

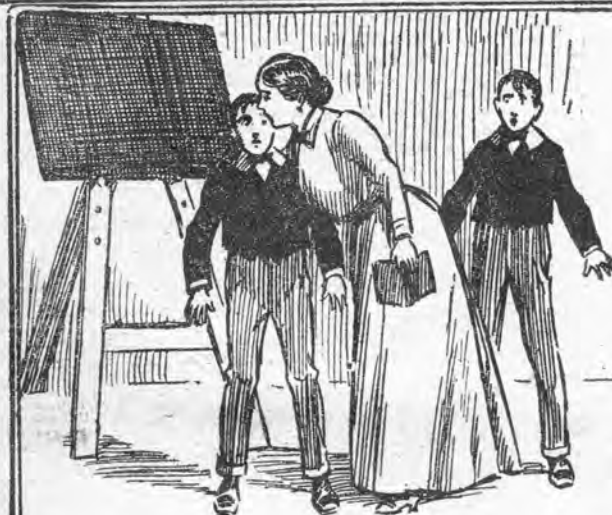
Next Thursday's **"TOM MERRY'S LEGION OF HONOUR!"** By MARTIN CLIFFORD.
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Merry & Co. at St. Jim's.

- BY -
MARTIN CLIFFORD.

CHAPTER 1. D'Arcy to the Rescue.

"**R** EAD it out, Crooke!"

"He, he, he!"
Tom Merry heard the remark, and the unpleasant cachinnation that followed, as he came along the Form-room passage at St. Jim's.

A group of juniors were standing by the window at the end of the passage.

One of them—Crooke of the Shell—had a letter in his hand, and a grin of enjoyment on his face. Mellish of the Fourth, and Gore of the Shell, and several other fellows were standing round him, grinning too. They evidently anticipated much amusement from the reading out of the letter Crooke held in his hand.

"Dear Mr. Lathom," began Crooke, with a chuckle.
Tom Merry started.

He had glanced carelessly at the group, and concluded that Crooke was about to read out a portion of some letter from home; perhaps some piece of kindly advice from an elderly uncle which was worth retailing for the amusement of his friends. But as Crooke began the letter, he understood—and he strode towards the group with a frown upon his brow.

"What's that letter, Crooke?" he asked sharply.
Crooke grinned.

"I found it in the Form-room passage," he said. "Lathom must have dropped it when he came out of the Fourth Form-room after lessons this morning. It's jolly interesting, I can tell you."

"Have you read it?"

"Of course I have," said Crooke, "and now I'm going to read it out to these chaps. If you don't want to hear it, you can clear off."

"Yes, buzz off, Tom Merry," said Mellish. "It's a letter from the vicar's sister to Mr. Lathom, you know, and Crooke says it's a case of spoons."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

But Tom Merry did not join in the laugh. The frown

deepened upon his brow, and he made a step towards the cad of the Shell, and held out his hand.

"Give me that letter!" he said.

"Do you want to read it out?" asked Crooke.

"No, I don't, you cad. I'm going to take it back to Mr. Lathom. You're not going to read it."

Crooke's hand closed tightly upon the letter, and he gave the captain of the Shell a look of defiance.

"What's it got to do with you?" he demanded. "I suppose I can read out the letter if I like, confound you. Mind your own business!"

"Yes, mind your own business!" said Mellish, getting a little farther away from Tom Merry as he said it, however.

"You've no right to interfere here, Merry."

"Yes, buzz off!" said Gore.

"Mind your own business, you know!"

Tom Merry's eyes flashed.

"It's anybody's business to prevent a rotten cad from reading a private letter, especially a letter from a lady," he said.

"Will you give me that letter, Crooke?"

"No, I won't," said Crooke savagely.

"Then I'll jolly well take it."

Crooke backed away, and thrust the letter into his pocket. Tom Merry advanced upon him with a blaze in his eyes, and his fists clenched. As a rule, Crooke would not have cared to provoke a conflict with the captain of the Shell, but his temper was up now, and he had four or five friends with him, and Tom Merry was alone. Most of the fellows were out in the quadrangle in the sunny July weather.

"Hands off, hang you!" said Crooke, between his teeth.

"You sha'n't have the letter. I know jolly well what you want to do; you want to read it, and—"

"Will you give me that letter?"

"No!" yelled Crooke.

Tom Merry did not waste any more time in words. He ran straight at the cad of the Shell, and grasped him. Crooke shouted to his companions:

"Stand by me, you fellows. Don't let him have the letter!"

Bump!

Next Thursday:

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Crooke went down heavily upon the floor, dragging Tom Merry down with him. In a moment three or four pairs of hands were laid upon Tom Merry, and he was dragged off Crooke and rolled on the floor. Crooke and Co. were strong in numbers, and they were glad of a chance of handling the hero of the Shell without much danger to themselves.

"Hands off, you cads!" shouted Tom Merry.
"Will you leave the letter alone?" demanded Pilker of the Fourth.

"No, I won't!"
"Bump him, then," said Mellish.
"Good egg! Bump him!"

Tom Merry struggled desperately in the grasp of his assailants. Gore rolled on the floor, knocked flying by a drive from Tom Merry's right, and Pilker, caught by a swift upper cut under the chin, dropped across him, yelling. But then Crooke and Mellish and another fellow were kneeling on Tom Merry, and he was pinned down, gasping.

"Got him!" said Mellish, between his teeth.
Pilker staggered up.
"Pile on him!" he exclaimed. "We'll teach the rotten cad to interfere. Sit on him, all of you, and Crooke can read the letter out."

"Ha, ha, ha!"
Tom Merry almost disappeared under the juniors as they piled on him. With fellows kneeling on his chest and arms and legs, he was pinned down by sheer weight, and his struggles only made the cads of the School House kneel harder. They grinned down at his red and furious face.

"Hold him down," chuckled Crooke. "I'll read out the letter now, and he can hear it, and if there's any row about it afterwards, we can all say that Tom Merry heard the letter as well as the rest of us."

"Ha, ha, ha!"
"You awful cad!" gasped Tom Merry. "I won't listen! I—"

"Yes, you will!" grinned Crooke. "Hold him tight, you fellows!"

"What-ho!" said Pilker. "We've got him! Go ahead!"
Tom Merry made a desperate effort to throw off his assailants. But it was no good. The weight was too much for him. As he sank back under them, exhausted by the effort, Crooke began to read out the letter—

"Dear Mr. Lathom,—I shall be very pleased indeed if you can come to tea this afternoon—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"
Tom Merry struggled again.
"Keep him quiet!" said Crooke.
"That's all right. Go on with the letter."
"Rescue!" yelled Tom Merry, in the faint hope that some of his chums might be near at hand. "Rescue! Lowther! Manners! Rescue, Shell!"

"Shove your fist into his mouth, somebody, or we shall have a giddy crowd here," growled Crooke.
"Rescue! Ow!"

Gore stuffed a far from clean handkerchief into Tom Merry's mouth, and he choked into silence. But his shout had been heard.

An elegant figure came scudding along the passage. It needed only a glance at the handsome waistcoat, the beautifully-creased trousers, and the gleaming eyeglass, to show that it was Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, the swell of the Fourth Form.

"Bai Jove!" ejaculated D'Arcy. "What is the mattah, deah boys?"

"Grooh!" gasped Tom Merry.
"That is not fair play, you know, four or five to one," said the swell of St. Jim's. "I do not wish to interfere with mattahs in the Shell, but, undah the cirs., I think I had bettah do so. Welcase Tom Mewwy at once!"

"Rats!" growled Crooke.
"Clear off!" said Mellish.
"I wefuse to cleah off," said Arthur Augustus indignantly.
"Welcase Tom Mewwy at once, or I shall give you a feahful thwashing. I wefuse to see a fwiend of mine tweeked with such uttah diswespect."

"Oh, go and eat coke."
Tom Merry ejected the handkerchief from his mouth with a great effort.

"Rescue!" he gasped. "Pile in, Gussy, there's a good chap. They're spying into a letter that doesn't belong to them."

"Bai Jove!"
Arthur Augustus required no more. His eyeglass dropped to the end of its cord, and he charged at the cads of the School House, hitting out with a force that few would have suspected the elegant junior capable of.

Biff! Biff!
Crooke dropped as if he had been shot, and Gore rolled along the passage yelling. Tom Merry made an effort at the same moment as the grasp of his assailants relaxed under

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this new attack, and tore himself free. He leaped panting to his feet.

"Now, then!" he exclaimed, with gleaming eyes.
"Yaas, wathah, deah boy! Shouldah to shouldah, you know!"

And in a moment more there was a wild and whirling conflict in progress.

CHAPTER 2.

The Reward of Virtue.

ARTHUR AUGUSTUS D'ARCY was generally a peaceful fellow, not so much because he had any special objection to fighting, but because any rough play was liable to cause damage to his beautiful clothes. But when he was excited, the swell of St. Jim's forgot even his clothes, and at such times he was a most dangerous antagonist. In spite of his elegant ways, he could always give a good account of himself in an encounter; as the cads of the School House learned to their cost on the present occasion.

Tom Merry and his ally did not wait to be attacked. They rushed upon their foes hitting out. The odds against them were three to one, but they did not mind that. And hard hitting at close quarters was not at all to the taste of Crooke and Co.

Mellish ran down the passage at the first onset, and disappeared, and Pilker dashed after him at top speed. The others would gladly have followed, but they had no choice. They were being knocked right and left under heavy blows, and in a couple of minutes, four gasping young rascals lay at the feet of the victorious two.

"Thanks, Gussy," gasped Tom Merry. "Now, then, Crooke, if you care to get up again, I'll give you some more. I'm willing to handle any two of you rotters."

"Yaas, wathah, and I will take the othah two with gweat pleasuah."

But the invitation was not accepted.
Crooke and Co. lay gasping and groaning, and no earthly inducement would have made them rise and face more punishment.

"Will you get up, Cwooke?" demanded D'Arcy.
"Oh!" groaned Crooke, rubbing a half-closed eye. "Ow! Yow!"

"I insist upon your gettin' up and takin' a lickin', Cwooke."

"Groo!"
Tom Merry laughed.

"They've had enough," he said. "Will you give me that letter now, Crooke? I've got no time to waste on you; it's close on time for lessons."

"Yaas, wathah! What lettah is it, deah boy?"
Tom Merry frowned.

"A letter from Miss Ponsonby to Mr. Lathom. That cad picked it up—or pinched it more likely—and he was reading at out."

"The uttah cad! Cwooke, if you don't give that lettah up at once, I shall kick you."

And Arthur Augustus drew back his elegant boot for the purpose.

"Hold on!" gasped Crooke. "I—I'll hand it over."
"Buck up, then, you cad."

Crooke scrambled to his feet. He fumbled in his pocket for the letter; and then, with a sudden spring, he passed Tom Merry and rushed down the passage.

"Stop him!" exclaimed D'Arcy.
But it was too late.

Crooke was gone—with the letter still in his pocket.
He had nearly reached the end of the passage, and would have disappeared in another moment, when two Shell fellows came round the corner arm-in-arm. They were Manners and Lowther, Tom Merry's special chums. Crooke dashed right into them, and there was a roar.

"You ass!"
"Where are you running, you fathead?"
"Collar him!" shouted Tom Merry excitedly. "Stop him!"

Manners and Lowther grasped Crooke at once as he tried to dodge past. The cad of the Shell struggled frantically in their grip.

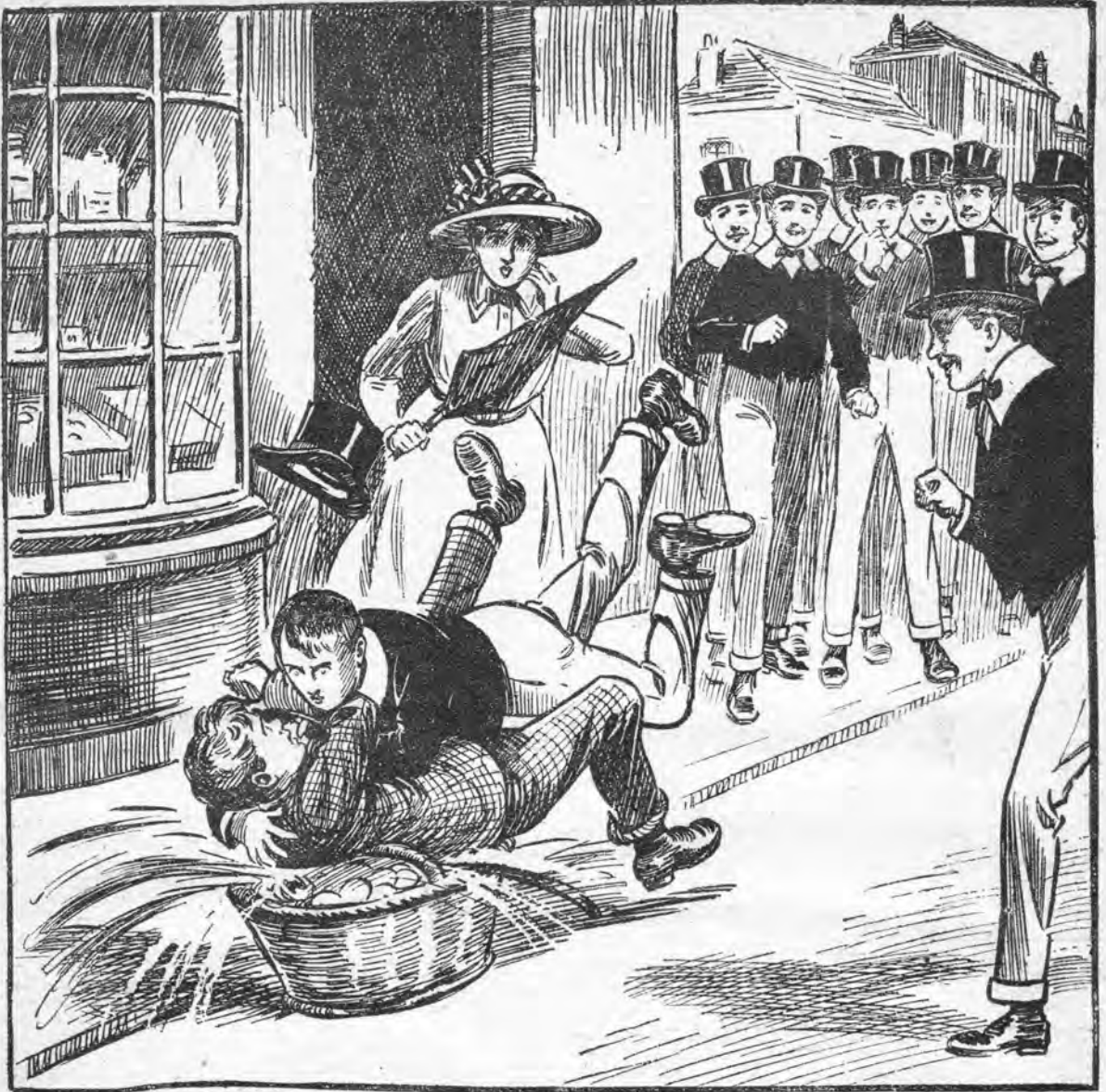
"Let me go!" he yelled.
"No hurry, my friend," said Monty Lowther calmly, "we'll see what Tommy wants you for, first. If you don't keep quiet, Crooke, I shall hit you."

Crooke kept quiet then. He did not want any more hitting. He had had more than he liked already.

He regarded Tom Merry very uneasily, as the hero of the Shell came up.

"I want that letter!" said Tom Merry.
"Look here—"

"Will you hand over the letter or take a licking?"
"Here it is, hang you!"



Miss Ponsonby ran up in great excitement and alarm. "Stop it! Stop fighting at once, you dreadful boys!" she exclaimed. "I'll smash him!" roared Blake. "I'll spifficate him!" bellowed Grimes. (See chap. 15.)

Crooke, with a savage scowl, handed over the letter. Tom Merry took it, and signed to his chums to let their prisoner go.

"He's been reading a letter that belongs to Lathom," he explained. "Kick him out."

"Certainly," said Monty Lowther cheerfully.

Crooke dashed round the corner, two powerful kicks from Manners and Lowther helping him on his way. A howl of pain floated back from the cad of the Shell as he vanished. The sound of the bell could be heard now, ringing for the afternoon lessons.

"Time we got into the class-room, Tommy," said Monty Lowther. "You look in a beautiful state for lessons, I must say."

"Bai Jove!" ejaculated Arthur Augustus, in dismay. "I shall have to go and bwush myself down. I am in a howwid dustay state."

"How are we going to get this letter back to Lathom?" asked Tom Merry dubiously. "I shouldn't like him to think that anybody's been reading it: I can't say I found it—as I didn't."

"He will guess you punched somebody to get it, if he sees you in that state," said Monty Lowther, with a chuckle.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Let Gussy take it, and shove it on his desk in the Fourth Form-room," suggested Manners.

"Good idea."

"Certainly, deah boy," said D'Arcy.

"Mind you don't lose it, then," said Tom Merry, as he handed the letter to the swell of St. Jim's.

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—"

"And now buzz off."

The fellows were coming in to afternoon classes now.

The Terrible Three hurried off to the Shell Form-room, Tom Merry dusting himself down as well as he could as he ran. Most of the Shell had already gone in, and Mr. Linton, the Form-Master, was there. Mr. Linton turned a severe glance on Tom Merry as he entered. The rough-and-tumble struggle in the passage had put the hero of the Shell into a state of considerable disarray, and his jacket and trousers were very dusty up the back.

"Merry!" rapped out Mr. Linton.

"Yes, sir," said Tom Merry.

"What do you mean by coming into the Form-room in that state?"

"I—I'm sorry, sir. I—"

"You have been fighting, I suppose?" said Mr. Linton, with a stern frown.

"I—I—"

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"Have you been fighting, Merry?"
 "Yes, sir," said Tom Merry reluctantly.
 "Then take fifty lines, and go and put yourself tidy at once."

"Yes, sir."
 Tom Merry could not very well explain, under the circumstances, and he took the imposition with the best grace he could. Crooke of the Shell grinned at him as he left the Form-room. It was some satisfaction to the cad of the Shell to see Tom Merry punished, at all events. And Crooke grinned more widely as Manners and Lowther glared at him. "You worm!" growled Monty Lowther, in an undertone. "If you had any decency, you'd own up to old Linton, as you caused it."

Crooke chuckled.
 "No fear!"
 "Br-r-r! You rotter!"
 Mr. Linton glanced round sharply.
 "Were you speaking, Lowther?"
 "I, sir?"
 "Yes, yes. You! Don't prevaricate, Lowther. You were speaking?"
 "Yes, sir," said Lowther, getting very red in the face.
 "I will have order kept in this class-room," said Mr. Linton. "You will take fifty lines of Virgil, Lowther?"
 "Yes, sir."

"Hard cheese, old man," said Manners, as Mr. Linton turned his back on the class, at his desk. "It's all Crooke's fault, and we'll bump the cad—"

Mr. Linton seemed to be gifted with wonderful powers of hearing that afternoon. He swung round in a flash.

"You were talking, Manners."
 "W-w-w-was I, sir?" stammered Manners.
 "I heard you. What were you saying to Lowther, which was so important that it could not be deferred till after lessons?" demanded Mr. Linton, with heavy sarcasm.

"I—I—"
 "Will you kindly repeat your observation, Manners?"
 "Yes, sir. I—I was saying—"
 "Well?" snapped Mr. Linton.
 "I was saying we'd bump Crooke after lessons, sir."
 "Indeed! You will do nothing of the sort. You will stay in after lessons and write out a hundred lines, Manners."
 "Oh!" groaned Manners.

And when Tom Merry returned to the form-room, looking glum, he found his chums looking equally glum.

"This is what comes of playing the game," muttered Monty Lowther, presently, with a sniff, "if we'd let Crooke have his own way, we shouldn't have got these blessed lines. This is what we get for being nice boys! Groo!"

"Never mind," said Tom Merry consolingly, "we'll take it out of Crooke later."

And that thought, at all events, was some solace to the chums of the Shell.

CHAPTER 3. Not Quite Right!

MR. LATHOM, the master of the Fourth Form, came into the Form-room that afternoon with a very cheerful smile upon his face. Mr. Lathom was evidently in a cheerful mood and the sight of it cheered the Fourth Form in proportion. Mr. Lathom was a kind, little gentleman, with very benevolent eyes peering out through big glasses, and he was very popular with the Form. He was so good-tempered, that the Fourth allowed themselves many little relaxations which were quite impossible to the Shell. And when he had that cheerful smile upon his face, the Fourth knew that they were in for an extra easy time.

"No blessed, irregular verbs this afternoon!" murmured Jack Blake. "Lathom's got his best temper on."

"Good!" said Digby. "All the better for Gussy. The ass is late!"

"Where's Gussy?" asked Herries.
 Digby chuckled.

"He was changing his bags in the dorm. when I came in. He's been in the wars and got dusty."

Mr. Lathom glanced over his class.

"D'Arcy is absent," said the Fourth Form-master, in his mild voice. "Do you know where D'Arcy is?"

"In the dorm., sir," said Blake. "He's had an accident, sir."

"Dear me! I hope not a serious accident?" said Mr. Lathom, with concern.

"Oh, no, sir; only made his bags dusty, sir!"

"Dear me! But surely D'Arcy is not staying in the dormitory to clean his bags instead of coming to lessons!" said Mr. Lathom. "I cannot allow anything of the sort! Go to him and tell him to come down at once, Blake, and leave his bags to be cleaned by the page!"

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"But—but, sir, he—he can't come down without them, sir!" said Blake.

"What do you mean?" said Mr. Lathom, rather testily.

"I suppose D'Arcy does not want to bring dusty bags into the Form-room, does he?"

"No, sir; that's why he's brushing them."

"I decline to have his bags brought into the Form-room at all!" said Mr. Lathom. "And you had better tell him so, Blake. I do not understand you, or understand why D'Arcy should wish to bring his bags here. The box-room is the proper place for them."

Blake nearly exploded as he realised the little misapprehension that the Form-master was labouring under.

"I—I— When I said bags, sir, I—I meant trucks!" he stammered.

"Trucks!" said Mr. Lathom, in astonishment. "There is a wide distinction between a bag and a truck, Blake, and I cannot see why you should use the same term for two such entirely different articles. If D'Arcy should bring a truck into the Form-room I should cane him. The proper place for trucks is in the garden, if such articles are here at all. I presume you mean a wheelbarrow?"

"N-no, sir!" gasped Blake. "I—I mean trousers, sir."

The Fourth Form giggled.
 Mr. Lathom stared at Blake.

"Oh, I understand!" he said. "You must not use slang, Blake, especially in the Form-room. Besides, the use of these absurd terms is likely to lead to misapprehension. Do you mean to say that D'Arcy is brushing his clothes?"

"Yes, sir."

"Oh, very well! We will commence without him, then."

