"My stars!" gasped Lance. "Phew!"

Von Haagel sat down and tore his hair. He was speechless, but it was very clear that he was angry. He shook his clenched fist in the air, and hammered his heels in the fallen moss.

"He's going to choke!" said Fordham, in alarm.

"Mad, mad, mad! Ach, yes!" spluttered the professor.

"It was der—der—"

He couldn't get out the word. He mopped his fiery face, and waved the hammer fiercely.

"Yes?"

"Der—der— Ach! Der—"

"Out with it!" said Lance.

"Der labyrinthodon!" gasped Von Haagel.

"Of course it was!" said Lance. "Ugh, the villainous brute! I ought to have known it!"

"That's all right!" said Fordham. "These beggars are tame as fossils. I like them best as fossils, too. You learned fellows can give them jaw-twisting names five feet long, but it's not so cheerful to meet one alive. That beast could have swallowed me. Where have we got to, and what shall we do next?"

Mr. Tooter dug his fingers into his beard.

"Great blackbirds!" he muttered. "Oh, great blackbirds!"

Mr. Tooter used his favourite expression, but the words could hardly be deemed prophetic. The last thing they expected to find in the place was a blackbird, and especially one of that species with a weakness for blinking. Mr. Tooter suggested that a drop of whisky would do no harm, and took several drops for the good of, perhaps, his hair.

"I wonder if I hit it?" said Maurice.

Tooter glanced at Fordham's rifle, and shook the drops out of the silver folding-cup. Then he closed the cup flat, and grinned again.

"I reckon not, sir," he said. "Leastwise, if you fired straight you didn't, sir."

"And why didn't I?"

"Because, sir," said Mr. Tooter, "you've got the sight jammed to nine hundred yards."

"So he has," laughed Lance. "You're a fine sportsman! You must have shot about a mile above it. No wonder the beggar grinned at you with all his teeth! You must have been shooting at one of William's blinking blackbirds at the top of the next tree. Hit him! I'll bet you've chipped a bit out of the South Pole!"

"I'll chip a bit out of you, sonny, if you chip me," said Fordham good-naturedly. "I must have knocked the sight up by accident. You needn't be so saucy because you're tricky with a rifle. I'll bet you hands down and triggers up with a shot-gun any day."

"Now he's starting, dad," said Lance. "Do you hear the boastful bouncer? Just because he can grass tame pheasants and hen-reared partridges, and knock over a few squealing hares and rabbits, he's quite proud. And yet he can't hit a thousand-toothed frog as big as a house. He might have hit it with a shot-gun, where about two hundred shots go to the ounce, and spread like oil on water. Boastful, bragging rascal! Dad, can those brutes travel?"

Von Haagel admitted his ignorance. Science was helpless to answer such a question. From the scattered fossils buried deep in the earth or washed up by the sea, it could only build up their vast and terrible forms, and speculate upon its awful strength and voracious appetite.

"Ach, dear lad," said the professor, shaking a great splash of water from his hand, "dot is what I know not. Der labyrinthodon is not well understood, for he is scarce. But you have seen him, and you ein naturalist I do not flatter, for I lofe mine lads too much to flatter. He is clumsy and heavy, and his shape is not for quickness."

"That's what I think," said Lance. "I'm off to bag him for the Natural History Museum at Kensington. Who'll come. Are you afraid, William? It's only a frog."

Mr. Tooter brightened up. As a labyrinthodon it was terrifying, as a frog it was nothing to inspire awe, whatever his size. Mr. Tooter tightened his belt and declared that he was ready. Their own tracks were plainly visible, and they followed them to the edge of the trees.

"He's gone," said Maurice. "Lend me your glasses, old chap."

He scanned the mud and reeds. At one place the reeds were broken down. The distance was about sixty yards.

"I expect he's in that patch," said Lance. "You see where I mean, William?"

"Ay, ay, sir!" answered William.

