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The School House juniors, chuckling with glee, started off with the caravan. They waved their hands to Figgins & Co. as they went merrily down the road. "Good-bye, Figgy! Pleasant walk home!" (See the Grand School Tale inside.)

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A Grand New, Long, Complete Story of Tom Merry & Co. and their Rivals
of the New House at St. Jim's.

By **MARTIN CLIFFORD.**



"Run for it, Gussy!" yelled Kangaroo. "Your train's going!" Arthur Augustus did not need to be told to run for it. He fairly flew across the quad, with his bag swinging in his hand. (See Chapter 6.)

CHAPTER 1.

D'Arcy Keeps it Dark.

FIGGINS of the Fourth frowned darkly. For ten minutes at least there had been a worried look upon the brow of the great Figgins. He was reclining, not to say sprawling, in the armchair in his study in the New House at St. Jim's. His long legs were stretched out, his hands thrust deep into his trousers-pockets, and his brow was corrugated like an iron roof.

Figgins of the Fourth seemed to be struggling with some mental problem, and struggling in vain.

And his study-mates were not helping him in the least. Fatty Wynn was seated at the study table devoting his whole attention to a pie. Kerr was standing before the looking-glass trying on artificial moustaches. Fatty Wynn was thinking of nothing but the pie—which was certainly a very

nice pie, and worthy of Fatty's devotion. Kerr was thinking of nothing but his part in a forthcoming performance by the New House Amateur Dramatic Society. George Figgins wrestled unaided with his mental problem, whatever it was.

Hence the dark and reproachful frown which Figgins turned upon the Co., and the reproachful tone of his voice when he spoke.

"Talk about Julius Cæsar!"

At that surprising remark Kerr turned round from the looking-glass, with a brown moustache on, which gave him quite a queer appearance; and Fatty Wynn looked up for a moment from the pie.

"Who's talking about Julius Cæsar?" asked Kerr, in surprise.

Figgins sniffed.

"You fellows remind me of him," he grunted.

Next Wednesday:

"THE HOUSE-MASTER'S BODYGUARD!" AND "A BID FOR A THRONE!"

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"Blessed if I know why we should remind you of Julius Cæsar!" said Kerr, in wonder.

"Here am I, trying to think it out!" said Figgins bitterly. "Cudgelling my brains to work out what they're up to—"

"Who?"

"Those bounders!" snapped Figgins. "The School House bounders, of course! Here am I trying to think it out, and all you fellows are thinking of is rotten pies and silly amateur theatricals! Talk about Julius Cæsar fiddling while Rome was burning! He wasn't in it with you chaps!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Well, where does the cackle come in?" demanded Figgins morosely.

"Ha, ha! It wasn't Julius Cæsar!" chuckled Kerr. "It was Nero!"

Figgins sniffed more emphatically than before.

"I don't care a tuppenny rap whether it was Julius Cæsar or Nero!" he said. "He was fiddling while Rome was burning, anyway. And that's what you fellows are doing. Here am I trying to think—"

"Have some of this pie?" said Fatty Wynn.

"Blow the pie! I suppose it's up to me to do all the thinking that's done in this study," said Figgins. "You fellows can go on playing the giddy ox. And if I don't get on to their little game the New House will be done in the eye, and those bounders will have the laugh of us. Go on! Don't mind me!"

Figgins of the Fourth was evidently in a pessimistic mood.

Kerr grinned and took off the moustache. As a matter of fact, it was the canny Scottish junior who did most of the thinking that was done in Figgy's study. He put away his moustaches very carefully, closed the property-box, and composed his face seriously.

"Let's have it, Figgy!" he said. "What's the trouble?"

"They're up to something," said Figgins, still morose. "But don't you mind! You go on playing the giddy ox, and leave it to me."

"I haven't noticed—" began Kerr.

"Of course you wouldn't," said Figgins sardonically. "You're too busy thinking about a silly part in a silly play. Lucky for this study that there's one fellow who keeps his eyes open!"

"Yes; they won't pull the wool over your eyes very easily, Figgy," said Kerr, who was an adept in the soft answer that turneth away wrath. "But what have you spotted now?"

Figgins's noble brow cleared a little. Kerr was interested now, and even Fatty Wynn was now devoting only half his attention to the pie.

It was, indeed, a serious matter. The rivalry between the two Houses at St. Jim's was as keen as ever. And if Tom Merry & Co. of the School House were plotting a surprise for the rival House it was up to Figgins & Co. to keep their eyes very wide open.

"They've got something on!" said Figgins, condescending to explain at last. "In the first place, you know there's a House match on Saturday."

"Yes."

"As a rule Tom Merry, Manners, and Lowther, and the chaps in Study No. 6 all play in the House matches—or, at least, some of them."

"Quite so!"

"Well," said Figgins impressively, "I hear that Tom Merry has asked Kangaroo to captain the junior team on Saturday. He's standing out. Manners and Lowther ain't playing either. And Blake and Herries and Digby and D'Arcy—they're all standing out of the match. There's been quite a buzz about it in the School House, filling their places in the team."

"May be going up the river—"

"Ass!" said Figgins politely. "They wouldn't cut a House match to go up the river!"

"More likely it's a feed!" said Fatty Wynn thoughtfully. "A picnic, you know—"

"Fathead! They wouldn't cut a House match for a picnic! You would, I dare say; but they wouldn't! They ain't wrapped up body and soul in rabbit-pies!"

"Ahem!"

"I suppose there's something on," agreed Kerr, with a thoughtful nod. "When those two sets of asses leave off ragging one another it generally means that they're going for us. But what is the little game?"

"That's what I'm trying to think out," said Figgins. "It's something on an unusually big scale, I know that! They're scheming something for Saturday. Reddy heard D'Arcy talking this afternoon. He said to Blake that it would be a surprise for the New House when they heard of it. Blake stamped on his foot, Reddy says. They're keeping it dark from us—awfully dark!"

"Then we've got to let in some light on the subject," said Kerr determinedly. "If there's seven chaps keeping the secret, it ought to be pretty easy to squeeze it out. Which of them are we going to tackle? That's the question. No good going for Tom Merry; he can keep a secret. Manners is as close as an oyster. As for Lowther, he would guess at once what we were after, and simply tell us some yarn and pull our leg. But one of the Fourth Form chaps—"

"Try Herries," suggested Fatty Wynn. "Talk to him about his bulldog, and that'll soften his heart, and then—"

"Or D'Arcy!" said Kerr. "Gussy's the man! If I couldn't screw a secret out of Gussy I'd eat my hat! Once get him talking and it will roll out!"

"Blake seems to be keeping a watch on him," said Figgins moodily. "I've got into talk with him three times, and each time Blake has chipped in, and refused to leave us alone. Blake is all there."

Kerr looked thoughtfully out of the study window, as if seeking for inspiration in the old elm-trees in the quadrangle. He uttered a sudden exclamation as he caught sight of the elegant figure of the swell of St. Jim's, Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, sauntering in the quad.

"Talk of angels!" said Kerr. "Here's Gussy!"

He threw up the sash of the window and called out:

"Hallo, Gussy!"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy came to a halt and, turned his famous eyeglass up to the window of Figgins's study.

"Hullo, deah boy!"

"Come up, old chap!" said Kerr.