And they commenced. The lesson was half-way through when Arthur Augustus D'Arcy entered the Form-room, newly swept and garnished, so to speak. He looked as clean and neat as a new pin as he came in.

"I am vewy sowwy to be late, sir," he said, addressing Mr. Lathom. "Owin' to an unfortunate circumstance, I had to change and bwush—"

"Very well; go to your place, D'Arcy."

"Yaas, sir. If you please, sir—"

"That is enough. You may sit down."

"But I wished to ask you somethin' vewy particularly, sir," said D'Arcy. "I have had an invitation to tea this afternoon, sir, and I wish to leave the Form-room earlay, if you don't mind, sir. It is wathah important, sir."

Mr. Lathom shook his head.

"After coming in to lessons a quarter of an hour late, D'Arcy, it is hardly possible for me to allow you to leave lessons early," he said.

"But, sir—"

"Please say no more."

"Oh, vewy well, sir!" said Arthur Augustus, with a great deal of dignity.

And he sat down.

The Form resumed their excursion into the realms of Roman history, which Arthur Augustus's entrance had interrupted. Arthur Augustus sat with a very dignified expression upon his face. He had two worries on his mind; one was that he wanted to get off early because he had an invitation to tea; and the other, that he wanted an opportunity of restoring to Mr. Lathom the letter Tom Merry had entrusted to him. That would have to be done diplomatically, for if Mr. Lathom knew that he had it, he would naturally inquire into how it had come into his possession; and Arthur Augustus, of course, did not want to betray Crooke. He was disgusted with the cad of the Shell; but the laws of schoolboy honour forbade anything like betraying a fellow, however caddish, to a Form-master. He wanted to find an opportunity of dropping the letter into Mr. Lathom's desk unobserved. If he had been early in the Form-room, he could have placed

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it there easily enough, but as a matter of fact he had been late. D'Arcy generally was late when it would have been specially advantageous to be early.

Arthur Augustus was thinking the matter out, and, as a matter of fact, he was not giving much attention to the lesson. Mr. Lathom was asking questions, which the Fourth-Formers were replying to as well as they could.

"Who was Pyrrhus?" Mr. Lathom inquired. And as the Fourth had been told at least fifty times who Pyrrhus was, there was quite a rush of replies.

"King of Epirus, sir."

"Why did he invade Italy?"

"He was invited over, sir," said Blake, rather proud of his knowledge.

It wasn't every fellow at St. Jim's who knew that Pyrrhus had been invited over to Italy by the Tarentines to help them in their war with Rome in some forgotten century or other.

"Very good!" said Mr. Lathom. "By whom was the invitation sent? D'Arcy! Do you hear me, D'Arcy? I am speaking to you!"

"Yaas, sir," said Arthur Augustus, coming out of a reverie with a start. "Certainly, sir!"

"Answer my question, D'Arcy. By whom was the invitation sent?"

"The Vicar of Wylcombe, sir."

"What!"

"Mr. Ponsonby, sir, the Vicar of Wylcombe."

The Fourth Form giggled.

They were as much startled by Arthur Augustus D'Arcy's reply as Mr. Lathom was, and they fancied that D'Arcy was pulling the Form-master's leg.

"D'Arcy!" ejaculated Mr. Lathom. "Is this—is this meant for impertinence, sir? I asked you by whom the invitation was sent Pyrrhus—"

"Oh!"

"To cross over into Italy—"

"Oh, sir!" gasped D'Arcy.

He had not heard about the unfortunate Pyrrhus, and he had been thinking of his own invitation to tea that afternoon.

"What do you mean, D'Arcy? If you are venturing to joke here—"

"I beg your pardon, sir. It was a slip of the tongue, sir," stammered Arthur Augustus.

"Indeed!" said Mr. Lathom, frowning. "Pray do not have any more slips of the tongue like that, D'Arcy! Now answer my question."

"Ahem, sir! I am afraid I do not know, sir!" stammered D'Arcy.

"I know, sir!" said Mellish, at once, eager to score at D'Arcy's expense. "It was by the citizens of Neapolis, sir."

"It was by nothing of the sort," snapped Mr. Lathom; "and you should be a little more accurate, Mellish, if you are so eager to display your knowledge! It was by the citizens of Tarentum."

Mellish was crushed.

"D'Arcy!"

"Ya-a-a-s, sir!"

"You will write out 'Pyrrhus, King of Epirus, was invited into Italy by the citizens of Tarentum,' fifty times!"

"Yaas, sir!"

And Arthur Augustus D'Arcy gave a little more attention to the lesson after that.

"You ass!" murmured Figgins of the New House, who was sitting next to Arthur Augustus. "What made you pitch an answer at old Lathom like that?"

Arthur Augustus sniled.

"I was thinkin' about my own affairs," he replied. "I have an invitation to tea at the vicarage this afternoon, and I want to get off early."

"Could you take a chap with you?" inquired Fatty Wynn anxiously.

"Wats!"

"They have good feeds at the vicarage," said Fatty Wynn reminiscently. "I don't mind the old boy talking. He always talks; and it doesn't interfere with the eating, so far as I've noticed. His sister is a brick. She makes the cakes herself, and I can tell you they're prime. If you could take a friend with you, Gussy—"

"Wats!"

"I hope you aren't thinking of House rows on an occasion like this?" said Fatty Wynn, with dignity. "In fact, it would be a good idea to take a New House chap with you, as a proof to the vicar that we live in perfect peace—brotherly love—and that kind of thing, you know."

"Wubbish!"

"Look here, you School House bounder!" began Fatty Wynn wrathfully, and rather incautiously.

Mr. Lathom looked round.

"I must really insist upon silence in this class," he said mildly. "I do not wish to detain any of you boys, but if you are not silent—"

The whispering died away at once. Nobody in the Fourth Form wanted to be detained that glorious summer's afternoon. And Mr. Lathom went on a personally-conducted tour with the Fourth into Roman history, in the midst of a general attention which was really flattering to him as a master.

CHAPTER 4.

Mr. Lathom Catches It.

ARTHUR AUGUSTUS D'ARCY was troubled.

The afternoon was passing away, and he had not yet restored the lost letter to Mr. Lathom.

What the letter contained, D'Arcy had not the faintest idea, for, of course, he had not looked at it. He knew that it was from Miss Ponsonby, the vicar's sister, and that was all. It might be very important, and Mr. Lathom might miss it at any moment, and begin to make inquiries about it. That would make matters very awkward for Arthur Augustus.

There was supposed to be a kind of platonic affection between Mr. Lathom, the Master of the Fourth at St. Jim's, and Miss Ponsonby, the vicar's sister, at Rylcombe. Miss Ponsonby was a single lady of some forty years, very well liked by the St. Jim's fellows, some of whom had had the distinction of being invited to tea at the vicarage. Tea at the vicarage was very attractive to the juniors, for, instead of the weak tea, bread and thin butter, and crumbly cake that might have been expected, the festive board was always well spread. Miss Ponsonby was fond of children, as she sometimes told the juniors—a deadly insult which they swallowed as politely as they could. As Fatty Wynn put it, they could swallow that along with the cake, and the cake was certainly ripping. A girl who could make a cake as Miss Ponsonby made it, must be all right, Fatty Wynn declared, and the fellows generally agreed that Miss Ponsonby was all right. Her friendship with Mr. Lathom had lasted many years, and the Fourth Form-master visited the vicarage at tea-time at least once a week, sometimes taking a specially favoured pupil with him. It was generally noticed that when it was known that Mr. Lathom was going to the vicarage to tea, Fatty Wynn became remarkably attentive and painstaking in class, and acted in all respects like a model pupil.

Mr. Lathom would have been surprised if he had known that, on the occasion of such visits, there was some speculation in the Fourth Form as to whether he would "pop this time." Indeed, Lumley-Lumley of the Fourth, in his unregenerate days, when he had been fond of "making a book" had had bets on the subject with several fellows. The odds Lumley-Lumley gave were three to one against.

As the letter in D'Arcy's pocket was from Miss Ponsonby, it might contain an invitation, and Mr. Lathom might not yet have read it. It was evidently very important to get it into Mr. Lathom's possession without delay, and Arthur Augustus tried to think of some means of accomplishing it.

"What are you scowling about, Gussy?" Blake asked him, later in the afternoon. "Not bothering about the lines, are you?"

D'Arcy shook his head.

"No, deah boy. I've got a letter that belongs to Mr. Lathom!"

Blake stared.

"What on earth are you doing with that?" he asked.

Arthur Augustus explained.

"By Jove!" said Blake. "It might be important. Look here, give it to me, old man, and I'll get it back to him."

"How will you do that, deah boy?"

"He's going to use the blackboard next lesson. I'll screw up the letter, and pitch it across so that it will fall on his desk when his back's turned."

D'Arcy's face cleared.

"Bai Jove! That's a good ideah," he said. "He is bound to see it on his desk soonah or latah, or if he misses it, he will look for it and find it there."

"Exactly. Hand it to me."

"Pewwaps I had bettah chuck it ovah, deah boy," said D'Arcy, with a shake of the head. "I thank you vewy much for the suggestion, but I would wathah trust myself in a maffah of this sort. It requires a fellow of tact and judgment."

"Look here—"

"You are wathah clumsy, you know, and you might muck up the whole thing, Blake, deah boy."

Blake breathed hard through his nose.

"Ass!" he murmured.

"Weally, Blake—"

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"You'll make a muck of it, you fathead!"

"I wufuse to be called a fathead!"

The much-enduring Mr. Lathom looked round, and the whispered dialogue ceased. Arthur Augustus prepared for business as the next lesson became due. Mr. Lathom turned his back, chalk in hand, when the blackboard was placed in position.

Arthur Augustus took the letter from his pocket, and folded it twice to give it compactness, and prepared to throw it.

"Careful!" murmured Blake.

"Pway don't bothah, deah boy. You'll put me off my throw!"

"Mind you don't biff Lathom on the back of the head!" muttered Digby.

"Weally, Dig—"

"You must allow for the wind from the window—"

"That's all wight!"

"Well, go it, before he looks round!"

Arthur Augustus rose cautiously to his feet. He raised his right arm above his head, and was about to throw the folded letter across to the Form-master's desk, when Mr. Lathom turned round from the blackboard.

He fixed his eyes upon Arthur Augustus in astonishment. D'Arcy remained arrested; his arm, like Mahomet's coffin, suspended between heaven and earth.

His hand closed tightly upon the letter, concealing it from view, but in his startled surprise his arm remained elevated, and he stared blankly at Mr. Lathom.

"Dear me!" said the Fourth Form-master, in amazement. "What do you mean, D'Arcy? What is the cause of that extraordinary attitude?"

Arthur Augustus turned crimson. He was at a loss for words. His attitude was indeed extraordinary, and very difficult to explain away. He dropped his arm to his side and stood looking in much confusion at the Form-master.

"If—if you please, sir," he stammered.

"If you expect to please me by these ridiculous antics, D'Arcy, you are labouring under a very curious delusion," said Mr. Lathom tartly. "Sit down at once, sir!"

"Ya-a-a-as, sir!"

Arthur Augustus sat down.

Mr. Lathom gave him a very severe glance, and turned to the blackboard again.

The Fourth Form grinned joyfully.

"Blessed ass!" murmured Figgins. "Better give it to me, Gussy, and I'll manage it for you."

"Oh, wats!"

"I'll try, if you like," said Redfern.

"Go and eat coke!" said Arthur Augustus ungratefully.

"Gussy, old man—" began Blake.

"Wats!"

It was evident that Arthur Augustus intended to deal with the matter himself. He kept a wary eye on Mr. Lathom. The Form-master was not likely to be occupied long in the cabalistic signs he was making on the blackboard. There was no time to lose.

Arthur Augustus rose to his feet again with more caution than before.

He raised his hand, and was about to project the folded letter through the air, when Jack Blake spotted Mr. Lathom turning round, and he caught at the swell of St. Jim's to drag him back into his seat in time.

It was too late—the missile had sped; and, unfortunately, Blake's sudden grip on D'Arcy had only the effect of swinging him round, so that the letter, as it left his hand, flew in the wrong direction.

Whiz!

Right towards Mr. Lathom it whizzed, as the master turned round from the blackboard.

"Now, my boys," said Mr. Lathom, "I— Oh, oh, oh!"

He staggered back as the folded letter smote him upon the nose, and then fell to his feet.

"My hat!" gasped Blake.

"Gweat Scott!"

Mr. Lathom stood gasping for a moment. Then his face flushed with anger, and his eyes glittered through his spectacles.

"What—what—" he ejaculated. "Who threw that paper at me? Answer me at once!"

"I—I—"

"Was it you, D'Arcy?"

"Ya-a-a-as, sir; b-b-but—"

Mr. Lathom made a stride towards his desk, and seized his cane.

"Come out before the class at once, D'Arcy!" he shouted.

"If you please, sir—"

"Stand out here instantly!"

Arthur Augustus reluctantly went out before the class. The Form were all grinning, though most of them were

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amazed at the extraordinary nerve shown by D'Arcy in pelting the Form-master during lessons. That was the unfortunate construction that Mr. Lathom and most of the Fourth placed upon D'Arcy's action.

"Now, sir, hold out your hand!" said Mr. Lathom. "I have never in all my career as a master met with such an example of outrageous impertinence! I am astounded! I—"

"If you please, sir, I didn't throw the lettah—"

"What? Just now, a minute ago, you admitted that you did! I trust you are not attempting to prevaricate, D'Arcy."

"I am quite incapable of pwevawicatin', sir," said Arthur Augustus indignantly. "I wepeat that I did not throw the lettah at you, sir. I—"

"Who threw it, then?"

"I did, sir. I—"

"You say you did, and you did not. What does this mean, D'Arcy?" roared Mr. Lathom. "I shall begin to believe that you are out of your senses, boy."

"I did not throw it at you, sir," gasped D'Arcy. "I threw it at your desk."

"D'Arcy!"

"It went the w'ong way, sir," stammered D'Arcy. "I trust you do not think me capable of the astoundin' impertinence of throwin' at a Form-master, sir."

"Ahem! But what do you mean by pelting my desk with paper, sir, even if I accept your explanation?"

"It's a lettah, sir," said D'Arcy reluctantly. "It belongs to you, sir."

"What?"

Mr. Lathom felt in his pocket, and then he picked up the folded letter. He glanced at it, and uttered an explanation.

"Dear me! This is my letter. I did not know that I had lost it. How did this letter come into your possession, D'Arcy?" demanded Mr. Lathom sternly.

"I was twyin' to return it to you without attwactin' attention, sir."

"That is very probable; but it does not explain how you came to have it in your possession," said the Form-master tartly. "If I dropped this letter, and you picked it up, you could have come to me and told me so, I suppose, and handed it to me."

"Ya-a-s, sir."

"Then you did not pick it up?"

"No, sir."

"Is it possible, D'Arcy, that you have been guilty of such dishonourable conduct as taking and reading a letter belonging to another person?" thundered Mr. Lathom.

D'Arcy turned crimson.

"I decline to weply to such a question, sir," he said loftily. "I wegard it as an insult!"

"Oh, you ass!" murmured Blake.

"You must give me some explanation, D'Arcy."

D'Arcy hesitated.

"It was given me to return to you, sir."

"By whom?"

"A—a Shell chap, sir."

"How did he get it? Did he find it?"

"No, sir."

"Very well, you must give his name, and I will inquire further into this. I will not have my correspondence spied upon. How did this boy you mention get the letter?"

"He took it away from a chap who had picked it up, sir, and was goin' to read it," said Arthur Augustus reluctantly. "We walloped him, sir, and took the lettah away, so it's all wight."

Mr. Lathom stared at the boy a moment, and then smiled. He put his letter into his pocket.

"Is that the reason why you had to change your clothes, and came in late to lessons, D'Arcy?" he asked more kindly.

"Yaas, sir."

"Indeed! In that case, I am much obliged to you, and I will say nothing more about the matter," said Mr. Lathom. "The boy who wished to read the letter certainly should be punished—"

"He's been punished, sir," said D'Arcy. "Tom Mewwy and I gave him a feaful thwashin, sir."

"Oh! So Merry was the Shell boy who gave you the letter?" said Mr. Lathom, with a smile. "Well—well, I will let the matter drop, but on another occasion, D'Arcy, please do not test your powers of taking aim in the Form-room. You may go back to your place."

"Thank you, sir."

"And—and I think you asked to be allowed to leave early this afternoon, D'Arcy?" said Mr. Lathom, after a moment.

"Yaas, sir," said Arthur Augustus eagerly.

"Very well, you are excused from lessons now. You may go," said Mr. Lathom graciously.

"Bai Jove! Thank you vewy much, sir!" said Arthur Augustus, and he left the Form-room with alacrity.

And Mr. Lathom, with his good temper quite restored, went on with the lesson. He glanced at the clock several times, and finally dismissed the Fourth ten minutes before the usual time. Mr. Lathom, as well as Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, was evidently thinking of the tea at the vicarage.

CHAPTER 5.

Mellish Has an Idea.

MELLISH of the Fourth had a thoughtful look upon his face as he came out of the Form-room after lessons, and a cunning gleam in his eyes. He went up to the Fourth-Form passage, and looked in at the door of Study No. 6, the famous apartment belonging to D'Arcy, Blake, Digby, and Herries. As he had expected, Arthur Augustus was there. The swell of St. Jim's was trying on a succession of neckties before a glass, evidently in some doubt as to which one he should wear—a very important matter indeed.

"Not gone yet?" grinned Mellish.

Arthur Augustus turned a haughty look on the cad of the Fourth.

"No, I am not gone yet!" he said coldly.

"You'll be late for tea."

Arthur Augustus turned his eyeglass scornfully upon the cad of the Fourth.

"I weally do not know how you are aware that I am goin' to tea at the vicarage, unless you listened to my remarks to Blake in class!" he said loftily.

"Well, a good many fellows heard you," said Mellish.

"I was one. I say, Gussy, the vicar wouldn't mind if you took a friend?"

"Weally, Mellish—"

"I'll come with you."

"I do not wegard you as a friend, Mellish; and in any case, I am goin' alone. Will you kindly wotire from my study, and not bothah me while I am selectin' a necktie?"

"You silly ass!" growled Mellish. As a rule, he would not have ventured to apply that epithet to D'Arcy, but he felt pretty well assured that he was safe at a time like this.

Arthur D'Arcy was dressed with scrupulous care for his visit to the vicarage, and he was not likely to risk spoiling or soiling his beautiful clothes by going for Mellish.

"Pway cleah out, Mellish."

"Fathead!"

"What!"

"Rotter!"

Arthur Augustus simply glared.

"Why, you wottah," he exclaimed, "how dare you? I will give you a feahful thwashin' for applyin' those extremely opprobrious epithets to me—"

He started towards Mellish with his fists clenched, and suddenly paused. He remembered that if he indulged in a rough-and-tumble with the cad of the Fourth he was not likely to remain in fit style to visit the vicar. And he had no time to change, or he would be late.

Mellish chuckled.

"Well, come on," he said.

"I will thwash you anothah time," said Arthur Augustus, breathing hard. "I wegard you as an uttah wottah, Mellish!"

"You're afraid."

"What!" yelled D'Arcy.

"Yah! Funk!"

That was too much for Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. Clothes or no clothes, tea at the vicarage or no tea at the vicarage, he could not stand that. He rushed at Mellish, and Mellish dodged down the passage and ran for his life. He had no intention of meeting the "fearful thrashing" he had been asking for.

Arthur Augustus paused in the passage, breathing hard. The Terrible Three came along the passage, and they stared at him. Mellish had just passed them at full speed.

"Trouble in the family?" asked Tom Merry cheerfully.

D'Arcy panted.

"That uttah wottah has been cheekin' me," he exclaimed; "and when I went for him he wan like anythin'. I wegard it as disgustin'!"

"Ha, ha, ha! Did you expect him to wait for a feahful thwashin'?" demanded Monty Lowther. "You should remember what an awful chap you are are when you are roused, Gussy."

"Yaas, that is true," said the swell of St. Jim's seriously. Lowther nodded with emphatic gravity.

"Mellish probably remembered that he hadn't made his will, and he buzzed off to get it done before you could get at him," said Lowther, with great solemnity.

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

"You uttah ass!" said D'Arcy, realising that Monty Lowther was being elaborately funny. "I wegard you as a silly fathead, Lowther, and I should punch your silly head if I wasn't goin' to the vicarage to tea!"

"Oh, good!" exclaimed Tom Merry. "Are you looking for three devoted chums to take with you, Gussy? If so, Lowther withdraws his remarks."

"I am not lookin' for anythin' of the sort. If I were, I should take Blake and Hewwies and Dig," said Arthur Augustus. "Pway don't be an ass. But if you like—"

"Yes?" said the Terrible Three eagerly.

"You can come into my study and help me select a necktie. I am wathah in doubt between the pale blue and the pink with gwey spots."

"You frabjous ass!" said the chums of the Shell together, and they marched on their way, without lending aid in the important matter of the necktie.

Meanwhile, Mellish had dashed down the Shell passage, and he went into Crooke's study. Crooke was there, and Gore of the Shell was with him. Crooke looked a little startled as Mellish burst in. For the moment he feared that it was the Terrible Three, and he was very much relieved to see that it was Mellish.

"You ass!" he growled. "You startled me."

"Never mind," said Mellish. "I've got an idea. Do you want a chance of getting even with D'Arcy for chipping in about that letter this afternoon?"

Crooke scowled, and Gore nodded.

"What's the weeze?" demanded Crooke.

"Gussy's going to tea at the vicarage, and he's getting his best bib and tucker on," said Mellish, with a chuckle. "He's going to arrive at the vicarage in great style."

"Well, we can't stop him, I suppose," growled Gore.

"He's sure to go by the towing-path, and then up through the vicarage garden," said Mellish. "The garden towards the river end is all shrubbery, and three fellows could lie in wait there for a chap, and roll him in the mud—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I say, that's a bit thick!" said Gore dubiously. "Gussy and his friends would rag us to death afterwards."

"They needn't know us. We'll change our Etons for old jackets, and tie handkerchiefs over our faces, and Gussy will think we're village kids—some of Grimes' gang."

"Oh, good!"

And the three cads of the School House sallied forth at once to be ready. As they passed Study No. 6 they could see Arthur Augustus D'Arcy still trying on neckties before the glass. They would evidently be in good time to prepare the ambush for the swell of St. Jim's.

They left the School House. Little Mr. Lathom, the master of the Fourth, was just leaving, looking unusually spick and span, and wearing a shining silk hat. The three juniors raised their caps to him as they passed, and hurried on, and Crooke chuckled as they got out of hearing.

"Lathom's going to the vicarage, too," he remarked. "That's what that letter from Miss Ponsonby was—an invitation to tea. He'll be there the same time as Gussy."

"We don't want him to run into us," said Gore, a little alarmed.

"Oh, that's all right! He always goes in state, you know—Rylcombe way, and to the front door of the vicarage. It's only half the distance, too. You've noticed he always goes that way, Mellish?"