"Then just sprinkle a charge of shot round there," said Lance, "and perhaps he'll come out to see why it's raining so hard. Ready, Maurice? Got that sight down?"

"You bet."

"Smack him, Will!" said Lance. "Right barrel, not the choke, for I want it to scatter."

Von Haagel stood with his legs wide apart and his binoculars raised to his spectacles, puffing and croaking in his excitement like some human labyrinthodon. Tooter levelled his gun and pulled his hardest.

"Why don't you shoot?" asked Maurice impatiently.

"The thing won't go off, sir!"

"You ass!" said Lance, pulling back the clutch. "You've got it at 'safe. Can't you read 's-a-f-e'? Haven't you

* Labyrinthodon, a huge, frog-like creature, so called from the formation of its teeth, which resembled a labyrinth.

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 210.

By MARTIN CLIFFORD.
Please Order Your Copy Early.

Next Thursday's Grand, Long, Complete
School Tale of Tom Merry & Co.

"THE NEW FIRM AT ST. JIM'S."

ever seen a hammerless gun before? Why, you've loaded hundreds!"

"Yes, I know; but I ain't never shot any frog, sir!" growled Mr. Tooter. "Take that, you reptile!"

The charge clipped through the reeds. Then a hoarse, quavering scream arose from the reed-beds, and flakes of mud were tossed into the air.

"Give him another dose, Will!" cried Lance.

Again the gun rang out. This time it was the choke-bore, and the shots hung well together. Tooter had stung the frog badly. The mud-flakes tossed up, and they could hear, loud above the shrill croaking, the reptile's feet hammering upon the ooze. The reeds swayed and rocked, and the labyrinthodon floundered out, its great eyes blazing, and the horrid mottled pouches of its cheeks and chin distended like speckled bladders.

Fordham's bullet crashed through its head. It simply shook itself and hissed. The silver-coated bullets were useless against it. Lance drew his own cartridge, and cut the end of it across with his knife. Then he fired. The hissing, groaning reptile collapsed and dropped its hideous head into the mud.

"Great blackbirds!" gasped Mr. Tooter. "If them there frogs like him comes from tadpoles—as I've heard they does—I shouldn't like to do no bathing where them tadpoles lives. Whoa! Steady, sir!"

Mr. Tooter clutched the professor's coat and held it.

"Ach, let me go—let me go!" panted the professor.

"Don't," said Maurice. "Knock him down, Tooter, if he's violent!"

"Suttinly, sir!" said the first officer. "I never disobeyed a horder yet!"

"Ach, you tyrants, dear lads!" puffed the impatient professor. "There lies der only labyrinthodon dot ever human eye looked on—at least, any eyes of civilised man—and you shall not let me vly to him. Ach, but I lofe my dear, brave tyrants, and so I shall forgive them. Dear lads, you shoot so straight, for mit you I shall not be afraid to walk up to der awful ichthyosaurus, der most dreadful reptile of all, for I know you shall kill him. Oh, ja, ja! I to him will walk quite close."

"Thanks awfully!" said Lance. "I'll take jolly good care I'm not about, though it's kind of you."

"Fancy being a before-lunch snack for a sixty-foot ichthyosaurus!" said Maurice. "Oh, Jupiter, he'd take us for pills! Tooter's whiskers might tickle his palate, but they'd give him a howling indigestion all the same. Now let's see if we can get round."

The ooze was terribly soft, but Mr. Tooter had a knife whose blade was like a cavalry sword. All his property was on a large scale, especially his boots. He possessed a silver watch, that must have found sixteen ounces at the least, with a very pale and vacant face, and the chain by which he kept it anchored, also of silver, would have held a rowing-boat in a storm. Mr. Tooter wielded the big knife and laid the reeds low. Very soon a causeway was made, and they approached the repulsive monster.

Of course, Professor von Haagel was first. There was a sickening, musty odour, but the professor scorned that. More rushes were cut to form a standing place.