Arthur Augustus smiled. He had a secret to keep; and he prided himself upon being awfully deep.

"Thanks, deah boy; but excuse me."

"We've got a lovely pie here," said Kerr gently as the cooing dove. "Won't you step in and sample it?"

"I say—" murmured Fatty Wynn.

"Shurrup, ass!"

"Thanks, no, deah boy!" responded Arthur Augustus. "I'm weally not hungwy."

"Never mind, come up!" said Kerr. "We want your advice about a tenor solo we're going to introduce into our play. We want you to show us how it goes, you know."

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was attacked on his weakest spot. What he didn't know about tenor solos wasn't worth knowing.

"Wight-ho, deah boy!" he said at once.

And he disappeared in at the porch of the New House.

Kerr turned from the window with a chuckle.

"Bagged him!" he said.

"I—I say, we're jolly well not going to hear him sing a tenor solo here, Kerr!" said Fatty Wynn, in alarm.

"Rats! We can stand that, I should think, to pump him!"

"But we mayn't be able to pump him, after all, and then we shall have had the tenor solo for nothing."

"Shush!"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy's step was heard in the passage. His eyeglass and his genial smile gleamed in at the doorway.

"Come in!" said Kerr heartily.

"Yaas, deah boy!" Arthur Augustus came in. "I am vewy pleased indeed to give you some advice about singin'. I'm wathah a dab at that, you know! What is the solo you are goin' to introduce into your play, old chap?"

"Well, what would you advise?" said Kerr thoughtfully. "Something like that ripping solo you gave at the last concert—what?"

"Yaas; that was wathah wippin'," agreed Arthur Augustus. "But I doubt if there is a fellow in your House who could sing it. Howevah, we can fix that up all wight. I'll sing it for you. You can give me a good part in your play."

G

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See column 2, page 22, of this issue.

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The horsey man touched his hat as Figgins & Co. ran up. "That our caravan?" exclaimed Figgins. "Tom Merry will be here in a few minutes. You're Thompson, I suppose?" "Yes, sir," answered the man. "Very 'ot driving in this 'ere 'ot weather. Makes a man thirsty!" (See Chapter 7.)

"Ahem!" murmured Figgins.

"I should be vewy pleased to take a part," said D'Arcy generously. "Of course, you New House chaps are hardly up to givin' a play on your own. By puttin' me in, with a weally good tenah solo, you will ensure the success of the performance. You can weckon on me, deah boys."

Figgins seemed to be upon the point of exploding, but Kerr made him a sign.

"You're awfully good, Gussy," he said.

"Not at all, deah boy. Always glad to help you young-stahs in a time of difficulty," said Arthur Augustus.

"Oh!" murmured Figgins.

"M-m-my hat!" gasped Fatty Wynn. But Kerr never turned a hair.

"Right-ho!" he said heartily. "Then we can depend on you for Saturday?"

Arthur Augustus started.

"Saturday?"

"Yes."

"Bai Jove! I—I'm afwaid I can't help you on Saturday," said Arthur Augustus. "It is vewy unforch, but I am booked for Saturday."

"Oh, the House match?" said Kerr carelessly.

"N-no. I'm not playin' cwicket."

"Then you can help us, Gussy. In a time of difficulty," said Kerr solemnly, "we naturally turn to you. Only just now I said to Figgins that you were the fellow that we must rely upon to help us out."

Figgins grinned; but the double meaning of Kerr's remark was lost upon Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

"Yes, Gussy is the chap," said Figgins heartily. "Make it Saturday, Gussy. We shall rely on you."

"Imposs, deah boys! I'm awfully sowwy, but it can't be done. You see, the other fellows would be disappointed if I didn't go. And they will be bound to wun into some twouble if I go along with the partay."

Kerr's eyes gleamed; he was getting to it now.

"But couldn't that be put off, Gussy?"

"Imposs, aftah asking the House-mastah for leave. Besides, Tom Mewwy is goin' this evenin' to make the awwangements with the man."

It was as much as Figgins & Co. could do to keep their faces composed. They were getting very "warm" now. In a few minutes more, at this rate, the secret would be a secret no longer. But just then there was a hurried step in the passage, and Jack Blake of the Fourth dashed into the study, looking somewhat excited.

"Oh, you're here!" he exclaimed wrathfully. "I thought I spotted you coming in. You ass! Come along!"

"Weally, Blake—"

"Come on!" roared Blake, grasping the swell of St. Jim's by the shoulder. "I suppose you've been blabbing—what?"

"Nothin' of the sort," said Arthur Augustus indignantly. "I have been talkin' about tenah solos, and haven't said a word about the twip—"

"Shurrup!"

"These fellows don't know that we are goin' to engage a—"

"Shut up!" roared Blake ferociously.

"Weally, Blake—"

But Arthur Augustus was not allowed to continue. Blake rushed him out of the study at top speed. They rushed down the passage to the stairs, Arthur Augustus D'Arcy's wild expostulations dying away in the distance.

"Weally, Blake, I haven't said a word. I twust I can keep a secwet. Wow! You are wumplin' my jacket, you silly ass! I haven't told them about the— Yawwoh!"

Figgins & Co. looked at one another.

"Rotten luck Blake hopping in just then!" growled Figgins.

"But we're on to it," Kerr said thoughtfully. "They're planning a trip of some kind, and they've had to ask the permission of their House-master. And Tom Merry is going

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NEXT
WEDNESDAY—

"THE HOUSE-MASTER'S BODYGUARD!"

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this evening to make arrangements with some man. We're on the track."

"Yes, rather; but—"

"And we'll soon know the rest," said Kerr determinedly. "Looks to me now as if it isn't up against us after all. They've got some big scheme on, and they're afraid that we shall chip in and muck it up for them—that's why they're keeping it dark."

"And we're jolly well going to chip in!" grinned Figgins.

"You bet! This is where the New House does the School House in the eye! We sha'n't get anything more out of Gussy now, but we'll try Herries. Come on!"

And the three juniors, well satisfied with their progress so far, quitted the study and the House, and proceeded in search of Herries and information.

CHAPTER 2. The Great Scheme.

"AND Towser!"

"Rats!"

"Look here—"

"Wats!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy emphatically. "I wepeat, wats! I decline to considah Towsah in the mattah for a moment!"

"I tell you—"

"That wotten bulldog, Hewwies, has no wespect whatever for a fellow's twousahs! And in the somewhat close quartahs of a cawavan, it is quite imposs. I wepeat—"

"Look here—"

"Rats!"

"Bosh!"

"Piffle!"

It was a regular chorus. Herries simply glared at the half-dozen fellows in Study No. 6, in the Fourth-Form in the School House.

Tom Merry and Manners and Lowther—the Terrible Three of the Shell—were in the Fourth-Form study, discussing ways and means with the chums of the Fourth concerning that mysterious expedition which Figgins & Co. were so keen to know all about.

There was not always complete agreement between the Terrible Three and Blake & Co. The Shell fellows sometimes alluded to Study No. 6 as cheeky fags. Study No. 6 sometimes alluded to the Terrible Three as rank duffers. Agreement wasn't always possible. But on the point now under discussion there was a singular unanimity. Herries' proposal to take his bulldog Towser on the expedition met with the same reply from the Terrible Three and Blake and Digby and D'Arcy. And that reply was "Rats!"