"Yes, always," said Mellish, who knew everybody's business at St. Jim's. "I've seen him go to the vicarage a dozen times or more, and he always goes to the front door."

"That's all right, then," said Gore.

"Of course, it's all right! Come on!"

And the three young rascals hurried on their way, to get well ahead of D'Arcy.

CHAPTER 6.

A Slight Mistake!

"NOW then, quiet!"

Crooke & Co. had hurried along the towing-path, and reached the gate of the vicarage garden by the river. Rylcombe vicarage possessed a very long garden, which stretched down a great distance from the house to the river, and near the river it was thick with trees and shrubberies. A better spot for an ambush could not have been found.

The three juniors entered the garden quietly, and followed the path between the high shrubberies for a dozen yards or so, and Crooke uttered a sudden exclamation.

"My hat! What luck!"

On the garden path lay the end of a hose, with water trickling from it. It had evidently been left there by the vicarage gardener, to be used again. There was no sign of the gardener returning, however, and Crooke picked up the end of the hose with a chuckle.

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"What price letting Gussy have this as he comes up the path?" he asked.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Quiet!"

The hose trailed away through the shrubbery. Crooke plunged into the shrubbery, carrying the end of it with him. Mellish and Gore followed him. There was ample cover for them, crouching among the shrubs.

They had put on old jackets, and now, crouching there in cover, they tied their handkerchiefs across their faces sufficiently to conceal their features.

Then they waited.

"I say," murmured Mellish, "if we get out into the path he'll see us, and—"

"No need to get out—I can let him have the water from the shrubbery," said Crooke. "We shall see his topper as he comes by, and then I can let him have it."

"Good!"

And the three young rascals lay in wait, looking for the gleam of a silk topper along the path over the shrubbery.

They had not more than ten minutes to wait.

Click!

It was the garden gate by the river.

Crooke drew a quick breath.

"He's coming!" he whispered.

"Ready!"

"I'm all ready! Quiet!"

Gore and Mellish chuckled softly, and were silent.

The prospect of deluging Arthur Augustus D'Arcy with a sudden rush of water, as he came up the garden path, was delicious to them. The swell of St. Jim's would be in his very best garments, with his very best silk topper on, and after the deluge he would not be likely to want to go on to the vicarage for tea. He would hardly be in a suitable state to do so.

Footsteps sounded along the path.

Over the tops of the high shrubs the three crouching rascals saw the gleam of a silk topper in the sun.

The victim was approaching.

Crooke held the nozzle ready. As soon as the pedestrian came abreast of the ambush, he meant to let fly through the openings of the shrubbery, and the unsuspecting swell of St. Jim's would be simply swept off his feet by the rush of water.

Closer came the footsteps.

The silk hat gleamed almost abreast of the ambushed juniors, and Crooke made a movement. He caught a glimpse through the shrubs of a moving figure, and turned on the water.

Sizzz!

Whizzz!

Splash!

"Oh!"

The jet of water smote the figure in the path fairly in the chest and bowled him over like a ninepin.

There was a startled gasp as he went down.

A pair of legs tossed in the air as he was bowled over, and Crooke scrambled forward, playing the garden hose upon the fallen figure.

Sizz! Splash! Whizz! Splash!

"Oh! Ah! Help!"

It was not D'Arcy's voice.

"You ass!" roared Gore, in terror. "It's not D'Arcy!"

"Wh-what!" stammered Crooke.

"You've got the wrong chap!"

"My hat!"

Crooke stared out into the path, in his confusion still allowing the hose to play at full force upon the fallen figure.

A little man lay sprawling in the path, drenched with water, utterly confused and bewildered by the attack. His silk hat had fallen off, and his thin hair was dripping. His spectacles had slid down his nose, and he blinked painfully with wet eyes.

Crooke dropped the hose with a gasp of terror.

"My hat! It's Lathom!"

"Lathom! Oh, crumbs!"

Crooke stood staring at the fallen figure, too terrified to run, and lacking the presence of mind to turn off the water.

He realised that Mr. Lathom, tempted probably by the beautiful weather, had taken the longer path by the river for once, and had come into the garden by the gate from the towing-path.

He had only seen the silk hat before he let fly with the hose, and how was he to know that it wasn't D'Arcy's topper?

How was he to know, indeed? But that explanation was not likely to satisfy Mr. Lathom, and a vision of a flogging in the public hall at St. Jim's floated before Crooke's terrified eyes.

Gore grasped his arm. Mellish was already running.

"Come away, you ass!" gasped Gore. "Run for it!"

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Crooke dropped the hose and fled.

The three of them ran down the path, leaped over the gate, and went tearing along the towing-path as if their lives depended upon it.

The hose had fallen with the nozzle towards Mr. Lathom, and it was still pumping out water.

The unfortunate master of the Fourth was shrieking for help.

Footsteps sounded up the garden; the three practical jokers had escaped only just in time.

The gardener came running from one direction, with a pair of shears in his hand, and from the house came the stout vicar of Rylcombe, followed by Miss Ponsonby.

"Good gad!" ejaculated the vicar.

Miss Freda Ponsonby gave a shriek.

"It is Mr. Lathom!"

The Fourth Form-master of St. Jim's sat up.

He sat up in a pool of water, and water was running down his face and his shoulders.

The vicar kicked the hose aside. The gardener raised up Mr. Lathom to his feet. The Form-master was in a state of utter bewilderment.

"Goodness gracious! How did this happen?" cried Miss Ponsonby.

"Ow!" gasped Mr. Lathom. "Oh! Ah!"

He spluttered and struggled for breath.

"Someone turned the hose upon me!" he gasped. "Someone rushed out of the shrubbery—a—a boy—a fiendish ruffian—with something tied over his face! Dear me, I am drenched! I shall catch cold! Oh dear!"

"Come into the house at once!" exclaimed the vicar. "I can give you a change of clothes. Quick! Let me help you! Freda, my dear, will you telephone for the doctor?"

Mr. Lathom was assisted into the house.

The vicar piloted him up to his bed-room, where the unfortunate master of the Fourth was able to towel himself down.

But he did not feel equal to donning the clothes the vicar placed at his disposal.

A gentleman of Mr. Lathom's years could not be drenched suddenly with cold water with impunity. Mr. Lathom had caught a very bad cold, and he turned in, in the vicar's comfortable bed, and waited for the medical gentleman to arrive.

Dr. Short arrived promptly, and ordered Mr. Lathom to remain in bed.

And Mr. Lathom remained.

CHAPTER 7.

"Sootable."

TOM MERRY & CO. were playing cricket that afternoon. The Terrible Three had batted, and were out, and they had adjourned to the school shop for liquid refreshment in the shape of ginger-pop, when they sighted Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. The swell of St. Jim's, with a very serious look upon his face, came into the school gates with his usual elegant walk. The Terrible Three hailed him.

"Hallo, Gussy! Come and have a ginger-pop."

Arthur Augustus came towards them.

"Thank you, deah boys, I will," he said. "It's vewy warm walkin'."

"Haven't you been to the vicarage to tea?" asked Tom Merry. "You started out to go there."

Arthur Augustus nodded.

"Yaas, wathah! I've been there."

"You've had your tea jolly quick, then," said Manners.

"You haven't been gone half an hour, and it takes nearly that to walk there and back."

"I didn't stay to tea."

"Anything wrong?" asked Monty Lowther.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Lathom was going," Tom Merry remarked. "Crooke read that much out of that letter before he was stopped. Didn't Lathom like youthful company?"

"I twust you do not imagine that my Form-mastah could possibly object to my company at tea, Tom Mewwy?"

"No; he might like it—there's no accounting for tastes," agreed Tom Merry.

"Weally, you ass—"

"But why didn't you stay, then?" asked Jerrold Lumley. Lumley, coming out of the tuckshop with a foaming glass in his hand. "Why did you miss your tea, Gussy? Did they make you slide while Lathom popped?"

"Weally, Lumlay—"

"I guess it's bound to come sooner or later," said Lumley. Lumley, sipping his ginger-beer, and nodding his head wisely. "I used to offer three to one against before I turned over a giddy new leaf. I should make it even now."

"I object to frivolous remarks upon a serious subject," said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, with his nose very high in the air.

"Bosh!" said Lumley-Lumley cheerfully. "It would be serious enough for Lathom, but I don't see that we need be solemn about it."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Pway don't be an ass, Lumlay. As a mattah of fact, I did not stay to tea, as the house was in some confusion, owin' to a feahful accident. Miss Ponsonby was vewy much upset, and undah the cires. I wegardeed it as more delicate to wefire."

"Good old Gussy! Always doing the right thing," said Monty Lowther.

"I trust I may be twusted always to do the cowweet thing, Lowthah."

"But who's had an accident?" asked Tom Merry. "I hope Miss Ponsonby isn't hurt. She's a jolly good sort."

"Miss Ponsonby is all wight."

"The vicar—"

"The vicar is all wight."

"Who is it, then?"

"Mr. Lathom. There was a feahful accident as he came up the garden—"

"Poor old Lathom!" said Tom Merry, really concerned. "That's rotten! He's a good chap. I hope there wasn't much damage?"

"I am sowwy to say there was."

"By Jove! I'm sorry!"

"So am I," said Monty Lowther, serious for once. "Lathom's a good little ass."

"The damage is vewy sewious, and, I am afwaid, iwwepawable," said Arthur Augustus.

"Poor old Lathom! Have you seen him?"

"No; but I saw his clothes."

"His clothes?" said Tom Merry, in wonder. "How could you see his clothes without seeing him?"

"He's gone to bed."

"Oh!" Tom Merry shuddered a little at the mental picture of clothes stained with blood after an accident. "Poor old Lathom! It's rotten! Was there blood on his togs?"

"Blood? Certainly not!"

"They were cut up, I suppose?"

"Not that I am aware of, deah boy. I certainly did not observe it."

"Then how on earth do you know that Lathom is damaged by seeing his clothes?" demanded Tom Merry.

"I did not say that Mr. Lathom was damaged," said D'Arcy, in surprise. "I was weferin' to the damage to his clothes. It is iwwepawable."

"You—you ass!"

"I have only told you what I know. The clothes are uttably wuined. They have been soaked with watah, and they are shwinkin' already. As a mattah of fact, Mr. Lathom is wathah careless in choosin' his cloth, and it is not of a vewy good quality," said Arthur Augustus, with a shake of the head. "I would not say so to Mr. Lathom, of course, but it is a fact. His clothes are shwinkin' feahfully, and I am afwaid he will nevah be able to wear them again. The damage is iwwepawable."

"Oh, you funnay ass!" said Lowther. "Then Lathom isn't hurt at all?"

"He has caught a cold fwom bein' dwenched with watah, and is weMAININ' at the vicarage. He is goin' to stop the night. It is not, howevah, sewious, so fah as Mr. Lathom is concerned, but his clothes—"

"Blow his clothes!" growled Manners. "What happened?"

"Some young wascals turned a garden-hose on him—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"It is not a laughin' mattah, deah boys. Mr. Lathom has caught a severe cold, and his clothes are wuined."

"Lucky he's not hurt," said Tom Merry. "You gave me the shivers for a minute, you fathead! Who was it watered him?"

"That is not known. They had found twaces of the wascals havin' crouched in the shwubbewy, but they seem to have had their faces disguised, and Mr. Lathom saw only one of them, and did not wecognise him. I think it was some young wuffians of the village. It couldn't have been the Gwammah School chaps, as they have gone away to the seaside."

"The Grammarians wouldn't play a jape like that on a middle-aged man," said Tom Merry, shaking his head. "It was a caddish thing to do."

"Yaas, wathah!"

Monty Lowther gave a sudden chuckle.

"My hat! Crooke and Mellish and Gore came in a little while ago, and I thought by their looks they had been up to something. Did they know you were going to the vicarage, Gussy?"

"Mellish did. He asked to come with me, and I wefused."

"Which way did Lathom go?"

"By the towin'-path."

"Ha, ha, ha! Then I'll bet you two to one in silk hats that

they were there to drench you, and they let Lathom have it by mistake. He always goes the other way."

"Bai Jove!"

"I guess that's about correct," grinned Lumley-Lumley.

"The uttah wascals! Now I came to think of it, it is vewy pwob. indeed. Do you know where they are, deah boys?"

"They went into the School House."

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy started towards the School House. He walked with as much speed as was consistent with the dignity of a D'Arcy, and the chums of the Shell grinned as he went.

"I guess Gussy's going to look for trouble," remarked Lumley-Lumley. "If he tackles the three of them together he will be bumped."

"I think so, too," said Tom Merry. "We owe Crooke & Co. a little account for getting us lines this afternoon. I think we'll look after Gussy."

The Terrible Three and Lumley-Lumley followed the swell of St. Jim's into the house. A sound from Crooke's study as they approached it warned them that Arthur Augustus did indeed need looking after.

"Gewwoff, you wottah!"

"Ha, ha, ha! Gussy found them at home."

The juniors ran on, and Tom Merry kicked Crooke's door open.

Crooke & Co. were at home, and Gussy had found them. Apparently the swell of St. Jim's had rushed in to execute summary vengeance upon the cads of the School House without counting odds. He was lying on his back on the carpet, and Mellish and Gore were seated on his chest, and Crooke was digging a shovelful of soot out of the chimney, with the evident intention of plastering it over D'Arcy's aristocratic features.

"Wescue, deah boys!" gasped the swell of St. Jim's. "These wottahs are uttably wuinin' my twousals!"

Tom Merry & Co. rushed in.

In a moment Gore and Mellish were whirled off the prostrate swell of St. Jim's and hurled sprawling on the floor, where Crooke joined them a moment later. Arthur Augustus staggered to his feet.

"Thank you, deah boys!" he gasped. "I was goin' to thwash them, and they seized me in an uttably diswewpectful mannah and thwew me on the floor. They are uttah wuffians! Pway hold my eyeglass while I thwash them."

"Oh, better leave them to us," said Monty Lowther. "You may damage your clothes, you know."

"Bai Jove, I nevah thought of that!"

"Crooke's been raking out soot," Lowther remarked, seizing the shovel. "It's a pity to see labour wasted, so I think the soot ought to be used—"

"Weally, Lowthah—"

"On Crooke," added Lowther.

"On Cwooke! Ha, ha, ha!"

"Keep off, you rotter!" howled Crooke, as Lowther approached him with a shovel laden with soot. "I—I—oooooh!"

Monty Lowther, with a swing of his arm, scattered the soot over the countenances of three gasping and spluttering rascals.

"Oh! Ow!"

"Yaroooh!"

"There!" said Monty Lowther genially. "That will teach you not to turn garden-hoses on harmless and necessary Form-masters. I regard that as a sootable punishment."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"And if any of you gentlemen are not satisfied, I shall be vewy pleased to meet you one at a time in the gym, with or without gloves," said Monty Lowther politely.

And Tom Merry left the study chuckling. Crooke & Co., to judge by their remarks, were not satisfied. But as they did not trouble Lowther to meet them in the gym—with or without gloves—it is to be supposed that they became satisfied afterwards.

CHAPTER 8.

A Petition to the Head.

JACK BLAKE, of the Fourth Form, looked serious as he sat down to tea in Study No. 6. Herries, D'Arcy, and Digby, who shared that famous study with Blake, were looking serious, too. Seriousness was not a weakness the chums of the Fourth were frequently guilty of. It was evident that something had occurred to disturb the habitual serenity of Study No. 6.

"It's rotten!" said Blake.

"Beastly!" said Herries.

"Horrid!" said Digby.

"Yaas, wathah!"

The chums of the Fourth were in full accord on the subject. They could not be alluding to the tea, which was certainly a vewy plentiful one. The table was spread so lavishly that

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it was evident that the four juniors expected visitors. And the visitors were coming.

Six fellows belonging to the Fourth Form and the New House had come into the School House, and they approached Study No. 6 with sweet smiles upon their faces.

They were Figgins, Kerr, and Wynn—Figgins & Co., the leaders of the New House juniors, and Redfern, Owen, and Lawrence, otherwise known as the New Firm.

The rivals of the New House were evidently on excellent terms with one another just now, and on equally excellent terms with the School House fellows.

There was no special reason why they should all be overflowing with the milk of human kindness, excepting that Jack Blake had lately received a very liberal tip from an affectionate uncle, and in the fulness of his heart he was standing a big feed in the study.

He had asked his rivals of the New House to it; and the juniors had suspended House rows for a time in consequence; the fellows being at bottom on the best of terms with one another, in spite of the constant alarms and excursions which frequently made things lively at St. Jim's.

Figgins & Co. came in, and the New Firm followed, and the School House fellows welcomed them with great cordiality.

But the gloom upon their youthful brows did not escape the notice of their visitors. Fatty Wynn had eyes only for the lavish display of good things upon the table, but the other fellows inquired what was the matter.

"Haven't you heard?" asked Blake.

"No," said Figgins, in surprise. "What's happened?"

"Lathom's caught a bad cold."

The New House fellows stared at Blake in amazement. It was certainly very creditable to Blake to be so dreadfully concerned because his Form-master had caught a cold. But it was not exactly what was expected of Blake. Form-masters had caught bad colds before, and Blake had borne it with great fortitude.

"Is it a joke?" asked Kerr. "Of course, we're sorry for Lathom, but I don't see any special reason to go into mourning. I suppose he'll get over it."

"I heard about that!" said Redfern, with a stress on the "that." "But I hadn't thought about putting on any sackcloth and ashes."

"But if you want us to do a little weep before tea," said Lawrence, "I don't know that we've got any special objection."

"Boo-hoo!" said Owen obligingly.

"Oh, don't play the giddy ox!" said Blake crossly.

"What I mean is, that Lathom is laid up at the vicarage, and he's going to be laid up for two or three days. The doctor's forbidden him to be moved."

"Well, let's weep," said Redfern. "I thought I could endure Mr. Lathom's absence for two or three days, but I don't mind weeping. Boo-hoo!"

"You ass!" shouted Blake. "Blow Lathom—"

"Weally, Blake—"

"I'm not thinking of Lathom. I'm thinking of us."

"Now, you're talking," said Figgins. "What's the row?"

"You remember the last time Lathom was seedy, he went away," growled Blake, "and they put the Fourth Form under a prefect."

"Oho!" said Figgins, looking serious.

The New House fellows understood.

On the occasion of a previous absence of Mr. Lathom, the Fourth Form had been put under the charge of a prefect; and that prefect was Knox, the bully of the Sixth. There had been terrific trouble in the Fourth-Form room in consequence.

"S'pose we get put under Knox again?" grunted Herries.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"We'll give him beans, as we did before," said Redfern.

"Yes, that's all very well; but it will mean trouble. We don't want to get detained for whole afternoons with all the cricket matches on. And Knox would be deeper this time; he would be careful to keep the peace, and rag us in his underhand way."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Even if it's Kildare or Darrel, it won't be much better," said Blake. "Lathom lets us have an easy time. Kildare or Darrel or Langton would be heavier on us than old Lathom, and if it should be Knox or Beake, it would be—"

"Awful!" said Figgins.

"Enough to worry a chap," growled Blake. "Blessed if I know what Lathom wants to go and catch a cold for! It's just like a Form-master, worrying chaps in this way."

"Might get a new master down, same as we did before," Lawrence suggested.

Blake shook his head.

"Not for a couple of days. It wouldn't be worth while. They'll put us under a prefect as sure as a gun, and the pre-

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fects won't be anxious for the job, either. They'd think it a lot of trouble—all excepting Knox. He'd like to take it on, for the sake of paying off old scores."

"I s'pose so," said Figgins thoughtfully. "But I don't see that we can help it. Let's have tea."

The suggestion was too good not to be followed.

The crowd of juniors sat down round the table, and tea began. Under the influence of the good things that were provided in abundance, the juniors took a more cheerful view of the matter; but they still discussed with many misgivings as to who was likely to be put in charge of the Fourth Form during Mr. Lathom's unavoidable absence.

Lumley-Lumley looked in at the door.

"Come in!" said Blake hospitably.

The Outsider of St. Jim's shook his head.

"Thanks, I guess I haven't come to cadge a tea!" he said cheerfully. "I wanted to speak to you fellows. Do you know Knox has asked the Head to let him have charge of the Fourth while little Lathom's on his giddy beam ends?"

"Bai Jove!"

The juniors glared.

"Is it a fact?" exclaimed Blake. "We might have expected it."

Lumley-Lumley nodded.

"I guess so. I had it from Lefevre, of the Fifth—Knox told him, and he thinks the Head will let him. Knox is training to be a schoolmaster, you know, and the Head reckons it will help him on to have a little bit of experience in handling a junior Form. All very well for Knoxey—but what price the Fourth?"

"We won't stand it."

"Well, I'm going to see the Head about it," said Lumley-Lumley resolutely. "Will any of you fellows come and back me up?"

"See the Head!" repeated Figgins.

"I guess so! We don't want Knox—and why shouldn't we petition the Head not to put him over us, and give him the whipland of the Fourth?"

The Fourth-Formers looked at one another.

"Bai Jove! The Head might wegard it as checkay, you know."

"Blessed if I see it. I'm going, anyway. Will you fellows come?"

"I will!" said Blake, jumping up. "It can't do any harm if it doesn't do any good. I'm with you, my son!"

"In that case, I had better come, too, deah boys. You had better leave the talkin' to me. It is much better for the mattah to be put to the Head by a fellow of tact and judgment."

"Rats!" said Lumley-Lumley. "I'm going to do the talking, but you can come if you like."

"Weally, Lumlay—"

"We'll all go," said Redfern. "It will be a deputation of both Houses, and it is bound to impress the Head."

"Good egg! Come on!"

And leaving their unfinished tea, the juniors marched out of the study. Only one fellow remained behind. It was Fatty Wynn. Figgins called back to him from the door.

"Ain't you coming, Fatty?"

"Eh?"

"Come on!"

"Oh, you fellows can manage without me!" said Fatty Wynn, without looking up. "This ham is ripping, and the poached eggs are a dream. You'll be all right—don't let Gussy talk, that's all!"

"Weally, Wynn—"

The Fourth-Formers marched down the passage with a very determined air. They were joined by several other fellows as they went—Reilly of the Fourth, and Brooke and Bishop, and several others. The Fourth Form might have little disagreements on all sorts of subjects; but they were all agreed upon one point—they did not want Knox, the prefect, to take charge of the Form. If that happened there would be trouble.

CHAPTER 9.