"Dear lads," puffed Von Haagel. "I am disappointed, and yet I am delighted." He drifted in his excitement into bad English. "Ach is id nod vunderful? Is nod dot supline? Is nod dot perfect? Himmel! Dot vos der labyrinthodon, but he vas small, dear lads. Ach, der peauty, ter tarling, der lofe!"

He raved over the horrid thing, spread out its clammy feet, fondled the huge horny knobs on its body, lifted its forelegs to point out the bristly tufts of hair, and propped open the hideous mouth to show the rows of twisted teeth.

"Oh, peautiful—glorious! Oh, vunderful! Ach, grand, supline, superb, marvellous! In mine book did I not draw him so to der life? Dell me, lads, did I nod do der life picture of him?"

"By George, you didn't daddy!" said Lance, holding his nose. "You forgot to draw the smell!"

"A traction-engine couldn't draw that, sir!" said Mr. Tooter. "Oh, law!"

The stench was revolting. Lance, a brilliant taxidermist—a man who stuffs animals, birds, reptiles, has not to be sensitive—swore mentally that he would hand the stuffing of the specimen over to Von Haagel. They were past wondering and astonishment.

"How are we going to get him home?" asked Lance.

"Why, bring the aeronef and put a rope under him, old son! What's easier?"

"Den vetch it, dear lads—vetch id. I nod leaf him!" said the professor firmly.

"Don't be silly, dad!" said Lance. "Who's to hurt him?"

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 210.

DON'T MISS "BOLSOVER MINOR'S LAST SACRIFICE!" The Splendid, Long, Complete School Story "MAGNET" LIBRARY. appearing in this week's number of the One Penny.

"How can I tell dot? We know not what vile creatures shall come him to devour. Ach, is he nod prodigious?" he said, gazing at the ghastly thing rapturously.

"He's certainly a bit high," said Lance. "If we meet things like this often, Maurice, we shall have to leave our Lee-Metfords at home, and use the elephant guns with explosive bullets. It's like shooting at them with peas. When you got him through the head he hardly winked. I should say he's deficient in brains."

They persuaded the professor to leave the labyrinthodon, pledging themselves to return on the morrow and skin it.

It was covered over with reeds, and Lance, Maurice, and Mr. Tooter were heartily glad to beat a retreat, for the reptile was anything but agreeable company.

The steady heat was almost intolerable in this strange, flowerless, birdless country. They pushed on for another hour up the slope, and then Mr. Tooter, whose appetite never failed, suggested lunch. By this time they were drenched to the skin.

"Lunch be it, then," said Maurice, "though I'm not at all peckish. I'll bring an umbrella when I come this way again. I'm certain there's fever about. We'll take some quinine when we get back."

No time was wasted over lunch, but when Von Haagel tried to rise he found himself unpleasantly stiff. He sat down again, asking Lance to fill his pipe.

"Dear lads," he puffed, "we are only at der gates of der land we seek, or, rather, outside der walls."

"You mean that we ought to be across the mountains, dad?"

"Ach, yes! Ach, yes!" said the professor. "And I will tell you what I do think."

He waved his fat arms round him and puffed harder. "All this, dear lads," he went on, "is supline, is wonderful. We have seen der pterodactyls, and we have shot der labyrinthodon. But I tell you, der real land we seek is over dere. These trees—splendid trees—but not trees at all, are stunted. They are like flowers sprung from seeds dot blow out of ein lovely garden, and fall on barren soil. They grow, but they grow small and weak, and not beautiful like those in the garden. Ach, no! Der garden is yonder, and we must enter it, dear lads."

Maurice took a photograph of the peaks from his pocket. It was impossible, too terribly hazardous even to dream of raising the aeronef high enough to pass between the shining cones. The thought was enough to make a human being dizzy. The air would be too thin and rarefied for the suspensory screws. There could be no oxygen for their lungs, and the fierce and awful cold would stiffen them into frozen corpses.

"You might as well try to empty the Thames with a thimble as to try to get over those mountains," he said.