"Now, look here," said Herries. "We've arranged this bizney very well, so far. We've got leave from the House-master to clear off for the whole week-end."

"Yass, wathah; but—"

"We know where to get a caravan, and we're going to get it—"

"Quite so; but—"

"We're keeping it dark from the New House rotters, so that they won't be able to chip in and muck up the excursion—"

"Exactly; but—"

"We're laying in a good supply of tuck, and we've got everything we want for a jolly good time—"

"Precisely; but—"

"Well, then," said Herries, "when everything is going swimmingly, what do you want to spoil the whole thing for?"

"But—"

"Blow your butts! How can fellows go caravanning without a dog?" demanded Herries.

"A dog is not a necessawy appendage to a cawavan, Hewwies."

"Rot! Don't you always see a dog tied under a gipsy's caravan?"

"We are not gipsies, deah boy!"

"Well, if Herries wants to tie Towser under the caravan that alters the case," remarked Tom Merry considerably.

"But I don't!" said Herries promptly. "I was only putting a case. Towser is coming in the caravan."

"Wubbish!"

"Rot!"

"Cheese it!"

"Put it to the vote!" suggested Manners.

"Hear, hear!"

"Hands up for Herries' beastly blughound in the caravan!" grinned Monty Lowther.

Herries put his hand up promptly. On second thoughts he put up his other hand as well. But there was no more hands. The majority was evidently dead against the inclusion of the redoubtable Towser in the party.

"Hands up against Towser!"

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Six pairs of hands went up as if by clockwork. Six juniors grinned at Herries, who frowned truculently.

"You see, you're in the minority," said Blake.

Herries snorted.

"Ibsen says—" he began.

"Who's Ibsen?" asked Digby innocently. "Anybody we know?"

"Ass!" said Herries witheringly. "He was a Norwegian, or a Swede, or a Russian, or something—and he wrote books, or plays, or poems, or something; and he says—"

"I don't believe Ibsen says anythin' about bulldogs, Hewwies."

"I didn't say he does. He says—"

"Besides, Ibsen didn't know your bulldog Towser—"

"Ibsen says that the majority is always in the wrong!"

"Blow Ibsen!"

"Ibsen says that the majority is always in the wrong!" yelled Herries. "I don't bet very much on Ibsen, as a rule, but I think he's right there. And in this case, you can see for yourselves, if you had a little hoss-sense, that the minority is in the right. I'm the minority!"

"Wats! Ibsen was an ass. Besides, Ibsen hadn't met your beastly bulldog. If Towser had wowwied Ibsen's twousahs—"

"So it's settled—" said Herries.

"Yes, it's settled!" agreed the whole party.

"That Towser comes—"

"That Towser doesn't come!"

"Besides, we shall want a dog with us to keep guard!" said Herries. "We shall be camping out two nights in the caravan. Suppose we meet some robbers—"

"Suppose we meet your grandmother!"

"And he'll be company for us," said Herries. "There never was such a good-tempered dog as Towser. He practically never bites anybody, and never unless a fellow looks at him; he doesn't like being looked at!"

"I wefuse to wisk my twousahs in the pwesence of that wotten bulldog!"

"Then you can leave 'em here," said Herries gruffly.

"I wefuse to do anythin' of the sort. I wegard the suggestion as—"

"I'm not going to leave Towser behind because of your trousers. Suppose he did take a nip, in his playful way? Suppose he did?" demanded Herries.

"Why, you uttah ass—"

"I'll go and see Towser now," said Herries. "He hasn't been looking so very well lately, and a change of air may do him good. I mustn't forget to bring his biscuits."

"And I won't forget to bring some dog-poison," said Monty Lowther.

"Look here—"

"Oh, rot!" said Herries; and he cut short the discussion by departing from Study No. 6, and closing the door with unnecessary force.

Herries looked very excited and wrathful as he walked down to the stables to see his unpopular favourite. It was a grievance with Herries of the Fourth that there was a prejudice against his bulldog. His study-mates did not like to have him in the study, and the Housemaster had forbidden him to be brought into the House at all. Only the stableman who helped Herries to look after Towser really liked Towser. And poor old Towser wasn't really ferocious at all, though he looked as ferocious as a wild jabberwock. A playful nip every now and then—that was all the relaxation Towser allowed himself; and then, as Herries indignantly declared, it was only his fun. But there was no doubt that there existed a prejudice on the subject. The fellows were unanimous in declaring that, if it was only Towser's fun, then Towser was altogether too funny.

Three youths who were sauntering in the quadrangle joined Herries on his way to the stables. They were Figgins and Kerr of the New House, and their manner was very friendly—suspiciously friendly, Herries might have thought, if all his thoughts hadn't been wrapped up in Towser at that moment.

"Going to see Towser—what?" said Figgins, guessing Herries' object, from the direction he was taking, and wondering what was the cause of the cloud upon his brow.

"Yes," grunted Herries.

"I hope he's well," said Kerr, with great solicitude.

"He's all right. He missed me during the vac, though," said Herries. "Towser is very sensitive. I'm jolly well not going to leave him behind again, not if I know it."

The New House trio exchanged a glance. They "tumbled" at once. There had evidently been a discussion in the School House as to whether Towser should go on that mysterious expedition, or whether he shouldn't. Figgins & Co. felt themselves on the track once more. But they were very diplomatic.

"I wouldn't!" said Figgins heartily. "Love me, love my dog, you know. I'd take Towser with me, if I were you."

"I'm jolly well going to," said Herries unsuspiciously. "It's all rot to say that there wouldn't be room for Towser. If there wasn't room inside, there's the annex."

"Of course there is," said Kerr, wondering what on earth the annex was. "You—you could put him in the annex quite easily."

"And he would keep guard," said Herries. "There might be footpads—who knows? Tramps, and all sorts of things late at night."

"Ye-e-s, of course!" stammered Figgins. "Late—late at night! Of course there might!"

They had arrived at the stables by this time. Towser greeted his master with a peculiar rumble, which was supposed to be a growl expressive of joy. Herries fumbled with the big head of his favourite, and Towser rumbled again.

"Leave him behind!" growled Herries wrathfully. "Not if I know it! Good old Towser!"

"What a—ripping bulldog!" said Kerr. "You ought to put him in a dog show, Herries. He would be bound to take first prize."

"My dog ain't a monkey to be stuck in a show."

"Of—of course not. I—I mean, don't ever put him in a show, by any means!" stammered Kerr, a little taken aback. "Certainly not!"

"Suppose he did get at the grub," said Herries, apparently following some train of thought started by the argument in Study No. 6—"suppose he did? I suppose we could get some more grub. We ain't going to the North Pole, or the South Sea Islands, that I know of."

"Of course not!" agreed Figgins. "You're going—" he paused.

Herries appeared to recollect himself, and he gave the New House juniors a suspicious look.

"Never mind where we're going," he said curtly. "P'r'aps we're not going anywhere. Don't poke my dog's head like that, Wynn; he doesn't like it."

"Oh!" said Wynn.

"I wish you wouldn't stare at him, Figgins. He may bite you, and then you'll be blaming me, and talking rot about Towser being bad-tempered."

Figgins hurriedly backed away.