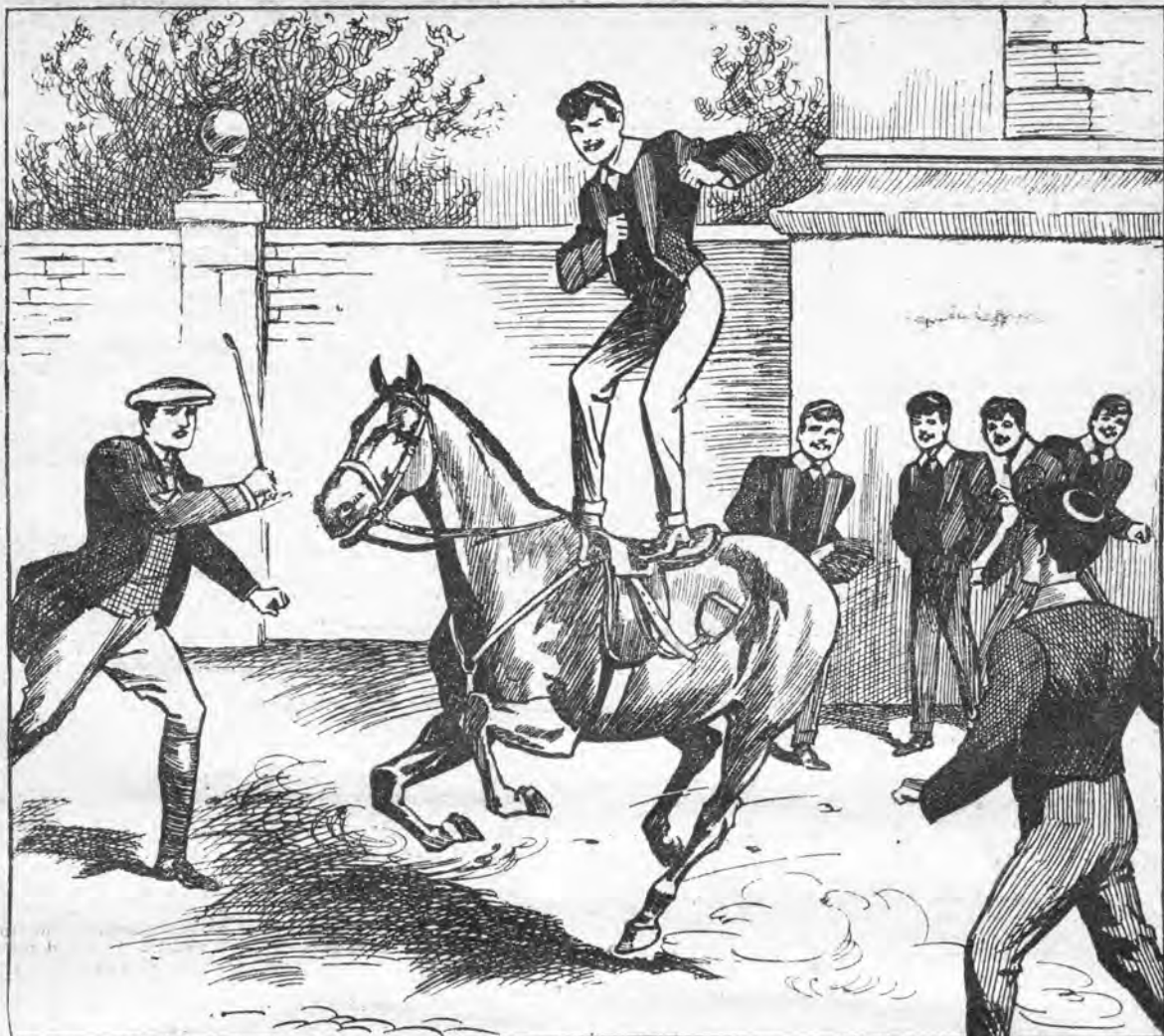
Quite the Limit!

DR. HOLMES was in his study, with a letter in his hand, and a very thoughtful expression upon his face. Mr. Raiton, the housemaster of the School House, was with him, also looking very thoughtful. The letter was in the handwriting of Mr. Lathom—somewhat shaky as it had been written in bed, and the two masters had just perused it.

"It does not seem to me to be a bad idea," said the Head, evidently referring to some contents of the letter. "What do you think, Mr. Raiton?"

"I do not see why it should not be satisfactory, sir."

"Mr. Lathom points out that his Form object to being placed under a prefect," the Head continued. "There was



"Get off my horse!" roared Coker, rushing out into the close. Nobby did not heed; he did not even hear. He was guiding the pony in some way with his disengaged foot, for the animal now was galloping in a circle round the green close. Coker rushed to intercept them. "Stop!" he roared. (The above incident is taken from the splendid complete tale of Harry Wharton & Co. at Greyfriars, entitled "THE CIRCUS SCHOOLBOY," by Frank Richards, which is contained in "THE MAGNET" Library. Now on Sale. Price One Penny.)

trouble in the Form-room the last time. I am afraid the juniors were unruly, but some of the fault was certainly on the part of the prefect. Knox has requested to be allowed to take charge of the Fourth during Mr. Lathom's absence, with an eye to training in his chosen career. But—"

"But the Fourth would not like that, I think, sir; and indeed I think there would be some justification for their dislike."

"I am afraid, too, that a prefect is hardly equal to managing so large a Form as the Fourth is at present," the doctor remarked. "Under the circumstances, Mr. Lathom's suggestion comes very opportunely. If the Fourth really object so seriously to being governed even for a few days by a prefect—"

"They certainly do!"

"Exactly! I should pay no regard to their objection, of course, if there were nothing else to be done. But Mr. Lathom's suggestion, and Miss Ponsonby's kind offer, come at the very moment they are needed."

There was a sound of trampling feet in the passage.

Knock!

"Come in!" said the doctor.

The door opened, and Lumley-Lumley & Co. walked in. Dr. Holmes adjusted his glasses, gazing at the juniors in astonishment.

"What has happened?" he exclaimed.

"Nothing, sir."

"Then why do you invade my study in this way?"

"I guess—"

"Pway allow me to explain—"

"Shut up, Gussy!"

"One at a time, please!" said Dr. Holmes, raising his hand. "Lumley-Lumley, you appear to be the leader! Pray explain to me what is the matter!"

"Certainly, sir," said Lumley-Lumley. "We are all sorry to hear, sir, that Mr. Lathom is laid up with a severe cold, and won't be able to return to school for a few days!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

The Head looked surprised.

"If this is a demonstration of sympathy with Mr. Lathom, I am sure Mr. Lathom will be very much gratified when he hears of it," said the doctor, somewhat drily. "But—"

"Yes, sir. And—and we want to ask a favour—"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"We hear that there's some idea of putting the Fourth under a prefect, sir."

The Head and Mr. Railton exchanged glances.

"Well?" said Dr. Holmes patiently.

"We don't want Knox, sir," said Blake.

"Wathah not!"

"If you don't mind, sir, we don't want a prefect at all; but if we have one, we don't want Knox, sir," said Lumley-Lumley. "We want to—ahem!—to set an example of order and—good conduct while Mr. Lathom is away, sir, and—"

"And Knox would muck it up, sir!" said Figgins.

"Indeed!" said the Head.

"I hope you don't think it cheek on our part to come here,

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sir," said Redfern; "but we feel very deeply on this point, sir."

"Yaas, wathah! I considah—"

"Very well, my boys," said the Head kindly. "As you feel deeply on the point, I am very glad to be able to say that your wishes will be met."

"Oh, good!" exclaimed Blake heartily.

"If it had been necessary to put you in charge of a prefect," said the Head, a little sternly, "I should have done so, and I should have expected you to obey him and respect him as much as if it had been myself."

"Ye-es, sir."

"But as it happens, it is unnecessary."

"Hurray!"

"Silence, please! I have just received a letter from Mr. Lathom, in which he states that the medical man has advised him to keep his bed at the vicarage for some days, and suggesting a substitute. It is not his wish that you should be placed in charge of a Sixth-Form boy."

"Good egg!" murmured Digby. "Good old Lathom!"

"Yaas wathah!"

"Mr. Lathom is perhaps acquainted with your views on the subject," said Dr. Holmes. "He has suggested a substitute for himself, who has kindly offered to relieve him at his post for a few days, and I have decided to accept that offer."

The juniors exchanged glances of congratulation.

Their fears were relieved. Their enemy in the Sixth Form would not be placed in power over them, and they were satisfied. Whom the substitute might happen to be was a matter of lesser importance.

At all events, so they deemed, so far. They did not know yet who the substitute was to be.

"I am very glad to be able to meet your wishes," said the Head, "and I am sure that you will treat Mr. Lathom's substitute with the same respect that you show to Mr. Latham himself."

"Oh, certainly, sir!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Very good!" said the Head. "She will arrive to-morrow morning to take charge of the Fourth Form."

There was a general start.

In spite of the great respect the St. Jim's fellows felt for the Head, it must be confessed that for a moment the juniors fancied that Dr. Holmes's brain was wandering.

"I—I beg your pardon, sir!" murmured Figgins.

"You—you said, sir—"

"He will awvive to-morrow mornin, sir—"

"No," said the Head, with a smile. "She will arrive."

"She, sir!"

"Bai Jove!"

"Yes," said the Head calmly. "Miss Ponsonby has kindly offered to take charge of the Fourth Form while Mr. Lathom is indisposed."

"Oh, sir!"

The juniors could say no more than that.

They looked at the Head with a sickly expression upon their faces.

They had had their way. They were not to be governed by a prefect—they were to have no dealings with the obnoxious Knox.

But—

Miss Ponsonby!

The Fourth Form were to be taken by a woman!

Petticoat government in the Fourth!

Even Arthur Augustus, lady's man as he was, and unlimited in his devotion to the fairer and superior half of humanity, felt dismayed.

Dr. Holmes did not appear to notice the dismay in the faces of the unhappy Fourth-Formers.

"Yes," he said kindly, "Miss Ponsonby has been so good. It is really very kind of her. She has had experience in taking a Form in a girls' school, and is, of course, quite able to take charge of a junior Form."

"Bai Jove!" murmured D'Arcy.

"It is a very great pleasure to me to find, so easily, an adequate substitute for Mr. Lathom, and a great relief to Mr. Lathom, too," said the Head. "And, of course, it is very gratifying to be able to meet the wishes of the Fourth in this way."

"Our wishes!" groaned Blake. "My hat!"

"Did you speak, Blake?"

"I—I— No, sir—yes, sir!"

"You may go, my boys," said the Head graciously.

The juniors went.

They were incapable of speech, and they did not even thank the Head, and did not say how pleased they were. The study door closed upon them.

Mr. Railton and the Head exchanged a glance.

They smiled.

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Outside, in the passage, the juniors did not smile. They paused and looked at one another, and each read his own dismay and disgust reflected in the countenances of the rest.

"Miss Ponsonby!" groaned Blake.

"A blessed gal teachah!"

"The Shell will rag us to death!"

"The whole coll. will cackle!"

"She'll make us be good!"

"She'll take us out for walks!"

"Oh, dear!"

"Bai Jove!"

"Out of the frying-pan into the fire!" groaned Figgins.

"This is worse than Knox!"

"I—I say," said Herries desperately. "Let's go back and ask the Head to let us have Knox instead!"

"Imposs., dear boy!"

"Can't; it's settled now!" murmured Blake. "Oh, what asses we've been! We ought to have gone to the Head and petitioned him to let us have a prefect."

"I guess so!"

The juniors turned wrathfully upon Lumley-Lumley.

It had been his idea to go to the Head and petition against a prefect; and they regarded him as the author of all their misfortunes. They glared at him.

"You ass!" said Blake.

"You fathead!"

"If you hadn't brought us here to play the giddy ox," said Redfern, in measured tones, "we should have heard about this, and could have come here with a different kind of a petition. Now it's too late!"

"You chump!"

"You dangerous ass!"

"You burbling jabberwock!"

"Oh, draw it mild!" protested Lumley-Lumley. "How was I to know? How was I to guess that Lathom was going to spring this on us? I—"

"Yah!"

"Ass!"

"Oh, bump him!" said Blake wildly. "I must bump somebody, or I shall have a fit! Bump the silly ass! We'll teach him to take us petitioning to the Head, and getting caught in a trap like this! Bump him!"

"Yaas, wathah! Bump the awful ass!"

"Here, I say—hold on—ow—yow—cooop!"

Bump!

Lumley-Lumley, grasped by many hands, descended upon the floor with a terrific bump. The juniors left him gasping there, and returned disconsolately to Study No. 6, and their unfinished tea. Fatty Wynn was still going strong; but the rest of the Fourth-Formers had little appetite left. They had, as Figgins said, escaped the frying-pan only to fall into the fire, and their last state was worse than their first.

It was the limit!

CHAPTER 10.

The Fourth Form are Not Pleased.

A WOMAN take the Fourth Form at St. Jim's.

A girl attempt to manage the Fourth!

Petticoat government in the Fourth Form-room! Blake and Figgins and Redfern, and all the mighty men of the Fourth, under feminine domination!

The whole school cackled when they heard of it.

The "Babes" of the First and Second Forms, certainly, were sometimes taken by the Head's niece. They didn't like it. But the Fourth! The Fourth Form of St. Jim's, every fellow of them, simply writhed.

Even Mellish was exasperated. And the worst of it was, that the other Forms took it as a huge joke. The Shell, instead of being properly sympathetic, as the unhappy Fourth had a right to expect, only chuckled over it. The Fifth grinned hugely. Even the fags of the Third took occasion to be cheeky about it. D'Arcy minor—the celebrated Wally—congratulated his major on it, and Arthur Augustus, for once in his life, came very near boxing his minor's ears.

There were several fights on the subject in the junior common-room. The Fourth were exasperated, and they could not stand jokes about it. They "walloped" Third Form fags, and they fought with the Shell fellows. There was some satisfaction, certainly, in punching the heads of fellows who joked on the subject. But that did not alter the awful fact. On the morrow morning, they were to be taken by a vicar's sister as if they were a Form in a girls' school, or a First Form set of babies.

"I won't stand it!" said Blake wildly. "I'll run away from school!"

"Bai Jove, that's a wathah good ideah!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "We could wun away and become piwates, you know!"

"I've got an idea," said Mellish.

"Oh, you can go and eat coke!" said Blake unthankfully. "Yaas, wathah! You run away and play!"

"But it's a good wheeze," persisted Mellish. "We can rag her, you know. Women can't stand being ragged, and she'd be too tender-hearted to get us licked. We could rag her baldheaded the first morning, and make her sick of it!"

To Mellish's surprise, there was a roar of indignation from the Fourth. He regarded that as a very good idea, and did not see any objection to it himself. The reception it met with showed that the other fellows did, however.

"You uttah wottah!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "Do you think that a decent chap could wag a woman?"

"Oh, he's a rotten cad!" said Blake. "Don't you understand, you worm, that if she's too tender-hearted to have us punished, that puts us on our honour to behave well!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"As for being rude to a woman, that may suit you," said Reilly, with a sniff. "But, faith, if I catch you at it, you'll have some lovely black eyes after it, bedad!"

"And thick ears!" said Herries.

"And swollen noses, bedad!"

"Ha, ha! How many?"

"We'll scalp Mellish if he begins any of his caddish tricks," said Macdonald. "But it's rotten for us, all the same."

And Mellish was hooted out of the common-room for his valuable suggestion.

That way out of the difficulty was barred, and as there seemed to be no other way out, it was clear that the Fourth Form were "in for it."

The Terrible Three came into the common-room smiling. The Fourth-Formers glared at them. They thought they saw the reason for those smiles.

"Well, what are you monkeys grinning at?" was Blake's polite query.

"Yaas, wathah! I object to those Shell boundahs gwinning here."

"Congratulations!" said Monty Lowther blandly.

"What for?" demanded Blake.

"Your good luck," said Tom Merry. "By the way, is it true that Miss Ponsonby is going to make you wear pinafores?"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared the Shell fellows.

Blake snorted.

"Chuck them out!" he roared. "I'm not going to stand their cheek! Chuck 'em out!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Here—hold on—I mean, leggo—oh!"

But the Fourth-Formers did not let go—they held on! The Terrible Three were seized by many hands, and hurried forth into the passage, and they rolled along the linoleum there with wild yells.

"That's better!" said Blake, panting with his exertions.

"We're not going to have any cheek from the Shell on the subject, anyway!"

"Wathah not!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled Noble, of the Shell.

"What are you cackling at?" demanded Blake, turning on the Cornstalk wrathfully.

"Oh, nothing! I was only thinking that you'll have to stop those rough games when you have a lady teacher!"

That was enough! The Fourth-Formers rushed upon Kangaroo, and he went flying through the doorway.

"Any more Shell-fish got anything funny to say?" roared Blake.

"Not at all," said Bernard Glyn, dodging towards the door.

"I think it's a jolly good thing for you. You will have to wash your faces to-morrow morning—"

They rushed at him, but he was gone.

The Fourth Form went up to bed that night in an excited frame of mind. Over in the New House, Figgins & Co. were as excited as Blake & Co. in the School House. The girls of the other Forms were wildly exasperating to all the Fourth.

As Blake and the rest were going to bed, Wally of the Third put his head in at the dormitory door.

"Gussy!"

Arthur Augustus looked round.

"Weally, Wally—"

"I've come to give you a tip," said Wally. "This is a serious matter. I'm not going to have you falling in love with your lady teacher. I—"

Biff! Biff!

Two pillows crashed on the door as Wally hurriedly closed it and withdrew.

Knox, the prefect, came to see the lights out for the Fourth. There was an unpleasant grin on the face of the prefect, which made the Fourth long to punch him; but it was rather a serious matter to punch a prefect.

"I hear that you young sweeps don't want me to take you while Lathom's away," said Knox. "I hope you'll like petticoat government instead."

"Well, anything's better than you, Knox," said Blake. "In the lowest deep there's still a greater depth, you know."

"Yaas, wathah! Upon the whole, I'm vewy pleased that we're not going to have you, Knox!" said Arthur Augustus. "Nothin's so bad but what it might be worse."

Knox scowled.

"I hear that Miss Ponsonby smacks her pupils when they're naughty," he said, "and makes them stand in the corner with their faces to the wall. I shall look in at the Fourth Form-room to-morrow to see how you're getting on. Ha, ha, ha!"

Whiz!

Prefect or no prefect, the Fourth were "fed" up, and a pillow flew through the air, and smote Knox on the nose, and the prefect sat down with startling and painful suddenness on the hard floor of the dormitory.

He was up again in a moment, red with rage.

"Who threw that pillow?" he roared.

"Yah!"

"Get out!"

"Go and eat coke!"

Knox made a rush at the shouting juniors. Five or six pillows and bolsters hurled upon him, and he rolled over again. He picked himself up more slowly this time, and gave the juniors a glare. But he did not attempt to come to close quarters again.

"Take fifty lines each!" he exclaimed.

And the Fourth-Form grinned and went to bed. That was Knox's way of getting out of a difficult position; he knew the juniors would not do the lines, but as he would not ask for them, his dignity would be saved. It was just as well for him that he stopped short, for the juniors were quite exasperated, and Knox had come very near to being thoroughly ragged.

It was a long time before the Fourth-Formers slept.

For an hour or more there was a buzz of voices, and when the juniors slept at last, some of them dreamed that they were dressed in pinafores, walking two and two to church with Miss Ponsonby in command.

CHAPTER 11.

Nice for the Fourth.

MISS PONSONBY arrived the next morning.

Miss Pon, as she was sometimes called in the village and the school, was a very good-looking young lady, for her forty years; very healthy and wholesome, and kind, if not exactly beautiful.

Miss Pon thought she understood boys.

Perhaps she did not understand boys so well as they understood her. Boys are a problem. They do not understand themselves, as a rule, and grown-up people are often sadly at a loss in attempting to grapple with the puzzle of boy-nature.

Miss Ponsonby had not really solved that riddle, although she fully believed that she had done so.

Before taking command in the Fourth Form-room, she had an interview with the Head, and she expressed views which left the good old doctor a little doubtful.

"All boys require is kindness and attention in minute details," Miss Pon declared. "I have always succeeded with my classes of girls. Why should boys be treated differently? Gentleness must be the watchword. Kindness is the thing, and affection. I shall rely upon their better natures, and appeal to that love of goodness which I am assured is born in every boy the same as in every girl."

"Ahem!" said the Head.

"I shall offer the head boy in class a pretty bow, which he will wear in the playground as a distinction," said Miss Pon.

"Dear me!" said the Head.

"And I shall call them by their Christian names, as I do my girls. Do you not think that that seems so much more sweet?"

"Ahem!"

And, with these noble intentions in her mind, Miss Ponsonby entered into the lion's den, so to speak.

The Fourth were not yet there.

Morning school began at St. Jim's at nine, but at nine o'clock none of the Fourth had turned up.

Miss Ponsonby was patient.

At five minutes past nine a few fellows straggled in. Redfern, Owen, and Lawrence, of the New House, were the first. They were scholarship fellows, and supposed to be unnaturally keen about lessons. Hence their arrival only five minutes late.

"Good-morning!" said Miss Ponsonby.

"Good-morning, miss!" said Redfern.

"Where are the other boys?"

"In the quad, I think, Miss Ponsonby."

"That is not right," said the vicar's sister gravely. "Nine o'clock is the time for first lessons. I hope you are not going to be careless, my dears."

The New Firm looked at one another in a sickly way. She

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had called them dears already. She would be kissing them next, as Owen whispered in a disgusted undertone.

"We are sorry, miss," said Redfern politely. "We thought you wouldn't mind, as it was first morning."

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy came in. Arthur Augustus had intended to be in the Form-room on the very stroke of nine, in order to show that, little as he liked feminine government in the Form-room, he understood what was due to a lady. Punctuality, the politeness of princes, was a great point with Arthur Augustus. Unfortunately, he had considered it only due to Miss Ponsonby to put on an extra special necktie; and it had detained him ten minutes at the last moment.

"Pwax excuse me, Miss Ponsonby," said D'Arcy, in his graceful way. "I trust you will overlook this unpunctuality on my part for once."

"Certainly, my dear!" said Miss Ponsonby.

D'Arcy jumped.

The rest of the Fourth wandered in. The whole Form had rejected Mellish's suggestion of ragging the lady teacher, with indignation. But they had felt that discipline in the Form-room would be slack in feminine hands, and so they had naturally allowed themselves a little rope, as it were, about coming in to lessons. They strolled in as if it were a meeting of the Hobby Club, and sat at the desks in careless attitudes. Arthur Augustus, indeed, sat bolt upright, as an example to the rest; but Arthur Augustus's example was not always followed; and it wasn't upon this occasion.

Miss Ponsonby greeted all her pupils kindly.

She had utilised the delay in sorting over Mr. Lathom's books in his desk, and she was prepared for war, so to speak.

"Until I grow a little used to the Form work, I shall have to depend upon you for some assistance, my dears," she said, beaming.

The Fourth Form grunted.

"Arthur!"

D'Arcy looked up. So did Digby. So did several other fellows who happened to bear that uncommon name.

"Yes, sir—miss."

"Yaas, Miss Pon."

"Adsum!"

"H'm! I mean D'Arcy," said Miss Ponsonby. "D'Arcy, will you kindly tell me what book you are now using?"

"De Belloc Gallico," Miss Ponsonby."

"Which book?"

"Liber primus, Miss Ponsonby."

"Very good. You will commence, Percy."

Percy Mellish rose, colouring. Nobody ever called him Percy at St. Jim's—at all events, hitherto—though after that day he was Percied continually by humorous juniors.