"One is about as easy as the other."

"But may we not find a pass? Ach! Why not?"

"That's my idea," said Lance. "They seem to be in a kind of a circle. We can float round, at any rate."

"Then let us go—let us go!" panted the professor. "Himmel, let us nod delay. I will take der feet of der labyrinthodon only. You shall shoot more for me."

He had forgotten his stiffness. Tooter repacked his basket. As they approached the pool, a hideous shriek made them huddle close together.

"You're too late!" said Lance hoarsely, pointing through the trees.

"Der pterodactyl!" gasped Professor von Haagel.

The monster had sniffed the carrion like a vulture. The black brute was erect, its lengthy wings folded round it, its green eyes ablaze, tearing and rending with its spiked teeth at its loathsome meal. Lance raised his rifle, but Maurice caught his wrist.

"No, Lance, no!" he whispered. "Look, there's another!"

They stole away, and then began to run through the dripping wood. They had seen enough for one day at least.

Afloat Once More—The Crystal Lake—Wonderful Fishing—Von Haagel has a Bite.

Teddy Morgan was never idle, and he never found his labours ended.

He recharged the cylinders with liquid air, and then got to work on the damaged electric-lighting plant.

He kept Mr. Crooks very busy, and just as the explorers returned, Mr. Crooks was perched on top of a ladder manipulating a wire.

Mr. Crooks by some mistake got hold of a live wire. The sensation was painful and startling. The cook shrieked, and, flinging his arms and legs round the vertical column, slid down it, and reached the deck with a bump.

Jackson laughed unfeelingly, and Morgan smiled.

Mr. Crooks slowly and thoughtfully raised his head, and glared at the spot he had so hurriedly vacated.

"That was 'ot!" he growled thoughtfully. "I come down sharpish, but no bones broken. Why not?"

"I guess he chased hisself that time, Teddy?" grinned Jackson. "Did it tickle?"

"It was red-'ot," said Mr. Crooks, rubbing himself, "and the deck was 'ard. Steel is 'arder than wood, but no bones is busted. For which same, let us be joyful and sing. Why not?"

Lance, Maurice, and the professor scrambled aboard. They were well ahead of Tooter, who had lost a boot in a muddy spot. They were all hot and wet.

"We'll get afloat again now, Teddy," said Lance, "and coast along gently in search of a pass."

"Our water supply is pretty low, sir."

"But we're sure to find plenty," put in Fordham. "There must be scores of brooks and runnels from the melting snow. We couldn't drink the filth here. It's more like pea-soup than water, and the smell is sublime."

"And the sweet animals that bathe in it," said Lance. "Ugh, the thought of it makes me feel creepy! We'll go easy, Teddy, and stick a few chairs forward. Don't travel fast, or you'll blow us away."

Jackson was sent for three deck chairs and a table. They changed their wet clothes, and took a dose of quinine each as an antidote to the pestilential air they had been breathing.

The Wings of Gold rose fifty feet, and skimmed along gently. The clouds had rolled away, and they could see the shimmering ice and the foothills trending away north. The spectacle was stupendous in its grandeur.

"A sight like that makes a man feel what a miserable little rat he is on the world," said Lance.

"Ach, yes," puffed the professor, "dot is true, Lance! It is all so wonderful, dot I shall never more surprised be at anything."

"I shall be surprised if I ever get the scent of that beastly labyrinthodon out of my nose," said Fordham. "I can actually taste it. Hi, Crooks, you long rascal! Bring up some whisky-and-soda. We'd better give Tooter a drop, for it's supposed to ward off fever. My stars and comets, how that place steamed!"

The cook brought the refreshments on a tray, and the inquisitive bantam joined the group. But they looked in vain for a break in the wall.

The aeronef hardly seemed to move when they looked upwards, but when they looked down the panorama was for ever changing.

"This is grand and luxurious," said Lance. "It's a pity the old boat shakes so much. Tooter has only one false tooth, and he swears it has been shaken loose. I think I shall fix up a hammock and take my ease in that."