"Well, I'd take him, if I were you!" said Kerr. "You can put him in the—the annex—"

"What do you know about the annex?" grunted Herries. "It seems to me as if you fellows are trying to pump me. You clear off!"

The game was evidently up; Herries was on his guard now. The New House trio had gained a little additional information, but not much. They felt a little sore; and as there was no further need to be polite to Herries, the game being up, their politeness dropped from them like a cloak.

"Oh, we'll clear off!" said Figgins. "I only wanted to have a look at that tripehound. It is a tripehound, isn't it?"

"Cross between a rhinoceros and a hedgehog. I should say," remarked Kerr.

"Herries calls it a dog," said Fatty Wynn. "Queer ideas some fellows have about what's a dog, don't they? More like a jabberwock or a snark!"

And Figgins & Co. retreated, leaving Herries speechless with indignation. The Co. were gone before Herries could think of a sufficiently crushing rejoinder. They chuckled as they walked back to the New House.

"Well, we're on the track," said Kerr, ticking off on his fingers the points elicited so far. "They're going on an expedition. They're going to be out late. They've asked leave of the House-master. They're going to have something with an annex—whatever that may happen to be. And Tom Merry's going to make the arrangements this evening with a man. Gentlemen, chaps, and fellows, Tom Merry's our game next. We've got to know about that arrangement with a man; we've got to see that man, too!"

"How?" said Figgins, rather hopelessly.

"Tom Merry's going out. He must have a pass out of gates. Well, if he can get a pass, we can get a pass. And we're going to track him down. What's the good of being Boy Scouts if we can't track him down? We've got to keep an eye on the gates, and see when Tom Merry starts—and keep him under our fatherly eye!"

And after that the chums of the New House were very much on the look-out; and Tom Merry hadn't the slightest chance of leaving the school without being spotted.

CHAPTER 3.

Shadowed by Three.

TOM MERRY rose from the tea-table in his study in the School House. He looked at his watch.

"Time I was off!" he remarked. "I mustn't be late in Wayland. You can trust me to look over the caravan and see that it's all right. No good a crowd of us going, or the New House bounders might spot something. We don't want Figgins & Co. on the track. Blake says they are suspicious already; they've been trying to pump Gussy!"

"Look out for them as you go out, then," said Manners. "It's got to be kept dark. If they knew we were having a caravan out on Saturday, we should have a whole army of them on our necks. It would be just like those rotters to swoop down on us and collar the caravan and walk off with it!"

"Just what I should expect, if they knew," said Tom. "Gussy says he didn't let anything out!"

Monty Lowther grunted.

"You know Gussy!" he said uneasily. "You know the way he keeps a secret. I shouldn't be surprised if Figgins smells a rat!"

"Blake found him jawing in Figgy's study, and yanked him out," said Tom thoughtfully. "He's keeping a regular watch and ward over Gussy. I think it's all right so far; but we shall have to be careful."

"Keep an eye open when you go out."

"Right-ho!"

Tom Merry put on his straw hat and sauntered out of the School House. It was a fine summer evening, and the quad was crowded with fellows. Tom Merry smiled with satisfaction as he walked down to the gates. He was very pleased with himself and with the way things were going.

It had been Tom Merry's idea at the start, and the other fellows had taken it up quite enthusiastically. The idea of spending a week-end in a caravan was, as Blake said, simply nobby. A whole week would have been better, of course, but there were difficulties in the way of that. The cricket match on Saturday afternoon could be cut, but lessons could not be cut. That was where the masters came in.

Excepting for that, the Head had been very considerate in the matter. He could trust the juniors not to get into mischief, and he seemed to agree that experience in camping out was necessary and useful to fellows who belonged to the great organisation of Boy Scouts.

Caravanning was a good idea, and the Head had not put any difficulties in the way.

The juniors had leave to depart from St. Jim's after morning lessons on Saturday, on the understanding that they were to turn up to first lessons on Monday morning as usual, and not to "cut" church on Sunday. All the Head asked was that they should have the permission of their people, and that was easy to obtain. That settled it. Only it was necessary to keep it dark from their old rivals in the New House.

In the first place, going caravanning was a stunning wheeze, and it would make Figgins & Co. simply green when they heard of it, too late to chip in or go and do likewise. In the second place, if Figgins & Co. knew in advance, they were pretty certain to attempt to jape the caravanners. Figgins would be quite capable of raiding the caravan if he could and walking it off under the noses of the rightful owners. And if such a thing as that happened, Tom Merry & Co. would have the laugh very much up against them. It was extremely necessary to keep a sharp look-out, and not give the rival House a chance of scoring.

Whether Figgins & Co. smelt a rat yet Tom Merry could not be sure. He was on the look-out as he strolled down to the gates, quite prepared to find the eyes of Figgins & Co. upon him.

He gave a low whistle as he caught sight of the Co. lounging in the gateway. The gates were not yet shut, and Figgins & Co. were there, apparently much interested in the scenery outside.

"Hallo!" said Tom Merry, as he came up. "Admiring the view?"

"Yes; ripping, ain't it?" said Figgins with great affability. "The trees are a lovely colour at this time of the year, don't you think?"

"Topping," said Tom Merry gravely.

"Going for a walk?" asked Kerr.

"Yes."

"We'll come along if you like. You might meet some of the Grammarians."

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 342.

NEXT WEDNESDAY—**"THE HOUSE-MASTER'S BODYGUARD!"** A Magnificent New, Long, Complete School Tale of Tom Merry & Co. By MARTIN CLIFFORD.



"No. You'd miss calling-over," said Tom. "I suppose you haven't got passes out of gates."

"Ahem! Well—"

"Ripping sunset, ain't it?" said Fatty Wynn.

"Gorgeous," said Tom, with a smile. "Ta-ta!"

And he walked out of the gates, fully convinced in his mind, now, that Figgins & Co. were there to watch for him, and that they had obtained passes in order to track him. Evidently they had succeeded in extracting some amount of information from Arthur Augustus after all.

But Tom Merry's manner as he walked down the lane did not seem to hint that he suspected anything. He did not look behind once. Figgins & Co., who were following him down the lane, were glad that he did not look behind.

Tom did not need to look behind. He had a small pocket-mirror in his pocket, which he had found useful in scouting expeditions for a similar purpose, and he had taken it out and was holding it so that he had a view in it of the lane behind him, without allowing it to be seen from behind.

In the little looking-glass he had a full view of Figgins, Kerr, and Wynn coming along the lane in a very cautious manner.

Tom Merry grinned, and slipped the looking-glass back into his pocket, and strode on, still without turning his head.

He knew now how much Figgins & Co. knew. They were on the track, but they did not know where he was going, or what he was going for, or they would not be taking the trouble to track him down. If Tom Merry walked on to the place in Wayland where the caravan was to be hired, Figgins & Co. would soon know all about it. But Tom did not intend to do anything of the sort now. His plans had changed, and he chuckled to himself as he walked on. That interview at Wayland could wait while he proceeded cheerfully to pull the legs of his shadowers.

The captain of the Shell passed the stile where the footpath led through the wood to Wayland. It had been his original intention to take that footpath. Now he passed it, keeping on towards Rylcombe.

"Not going to Wayland?" said Kerr.

"I don't see what he can have to do in Rylcombe," said Figgins, a little puzzled.