Mellish was chiefly distinguished in the Form as a slacker, and for avoiding work at every possible opportunity. He was glad he had been called upon to construe first, as it enabled him to begin where he liked. The new Form-mistress, of course, did not know what the Fourth had been doing, and Mellish had not done his preparation the preceding evening—a duty he frequently neglected. If Mr. Lathom had been taking the class that morning, there would have been trouble for Mellish; but under the circumstances he was able to avoid it, by starting at a place that was perfectly familiar to him, and to everybody.

"Gallia est omnis diviso in partee tres," said Mellish solemnly.

The Fourth Form stared.

Then they grinned.

Miss Ponsonby could not help being a little surprised.

"Is that the right place, Mellish—Percy?" she asked.

"Yes, miss."

"You are quite sure?"

"Quite sure, miss."

"Indeed!" Miss Ponsonby would never have suspected anybody of telling an untruth, so she was only surprised. "Very well, construe."

The Fourth-Formers looked at Mellish in wonder and disgust. His facility for telling lies was amazing. The Fourth Form were, of course, far advanced in the Gallic War; and Mellish, with perfect coolness, had started at the very beginning of the first book, and was going to construe lines which

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he had known by heart when he was a fag in the Third Form.

"The awful wottah!" said D'Arcy, in a whisper to Blake.

"It's amazin' to me how that chap can tell those whoppahs. He ought to be shown up."

"Can't sneak!" said Blake.

"I was not pwoposin' to sneak, deah boy; but it seems wotten to see him takin' in Miss Pon in that way."

"He's a rotter," said Figgins; "but it makes it easier for us. I only just looked at my prep, last night."

"Yes; we shall have to go on where Percy leaves off," grinned Herries. "He's a cad, but it can't be helped; and it's all right for us."

"Yaas, wathah! But—"

"Please be quiet while your schoolmate construes, my dears," said Miss Ponsonby.

"Bai Jove!"

And the Fourth Form were silent while their schoolmate construed. Mellish went on with much fluency. As a rule, he was the worst in the class, but on the present occasion the veriest duffer at St. Jim's could hardly have faltered. There was not a fag in the Second or Third who could not have informed Miss Ponsonby that ancient Gaul was divided into three parts, and specified the inhabitants thereof.

Miss Ponsonby nodded with approval as Percy Mellish told her without a fault that all Gaul was divided in three parts, of which one was inhabited by the Belgae, another by the Aquitani, and the third by those who in their own language Celts, and in ours, Gauls are called.

"Very good indeed, Percy," said Miss Ponsonby. "This shows that you have been very careful with your preparation."

"Yes, miss," said Mellish demurely; "I always make it a point to be very careful with my preparation, please. I look upon it as a duty that I owe to my parents and to my kind teachers."

"Oh, my hat!" murmured Blake.

Miss Ponsonby beamed.

"You will take the head of the class for the present, Percy," she said.

Percy smirked.

He took the head of the class; the first time he had even taken the head of any class. Glares were bestowed upon him by fellows he displaced. Even fellows who were not keen on Form-room work, felt insulted at being passed over by the biggest slacker and duffer in the Form.

"I am very pleased with you, Percy!" said Miss Ponsonby. "I hope your schoolmates will be equally deserving. I have decided to offer a little reward to the head boy of the Form."

Fatty Wynn pricked up his ears. Perhaps the thought crossed his mind that the reward might take the form of a visit to the school tuckshop.

"I am going to give a pretty bow to the top boy, which he will wear in the playground," said Miss Ponsonby.

The Fourth Form gasped.

Mellish turned quite pale.

Miss Ponsonby fished in her bag—of course, as a woman, she could not possibly come even into a Form-room without a bag—and drew out a really pretty bow, which would have delighted the heart of a little girl of five—but did not have that effect upon the Fourth Form of St. Jim's.

The Fourth Form looked quite sickly.

"There!" said Miss Ponsonby, holding it up. "I made it myself, and it will be a mark of distinction to the dear child who becomes head of the Form."

And the good lady placed the pretty bow in a prominent position on the desk, where it could be seen by all eyes, as an incentive to hard work.

The juniors looked at one another.

One thought was in every mind. Mellish had the head of the class, and Mellish would keep it. With that handsome reward in view, and the prospect of being made to look absurd to all St. Jim's, no one was likely to struggle to displace Mellish. Percy, certainly would have been very glad to be displaced, but no one was likely to give him the chance.

"Jack!" said Miss Ponsonby.

NEXT THURSDAY:

TOM MERRY'S LEGION OF HONOUR!

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Grimes led the village urchins along the street, marching abreast of the enraged Tom Merry & Co. Miss Ponsonby turned very pink and shook her parasol at the village boys. "Go away at once, you rude children," she exclaimed. (See Chapter 16).

Three or four Jacks rose, but Miss Ponsonby's finger singled out Jack Blake, and Blake began to construe. He went on from where Mellish had left off, in lines as familiar to him as his own name, but he made a woeful mess of them.

"Hi omnes lingua, institutis, legibus inter se differunt," said Blake, and he proceeded with much solemnity to construe: "All these have instituted a lingo which is not legible."

There was a cackle from the Fourth.

Miss Ponsonby started.

"Jack!" she shrieked.

"Yes, sir—I mean miss."

"You have not prepared your lesson."

"N-n-not this, miss!" stammered Blake.

"That is very wrong, Jack!"

"I—I—"

"I fear I must place you at the bottom of the Form."

"Thank you, miss—I—I—I mean yes, sir!" stuttered Blake.

"You will go on—what is your name, my dear?" asked Miss Ponsonby, looking at Lumley-Lumley.

"Jerrold, miss."

"Please go on, Jerrold, and show Jack how that passage should be construed."

"I guess I can do it, miss."

"Pray go on."

Jerrold Lumley-Lumley construed.

"All these linger in institutions in different legs."

"Oh, dear!" exclaimed Miss Ponsonby, while the Form yelled. "You are a dreadful dunce, Jerrold. You will show him how it should be done, Patrick."

Reilly rose to the occasion.

"Hi omnes lingua—" he began.

"Yes, yes; construe," said Miss Ponsonby.

"Faith, all these lingoes are by institutions lawfully differentiated."

"Oh!" said Miss Ponsonby. "You have been neglecting your preparation. You seem not to be able to grasp the rudiments of Latin. I shall now take you through this instead of letting you construe."

And Miss Ponsonby spent the next half-hour drilling into the Fourth-Form heads knowledge which they already possessed. They took it patiently. So long as they were not moved up to the top of the class the juniors were satisfied.

And it was not only in the Latin lesson, but in the other lessons that the Form-mistress found the Fourth woefully deficient. It seemed to be a Form full of duffers. It was not ragging, as Blake remarked; it was self-defence. Nobody intended to go out of the Form-room after morning lessons with that ridiculous bow pinned upon him if he could help it. Miss Ponsonby came to the conclusion when lessons were over that the Fourth Form of St. Jim's was a dreadfully stupid Form, and she did not wonder that Mr. Lathom was showing signs of baldness. Even Mellish showed himself as stupid as the rest, in the hope of being deprived of his honourable place; but it did not avail him. He had distinguished himself once, and nobody else had distinguished himself at all, excepting for stupidity.

"Dismiss!" said Miss Ponsonby at last.

And as the Fourth Form marched out, she made Mellish stop at her desk, and pinned the bow upon his jacket. Mellish followed the rest of the Fourth out of the Form-room with a face as red as fire.

CHAPTER 12.

Lost at Last!

TOM MERRY & CO. were waiting in the passage to greet the Fourth Form as they came out. Percy Mellish's pretty bow attracted general attention at once.

"What's that?"

"Where did you pick that up, Mellish?"

"How nice!"

"It's Percy's reward for being good," said Blake, with a grin. "Miss Pon gives a pretty bow to the top boy in the Form!"

"Eh—Mellish top boy!" exclaimed Tom Merry, in amazement.

"Yes; he's wonderful to-day. He construed the first sentence in 'Cæsar' without a mistake."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Doesn't it look nice?"

"Bravo, Percy!"

"If you call me Percy I'll punch your silly heads!" yelled Mellish, and he grabbed off the bow and threw it upon the floor and jumped on it.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Miss Ponsonby came out of the Form-room.

She smiled sweetly at the juniors.

"I am so glad to hear the sound of childish laughter," she said. "It shows that you are all so happy and fond of one another. Dear me, Percy, you have lost your bow!"

Mellish turned very red.

"Have you dropped it?" asked Miss Ponsonby, looking distressed. "Dear me, that is very unfortunate! Will you little ones look for it?"

The little ones looked for it.

They were not likely to miss it under the circumstances. They liked to see the sneak of the Fourth decorated with that bow. Blake picked it up and handed it to Miss Ponsonby.

"Here it is, sir—I mean ma'am!"

"Thank you, Jack!"

Blake coloured furiously. Miss Ponsonby smoothed out the bow and dusted it, and signed to Mellish to approach. He came up looking as if he were going to execution.

"There!" said Miss Ponsonby, pinning it on again. "Now be more careful with it, Percy. It is a very honourable distinction, and I trust it will cause, not envy, but emulation among your dear schoolmates."

"Oh, we don't envy Mellish, Miss Pon. We know he deserves this."

"That is a very proper view to take, Arthur. I trust your conduct this afternoon will earn you a bow."

"Oh!" said Digby.

And Miss Ponsonby passed on with a sweet smile.

"I won't stand it!" said Mellish wildly. "She's no right to stick a rotten bow on me. I'm not going to stand it!"

"This is what comes of being too clever!" grinned Monty Lowther. "You always were too clever by half, Percy!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I'm sure that bow suits you, Percy," said Blake.

"Shut up!" roared Mellish.

He strode furiously out into the quadrangle and dragged off the bow and hurled it far.

"How do you like your new master, you chaps?" asked Tom Merry sympathetically.

Blake groaned.

"She calls us by our Christian names," he said. "Goodness only knows how she knows them. But she does. It's a gift, I suppose."

"It's wathah howwid!"

"She calls the quad, the playground," said Bishop.

"She patted me on the head!" growled Reilly.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"My dear chaps," said Lowther severely, "you ought to be pleased. It isn't every Form that has a nice girl to take charge of it."

"We'll swop her for Linton," said Blake.

"Ha, ha! No fear!"

"You'll have her in the School House for dinner, anyway," said Figgins. "I'm jolly glad the Fourth master is a School House chap."

"She'll sit at the head of the table, and keep you School House fellows in order," said Redfern, with considerable satisfaction.

"Br-r-r-r!" said Blake.

It was only too true. At dinner-time Miss Ponsonby took the head of the Fourth-Form table in the School House. The School House, being by far the larger house of the two at St. Jim's, contained the quarters of most of the masters, and the Fourth Form had always considered it right and proper that their Form-master should be a School House chap, as they called it. It showed that they were the principal

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House. But just now they would have been quite willing to pass on that honour to Figgins & Co.

Miss Ponsonby greeted the boys sweetly as they came in to dinner.

All the fellows felt under an irksome necessity of being a little more particular with a lady at the head of the table, and it was a bother to everyone excepting Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, whose manners, of course, always had that repose which stamps the caste of Vere de Vere.

Miss Ponsonby's eye singled out Mellish at once, and noticed the absence of that honourable decoration she had bestowed upon him.

"Percy!"

Mellish kept his eyes fiercely upon his plate. There were other Percies in the Form, and he did not see why he should answer. But Blake kindly jogged him.

"Miss Ponsonby's speaking to you, Mellish."

Mellish looked up with a scowl.

"Have you lost your bow, Percy?"

"Ye-es," mumbled Mellish.

"Dear me! That is quite unfortunate. I am afraid you are a careless child, Percy."

Percy snorted.

"Do not look cross about it, dear," said Miss Ponsonby.

"I know you must feel the loss, but I will make you another bow."

"It's all right, Miss Ponsonby," said Lumley-Lumley. "I've found it."

And he passed it along the table. It was rather dusty, but it was the bow. Mellish gave Lumley-Lumley an almost murderous look. He did not feel at all grateful to him for having found the bow.

"Oh, thank you, Jerrold!" said Miss Ponsonby. "This is very kind and thoughtful of you, and I am sure Percy feels grateful to you."

"I guess he doesn't look it," murmured Lumley-Lumley.

"What did you say, Jerrold?"

"It is very pleasant for me to be able to render a little service to my dear schoolmate, ma'am."

"Quite so—quite so. A very sweet sentiment, Jerrold. Percy, thank your kind playmate for what he has done."

Percy glared at his kind playmate.

"Percy, my dear!"

"I—I'm much obliged to you, Lumley," said Percy.

"Not at all," said Lumley-Lumley blandly. "I'm very glad to do a little thing like this for you, Percy. I shall always keep an eye on you after this, and if you lose your bow again I will always bring it straight to Miss Ponsonby. You can rely on me, Percy."

Percy nearly choked.

"I am sure you set a very good example to the other children, Jerrold dear," said Miss Ponsonby. "Come here, Percy, and I will pin your bow on again, and I do hope you will be more careful with it."

Mellish, with a face like a very rich sunset, came up to the head of the table, and Miss Ponsonby pinned on the bow. Mellish sat down in his place again, the cynosure of all eyes. Fellows in all parts of the dining-hall craned their necks to look at him, perhaps to admire the bow.

How the Fourth Form maintained their gravity they never knew.

After dinner was over they marched out, and Lumley-Lumley, according to his promise, kept a friendly eye on Percy Mellish.

It was not long before Mellish lost the honourable decoration again. But this time he was careful to lose it in a fire, where it was consumed before the obliging Lumley could rescue it.

Miss Ponsonby noted its absence when the Form came in for afternoon lessons. There was a slight frown upon her brow as she called to Mellish. Percy seemed to her to be very careless indeed.

"Percy, where is your bow?"

"I—I'm sorry!" stammered Mellish. "I've lost it."

"Lost it for a third time?" said Miss Ponsonby coldly.

"Ye-es, ma'am."

"Has anyone found it?" asked Miss Ponsonby.

No one had.

"I am afraid it will be useless for me to give you another bow, Percy," said Miss Ponsonby severely; "you are too careless. You must take the loss of your bow as a punishment for your carelessness."

And Mellish took his punishment with great equanimity.

ANSWERS

CHAPTER 13.

The Little Boy Who Was Good.

AFTERNOON lessons in the Fourth Form-room were not a pleasure to the Fourth.

During the morning Miss Ponsonby had followed the usual routine of lessons, but in the afternoon she introduced some improvements, on the lines of the girls' school in which she had been a teacher.

"I am going to give you children a pleasant change," she announced.

The juniors looked up eagerly. For a moment they hoped that Miss Ponsonby was going to excuse them from lessons. They would have been very pleased to play cricket instead. But Miss Ponsonby's next words dashed their hopes to the ground.

"I am sure you will all like a change from the class-room on a hot afternoon like this," said Miss Ponsonby. "I am going to take you out for half an hour, and we will sit in the grass, and I will tell you a story."

"Thank you, ma'am!" said Figgins faintly, as somebody was apparently expected to answer.

The Fourth Form were not sorry to get out of the Form-room, so far as that went. But they followed Miss Ponsonby into the quadrangle with many misgivings.

Miss Ponsonby led them to the Head's lawn, where she told them to sit down and make themselves comfortable. Then she sat down on a camp-stool herself.

The juniors sat or reclined in the grass round her.

"Percy," said Miss Ponsonby, "you shall hold my sunshade. I always used to let the best girl in my class hold my sunshade, and you have been a good boy."

Percy made a horrible grimace, which, fortunately, Miss Ponsonby did not see. He sat beside the Form-mistress and held the sunshade.

"Now, what story shall I tell you, my dears?" asked Miss Ponsonby, beaming round upon the unhappy circle.

"Football," said Figgins.

Miss Ponsonby smiled.

"I'm afraid I should not be able to deal with that subject, dear."

"Cricket," suggested Redfern.

"Ahem!"

"Hockey," said Blake.

"I fear that that is also out of the question. Shall I tell you a story of a good little boy who was unexpectedly rewarded for his goodness?"

Now, if Miss Ponsonby had said to her former class of girls, "Shall I tell you a story of a good little girl who was unexpectedly rewarded for her goodness?" the whole class would have responded immediately, "Do, dear Miss Ponsonby!" with great enthusiasm.

But the response of the unhappy juniors was not enthusiastic.

Some of them had caught sight of Taggles, the school porter, who was doing a little gardening, and had paused in his labours to look on at the scene. They would have given weeks and weeks of pocket-money to throw Taggles into the lake. And they were in dread of the scene lasting after the other fellows had come out of the Form-rooms. As it was last lesson, school would soon be over, and if the rest of St. Jim's came and saw them sitting in the grass round their teacher, the Fourth felt that they would expire of shame. And there was no escape.

"There was once a little girl named Alice," said Miss Ponsonby.

The Fourth Form groaned.

"She lived in a little cottage ever and ever so pretty," said the Form-mistress. "Dear Percy, do not push the sunshade against my bonnet."

"I—I can't help it," muttered Mellish. "My arm aches."

"My dear child! If you are tired you must not hold my sunshade a moment longer," said Miss Ponsonby. "Jack, would you like to hold it for me instead of Percy?"

Blake complied.

"Alice was a good little girl," continued Miss Ponsonby. "She loved her mother and her dear aunts and her kind teacher. She—"

"Excuse me, ma'am," said Lumley-Lumley. "Wasn't this going to be a story about a good little boy?"

"Dear me!" said Miss Ponsonby. "Thank you so much for reminding me, Jerrold. You are quite right. There was once a good little boy named—"

"Percy," suggested Lumley-Lumley.

"Yes, named Percy," said Miss Ponsonby brightly. "Of course, any name would do, and it is very sweet of you to suggest the name of a playmate you are fond of, Jerrold. There was once a good little boy named Percy."

"Haw, haw, haw!"

Miss Ponsonby looked round. That unseemly interruption had come from Taggles. Taggles blushed as he caught Miss

Ponsonby's stern eye, and immediately retreated and became very busy in another part of the garden.

"This little boy," resumed Miss Ponsonby, with some dignity, "lived in a little cottage that was ever and ever so pretty. She—I mean he—had a teeny-weeny doll—I should say—H'm! Let me think a moment."

Miss Ponsonby thought a moment. Lumley-Lumley interjected a question.

"Was everybody fond of Percy, ma'am?"

"Yes; he was loved by all," said Miss Ponsonby.

"That reminds us of our Percy," said Lumley-Lumley.

Percy gave Lumley-Lumley a glance that was positively murderous. The Fourth-Formers grinned, feeling a little more satisfied since Miss Ponsonby had named the hero of her story Percy. It was some consolation to see Mellish writhing with suppressed rage.

"Percy had a little cricket-bat that he was very fond of," said Miss Ponsonby, giving the story a really boyish turn, as she fancied. "This cricket-bat had been given him by a kind uncle who loved him dearly. Percy was so fond of this little doll—I mean, cricket-bat—that he used to take it to school with her—that is to say, him—h'm! Now, the school that Percy went to was ever and ever so big. Percy's teacher did not allow dolls—I mean, footballs—that is to say, cricket-bats, to be brought into the school, and Percy always hid the cricket bat under his little coat."

The juniors grinned cheerfully. They could imagine Percy hiding a cricket-bat under his little coat.

"But one day," resumed Miss Ponsonby, "when the teacher was not looking, Percy played with his cricket-bat. He pressed it to make it squeak—that is to say—"

The juniors chuckled. The cricket-bat was getting mixed with the doll of the original story again.

"That is to say, he allowed it to fall upon the floor," said Miss Ponsonby, with a really wonderful flow of invention. "The crash of the bat as it fell was ever and ever so loud. The teacher looked round with a frown."

"Oh dear!" exclaimed Lumley-Lumley.

"Shut up, you ass!" murmured Figgins.

"The teacher asked who had dropped the doll—that is to say, the bat. Percy was very much frightened. He thought that the teacher might slap him!"

"Poor Percy!" said Lumley-Lumley. "That's different from our Percy, ma'am. He never has anything to do with cricket-bats."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Who dropped that doll—bat?" asked the teacher, in ever and ever so loud a voice, pursued Miss Ponsonby.

"And Percy rose and said nobly, 'Please, I did!'"

"With my little hatchet!" said Lumley-Lumley.

"What did you say, Jerrold?"

"It was ripping of Percy, ma'am! Just like our Percy; he'd rise up and tell a teacher anything!"

"If it wasn't true!" murmured Horries.

"Now, my dear children, I should like to say that the teacher forgave Percy at once for being so truthful," continued the narrator. "But the teacher was cross, and she made Percy stand in the corner of the school-room for the whole afternoon. Percy was tired, and he had a big, big ache in his little legs. Don't you all feel sorry for poor Percy, my dears?"

The Fourth-Formers, thus appealed to, looked simply idiotic.

"It was hard cheese!" gasped Figgins.

"Yaas, watah! I should have refused to stand in the corner! I should have insisted that it was infwa dig."

"My dear Arthur!"

"Weally, Miss Ponsonby—"

"To resume. While poor Percy was standing in the corner, feeling very tired and very, very much ashamed, the rector came in. The rector immediately saw Percy, and—"

There was a whoop in the quadrangle, announcing that the school was out.

The juniors made a general movement.

They simply could not endure to be found where they were by the Shell fellows and the fags, and yet it would be somewhat discourteous to interrupt Miss Ponsonby in the midst of her thrilling story.

"The rector said—"

What the rector said to Percy was never known. Mellish rose from the grass, with an ache in his legs from sitting in an uncomfortable position, which probably equalled that of the Percy of the story.

"Time's up, ma'am!" said Mellish sullenly. "The school's dismissed!"

"Would you not like me to finish the story, my dears?" asked Miss Ponsonby.

The Fourth-Formers wanted to be polite. But politeness carried to such an extent would really have verged upon hypocrisy. They did not reply.

There was a shout from the direction of the gate in the

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quadrangle. A row of faces belonging to Shell fellows looked over the gate, admiring the scene in the garden. Shell fellows and fags of the Third crowded there, greatly interested.

The Fourth-Formers were crimson.

"The rector said——" said Miss Ponsonby.

The Fourth Form rose as one man.

"I will finish the story to-morrow," said Miss Ponsonby graciously. "You may go!"

"Thank you, ma'am!"

And the Fourth Form went. They never learned how Percy was rewarded for his goodness. But they did not feel very curious upon the subject.

CHAPTER 14.

D'Arcy Rises to the Occasion.

THE next day several of the Fourth Form inquired of Mr. Railton, with much solicitude, how Mr. Lathom was getting on. Mr. Lathom was still at the vicarage, and Miss Ponsonby was still at St. Jim's.

It would have been very flattering to Mr. Lathom to hear how anxious his Form were about him. They were as eager to hear the latest bulletin as if he had been an emperor or a prince, at least.