"Good idea," said Fordham lazily. "It is a trifle bumpy and noisy. How's the wind? We ought to send another postman out."

Morgan stopped the driving machinery, and allowed the aeronef to glide until her own momentum was exhausted.

Lance wrote out a couple of messages.

The little breeze that was stirring was northerly. The two little balloons were carefully inflated and set free.

"How are we going to hand out for the night?" asked Fordham. "I don't fancy the ground."

"Neither do I," said Lance. "We might have some uncanny visitors. There's water. Do you see it?"

The aeronef was gliding past a great cliff of brown stone.

A streak of silvery water, hardly thicker than the blade of a penknife, showed brightly against the dusky background.

Morgan headed the aeronef for it.

The streak widened as they neared it.

"Ach," puffed the professor, "dot was ein little river! Ach, see! See down yonder, dear lads!"

Eight hundred feet below, a small lake flashed like burnished silver. Tooter let the hose fall under the rail, and the winged vessel dropped swiftly as Morgan lessened the speed of the suspensory screws. The lake was probably a mile long—a true mountain lake, fed by melting snow. The Wings of Gold rested above it thirty feet.

"Try the stuff before you pump it, Teddy!" shouted Fordham.

"Right, sir."

A pail went splashing down at the end of a rope. The water was icy cold, pure and sweet. In a few minutes the pump was working. Jackson suddenly shouted:

"There's fish!"

A great ripple broke the surface of the shiny lake, and Jackson absolutely tumbled down the ladder to get his rod and tackle. The little Cockney was a devoted angler, but the ripple excited the professor to an equal extent.

"Dear Lance," he panted, "we must catch ein fish! Dot is most important, Maurice. We must have ein fish! Quick, dear lads—quick! Oh, quick, mine dear lads!"

"Don't be impatient, dad!" laughed Fordham. "And

don't dance, or you'll go overboard for a certainty. We'll do our best for you. What do you think the brutes will bite best? We've got no bait, except flies."

"Try der flies, dear lads. You shall catch me ein fish. Ach, yes, you shall catch me ein fish!"

Another great ripple danced over the lake. Jackson rushed up with a powerful pike-rod, which he put together with feverish haste. He opened his bait-box so hastily that he drove a hole in his thumb, and danced like the professor.

"What bait are you going to try, Josh?" inquired Morgan.

"An enjyrubber gudgeon, not 'arf!" said Jackson. "And if that long, one-eyed chump comes near me I'll chase it rahnd his neck! Come out of the way!"

Jackson swung the rod, and the bait went whizzing a good fifty feet. As Jackson reeled up, it came spinning and flashing through the water. The next moment Jackson lay on his back at their feet, his legs in the air, and the stump of the broken rod in his hand.

Tooter, the only other man on deck, scratched his beard in astonishment, while the bantam tugged at his prostrate owner's watch-chain.

Tooter placed Jackson in one of the chairs, and fanned him. Jackson gazed about him vacantly.

"Ain't them rockets a treat?" said the angler. "I can see fountains of 'em. There's jist one bustin' against me nose. Where am I? There's annuver squib! They are pretty, not 'arf! Oh, my poor old napper! 'Ow did it happen? There's a katherine-wheel a-buzzin' in yer whiskers. Mind it don't singe them!"

"He was dotty!" said Mr. Crooks. "Why not? Most folks is."

Before Jackson had recovered, Maurice came up ready for the fray.

"Any luck?" he shouted.

"Luck?" said Jackson. "Oh, let me go and chase myself! It was a whale as bit. Look at my rod, sir!"

Maurice whistled, as he put up his eighteen-feet salmon-rod, and threaded it. He fastened on a spoon-bait, and sent it skimming across the water. Three times he reeled up, and cast. Then he staggered, and shouted. The rod bent double. A second later it leapt back, quivering, and Mr. Crooks clutched at his chin, and yelled as the broken line cracked across his face like a whip-lash.