"Still, he's going there."

The Co. kept on, a good distance behind Tom, but keeping him well in sight. They were ready to dodge into cover if the Shell fellow turned his head. But Tom Merry did not turn his head. Never had a shadower's task been easier.

They entered the village, and Tom Merry walked into Mrs. Murphy's little tuckshop, where he cheerfully regaled himself with ginger-beer. Figgins & Co. would have been glad to do the same, for the evening was warm, and the lane dusty; but they could not venture to show themselves. On the opposite side of the way they waited for Tom Merry to come out.

They dodged into the doorway of Mr. Bunn's, the tailor's, as Tom came out of the tuckshop. He did not glance in their direction. He walked down the old High Street, and turned into the lane that led to Abbotsford. In the growing dusk Figgins & Co. followed on the track. They had to keep nearer to their quarry now, for the shades of night were falling fast.

For about a mile they kept on, wondering whether the Shell fellow was going to Abbotsford, which was at a considerable distance. Suddenly he vaulted over a stile, and followed a footpath through a dim meadow. Figgins & Co. promptly followed. They kept the glimmer of Tom Merry's white straw hat in sight as they tramped through the dusk. They asked themselves where the dickens he was going. According to all appearance, he had started out for an aimless tramp across country. Yet they had it from Arthur Augustus D'Arcy that he was going to see a man for the purpose of making the arrangements for that mysterious expedition on Saturday. But where in the name of wonder was he going to see that man?

"Hold on!" murmured Kerr. "He's stopped!"

The Co. came to a halt. Tom Merry had crossed another stile, almost hidden by the bushes that grew round it. They could not see him now, but they could see the white straw hat quite plainly, glimmering among the bushes in the dusk. Apparently Tom Merry was leaning on the stile on the other side.

"Taking a rest?" muttered Fatty Wynn. "Well, I'm not sorry to have a rest."

"Is he looking back, Kerr?" murmured Figgins.

"He can't see us if he does. It's the strawyard we can spot

him by," said Kerr. "Keep ready. He'll be moving on soon."

The Co. waited and watched. As the darkness grew thicker, the straw hat over the stile grew dimmer to the view, and the three juniors kept a little closer, to make sure of keeping it in sight. Yes, there it was. It had not moved. They were within a dozen yards of it now, in the growing gloom. But there was no mistaking the glimmer of that strawyard among the dark bushes round the stile. Half an hour had passed, and the Co. were growing puzzled and uneasy.

"Blessed if he isn't taking a jolly long rest!" murmured Figgins.

Kerr frowned thoughtfully.

"He may have spotted us," he muttered. "He may be sticking there for a joke on us, and laughing in his sleeve all the time."

"Well, he jolly well can't get to that man, whoever he is, without our being on his track. That's one comfort."

Ten minutes more passed. Still there was no movement at the stile. The straw hat had moved a little with a slight motion, and that was all.

"He must have gone to sleep," said Fatty Wynn in a whisper.

"I've seen the hat move," said Kerr, who had wonderful eyesight.

"But what's the little game?" said Figgins restively. "I'm getting fed up. He can't have come out here to look at the stars and make up poetry, I suppose?"

"Hardly. He must be pulling our leg."

"Oh, come on!" said Figgins, losing patience. "Anyway, we'll give him a jolly good bumping for leading us a dance like this!"

All the Co. were fed up. It seemed only too evident that Tom Merry had guessed that they were there, and was amusing himself at their expense. They ran on to the stile, and Figgins brought his fist down on the straw hat among the bushes.

Then he gave a yell.

"Great Scott!"

"Spoofed!" roared Kerr.

"Oh, the rotter!"

The straw hat had rolled to the ground under Figgins's heavy weight. But there was no head inside it, and there was no sign of Tom Merry.

Figgins & Co. gazed at the straw hat almost in stupefaction.

It had been perched on a branch over the stile, in the bushes, and had looked exactly as if it was on the head of the wearer, who was leaning on the stile. But there was no wearer. He had vanished. And the Co., almost gasping with rage, realised that Tom Merry had been gone more than half an hour, leaving his hat on the branch to keep the Co. occupied. It had been perfectly easy for him to perch the straw hat there and then creep away under cover of the bushes and vanish in the dusk. More than half an hour! He was miles away by this time, very probably at his destination—wherever that was—seeing the man about the arrangements.

"M-m-m-my hat!" stuttered Figgins.

"Oh crumbs!"

"He knew we were after him!"

"He's been pulling our leg all the time! The rotter!"

"The beastly spoofer!"

Figgins picked up the straw hat. His feelings were almost too deep for words. Where was Tom Merry now? Echo answered, "Where?"

"Hallo! There's a note here," said Figgins.

A fragment of paper was pinned on the band of the hat. Figgins jerked it off, and Kerr struck a match. There was a pencilled scrawl on the paper. The Co. glared at it. Tom Merry had written that note, leaning on the stile with the back of his straw hat in view of the shadowers—he had pinned it on the band in front of the hat—and then he had left the hat on the bough—and they had never suspected! And they read:

"Dear Figgy,—Would you mind taking the hat back to St. Jim's for me, as I have to leave it behind me. I don't want to lose it, as it cost me seven-and-sixpence. Sorry I sha'n't see you again this evening; but you can leave the hat with the porter. I hope you enjoyed your walk. Nice evening for a walk, isn't it?"

TOM MERRY.

"P.S.—This is where you smile!"

Figgins did not smile.

"The—the cheeky rotter!" growled Figgins. "I've a jolly good mind to jump on his beastly hat! We've been spoofed. But how the dickens were we to guess that he would have the nerve to go about without a hat to keep an appointment?"

Kerr groaned.

ANSWERS

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 342.

OUR COMPANION PAPERS: "THE MAGNET" LIBRARY. Every Monday. "THE PENNY POPULAR," Every Friday. "CHUCKLES," Every Saturday.

"He's done us! Bring his blessed hat along. Let's get back!"

And Figgins & Co. sadly and dolefully got back, and duly left Tom Merry's hat with Taggles the porter, to be called for.

CHAPTER 4.

Kerr Does Some Thinking.

"**B**AI Jove! Where is your hat, deah boy?"

The chums of the School House were waiting for Tom Merry to come in; and when he came in, hatless, they were surprised.

"Where on earth's your headgear?" asked Manners.

Tom Merry grinned.

"Figgins is going to bring it home for me," he said.

"Figgins!"

"Exactly!"

Tom Merry explained, and there was a chuckle from the juniors. The idea of Figgins and Co. spending their time that evening in watching Tom Merry's straw hat from a distance tickled them immensely.

"Bai Jove! I wegard that as vewy funnay," grinned Arthur Augustus. "It was a weally good ideah. And you went to Wayland aftah all, and kept the appointment?"

"Yes, rather!"

"Bai Jove, without a hat? Ha, ha, ha! It is wathah naitay to go about without a hat, you know. I shouldn't be surprisid if the New House boundahs jump on your hat, though."

"I had to risk that," said Tom Merry. "Well, I've seen the man. It's all serene. The caravan is simply ripping! There's the annex all complete. Everything in topping order! They're going to send the van to Abbotsford by goods train, where we go for the start. They've undertaken to supply a first-class horse. On Saturday morning the caravan will be on the common at Abbotsford, with horse complete, with a man in charge, waiting for us."