Mr. Railton gave them what satisfaction he could. Mr. Lathom was mending, but he was mending slowly. That was all the Housemaster could tell them, excepting that the master of the Fourth was not expected to return to St. Jim's for a few days, anyway. The Fourth heard it with long faces.

"Never mind!" said Blake, looking as if he minded very much, however. "We can stand it this morning! Thank goodness, it's a half-holiday this afternoon!"

"Yes; that's a giddy blessing!" said Herries.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"We'll lick those Shell bounders at cricket, and make 'em sit up for their cheek!" said Figgins vengefully.

Tom Merry & Co. watched the Fourth-Formers go in to morning lessons, and they grinned. They were sympathetic, but they could not help grinning.

Miss Ponsonby was there, sweet and calm and smiling, as usual.

There was no chance for Mellish to repeat his performance of the previous day, nor, indeed, was the cad of the Fourth anxious to retain the top of the class. He did not want any more of the decorations that were so hard to get rid of.

Miss Ponsonby commenced with him, and the exceeding badness of his construing caused him to be moved down several places, which happened to bring Lumley-Lumley into his place.

Lumley-Lumley glared at Mellish for thrusting this unsought honour upon him. Mellish grinned gleefully.

"You'll have a bow to-day, you rotter!" he muttered along the desks.

Lumley-Lumley's reply waited for some minutes, and then it took the form of a pellet of screwed-up paper, which caught Mellish with some force behind the ear.

Mellish clapped his hand to the affected spot and howled:

"Ow!"

"Dear me!" exclaimed Miss Ponsonby. "What was that?"

"Yow! Some beast chucked something at me!" growled Mellish.

"Percy!"

"Ow!"

"How can you use such an expression in description of one of your dear playmates, my child?" exclaimed Miss Ponsonby, very much shocked.

"Well, he is a beast!" said Mellish.

"I am surprised at you, Percy!"

Percy rubbed his ear and growled.

"Which boy was it threw a pellet at Percy?" asked Miss Ponsonby, looking over the class. "I trust the delinquent will be frank enough to make himself known, when I undertake that he shall not be punished."

Lumley-Lumley made a grimace.

"It would be so painful to me to have to keep the whole class in," said Miss Ponsonby.

Very expressive glances were cast upon Lumley-Lumley by his Form-fellows. They didn't want to be kept in.

"If you please, Miss Ponsonby, I know who did it!" said Lumley-Lumley meekly.

Miss Ponsonby looked at him coldly. She did not encourage tell-tales.

"Indeed!" she said. "I do not wish you to name another boy. I asked the boy himself to own up!"

"I guess I'm the boy!"

Miss Ponsonby's face cleared.

"Oh," she said, "I understand! Why did you do it, Jerrold?"

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"Just to make Percy sit up," said Lumley-Lumley. "I just wished to remind Percy that I was here, you know, ma'am, because I'm so fond of him!"

"My dear Jerrold, that is most creditable to you!" exclaimed Miss Ponsonby.

"He's telling whoppers!" growled Mellish.

"Percy! What did you say?"

"He's stuffing you, ma'am!"

"What an extraordinary expression!" said Miss Ponsonby.

"What do you mean?"

"He's pulling your leg—ahem—I mean, he's fooling, spoofing, telling whoppers!" howled Mellish. "He chucked that thing at me to hurt me, and it's hurt!"

"Sneak!" hissed half the Form.

Miss Ponsonby turned a very grave face upon Lumley-Lumley.

"My dear Jerrold, I am surprised and pained!" she said.

Lumley-Lumley turned very red.

"Come out before the class, Jerrold!"

The junior obeyed, wondering whether Miss Ponsonby was going to assume a Form-master's rights to the cane.

"Come here, Percy!"

Percy Mellish joined Lumley-Lumley very unwillingly before the class.

"Now," said Miss Ponsonby, "I'm sure you two boys do not really feel any ill-feeling towards one another. I am sure you are really fond of one another."

"H'm!" murmured Lumley-Lumley.

"Oh!" said Mellish.

"Now, shake hands with one another, like good little boys, and I will kiss you both!" said Miss Ponsonby.

Mellish and Lumley-Lumley gasped.

Probably Miss Ponsonby had composed many little differences successfully in that way at her girls' school. But at St. Jim's such methods had never been tried.

"You'll—you'll what?" gasped Lumley-Lumley.

"You'll—you'll——" stuttered Mellish.

"I will kiss you both!" said Miss Ponsonby, beaming.

"Now, shake hands like dear little children!"

"Oh, my hat!" moaned Blake. "What next?"

"Bai Jove!"

Miss Ponsonby was waiting, in the evident expectation of being obeyed. Lumley-Lumley and Mellish, looking very shamefaced, shook hands.

"Dear children!" said Miss Ponsonby.

She bent her head and kissed Mellish on the forehead. He jumped. Then she turned towards Lumley-Lumley. That cheerful youth was generally credited with possessing the coolness habitual to a cucumber, and with having the nerve to face anything. But there was evidently a limit even with Lumley-Lumley. He backed away.

"Oh, I say!" he gasped.

"Jerrold, my dear child——"

"I—I—— Oh——"

"Come here, dear!"

"If—if you please, I—I'd rather not!" said Lumley-Lumley, with a burning face.

"Jerrold!"

"I—I guess I ain't used to being kissed!" said Lumley-Lumley. "It serves Mellish right—I mean, it's all right for Mellish; but——"

Miss Ponsonby laughed.

"You are a silly boy!" she said. "You may go back to your place."

"Thank you, ma'am."

And Lumley-Lumley thankfully went.

"You uttah ass!" whispered Arthur Augustus indignantly, as the junior passed him. "I wegard your conduct as wotten! It is insultin' to Miss Pon!"

"Br-r-r!" growled Lumley-Lumley. "Let her kiss you, then! I'm jolly well not going to be kissed. I know that!"

"Bai Jove! It would only be the wight thing to do!" said D'Arcy. "It is howwid, of course; but no one has a wight to diswegard a lady's wishes."

"Well, pile in, then; I'm not going to!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

Arthur Augustus rose to his feet. He jammed his eyeglass into his eye, looked very determined, and spoke.

"Pway excuse me, Miss Ponsonby——"

"What is it, Arthur?" asked the Form-mistress, looking at him.

"Lumley-Lumley has had the wotten bad taste to decline to be kissed——"

"Never mind—never mind!"

"But I do mind, deah boy—I mean, deah sir—that is to say, deah gal! I cannot say that I am vewy fond of kessin' myself, but I know a lot of kessin' goes on in gals' schools, and that lady teachah is vewy fond of that kind of thing. I wegard it as bein' wotten bad taste for Lumley-Lumley to decline!"

"Really!" said Miss Ponsonby, turning very pink. "Undah the cires, Miss Ponsonby, in ordah that you may not fancy the Fourth Form to be lackin' in pwopah wespect for the faiwah sex, I am quite willin' to be kissed myself, if you weally want to kiss somebody!" said D'Arcy heroically.

There was a roar in the Fourth.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Miss Ponsonby turned crimson.

"Arthur—"

"I am quite sewious, Miss Ponsonby!" said D'Arcy, with a full sense of the self-sacrifice he was making. "I am willin' to come out before the Form and be kissed, if you would weally like it. I see no weason whatevah for mewmiment, you fellows!"

But the fellows apparently did. They roared. Miss Ponsonby's face was very red. She did not accept D'Arcy's really generous offer.

"You may sit down, Arthur," she said.

"Weally, Miss Pon—"

"We will now resume the lesson."

"But—but you don't want to kiss me, deah gal?"

"Certainly not! Sit down!"

"Bai Jove!" murmured Arthur Augustus, as he sat down.

"I suppose it's weally quite imposs. to undahstand women! She wanted to kiss Lumley, and she doesn't want to kiss me! I wegard that as vewy remarkable!"

And Arthur Augustus D'Arcy remained in a state of astonishment all through morning lessons.

CHAPTER 15.

Walking Out!

"DISMISS!"

It was a welcome word.

The afternoon was a half-holiday, and the Fourth Form were looking forward to it with unusual keenness. They were going to play a Form match with the Shell, and they wanted very much to lick Tom Merry & Co. on the cricket-field. But their teacher was not done with them yet.

"One moment," she said, holding up her finger as the Form prepared to march out. "It is a half-holiday to-day, my dears, and I have planned a little excursion for you."

"Bai Jove!"

The juniors could only look at their Form-mistress.

"I am going to take you for a little walk," said Miss Ponsonby sweetly. "Will you be all ready at three o'clock, and I will join you outside the House. We will have a little pleasant walk in the country, and I will give you some instruction in botanical subjects. I shall bring a little book with me. 'The Story of a Blade of Grass,' by Josiah Mugwump. A most interesting book."

"Oh!" said the Fourth.

They did not thank Miss Ponsonby for her thoughtful kindness. They couldn't. They left the Form-room, and grouped themselves in the quadrangle to talk it over. The Terrible Three joined the unhappy juniors, and they forbore from chipping as they saw how unhappy Blake & Co. looked.

"More trouble?" asked Tom Merry.

"Yaas, wathah!"

Blake groaned.

"I think we shall be driven to running away!" he said.

"The Form match is off for this afternoon."

"What!"

"We're ordered up for three o'clock, to be taken for a little walk."

"My hat!"

"Two and two, like a giddy girls' school, with a lady teacher and botany, and the story of a blade of grass!" groaned Figgins.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"It's no laughing matter, you silly ass! Fellows have been driven to all sorts of things for less than this!" growled Redfern. "We barred old Ratty out of the New House for less than this!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"I won't stand it!" howled Mellish. "I'm not going to be walked out!"

"It doesn't matter about you. You don't want to play cricket, Percy."

"Oh, shut up, you fathead!"

"My dear Percy—"

Percy stamped away in a fury.

The rest of the Fourth talked it over. Some were inclined to rebel, and some to remonstrate, and some to bolt, and not turn up again till calling-over. But upon the whole they felt that it would not do. Miss Ponsonby had to be treated with respect, and even if the juniors failed in respect, there was authority behind her. If their Form-master had ordered a little walk, they would have had no choice in the matter. Their Form-master had too much tact for that. But Miss

Ponsonby did not know the difference in taste between feminine classes and masculine ones. It seemed to her a delightful pastime to take a gentle walk in the country and investigate some of the beauties of Nature. Blake & Co. thought of the chipping they would receive from the village boys if they marched two and two in charge of the vicar's sister, and groaned in spirit. Little matters like that did not even enter Miss Pon's mind.

At three o'clock the Fourth, in a state of suppressed desperation, lined up outside the School House. Miss Ponsonby came out with her sunshade and a book under her arm; a book which contained the most tiresome particulars as to the way blades of grass came into existence.

She greeted the juniors with a beaming smile.

"We shall have such a pleasant afternoon," she said.

"Yaas, wathah, Miss Ponsonby!" said D'Arcy feebly.

"Perhaps you would like to come?" said Miss Ponsonby, turning to the Terrible Three, who were looking on.

The chums of the Shell backed away in alarm. Only Monty Lowther retained his presence of mind in that emergency.

"Yes, yes, we should love it!" he exclaimed. "But we—we've got an engagement. We're late already, you chaps. Come on!"

And Tom Merry & Co. ran for their lives.

"Well, we are all ready!" said Miss Ponsonby. "Come!"

The Fourth Form started.

Miss Ponsonby did not seem to observe their unhappy expressions. Dr. Holmes happened to be crossing the quadrangle as the juniors marched to the gates, and he paused. The long array of Fourth-Formers lifted their hats.

"Bless my soul!" exclaimed the Head, in surprise. "Are the boys going out, Miss Ponsonby?"

"Yes, I am taking the dear children for a little walk," said Miss Ponsonby, with a beaming smile. "I am going to give them some instruction in botany."

"Dear me!"

"We shall have such a pleasant afternoon."

"I—I hope you will, I am sure," said the Head.

But he looked on with a dubious expression upon his face as the unhappy procession wound on towards the gates, and after that, the Head spent some time in serious consultation with Mr. Linton and Mr. Raitton.

Meanwhile, the Fourth walked out.

They were arranged in twos, and made quite a long column, and Miss Ponsonby walked beside them in the sweetest possible temper.

It was a beautiful July afternoon, and the juniors would have enjoyed a cricket match, or a row on the river, or a picnic in the ruined castle, or simply a ramble in the woods. But to be walked out like this in their best silk hats under charge of a lady teacher was not enjoyment—very far from it.

None of the Fourth had ventured to disobey the summons to walk out; but several of them began lagging behind in the lane, in the hope of being able to slip away unseen. But Miss Ponsonby was very watchful.

"Percy, dear," she said suddenly, "are you tired?"

Mellish turned red.

"N-n-no," he muttered.

"Then why are you walking behind?"

"I—I—"

"Perhaps you are tired, my poor boy. Come and take my arm," said Miss Ponsonby kindly.

"It's all right," gasped Mellish. "I—I'm not tired."

Miss Ponsonby shook her head.

"You are quite flushed, Percy dear. I am quite sure you are fatigued. Come and take my arm, and I shall assist you."

There was no help for it. Poor Percy had to take Miss Ponsonby's arm, and he took it with his teeth set and his eyes gleaming.

Mellish's fate was a warning to the others. Nobody lagged behind after that. Nobody wanted to be accommodated with Miss Ponsonby's other arm.

The route lay through Rylcombe, and the juniors simply trembled as they came into the old High Street. They had many foes there, and they knew that the enemy would not fail to take advantage of their present helpless position. Fortunately, the fellows of Rylcombe Grammar School were away at the seaside, so they had no attentions to fear from Gordon Gay & Co. But the village boys—Grimes, the grocer's boy, and Pilcher and Craggs and the rest—where were they?

The juniors soon learned where they were. Almost the first person they beheld on entering the village was Grimes, the grocer's boy. Grimes had a basket on his arm, full of groceries which he was conveying to various destinations. But Grimes was in no hurry to get them there. At the sight of the Fourth Form procession, Grimes stopped, and set his basket down, and stared at them.

"Well, my heye!" he gasped.

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Miss Ponsonby did not appear to notice him. But the juniors of St. Jim's glared at him in the most deadly way.

"My 'at!" gasped Grimes. "Is it a Sunday School treat?"

"Weally, Gwimes—"

"Cut off, you rotter," growled Figgins.

"I'll punch your silly head if you don't travel," hissed Blake.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Grimes. "Going to a tea-fight, eh? One bun each, with one currant in each bun—I know. You there, too, Master Lumley-Lumley?"

"Yes, I guess I'm here, too, Master Grimes," said Lumley-Lumley cheerfully.

"Haw, haw, haw!" roared Grimes.

The juniors glared at him, and some of them stopped, strongly tempted to leave the ranks and bestow summary chastisement upon the humorous Grimes.

Miss Ponsonby looked back, frowning a little.

"Pray keep in order, my dear children," she said.

"Yaas, wathah, Miss Ponsonby; but—"

"Haw, haw, haw!"

"Please run away, you rude boy," said Miss Ponsonby.

"I am shocked at you. Please run away at once."

"No offence, ma'am," said Grimes. "Haw, haw, haw!"

Jack Blake made a sudden jump out of the ranks, and seized Grimes round the neck.

Grimes returned grip for grip with great heartiness, and they struggled furiously on the pavement, and Miss Ponsonby shrieked.

Bump!

Crash!

The two combatants fell across Grimes's basket, and there was a terrific smash, and broken eggs spurted over both of them.

"Oh!" gasped Grimes.

"Bai Jove! You've done it now, Gwimey, deah boy."

Miss Ponsonby ran up in great excitement and alarm.

"Stop it! Stop fighting at once, you dreadful boys!" she exclaimed.

"I'll smash him!" roared Blake.

"I'll spifficate him!" bellowed Grimes.

"Yah!"

"G-r-r-r-r-r!"

"Oh, separate them, separate them!" gasped poor Miss Ponsonby, wringing her hands. "They will hurt one another. I am sure they will hurt one another."

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled Figgins. "I think that's very likely."

"Yaas, wathah."

"Separate them! I command you—I beg of you—"

Three or four of the village youths rushed to the aid of Grimes. As if by magic, they had gathered upon the spot. Pilcher, the butcher's boy, and Craggs, the chemist's boy, and two or three others rushed up. Blake's comrades, of course, were bound to take a hand then. In a few moments three or four distinct fights were in progress, and the beautiful marching order of the Fourth Form was quite broken up.

"Go it!"

"Bump the cad!"

"Yah!"

"Oh!"

Miss Ponsonby wrung her hands.

"Help!" she shrieked. "Help! Help!"

CHAPTER 16.

Very Pleasant.

WHAT'S all this 'ere?"

It was the awe-inspiring voice of Police-constable Crump, the representative of His Majesty's Police Force in the village of Rylcombe.

The combatants separated as the stout policeman came up. Grimes and Co. vanished, taking swollen noses and thick ears with them, and leaving some of the same with Blake and Co.

Miss Ponsonby ceased to shriek, but she was almost weeping with horror. It was only too evident that the boys had damaged one another.

"A' right, ma'am," said P.-c. Crump respectfully, "the young raskils are gorn."

"Oh!" panted Miss Ponsonby. "It was dreadful! Thank you so much for coming, constable. Jack, my dear boy, I am afraid you began it."

"Very likely," said Blake gruffly.

"I fear you are a violent tempered boy, Jack."

Blake grunted.

"Under the circumstances, Blake, I think I ought to send you back to the school, and refuse to allow you to participate in this pleasant afternoon walk," said Miss Ponsonby severely.

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Blake brightened up wonderfully.

"All right, Miss Ponsonby," he said, "I'll go."

Miss Ponsonby relented.

"No, Jack, you need not go," she said, "I do not wish to be severe. So long as you have a proper sense of your fault, I wish to be kind."

"I—I say, kindness is only wasted on me, ma'am," said Blake. "I think I—I ought to be punished. I ought to be sent back."

Miss Ponsonby looked very pleased.

"I am glad to see that you see your fault so clearly, Jack. I shall overlook it. Come on, my dear little ones, and you must be careful not to become mixed up in any more quarrels with rude boys."

Blake snorted.

The column marched on, some of the fighting-men dabbing at their noses with their handkerchiefs, or caressing eyes that showed some signs of discoloration.

"Werry glad to be of service, mum," said Mr. Crump.

"I am very much obliged to you, constable," said Miss Ponsonby.

"Not at all, mum. Dooty, mum. Don't expect nothing for doing my dooty, mum!" said Mr. Crump, who, however, did seem to expect something.

"Thank you so much, constable."

And Miss Ponsonby walked on. Police-constable Crump gazed after her with a very deep emotion expressed in his fat face.

"Not a bob!" he murmured. "Not a tanner! Well!"

And as his inward disgust was too deep for expression in the inadequate English language, Police-constable Crump finished with a snort.

The Fourth Form walked on.

They had no doubt that Grimes and Co. would be looking out for them when they returned through the village, and that the trouble was not yet over. The prospect of another row with the village fellows was their only consolation for that pleasant afternoon's walk.

Miss Ponsonby led them up and down lanes, and paused in meadows and woods, and explained to the juniors many of the cunning ways Nature has in the vegetable kingdom. But it is to be feared that most of that valuable information fell upon inattentive ears.

The juniors were thinking of the cricket-field at St. Jim's, and botanical researches appealed to only a few of them.

"Never mind," murmured Redfern; "we'll have a row with Grimes & Co. as we go back."

"Yaas, wathah! That's one comfort!"

"Percy, dear—" said Miss Ponsonby, looking round.

"Dear me, where is Percy?"

Percy had vanished. He had taken advantage of the cover afforded by the woods to steal quietly away. His example was followed. About every five minutes the party was decreased in number by one or two, and so Miss Ponsonby's procession was much less numerous as it turned back towards the village at last.

The good lady could not help noticing it, and she shook her head sadly.

"I am afraid some of the dear children have wandered away," she said. "That is very thoughtless."

"They'll turn up all right for call-over, ma'am," said Blake.

"Dear me! Where are you going, George?"

Herries turned red.

"I—I was just going to—to stroll over there," he stammered.

"Please keep together," said Miss Ponsonby reprovingly.

"Ye-es, miss!"

They marched back towards the village.

As they entered Rylcombe, they looked out for their enemies, and they saw them. Quite a crowd of Rylcombe urchins had gathered to amuse themselves at the expense of the juniors of St. Jim's. It was not often that they had the Fourth-Formers at their mercy in this way. Grimes, without his basket this time, was there, and he had a score or more of young rascals with him.

They did not interfere with the St. Jim's procession.

They flattered it—if, as the old saying avers—imitation is the sincerest form of flattery.

"Line up there!" said Grimes.

And the village urchins, clucking and grinning, lined up. Grimes led them along the street, marching abreast of the St. Jim's column.

The young rascals assumed most serious looks, and walked in step with the St. Jim's fellows; and Grimes, walking beside them, and keeping them in order, gave an imitation of Miss Ponsonby's manner that was utterly absurd. Some of the juniors themselves could not help grinning.

Miss Ponsonby looked very pink. She shook her parasol at the village boys.

"Go away at once, you rude children!" she exclaimed.



"Can you tell me where the rubbish is chucked in this school?" asked Nobby politely. "I've got this rubbish to throw away. I found it in my study, but I don't want it there!" (The above picture is a reproduction of the cover of our popular companion paper "THE MAGNET" LIBRARY, and depicts an amusing incident taken from the splendid school story of Harry Wharton & Co., entitled: "THE CIRCUS SCHOOLBOY," by Frank Richards, which is contained in "THE MAGNET." Buy a copy to-day. Price One Penny.)

"Whose road is it, ma'am?" inquired Grimes. "I s'pose we're free to walk on the public 'ighway, ain't we?"

"Weally Gwimes, you wottah—"

"Horder!" said Grimes. "Tention! Keep in horder there, and don't look at them rude boys!"

"This is really intolerable!" murmured Miss Ponsonby.

"Shall we shift 'em, Miss Ponsonby?" asked Figgins eagerly.

"Yaas, wathah! Pway allow us—"

"No, no, no!" exclaimed Miss Ponsonby. "I forbid you to approach them! I will not have scenes of hooliganism!"

"Weally, Miss Ponsonby—"

"We'll soon make 'em buzz off, you know!" said Blake pleadingly.

"I forbid you to do anything of the sort. Pray take no notice of those rude children!" said Miss Ponsonby.

The Fourth-Formers marched on, with gritting teeth. Grimes & Co. kept pace with them, Grimes imitating Miss Ponsonby, and the village boys imitating the juniors with

great fidelity. The Saints were growing more and more restive every moment.

Grimes's remarks, too, were very hard to bear in silence. Grimes had quite a flow of humorous language.

"Horder!" he said. "Don't look at them rude schoolboys. Don't you know that them boys are brought up in a school because they've got no 'omes, or else because their parents can't stand 'em about the 'ouse. You should feel sorry for them boys, my dears, but you should be careful not to mix with them or to imitate their bad manners."

The Co. chuckled.