"Oh, thank you!" said Maurice. "And sir to you! This is nice!"

"Oh, was it?" groaned the cook. "If it was, why not? But it ain't! Therefore, it can't be!"

"What's the matter, old chap?"

Lance, with the professor trotting after him, came up.

"The matter is, my son," said Fordham, "that you want a small cable for these minnows. Salmon-line is no good. Cotton would be just as useful. They'll take a spoon-bait, and keep it. You try."

"Oh, rats!" laughed Lance. "You don't know how to fish. Move yourself!"

Lance fished with a spoon-bait also. The bait dropped into the water. Almost before it had time to sink it was seized. He held on for a moment, the line whizzing from the wheel. Then, with a sudden jerk, the line parted.

"Oh, mices!" laughed Fordham. "You do know how to fish!"

Mr. Crooks sniggered, and Jackson laughed outright. The professor puffed up with another rod, and hurled the bait forward. Von Haegel had never fished before in his life. Lance had fitted him with a powerful sea-rod and a line like a small hawser. Then, to their utter amazement, they saw the professor's legs shoot from under him. The professor, with a yell, glided swiftly forward, until his feet darted under the steel rail. He would have gone overboard altogether had not his legs gone either side of the upright bar. Like grim death he clutched the tossing rod.

"Ach!" he spluttered. "I have the rascal! Ach, he shall not me escape! 'Ja, ja! I him have! Du mien gute! He will tear from me der arms from der sockets. Ach! Ouch!"

The professor's nose struck the second rail violently, and he clutched at Jackson's ankle, dragging the little Cockney out of the chair. Jackson brought down the chair and the table with the soda-water bottles with him, and shot the bottles over Von Haegel in a shower. The bantam got wet, and immediately attacked its owner with beak and spurs. But the professor stuck grimly to the rod.

"Hold him, dad!" cried Lance. "He's a beauty! Don't let him go!"

(Another long instalment of this thrilling adventure serial in next Thursday's "GEM" Library. Order in advance. Price One Penny.)

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 210

By MARTIN CLIFFORD. Please Order Your Copy Early.

Next Thursday's Grand, Long, Complete School Tale of Tom Merry & Co.

"THE NEW FIRM AT ST. JIM'S."

OUR SPECIAL WEEKLY FEATURE



For Next Thursday.

Our next grand long, complete school tale dealing with the adventures of Tom Merry & Co. is entitled

"THE NEW FIRM AT ST. JIM'S,"

By MARTIN CLIFFORD,

and my readers will well be able to imagine the excitement caused in junior circles by the formation of a fresh Co. It will pay all my chums, so as to be certain of reading

"THE NEW FIRM AT ST. JIM'S,"

to order the next week's GEM Library to-day.

Concerning "Back Number" Notices.

It occasionally happens that a reader writes to his fellow-reader, who is advertising in the "Back Numbers" column that he has some surplus copies to dispose of, and receives no answer. I must ask my chums to assume in such cases that the back numbers have already been disposed of. In many cases advertisers in this column have been so overwhelmed with applications that it has been impossible for them to reply to them all. Will my chums also note that only advertisements dealing with back numbers of THE GEM, "The Magnet," and "The Boys' Friend" 3d. Library can be inserted on this page.

Back Numbers Offered and Wanted.

Master E. Paddock, of 12, Sloane Gate, Sloane Street, London, S.W., wishes to obtain Nos. 148 to 153 of THE GEM Library. Can any reader oblige?

Master H. Beechy, of 20, Kimberly Road, Eastney, Portsmouth, has No. 101 of THE GEM, which he is willing to let any fellow reader have.

Master William Thomas, of 208, Picton Road, Wavertree, Liverpool, will be glad to lend any fellow reader any copy of THE GEM or "The Magnet" that he has in his possession.

Can any reader supply John Da Costa with No. 131, Vo. 4, of THE GEM Library. Address, St. Catherine's, Barton-on-Sea, Hants.