"Good!"

"And Figgins & Co. don't know!" chuckled Blake.

"Not a syllable! They smell a rat—but that's all! They haven't a suspicion of the caravan. They seem to be mighty curious about the matter," chuckled Tom. "They had quite a long walk this evening. I asked Taggles when I came in, but they hadn't got back yet. I'm afraid they won't have much time for their prep. This is what comes of being naughty and inquisitive kids."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Tom Merry & Co. were very cheerful that evening. Figgins, in spite of his determined investigations, was as far as ever from learning what was "on." And as the next day was Saturday, there wasn't much time left for the New House juniors to make further investigations. And on Saturday afternoon Figgins & Co. would be busy with the House match.

Tom Merry & Co. went to bed that night in a mood of complete satisfaction.

Figgins & Co. were not nearly so satisfied.

Figgins, in fact, remained awake quite a long time, thinking the matter out, but without getting any nearer to the solution.

He fell asleep at last, and dreamed that he was shadowing Tom Merry's hat across dusky fields without being able to effect a capture.

In the morning Figgins looked quite worried.

He had not had much time for preparation the previous evening, and he was likely to have some trouble with Mr. Latham, his Form-master, that morning, but that was not what was worrying the mind of the great Figgins.

He was thinking of the mysterious School House scheme, which was to come off that day, and which he had not succeeded in penetrating. Some more of the New House fellows were thinking about it too. Redfern and Owen and Lawrence all knew that there was something on, and they hinted to Figgins that it was "up" to the junior captain of the House to see that the School House bounders didn't score over them. And Figgins had nothing to say in reply. He knew that it was up to him, but he had cudgelled his brains in vain. He was quite gloomy at breakfast, and after breakfast he walked out into the quadrangle with his chums in a pessimistic mood.

"I haven't an idea!" he said gloomily. "That beast diddled us last night, and that was our last chance. And Reddy and the others are beginning to chip me about it. If those rotters get the better of us, I shall never hear the end of it. Can't you fellows think of something?"

"We—we've got to find it out somehow," said Fatty Wynn vaguely.

Figgins sniffed.

"We know that, fathead. Look here, Kerr, you're a deep Scotch beast—you ought to be able to think it out if anybody can. Where's your blessed canniness gone to?"

Kerr smiled serenely.

"I've thought it out," he said.

"My hat! You mean to say you're on to it?" exclaimed Figgins breathlessly.

"Not quite! But I've thought of somebody to pump."

Figgins shook his head.

"N G," he said. "The only one of them we could pump is Gussy, and they're watching him all the time. He never comes out of the house without Blake with him. Look at him now—there he is, and Blake with him."

Kerr glanced across the quad at Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, who was sauntering in the morning sunshine, chatting with Blake. Blake did not leave him for a moment. He was evidently on the alert against the wiles of Figgins & Co.

"Never mind, Gussy," said Kerr carelessly. "I've thought of somebody else."

"I tell you, Tom Merry and Manners and Lowther are as close as oysters," said Figgins despondently. "No getting anything out of them."

"I wasn't thinking of them."

"We've tried Herries, and it was N G. And Blake and Digby are on their guard."

"Quite so!"

"Well, there isn't anybody else," exclaimed Figgins.

"They may have told Kangaroo, and some of the School House chaps, but we can't screw it out of them, can we?"

"No!"

"Well, then, ass, who are you going to get information from?"

"The Head."

"Eh?"

"The Head," said Kerr calmly.

Figgins and Wynn regarded their Scottish chum in blank amazement.

"The Head!" repeated Figgins, dazedly. "The Head!"

"Look here," said Kerr, quietly. "We know a bit already. They're going on an expedition, and they're going to stay out late at night—we know that. They've asked leave of their House-master, but a matter like that would have to be referred to the Head. I fancy they asked Railton to speak to the Head for them. But if it's a matter of staying out late at night, they would have to explain it all to the Head. He wouldn't let the kids in the Fourth and the Shell stay out at night without having a jolly good reason for it. They must have explained the whole bizney to him when they got leave."

"I suppose so," agreed Figgins. "Yes, of course they must. But if you're thinking of going to the Head to pump him, I can only say that you must be off your silly rocker."

"Not at all. I'm not going to the Head to ask him questions. I'm going to ask him for leave for us three to join them."

"Eh?"

"After giving permission to those bounders, he can't very well refuse it to us," said Kerr. "Taint as if we were fellows like Levison or Mellish, who can't be trusted out of sight. We explain to the Head that we're going in the party, if he gives us leave. I fancy he will give us leave."

"B-b-but we're not going in the party!" stuttered Figgins.

"Yes, we are!"

"Oh!"

"What about the House match?" said Fatty Wynn.

"If those fellows can cut it, we can cut it. There are plenty of chaps to take our places in the team."

"Ye-es, but—!"

"Come on," said Kerr. "The Head will be in his study now, and we can catch him. Let's strike the iron while it's hot. Leave the talking to me."

"B-b-but I say, Kerr, old man—"

"Oh, come on!"

Kerr had his way. Figgins and Wynn followed him in silence to the School House, but with some inward misgivings. They had great faith in the perspicacity of the Scottish junior; but this time they could not help having doubts. But it was evidently the last chance, and they were willing to "give Kerr his head," as Figgy expressed it. They met the Terrible Three as they entered the School House, and the School House chums smiled at them sweetly.

"Had a nice walk last night?" asked Manners affably.

"Many thanks for bringing my hat home," said Tom Merry. "Taggles gave it to me this morning. It was really kind of you."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, rats!" said Figgins.

And they walked on without further rejoinder, and Kerr tapped at the door of the Head's study. Tom Merry and Manners and Lowther walked out into the quad with smiling faces. They did not guess the purport of that visit to the Head.

CHAPTER 5.

Figgins & Co. Smile.

"COME in!" Dr. Holmes, the Head of St. Jim's, glanced up as the three New House juniors came respectfully into his study.

"If we might speak to you for one minute, sir—" began Kerr meekly.

"Certainly, Kerr. Go on."

"It—it's about the excursion this afternoon, sir," said Kerr. "Tom Merry and the others are going—"

Dr. Holmes nodded.

"Might we go as well, sir?"

The Head looked thoughtful.

"Ah! You wish to join the party, is that it? I do not see any objection. You understand that you do not leave till after lessons are over for the day."

"Oh, yes, sir!"

"And you will be expected to appear for morning lessons as usual on Monday."

"On—on Monday, sir!" Kerr was taken a little aback. It was to be a week-end, then! He was gaining information already!

"Yes, certainly. There is no objection to the excursion, but I could not allow lessons to be missed."

"Oh, certainly, sir, we understand that!"

"Also, it is understood that you do not miss church on Sunday."

"Quite so, sir."

"Then I will speak to your House-master," said the Head.

"But there is another point. You must have the consent of your parents to this excursion, the same as the others. Is there time to obtain it?"

"Oh, yes, sir; we'll telegraph."

"Very well," said the Head. "Bring me the replies when you receive them, merely as a matter of form, of course. I hope you will have a very pleasant excursion, though I am afraid," added the Head, with a smile, "that you will be a little crowded. Let me see, that will make a party of ten."