"You must not laugh in the street, my dears!" exclaimed Grimes, in a shocked voice. "Leave that to them poor boys who are brought up without the advantage of a 'ome!"

"Oh, I shall go for him soon!" murmured Blake, in a choked voice.

"Cut off, you young sweeps!" roared Figgins.

"Don't answer that there rude boy!" said Grimes.

Figgins dropped out of the ranks. There would have been

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a combat in another moment, but Miss Ponsonby ran up in time. She pushed Figgins back into his place.

"You must not fight!" she exclaimed. "You must show your gentle and forgiving dispositions on an occasion like this."

"Oh!" said Figgins. He was feeling neither gentle nor forgiving at that moment.

Grimes & Co. accompanied the juniors half-way to St. Jim's. Then they stopped.

"We must go back now, my dears," said Grimes. "Salute them rude boys before you go. Right hands up!"

The array put up their right hands.

"Thumbs to noses!" said Grimes.

The order was obeyed.

"Fingers stretched out!"

The young rascals stretched out the fingers.

"Left hand up, thumb to little finger of right 'and, and fingers stretched out!" said Grimes, in the tone of a drill-sergeant.

And thus the young rascals saluted the St. Jim's juniors as they marched past. Blake & Co. marched on with crimson faces. Miss Ponsonby was watching them too carefully for them to get at the enemy, the good lady keeping herself carefully between the two parties. Leaving Grimes & Co. performing that respectful salute, the juniors tramped on in a state of suppressed fury that was very near explosion-point.

CHAPTER 17.

Saved!

"IT'S the limit!"

"It's past the limit!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"It's too thick!"

"We're not going to stand it!"

Voices were raised in wrath in the Fourth Form-room at St. Jim's.

After that pleasant little walk, the juniors had re-entered the school in a sulphurous state. The last straw had been added when Miss Ponsonby told them sweetly that, instead of having tea in their studies that afternoon, they should come out and picnic on the lawn, and she would continue the story of good little Percy, who was unexpectedly rewarded for his goodness.

As it was a half-holiday, and every fellow at St. Jim's was out of doors, the juniors would have a splendid audience this time, and they felt that they could not stand it. Miss Ponsonby had been the limit! This was considerably past the limit!

The Fourth Form met in the Form-room to discuss ways and means. Brooke, being a day boy, had gone home, but the rest of the Fourth felt that they were in for it. Tea-time was approaching, and Miss Ponsonby would expect them to be ready. The lady was at present in the Head's study discussing something or other with the Head—the juniors did not care what. Probably, as Bishop remarked indignantly, it was some scheme for making them wear pinafores, or bows in their hair.

"We ain't going to stand it!" Jack Blake declared, jumping on a form and addressing the indignant meeting. "It's too thick!"

"Altogether too thick!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"I think we've played up well," said Blake indignantly.

"We've stood more than most fellows would have stood!"

"Hear, hear!"

"It's time we put our foot down!"

"Hurrah!"

"Who's going to back me up to refuse to have tea out on the lawn, with the whole giddy school grinning at us?" There was a roar.

"All of us!" shouted Herries.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"I guess the whole crowd's in that!" said Lumley-Lumley.

"Something's got to be done," said Blake. "Latham has no right to catch a silly cold. He shouldn't have planted Miss Pon. on us, anyway. She's a good sort, but she can't handle the Fourth Form of St. Jim's."

"No fear!"

"We'll tell her plainly we won't have it!"

"Bravo!"

"Gussy had better be spokesman," said Blake hesitatingly.

"He's more of a lady's man than I am, and—and it requires a fellow of tact and judgment."

"Good! Gussy's the man!"

The swell of St. Jim's shook his head in vigorous protest. "I wefuse!" he exclaimed. "Undah othah circs., deah boys, I should be vewy pleased to take the lead, but I can't speak in a disrespectful mannah to a lady. It's impos."

"Look here, somebody's got to be spokesman!" said Blake.

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in exasperation. "If we're going to put an end to school-marning in the Fourth, somebody will have to explain it to Miss Ponsonby!"

All the Fourth Form were agreed that schoolmarning, as they called it, must end. They were all determined not to have tea on the lawn, and to listen to the further adventures of good little Percy, with the rest of the school chuckling at the spectacle. What they desired could not be brought about without matters being explained to Miss Ponsonby. But at the idea of standing out before the Form-mistress and explaining, the boldest spirits felt their courage ooze out at their finger-ends.

"Look here, Blake's the man!" said Pratt. "It's Blake's idea from the beginning. Blake ought to pitch it to Miss Pon!"

"But I—I—" stammered Blake.

"You're leader!" grinned Figgins. "You're the man! Go it!"

"Don't funk it, you know!" urged Kerr.

Blake stepped down off the form.

"I—I—I'll do it!" he said desperately.

Footsteps were audible outside in the Form-room passage. Blake turned pale. All the fellows had their eyes upon him, and there was no retreat now. He stepped to the door, and turned the key quietly in the lock.

"Blake! Weally, deah boy—"

Blake held up his hand.

"Quiet. She mayn't know we're here."

The handle of the door was turned. The door remained closed, and then there was a knock.

The juniors looked at one another in a guilty way, and remained as still as mice in the neighbourhood of a cat.

Knock, knock!

"My dear children, are you there?"

Not a word.

"My dearest children, please open the door if you are there!" said Miss Ponsonby from the passage. "I want to see you very particularly!"

No reply.

Knock!

"Speak up, Blake, you ass!" whispered Digby.

But Blake was silent.

"My dear boys!" said Miss Ponsonby again. "I'm sure you must be able to hear me! I wish very much to say good-bye to you before I go!"

The juniors jumped.

They could scarcely believe their ears.

"Go!" murmured Blake.

"Gweat Scott!"

Jack Blake turned the key in the lock back as silently as he could, and threw the door open. He tried to work up an expression of surprise upon his features as he saw the Form-mistress standing there. Miss Ponsonby's face was grave.

"Oh, Miss Ponsonby!" said Blake.

"My dear children," said Miss Ponsonby, "I am sorry I shall not be able to take charge of you any longer. We have got on together so pleasantly, with so much satisfaction on both sides, that this is a great disappointment to me. I am sure you feel it as much as I do!"

The juniors gave a murmur that might have meant anything.

"Dr. Holmes thinks that the work is too much for me, and he is so kind and considerate that I have not been able to convince him that I am really quite equal to it," said Miss Ponsonby. "The Fourth Form will be taken by Mr. Linton along with the Shell until Mr. Latham returns to St. Jim's. I shall not, therefore, have the pleasure of seeing you again, and I have come to say good-bye!"

"Oh, Miss Ponsonby!"

"Bai Jove! I'm weally sowwy!" said Arthur Augustus.

"No more pleasant little walks," murmured Lumley-Lumley.

And the whole Form said good-bye to Miss Ponsonby, and shook hands with her in turn, with the most cordial feelings in the world; and they gave their Form-mistress a cheer. They could afford to cheer now.

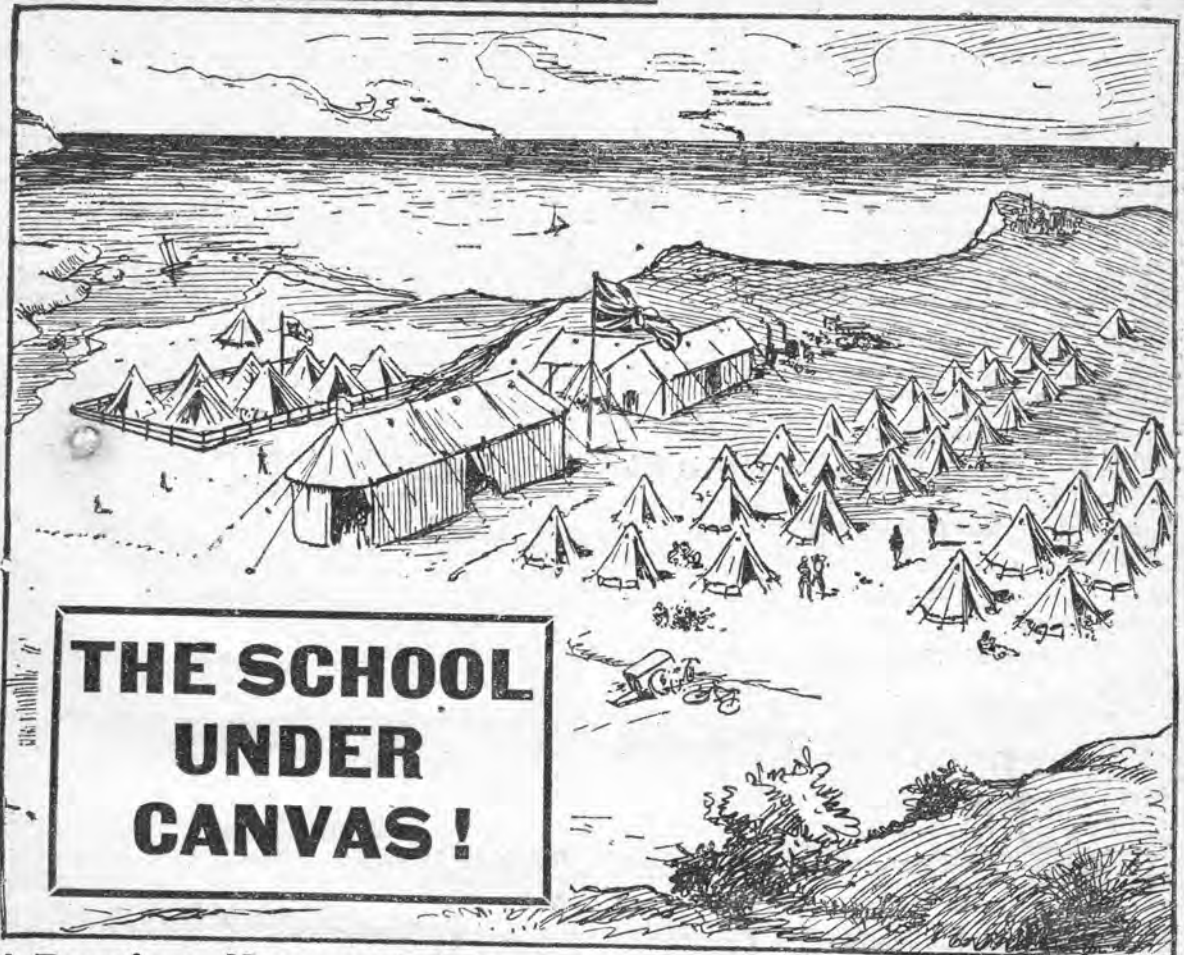
Tom Merry & Co. had the pleasure of Fourth-Form society in the Shell Form-room for several days, until Mr. Latham returned to St. Jim's. It was, as Blake cheerfully remarked to Tom Merry, rather rotten to have to pig in with the Shell, but they put up with it uncomplainingly under the circumstances. And Mr. Latham was received on his return with a welcome that was really flattering, and a little surprising to him. He did not know the dreadful experiences his Form had gone through in his absence.

THE END.

(Next Thursday's splendid complete tale of Tom Merry & Co. at St. Jim's is entitled: "TOM MERRY'S LEGION OF HONOUR!" by Martin Clifford. Order a copy Now—Price 1d.)

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By **PROSPER HOWARD.**

WHAT HAS HAPPENED SO FAR.

"The School will assemble in Big Hall at half-past six o'clock. An important announcement will be made."
"Signed), E. MONK, Headmaster."

The appearance of the above brief notice on the school board is the first hint that the Rylcombe Grammar School receives of the great change in its circumstances that is pending—nothing less than the removal of the whole school into temporary quarters under canvas by the sea, on the Essex coast. Dr. Monk's formal announcement of this step is greeted with the greatest enthusiasm by the entire Grammar School, with the exception of Herr Hentzel, the unpopular German-master, who has, apparently, reasons of his own for objecting. Gordon Gay & Co., and Monk & Co., and indeed the entire Fourth, as the liveliest Form in the school, are particularly excited at the prospect of the change. Just at this time the ranks of the Fourth Form are reinforced by Gustave Blanc—immediately christened Mont Blong—a new boy from

across the Channel. Mont Blong, who attaches himself to Gordon Gay & Co., is a slim and elegant youth with a peculiar flow of English, but he quickly shows his worth by holding his own with Carker, the bully of the Fourth.

Amidst great excitement the Grammarians travel down to their new abode. On their first night under canvas Gordon Gay & Co., including the French junior, are awakened by the collapse of their tent. They proceed to "get their own back" on Carker & Co., who are the cause of the trouble. During the strife Mont Blong slips away unheard, and when he returns he is so surprised at seeing Gordon Gay awake that he addresses him in perfect English. Gordon Gay is dumbfounded, and the next morning, while standing on the beach, he remembers the incident, and comes to the conclusion that Mont Blong is not exactly what he pretends to be—that there is something about him which he fails to understand—something mysterious.

(Now go on with the story.)

Broken Friendship.

Mont Blong joined Gordon Gay on the shore as he stood there after bathing, and watched some of the fellows still in the water.

"Mon ami," said the French junior timidly.

Gordon Gay looked at him squarely.

"Well?"

"It is zat you are displease viz me?"

"I don't like humbug," said Gordon Gay coldly. "You can speak English as well as I do if you like."

Mont Blong nodded.

"But it is zat I always speak viz ze French accent," he said. "He come easier to me, you see, my dear shum."

"You've been taking us in."

Mont Blong spread out his hands in deprecation in a very French fashion.

"Oh, my shum!"

"What were you doing last night, after you left us?" demanded Gordon Gay.

"I go round ze camp."

NEXT THURSDAY: **"TOM MERRY'S LEGION OF HONOUR!"** A Splendid, New, Long, Complete School Tale of the Chums of St. Jim's. By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

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"What for?"

"I have ze fancy to go."

"Is that all?"

"Vat is it more zan zat zat it should be?"

Gordon Gay shook his head.

"I don't know," he said. "But I know jolly well that you're a jolly lot deeper than you let on to be, Mont Blong, and you've taken me in. You're keeping a secret of some sort."

"A secret, my shum?"

"Yes!" said Gordon Gay grimly. "I'm not a fool! I don't know what it is, and I don't want to know; but I don't like secretive chaps. That's all!"

"My shum—"

"Oh, rats!"

Gordon Gay walked away, leaving the French junior standing with a very pensive expression upon his face.

He ran suddenly after the Cornstalk.

"Mon ami! Vun vord more, my dear shum!"

"Well, what is it?"

"You not speak about me viz ze ozzers, vat you have seen?" said Mont Blong. "I do not vish zat ze ozzers zink zat I am vat you call spoofing."

"Well, you are spoofing, aren't you?"

"But you say nozzing, my shum?"

"I won't talk about you, if that's what you mean," he said, Gordon Gay shrugged his shoulders.

a little scornfully. "It's not my business to tell the fellows that you have been humbugging us the last week or more."

"But it is not zat I humbug you," said Mont Blong almost tearfully. "I do not like zat vort humbug from my dear shum."

"Hang it all, I'm not your dear chum, and I don't like you calling me so!"

"My shum—"

"You're a giddy spoofer!"

"Zat is not right."

"There's more about you than you've let the fellows know," said Gordon Gay abruptly. "Where were you gone last night? Yes, I dare say you went up and down the camp, as you say, but that was not the sole reason that you left us for more than an hour."

Gustave Blanc was silent.

"Was it?" demanded Gordon Gay.

"Zat is one awkward question."

"You can't answer it."

"I do not vish to answer zat."

"Why not?"

"Perhaps I tell you some ozzar day, but zis day I cannot tell you."

Gordon Gay looked at him sharply.

"You are keeping some rotten secret," he said.

"Ze secret is not rotten."

"But there is a secret?" the Australian junior exclaimed quickly.

"I do not say zat zere is not."

"Well, I don't like chaps with secrets, that's all!"

Mont Blong looked very troubled. It was evident that the Cornstalk's attitude was a blow to him.

"I zink zat if you knew all you not speak so to your poor shum," he said pathetically.

"Why can't you tell me all, then?"

"Zat I cannot explain at zis moment."

Gordon Gay made a gesture of irritation.

"Well, I don't want to be mixed up in your giddy mystifications and your rotten spoofing, so the less we have to say to one another in the future the better."

And he strode away.

Mont Blong stood looking after him miserably, but he made no further attempt to expostulate with the angry Cornstalk.

Gordon Gay did not often allow himself to lose his temper, but on this occasion, like the prophet of old, he felt that he did well to be angry.

His frank and open nature shrank from secretiveness of any sort, and he did not like the mystification that the French junior was keeping up, and he could imagine no creditable motive for it.

Wootton major joined him as they went into the big marquee to morning lessons.

"Mont Blong looks down in the mouth," said Wootton.

"Have you been rowing?"

Gordon Gay made an impatient gesture.

"We're not speaking now," he said.

Harry Wootton eyed him in astonishment.

"You're not on speaking terms with Mont Blong?"

"No."

"Why not?"

"Because—" Gay paused, remembering his promise to Mont Blong that he would say nothing to the other fellows.

"Oh, never mind!" he concluded lamely.

Wootton major was more and more surprised.

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"You've had a row?" he asked.

"Well, a jaw, anyway."

"What about?"

"Oh, nothing!"

"Well, you're a queer beggar, to have a jaw with a chap about nothing, and then get off speaking terms with him," said Wootton major. "Mont Blong is a harmless young ass, and I don't see what you want to be down on him for."

"Well, there may be a reason, you know, although you can't see it," Gordon Gay remarked somewhat tartly.

Wootton major grinned.

"Keep your hair on, old son!" he said. "You're going to keep on speaking terms with me, whether you like it or not."

Gordon Gay laughed.

They went in to lessons, and Mont Blong cast a pathetic glance at the Cornstalk as he took his place in the Form. But Gordon Gay avoided his eyes, and the French junior gave a sigh that was heard by the whole Form. Mr. Adams, the master of the Fourth Form, stared hard at Mont Blong.

"Blanc!" he rapped out.

"Oui, oui, monsieur!"

"What is the matter with you?"

"Nozzing, sir."

"You made a remarkable sound."

"Zat was a sigh, sir."

"And why did you sigh? Are you ill?"

"Not at all, monsieur."

"Then what is the matter with you?"

"I have ze heart very heavy, sir."

Mr. Adams looked at him more gently. He remembered that the French junior was a stranger in a strange land, and he felt very kindly to the boy who was so far from his home and his people.

"Indeed! What are you sad about, Blanc?" he asked.

"I have quarrelled viz my dear shum, sir."

There was a giggle from the Fourth, and Mr. Adams smiled. Almost every eye was turned upon Gordon Gay. The Cornstalk junior turned scarlet.

"Well, well, I hope you will make it up again, Blanc," said Mr. Adams comfortingly. "Pray cheer up, and do not sigh in class."

"Non, monsieur."

And Blanc sighed again.

Mr. Adams hurriedly commenced the lesson.

Master and Pupil.

The change for the Fourth Form of Rylcombe Grammar School was great.

At Rylcombe the Forms had been accustomed to separate Form-rooms, and, in spite of opened windows, those Form-rooms had always seemed hot and stuffy to the juniors in the summer weather.

The change was complete now.

In the big marquee all the junior Forms were accommodated for lessons, the seniors having another tent for a Form-room near at hand.

The Fourth, Third, and Second were all in the big marquee, and there was ample room for all.

Through the opening of the great tent the juniors could see the sea, shining in the sunlight, as they sat at lessons.

It was strange, very novel, to them at first, and very delightful. They agreed with one another that it was a very pleasant change after the close Form-rooms at Rylcombe Grammar School. It seemed hardly like work at all to sit there with the blue sea under their eyes, and occasionally a white sail glancing by.

There was some absent-mindedness in the class in consequence, but Mr. Adams was very lenient the first morning, and he let the juniors down lightly.

Not so Herr Hentzel, who came in to take the Fourth in third lesson.

Gordon Gay glanced curiously at the German-master as he came in. He wondered whether Herr Otto Hentzel remembered the peculiar incident of the previous night, and was still sore about it. He soon discovered that it was so in both cases. The German-master's thin lips were tightly compressed, and his pale blue eyes were gleaming under the thick, bushy brows. Instead of beginning the German lesson as usual, he stood before the class, and regarded Gordon Gay & Co. with a fixed gaze.

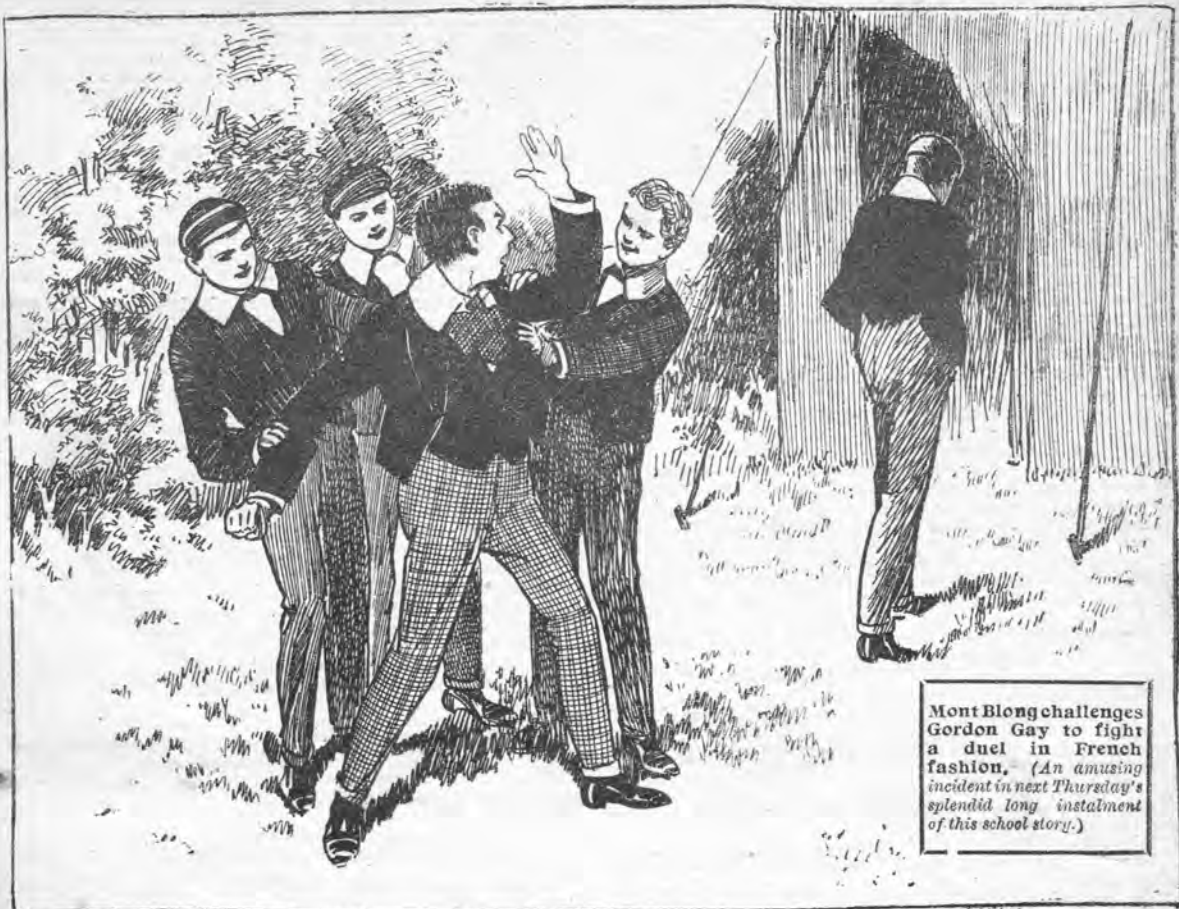
"Gay," he said, in a low, hard voice, "it is tat I vish to speak mit you."