Important Notice.

In connection with the popular Correspondence Exchange, which will this week be found on cover, page iii, I have been requested by a number of readers, several of whom are girls, to state that they have been so deluged with letters as a result of the publication of their request for a correspondent, that they are utterly unable to reply to all. From one hundred to six hundred letters and postcards have been received by many readers, who want me to thank very much all those who have so kindly written to them, and at the same time to explain that it is impossible to answer each one. Perhaps this notice will relieve the minds of those of my chums who have written to advertisers in the Exchange, and have been puzzled at not receiving any reply.

Replies in Brief.

P. W. and M. G.—I note your request, which I will give my best consideration.

Master F. Bailey (London, S.E.)—I don't think you have ever seen requests similar to yours answered on this page, such queries usually being addressed to some paper which makes a speciality of police-court and criminal news. I am afraid I must decline to answer it.

Clarence G. (Couch, Adelaide, Australia).—Thanks for your letter. Your scheme for popularising THE GEM and "The Magnet" by leaving copies on seats in railway carriages and other public places is indeed an excellent one, and I am very pleased to hear how well it has succeeded. You should be able to get the paper you mention from the same source that supplies you with THE GEM and "The Magnet" Libraries.

"Puzzled" (Hackney).—Yes, Frank Kingston's original name was Philip Graydon, but in order to conceal his identity during his campaign against the notorious Brotherhood of Iron, he adopted the name of Kingston, which he has retained up to the present time.

G. Walker (North Sydney, New South Wales).—Thanks for your letter. I am very glad to hear that a "slacker" has been changed into one of the very best fellows of your school by reading the tales of Tom Merry & Co. I heartily reciprocate your good wishes.

Cyril B. (Whitehaven).—The story of Todd's departure from Greyfriars was told in No. 169 of "The Magnet" Library, entitled "The Bully's Remorse," and dated May 6th, 1911.

"Constant Reader," "A Girl Gemite," and others.—Chilblains are due to a sluggish circulation of the blood, and the treatment should be preventive. In cold weather loose woollen gloves should be worn, and the skin should be kept clean and dry. Where chilblains have already formed they should be painted with collodion or dusted with starch, and wrapped in cotton wool; broken chilblains should be anointed with boracic ointment.

In reply to numerous inquirers, I may say that an excellent book, entitled "Practical Ventriloquism," can be obtained from Messrs. Upcott Gill, Bazaar Buildings, Drury Lane, London, W.C.

A Clever Contribution.

One of my many friends, who signs himself "Constant Reader," and writes from Bracknell, sends me a very ingenious rhyme dealing with his favourite paper, which is well worth publication. Here it is. It is called:

THE A B C OF "THE GEM."

A for the Authors—all second to none.
 B for the Boys, whose hearts they have won.
 C is the Confidence never misplaced.
 D for the Duties it shows must be faced.
 E for the Editor. (Give him a cheer!)
 F for the Fame, growing greater each year.
 G for the Gem readers (they know what is good).
 H is to Have it, as everyone should.
 I for the Interest 'twill ever sustain.
 J for the Joy reading brings in its train.
 K for the Knowledge it adds to our store.
 L is the Longing we each have for more.
 M for its Manliness, true and upright.
 N is our Need for its counsel and light.
 O is our Ownership so clearly shown.
 P is our Pride for the paper we own.
 Q is the Quality—pictures and text.
 R is the Rush always made for the next.
 S for its Standing—the first in all lands.
 T is the Truth which for ever it stands.
 U we Unitedly wish it god-speed.
 V is the Volume—a treasure indeed.
 W its Weal—we all have at heart.
 X is its 'Xtra Grand 'Xmas part.
 Y is our Yearning to have it, and then
 Zealously guard it until we are men.

Very good, "Constant Reader"! Your clever composition will probably be cut out and preserved by many of your fellow-readers of THE GEM.

THE EDITOR.