"Some of the School House fellows may be staying behind, sir," murmured Kerr. "You—you are very kind, sir, to give us leave."

"I think the excursion may be beneficial to you," said the Head kindly. "There are few healthier amusements than caravanning, especially in this splendid weather."

Figgins & Co. jumped.

They could not help it.

Caravanning!

That one word furnished the clue!

Caravanning!

So that was it!

It was all the Co. could do to refrain from uttering a whoop of triumph as that word fell from the lips of Dr. Holmes. As it was, their faces were so irradiated that the Head could not help noticing it. He smiled benignantly.

"I am sure you will enjoy yourselves," he said, "and I think I can trust you not to get into mischief."

"Oh, yes, sir!" chorused the Co. "Thank you so much, sir."

And they left the Head's study as if they were walking on air.

"My only hat—" began Fatty Wynn in the passage. But Figgins stopped him.

"Not a word till we're out of the School House!" he whispered. "Those rotters mustn't know that we've bowled them out. And don't grin! Keep a solemn chivvy, or they'll suspect something."

"Hold on a minute," said Kerr.

He turned back to the Head's study.

"If you please, sir, would it be possible for me to cut—I mean, miss—last lesson this morning, as I have some arrangements to make about the—the caravan?"

"You must ask your Form-master, Kerr. However, I will speak to him."

"Thank you so much, sir."

Kerr rejoined his chums, and they left the School House. They were very, very careful not to let their satisfaction appear in their faces. They were so very careful, in fact, not to appear joyful that they looked utterly gloomy and depressed as they walked out of the School House. Some of the School House juniors glanced at them as they passed with misplaced sympathy.

"Licked?" asked Reilly of the Fourth.

"No; not licked!" groaned Figgins.

"Lines—eh? Sure ye look as if ye were going to a funeral."

"Not detained for this afternoon—what?" exclaimed Kangaroo of the Shell. "There's the House match, you know!"

"We sha'n't be able to play in that," said Figgins, with

a lugubriousness that showed that he was a worthy member of the New House Amateur Dramatic Society. "We'll shove in some of the other fellows."

"Too bad!" said Noble sympathetically. "What have you been doing?"

"Ratty been complaining of you, I suppose," said Lumley-Lumley.

"Sorry you chaps seem to be in trouble," said Digby of the Fourth. "What on earth's the matter?"

Figgins shook his head sadly.

"I don't want to talk about it," he said. "It—it's too bad!"

And the New House Co. departed, with serious and solemn faces, but finding it hard to repress a wild desire to yell.

Not till they were on their own side of the quadrangle did they allow their clouded faces to clear. Figgins led the way up to the study. He slammed the door, and then dropped into a chair and yelled.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" gurgled Fatty Wynn.

"We've got it!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"What did I tell you?" grinned Kerr.

Figgins gave him a mighty thump on the back.

"Good old Kerr! You did it! If the Head guessed that we had been pumping him—oh, my sainted aunt!"

"The Head's a brick," said Kerr, "a real brick. He's going to speak to Lathom, and I shall cut last lesson—to make arrangements about the caravan."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"We'll send off the telegrams home at once. We've got to have the answers for the Head. That's easy enough. As my people are in Scotland, my answer won't come in time; but we can leave instructions for it to be taken to the Head when it does come. So they're going caravanning! Caravanning!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"What a really ripping wheeze," said Figgins admiringly. "We hadn't thought of it ourselves. I really wonder we didn't. And that's why they were keeping it dark. They suspected that we might chip in."

"And spoil the little game?" grinned Fatty Wynn.

"And perhaps raid the giddy caravan," said Kerr.

"Oh!" ejaculated Figgins.

The Scottish junior chuckled.

"That's what we're jolly well going to do. This is where the School House gets it in the neck."

"Raid the caravan," said Figgins breathlessly. "Oh, that's too rich! I had thought of ragging the bounders!"

"Not good enough! We're going to borrow the caravan!" said Kerr resolutely. "Besides, we have told the Head we're going caravanning, and we're bound to tell the truth. There's only one thing for it, we've got to pinch the caravan!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Go easy, though," said Figgins thoughtfully. "We've found out that the bounders are going caravanning. But we don't know where the blessed caravan is, or anything else about it. It won't be so jolly easy."

"We can figure that out," said Kerr calmly. "We know what Tom Merry was doing last night, now. He was seeing the caravan man, and making the arrangements with him. Now, the question is, where did he go to do it? Not much doubt on that point. Wayland is the only place near here where a caravan can be hired, and there's only one place in Wayland where they hire out caravans. That's Hooker's. It's as plain as the nose on your face that Tom Merry went over to Hooker's place at Wayland last evening."

"I suppose so," said Figgins, with a nod.

"We can jolly soon find out," said Kerr.

"Yes, as you're cutting last lesson, you can go over."

"I've got something else to do, then. We're going to find out now."

"But there's no time to go over before lessons."

"There's time to telephone."

"By gum, you think of everything, old chap!" said Figgins in great admiration. "I don't know whether we can get at old Ratcliffe's telephone, though."

"I sha'n't try to. I'll ask the House-dame to let me use the one in her room. She'll do it like a bird if we ask her nicely. No time to lose—come on!"

"Right-ho!"

There were two telephones in the New House—one in the study of the House-master, Mr. Ratcliff, the other in the housekeeper's room. The juniors sometimes used Mr. Ratcliff's telephone—but only in the absence of that gentleman, who did not look with an affectionate eye upon Figgins & Co. Mr. Ratcliff was in the house now, unfortunately. But Figgins & Co. sought out the House-dame, and "asked her nicely," and were given the necessary permission. And they went into the House-dame's sitting-room in



The Co. were fed up, and they ran on to the stile, and Figgins brought his fist down on the straw hat amongst the bushes. Then he gave a yell, "Great Scott!" "Spoofed!" roared Kerr. "Tom Merry's gone! The rotter isn't there at all!" (See Chapter 3.)

great spirits, and Kerr took up the receiver. Figgins and Wynn watched with bated breath, both of them trying to get an ear to the second receiver.

"One-nought-one Wayland, please," said Kerr.

He was through in a couple of minutes.

"Hallo!"

"Hallo! Is that Hooker's, Wayland?"

"Yes."

"This is St. Jim's—the school."

"Yes."

"About our caravan—"

"Yes, the caravan ordered by Master Merry?"

"Yes. I want to know if it is ready?"

"The instructions were to have it ready at three o'clock this afternoon," said the voice on the wires. "It will be ready then."

"Yes, quite so. But we find that we can get off a little earlier. Would it be possible to have the caravan ready at two instead of three?"

"Ahem! I will see. Please hold on a few minutes, as I shall have to telephone to Abbotsford."

"Abbotsford!" ejaculated Kerr.

"Yes; as the caravan has already been despatched by goods train."

"Right-ho! I'll wait."

Kerr looked round at his chums, with a grin.

"Got that?"

"Got it!" chuckled Figgins and Wynn.

"It was Hooker's, you see. Taking it for granted was the best way. If it hadn't been Hooker's they'd have told me it was a mistake. But it was Hooker's, you see. And we've got on to the whole bizney now. They're going a good distance afield, so they've arranged to start from Abbotsford instead of Wayland. The caravan's been sent there by goods train, and they're to arrive at Abbotsford at three to take possession."