"Yes, sir," said Gordon Gay.

"Last night you and your friends assault a friend of mine who came to see me mit himself."

"I am sorry, sir. We didn't know it was a friend of yours at the time. I thought that matter was over and done with, sir," said Gay quietly.

"Quite so, Gay, but afterwards I find tat someone follow tat friend of mine to my tent, and listen py der canvas while we talk."



Mont Blong challenges Gordon Gay to fight a duel in French fashion. (An amusing incident in next Thursday's splendid long instalment of this school story.)

Gay started.

"What, sir?"

"Someone last night was listening outside mein tent while tat I talk to my friend," said Herr Hentzel. "After long time I tink tat I hear a noise, and I go out, but he run. I find te signs in te grass where he lie close to te tent, and a slit in te canvas which he cut viz a knife to listen."

"My hat!"

"Was it you, Gay?"

Gordon Gay fixed his eyes upon the German-master.

"You have no right to ask me that question, sir," he said firmly.

"Vat?"

"I mean what I say, sir!" said Gordon Gay, in a clear and ringing voice. "If you have any reason to suspect me of acting in a dirty and caddish way you can take me before Dr. Monk. I'm quite willing to go. You have no right to ask me if I did what no decent fellow would do."

"Den it vas not you?"

"That question is an insult, sir, and I am not bound to answer it."

The German looked at him hard.

"I believe you, Gay," he said, at last. "It vas not you. But it vas somevun, and I punish tat poy ven I find him, mein Gott!"

Gordon Gay sat down, with a flushed face.

There was a troubling thought in his mind; the German-master was evidently in earnest, and was not mistaken; and what he had said let in a flood of light upon Mont Blong's absence the previous night. Was that where Mont Blong had been? In the absence of any explanation from the French junior, how could Gay doubt it?

Yet why should Mont Blong have wasted his time listening to the idle talk of two Germans? And how was it he knew German so well as to understand it? He had appeared in class more backward in German than he was in English, and certainly he had seemed backward enough in that language. Was his ignorance of German humbug, too, like his pretended ignorance of English?

Gordon Gay glanced involuntarily at Mont Blong. The French junior met his eyes with a glance of pathetic appeal,

which made Gordon Gay colour with anger. He turned his eyes away hastily. Since his quarrel with Mont Blong, it looked as if the theatrical French youth were going to act the deserted and broken-hearted chum incessantly; and Gay, who had all a British boy's natural shrinking from scenes of any sort, shuddered at the prospect.

The German-master, for some reason, turned his attention chiefly to Gustave Blanc for that lesson. He seemed to desire to plumb the depths of the French junior's ignorance—or otherwise.

Mont Blong appeared to do his best. He struggled manfully with German verbs, and faced German pronouns like a hero.

But he made a miserable hash of them, and Otto Hentzel's little blue eyes gleamed and twinkled with rage.

The natural antipathy between the Frenchman and the German seemed to glitter out, as it were, in the contest between master and pupil. And indeed, the master, who should certainly have known better, did not disdain to make a reference which was in the worst of taste, considering that he was speaking to a French pupil. In taking a simple sentence for the edification of the French junior, he made it run, "Sind Sie in Elsass gereist?"

Mont Blong's eyes glittered with rage at the question.

It was certainly harmless enough to ask any other fellow in the Fourth a question which meant in English only "Have you travelled in Alsace?"

Half the Fourth Form of the Grammar School were probably unaware of the fact that Alsace had belonged to France, and had been annexed by the Germans after the disastrous war of 1870. And if they had known it would have mattered nothing to them. But to the French junior it was different. Like all loyal Frenchmen he cherished in his heart the dream that some day Alsace-Lorraine should return to the fold, wrested from the Germans by the strong hand, as it had once been wrested from France. And to speak of the country at all to him, and to call it by its German name, was a gibe which was quite unworthy of the master, and should never have been uttered by him.

"Tat you answer me!" rapped out Herr Hentzel.

"I zink zat I not understand," said Mont Blong.

"Ach! You vas stupid, ain't it? Ich sage, Sind Sie in Elsass gerist?"

"Je ne sais pas, monsieur—I do not know him. You speak of ze name of a country zat I know not—que n'existe pas."

"Vat!"

"Zere is no country Elsass," said Mont Blong cheerfully. "But if it is zat monsieur shall meaus Alsace, oui, oui, I have travelled there!"

"Ich sage Elsass!" exclaimed the German-master angrily. "Zat is a barbarous name zat I know not, monsieur."

Herr Hentzel grasped his pointer.

"Ach! It is tat you do not know te history of your own country, ain't it?" he said sneeringly.

"Oui, monsieur," said Mont Blong, with dangerous sweetness. "It is ze ozzer day zat I read in ze history of ze Battle of Jena, monsieur!"

It was the German's turn to flinch from the gibe, as Mont Blong mentioned the name of that famous battle of Napoleon's in which Prussia was laid for so many years at the feet of France.

"Ach! You're insolent!" said Herr Hentzel, between his teeth.

"Zis for zat, monsieur, and it is zat you commence."

"Vat!"

"Jena for Elsass, monsieur," said Mont Blong.

The German-master made a step towards the French junior. But he recollected himself in time; it would look too ridiculous to enter into a controversy of this kind with a junior. He had made himself look absurd enough already. He allowed the subject to drop, and passed Mont Blong over; but he did not forget. At the close of the lesson he turned suddenly to the French youth again, and demanded the spelling of a difficult word, in which the unfortunate junior blundered sadly.

"You vill write him out a hundred times, Blanc!" said the German-master savagely.

"Oui, monsieur!" said Mont Blong cheerfully.

And Herr Hentzel dismissed the class.

"Horribly ratty this morning, old Hentzel!" Frank Monk remarked, as the Fourth Form streamed out of the big marquee. "Something seems to have upset His Whiskers!"

Gordon Gay nodded, and strolled away towards the sea. Mont Blong hurried after him.

"My shum—my shum!" he called out anxiously.

Gay halted in annoyance.

"What do you want?" he demanded.

"Is it zat you are still angry viz me?" asked Mont Blong pathetically.

"Oh, go and eat coke!"

"My dear shum—"

"Look here, was it you who were listening outside the Dutchy's tent last night?" Gordon Gay demanded. "Was that where you were gone?"

"Zat question you say yourself is an insult, my shum."

Gay was a little taken aback at having his own words quoted against him in this way.

"Well, yes," he admitted; "I—I beg your pardon if it wasn't you. But—hang it all, I believe it was! Will you give me your word it wasn't?"

"I say nozing."

"Then you did eavesdrop outside that old boulder's tent?"

"My shum—"

"I don't want to chum with a fellow who listens!" said Gordon Gay scornfully.

"My dear shum—"

"Oh, rats!"

And Gay stalked away in high dudgeon.

The Peacemakers.

"My hat! What's the trouble?"

The Old Co.—Frank Monk, Lane, and Carboy—were strolling along the shore, exploring their new surroundings in the interval before the midday dinner. The sound of a deep and heavy sigh came to their ears; and they looked round to discover Gustave Blanc seated upon a jutting rock, the picture of woe.

The three juniors halted, and stared at him.

"What's the trouble?" Frank Monk demanded.

"Homesick?" asked Lane. "I suppose that's it."

"Oh, quite!" said Carboy.

Mont Blong shook his head.

"Not homesick?" asked Monk.

"Non, non! It is not zat!"

"Sick in any other way?" asked Lane. "Got a pain in side?"

"Non, non!"

"Toothache?"

"Non!"

"Hard up?"

"Non!"

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"Lines worrying you?"

"Non. Tank you, mais non! It is not zat."

"Then what on earth is it?" asked Frank Monk, having exhausted the list of schoolboy sufferings that were known to him. "What are you groaning about if there is nothing the matter?"

"Zere is somezing ze mattair."

"What is it?"

Mont Blong smote himself upon the chest.

"It is here!" he exclaimed tragically.

"Your waistcoat doesn't fit?" asked Monk, puzzled.

"Non, non!"

"Stomach-ache?"

"Non, non, non, non!"

"Then what on earth—"

"C'est le cœur—it is ze heart."

"Pain in your heart?" asked Monk, in alarm. "I say, you'd better mention it to my pater, and he'll arrange for a doctor to see you. It might be serious."

Mont Blong shook his head again.

"It is not zat kind of pain," he said. "It is vat you call ze tart-cake."

"Tart-cake!" shrieked Monk, mystified. "Have you been eating too much? Is it just indigestion?"

"Non!" shrieked Mont Blong. "Non!"

"Then what do you mean viz tart-cake?"

"Ze cake—non, I make ze mistake—ze ache," said Mont Blong. "Zat is vat I would say viz myself—ze ache of ze heart."

Frank Monk roared.

"The heart-ache, you ass!"

"Oui, oui, zat is him," said Mont Blong, delighted at making his meaning clear at last. "I have him here." And he smote his waistcoat again.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"It is not a mattair for ze laugh of ze hyena," said Mont Blong indignantly. "I suffair—oh, I suffair moooh!"

"But what's the cause of the giddy heartache?" asked Frank. "In love?"

"That's it," said Lane, with a nod. "French chaps begin falling in love at the age of ten. At eleven they start having broken hearts. Is your heart broken, Mont Blong? Ten to one, it's Sally the housemaid."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"It is not zat I am in luff zis time."

"Then how on earth have you got a heartache?" demanded Carboy.

"I have quarrel viz my shum."

The Old Co. roared again.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Gustave Blanc rose to his feet indignantly. He pushed back his cuffs, and advanced upon the chums of the Fourth in a very warlike way.

"You laff!" he exclaimed. "I make you not to laff at ze heartache! I zrash you!"

Monk held up his hand in sign of peace.

"Hold on. Pax!"

"Pax," said Lane and Carboy, grinning, "we're sorry. We're awfully sorry!"

"Yes, rather," said Monk, growing serious. "Which of your giddy chums have you quarrelled with?"

"My dear shum Gay."

"Is it serious?"

"Ve no speak viz vun anozer," said Mont Blong pathetically. "Zat give me ze heartache. I suffair—I suffair very moooh."

"Poor old Mont Blong!" said Monk sympathetically. "It's rotten! We all sympathise with you very much. In fact, it gives me the tart-cake—I mean, the heartache, myself. Doesn't it give you the tart-cake, Laney?"

"Horribly," said Lane.

"And you, Carboy?"

"Oh, quite!"

"If it iz possible zat I make it up viz my shum," said Mont Blong. "Zen I am happy again—I sing—I dance! Now I have ze heartache. I zank you, for you are so kind as to feel ze heartache for me. I suffair."

"Too bad," said Monk, with a shake of the head. "I wonder if anything could be done? Perhaps if a mutual friend stepped in, Mont Blong, he might be able to make it all sereno again."

Mont Blong nodded eagerly.

"My dear friend, is it zat you help me make it up viz my dear shum?" he exclaimed.

Frank Monk winked at his chums with the eye that was furthest from the French junior.

"Certainly!" he exclaimed heartily. "I'm sure Lane and Carboy and myself will be glad to do anything we can."

"Yes, rather."

"Oh, quite!"

"In fact, I'm rather a dab at making up quarrels for people," said Monk. "My tender heart makes me fond of doing that sort of thing, too. Besides, I promised my Aunt Janette that I would always be a piece-worker—I mean, a peacemaker. I should be delighted if my good offices—ahem!—would set matters right."

"We'll take it in hand at once," said Lane.

"Look here, Blanc, are you willing to follow our advice?" asked Monk.

Mont Blong nodded again.

"Certainly, my dear friend. I do anything to make up viz my shum," he said mournfully. "But ze English nature is so cold. Zey are all like ze icebergs."

"Oh, that's only on the outside!" said Monk blandly. "We've got lots of emotion and things tucked away, you know. When we enthuse, we go the whole hog. Now, Gordon Gay is simply brimming over with—with—with tender-heartedness and sotheadedness and things. You've only got to tackle him the right way."

"Zat is all serene. I do anything you say."

"No good beating about the bush in a matter of this kind," said Monk thoughtfully. "The best thing is to show your friendship in an unmistakable way, fairly plump it on him, you know, so that there can't be any mistake about it."

"I like zat idea. I kees and embrace my shum."

"Exactly. Now, we shall all be called together by old Cutts's bugle for dinner soon," said Monk. "There'll be a big crowd outside the grub tent—masters and boys and everybody. The more public the occasion, of course, the better it will be. You fellows agree with me, don't you?"

"Oh, quite."

"Right as rain, Monkey."

"You go and wait just inside the mess-tent, Mont Blong," said Frank Monk impressively. "As soon as Gordon Gay shows up, rush right at him, and hug him round the neck, and kiss him, and so on, and swear eternal friendship. That is exactly what he will like, and I assure you that the result will surprise you."

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Lane.

Frank Monk turned upon him severely.

"What are you cackling at, Lane?" he demanded.

Lane choked.

"Oh—er—nothing! I—I—I was really coughing!"

"Well, don't cough like that again, or you will give Mont Blong the idea that you are unsympathetic, instead of feeling in this matter exactly as I do," said Monk.

Lane was troubled with another bad cough.

"You do just as I tell you, and you'll see the result, Mont Blong," said Monk, wagging his forefinger impressively at the French junior.

Mont Blong beamed.

"I zank you!" he exclaimed. "You are ze good friend, le bon ami! I embrace you!"

Frank Monk dodged.

"I—I say, I'm in rather a hurry!" he gasped, and he fled. Lane and Carboy followed him.

They restrained their emotions till a big rock hid them from the eyes of the French junior. Then they threw themselves upon the ground, and shrieked in ecstasy, and kicked up the sand with their heels in wild glee.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Ho, ho, ho!"

"Picture Gay's chivvy when the Frenchy embraces him and kisses him before all the giddy school!" gasped Monk.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Imagine his joy!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I told Mont Blong the result would surprise him!"

"And it will! Ha, ha, ha!"

"It's almost too thick to rot such an awful ass as Mont Blong!" gasped Lane. "But it's too good a jape to be missed! Ha, ha, ha!"

And the three chums laughed themselves into a state almost of hysterics. The loud and ringing ta-ra-ra of a bugle interrupted them. It was the signal from Corporal Cutts that it was time for the school to gather for the midday meal.

Frank Monk staggered to his feet, and dusted the sand from his Etons.

"Come on!" he gasped. "We mustn't miss it!"

"No fear! Ha, ha, ha!"

And the Old Co. hurried towards the school encampment. Fellows were returning to the camp from all sides, from the village and the cliffs and the beach. Wootton major and minor and Tadpole were strolling along together, but Mont Blong was not to be seen. Doubtless, he was in ambush in the mess-tent waiting for Gordon Gay, as instructed by the humorous chief of the Old Co.

Frank Monk looked round for Gordon Gay. He caught sight of the Cornstalk coming up from the shore with a damp towel over his arm. Gay had been swimming before dinner, and he came back alone, and there was a slight cloud upon his face. He had purposely avoided Mont Blong, being in mortal terror of some demonstration of friendship from the susceptible French youth which would make him look an ass, as he expressed it to himself, before the other fellows. Gordon Gay had a truly British horror of scenes; and he had already discovered that Mont Blong simply revelled in them, like most of his race.

There was a big crowd outside the mess-tent when Gordon Gay came strolling up. He nodded to Frank Monk & Co., wondering what they were grinning about.

Then he walked on to the mess-tent.

"Now, look out for the fireworks!" murmured Frank Monk.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

A little Gallic face and two very sharp eyes watched Gordon Gay from the mess-tent as he came up. Suddenly, like an arrow from a bow, the agile form of the French junior darted out.

He was upon Gordon Gay in a second.

"My shum! My lofed shum!"

The Cornstalk was taken completely by surprise.

In a moment Mont Blong's arms were wound about his neck, and the French junior was embracing him with exuberant affection.

"My shum! My shum! Zat you make him up viz me, my shum! I embrace and kees my dear shum!"

Smack, smack!

And Mont Blong kissed his astounded chum, with a smack on either cheek that could be heard half over the encampment.

There was one wild yell of laughter from the crowd. Gordon Gay, with a face as red as a turkey-cock's, struggled frantically in the embrace of the French junior.

"Ow! Groo! You'll make me sick! Leggo! Help!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"My shum! I lofe my shum!"

"Grooooo! Dragginoff!" gasped Gordon Gay. "He's kissing me! I shall be seasick! Groo! Yankinoff!"

"My beloved shum—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I kees my shum—my beloved shum!"

"Grooh! Help!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Gerroff!"

"My shum—my—yah! Oh!"

Biff!

Gordon Gay's patience was gone. His right came out, and it came into violent contact with Mont Blong's nose, and the French junior gave a wild yell, and rolled on the ground at the feet of his beloved chum!

(Another grand instalment of this thrilling serial next Thursday.)

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"TOM MERRY'S LEGION OF HONOUR!"Ask for What You Want.

I should like to remind my chums that the best way to assist me to give them what they want in the pages of the ever-popular "Gem" Library is to drop me a postcard, and ask for what they want in the way of stories and articles. I do not say that every reader will get just what he asks for—that would, of course, be impossible, and even an Editor cannot perform miracles. Readers' tastes often lie as far apart as the poles, as it is only natural they should, but by careful study of the suggestions and wishes of Gemites, as expressed on their postcards or letters to the Editor, it is possible to glean a very fair idea of the sort of thing that all classes of readers will enjoy. I therefore have pleasure in inviting my readers to take a hand themselves in the editing of "The Gem" Library. Let me know what you want, and I will do my level best to oblige you, but do not judge me too harshly if, say, an article on the subject you suggest does not immediately appear on the Chat page. That particular subject may be one which would only be likely to appeal to a very limited number of readers, and on that score it would have to be passed over in favour of something of more general interest. On the other hand, your article may strike me as being very sound indeed, and one likely to prove universally popular, in which case you would, in due course, see it carried out, and I would owe you my best thanks for the suggestion. So send along your ideas and wants, please, my reader-friends, and I will do my very best for you, as I have always tried to do.

Replies in Brief.

W. W. (Minoletti, E.).—I am sorry I cannot tell you the worth of the coin you mention without actually seeing it. You would probably be able to get a book dealing with the values of foreign coins from H. Glaisher, 32, Charing Cross, London, S.W.

G. W. H. (Peckham).—I am sorry I cannot fully explain to you the off-side rule in football, as space on this page is rather limited. You can find it, however, in any hand-book on football.

A. R. A. (Liverpool).—Thank you for your letter, and for the suggestions it contained, which latter I will bear in mind. In reply to your query, I have to tell you that two 3d. Books of Tom Merry & Co. have been published—Nos. 30 and 153—the first one being unobtainable, except through the medium of the Back Numbers Column.

G. E. M. T. (Islington).—Thanks for your letter, and excellent verse about "The Gem" Library. I am sorry that space does not allow of my publishing it on the Chat page.

A. C. P. (Worthing).—Many thanks for your kind and interesting letter, and also for your good wishes. I shall bear your suggestion in mind.

"The Trackers".—I must thank you for your long letter, and for the kind assistance you have rendered in further popularising the famous little companion papers, "The Gem" and "The Magnet" Libraries. I am very pleased to hear that you so enjoy reading our serial stories, and I

am sure you will hold the same opinion of our new ones as you did of "Through Trackless Tibet" and "Wings of Gold." I shall always be pleased to receive letters from my helpful chums, "The Trackers."

Arthur T. (Manchester).—In answer to your letter, I must tell you that I shall be very pleased to receive any specimens of your black-and-white work which you care to send up, when I would give you my opinion of them, if this would be of any value to you. There is always an opening for first-class black-and-white work, and, provided yours is up to the requisite standard, you should have no difficulty in obtaining commissions from one or other of the many papers controlled by this firm.

I.—Hints for Young Bowlers.

Speaking generally, bowling is a gift—a gift which can and must be developed by practice, but an inborn gift all the same. Many young cricketers are inclined to think that the speed at which the ball is delivered is of prime importance, but nowadays this is by no means the case. Something more besides mere force is required to get wickets on the modern dead-true wicket, for, once he has mastered the pitch of fast bowling, a self-confident batsman is generally able to score freely off it. It is the "spin" and "break" on the ball, and its deceptive flight on the way to the wicket, which proves so deadly. The young cricketer should therefore beware of overstraining himself and spoiling his natural action by attempting to bowl too fast; he will be much more likely to succeed as a scatterer of stumps if he will assiduously practise bowling at his natural pace. The art of accurately pitching the ball is, of course, of the first importance. This should be practised by bowling at a wicket with a piece of white paper marking the spot where the ball should pitch. If this is done painstakingly, the bowler will in time find that he can pitch the ball on the piece of paper practically every time, without being under the necessity of thinking about his length at all. The aim of a really deadly bowler is to vary his speed, the direction of his "break," and the length of his balls as often as possible, and this should be done without giving the batsman any warning or time in which to prepare for a sudden change of tactics.

The bowler who sends down the same ball, good as it may be as to length and direction, for over after over, may find occasionally that he is wearing out the batsman, and causing him to hit wildly at dangerous balls, in which case the trundler is sure to prevail before very long. It is more likely, however, that unless the bowler knows how to vary his ball in different and unexpected fashion, he will discover that the batsman has mastered his particular style, and, getting thoroughly set, will begin to hit freely and with confidence whereupon the bowler will find himself promptly taken off by the captain of the side.

To acquire variations in his bowling, the young bowler should practise constantly at a single stump, and watch carefully the results of different degrees of spin, which he should put on the ball just as it leaves his fingers. In this way a peculiarly deadly type of ball is sometimes discovered, which can be used in the next match with startling results.

It is impossible to teach bowling by rule. Every bowler has a different style, and should experiment for himself by imparting every variety of spin to his deliveries during practice. Once an effective ball has been discovered, he should practise it constantly until he can "turn it on" at will. In thus varying his style of delivery, the young bowler must, of course, be careful not to throw instead of bowling the ball. When attempting to bowl a certain type of ball it is sometimes found very easy to bend the elbow and wrist in delivering, and thus unintentionally throw the ball at the opposing batsman. Needless to say, this is not likely to escape the attention of the umpire.

(To be continued next week.)

THE EDITOR.