"But where?" said Figgins. "Abbotsford's rather a big place to hunt for a caravan."

"I'm going to find out where."

"Hallo!" came the voice. "Are you there?"

"Hallo!" replied Kerr.

"The van does not reach Abbotsford on the railway till two o'clock. It will be impossible for it to be ready till half-past two. Will that do?"

"But why?"

"It has to be sent from the station to the common, and the horse has to be put to it there. It cannot be done under half an hour."

"All right. Can we depend on it for half-past two?"

"Absolutely."

NEXT
WEDNESDAY—

"THE HOUSE-MASTER'S BODYGUARD!"

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A Magnificent New, Long, Complete School Tale of
Tom Merry & Co. By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

"Good! You're leaving somebody in charge of it?"
 "Yes, as arranged with Master Merry."
 "Who will it be?"
 "A man named Thompson will be in charge. Master Merry was told—"
 "Yes, that's all right. Just where on the common will it be waiting for us? Did Merry arrange that? He's rather a forgetful chap."
 "Yes, that was arranged. On the common near the town, just outside Abbotsford."
 "Right! We can depend on it that it will be there, horse and all, at half-past two?"
 "Absolutely."
 "Thanks! Good-bye!"
 "Good-bye!"
 Kerr hung up the receiver.
 "What price that?" he remarked.
 "Hooray!"
 "Those bounders are leaving after dinner by the train for Abbotsford, which gets there at two-forty, most likely," said Kerr. "That gives them easy time to walk down to the common before three. They're to find their giddy caravan ready for them—perhaps."
 "Perhaps!" chuckled Figgins.
 "We've got to get there at half-past two," went on Kerr.
 "We shall find the van ready—with no 'perhaps' about it."
 "Ha, ha, ha!"
 "But there isn't a train," said Fatty Wynn, "after dinner. There's only that one train to get there before three."
 Kerr sniffed.
 "Do you think I haven't thought of that, fathead! I know the time-tables. There's a train leaves Rylcombe at 12.30. It gets to Abbotsford at 1.40. That will give us a lot of time to wait there; but it's better to be too early than too late."
 "But we can't catch that train!"
 "Why not?"
 "Dinner—"
 "We shall have to miss dinner, of course."
 Fatty Wynn almost fell down.
 "Miss dinner! Are you dotty?"
 "Ass!" howled Kerr. "Are we going to spoil the jape of the season for the sake of letting you gorge? Go and eat cake!"
 "But—but—but we can't miss dinner! It's impossible! Miss dinner! My hat! I really think you must be out of your senses, Kerr," said Fatty Wynn indignantly. "Blessed if I ever heard of such a thing! Miss dinner! Dinner!"
 "We catch the early train and miss dinner," went on Kerr calmly, utterly unmoved by Fatty's breathless indignation.
 "But—but—but—"
 "Shut up! If you can't miss dinner, you can miss the caravan. Now about ways and means," said Kerr. "I've got last lesson off, you know; and that will be time to lay in supplies for the caravan. Hand out all the tin you've got, and I'll do the shopping, and get it in a bundle ready. We shall only want grub—all the things required will be in the caravan, of course. Hand over the tin. We'll borrow some more of the fellows. We can settle up when our allowances come. And now about sending off those telegrams to our people—for permission to go caravanning."
 "Ha, ha, ha!" chortled Figgins.
 "But I say—about dinner!" said Fatty Wynn in dismay.
 "Shut up!" roared his chums.
 Figgins & Co. left the housekeeper's room, and dispatched the necessary telegrams to their people by means of the house-page, whom they instructed to take the replies, when they came, and convey them to the Head.
 Figgins & Co. were extremely well satisfied with the way things were going. But when they appeared in the Form-room that morning they wore serious looks. They were still playing their part; and Jack Blake, who scanned them curiously, did not receive a hint of their inward satisfaction. Figgins & Co. were very, very deep!

CHAPTER 6.

Running for It!

TOM MERRY came out of the Shell Form-room after morning lessons with a cheerful visage. He was feeling very cheerful.

It was a beautiful summer day—ideal weather for caravanning. And the caravan was to be ready on Abbotsford Common at three; and the chums of the School House had comfortable time to have their dinner and catch their train. There was not a cloud in the horizon—so far as Tom Merry knew!

The chums of Study No. 6 met the Terrible Three in the Form-room passage, also smiling contentedly.

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OUR COMPANION PAPERS: "THE MAGNET" LIBRARY, Every Monday. "THE PENNY POPULAR," Every Friday. "OHUCKLES," Every Saturday.

"All sewene," remarked Arthur Augustus D'Arcy; "those bounders are not on the twack. They have been lookin' wathah wotten this mornin'."

"I dare say they're feeling rotten," grinned Blake. "They know there's something on, and they can't catch on to it. They will be ready to weep and wail and gnash their teeth when they find out we've gone caravanning."

"I've asked Kangy to tell them, after we've gone!" grinned Tom Merry.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Sure you haven't let Gussy let anything out?" asked Lowther.

"Weally, Lowthah—"

"That's all right," said Blake. "I've been keeping an eye on him. He hasn't had a chance."

"Weally, Blake—"

"They've been looking awfully solemn," chuckled Blake. "Kerr was let off for last lesson, and he cleared out of the Form-room. Went out looking for information, perhaps."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

But Tom Merry looked grave.

"Kerr missed last lesson!" he exclaimed. "Why?"

"Don't know! Lathom gave him leave, and he cleared off. But he can't have been investigating, I suppose?"

"Of course not, deah boy. They don't know anythin' about the car—"

"Shush!" whispered Blake, as Figgins and Kerr came down the passage. The two New House juniors went out sedately into the quadrangle.

"No; they can't have guessed anything," said Tom Merry reflectively. "But I'm rather suspicious of Kerr; he's awfully keen. But they can't know anything. Mind they don't get hold of Gussy again."

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—"

"I'm taking care of that," said Blake grimly. "He's not going out of my sight till we've started."

"I wefuse to be wegarded as unweliable."

"Oh, rats!"

And Blake walked away with Arthur Augustus, and persistently bestowed his company upon him till the bell rang for dinner, and then went in to dinner with him. There was no danger of Figgins & Co. extracting any more information from the swell of St. Jim's; and the caravanners did not anticipate danger from any other quarter. Figgins & Co., indeed, seemed to have given up their efforts to penetrate the mystery. They had gone into their house, and remained there.

They remained there until dinner-time. When Tom Merry & Co. were safe inside the dining-room of the School House, Figgins & Co. came out of the New House, secure from observation.

They came out smiling. Fatty Wynn had consoled himself with sandwiches. And the prospect of a feed in the caravan as soon as it was captured comforted him for the loss of his dinner. Figgins & Co. were in funds, and they had borrowed extensively among the New House juniors, too; and Kerr had done a tremendous amount of shopping while the rest of the Fourth were in the Form-room at last lesson.

Each of the trio carried a large bundle out of the New House. They hurried down to the gates, and Taggles the porter looked at them.

"Bell's gone for dinner, Master Figgins."

"Missing it," said Figgins cheerfully. "It's all right, Taggles. We've got leave."

And the three juniors walked out, and took their way down the lane towards Rylcombe. They were in good time for the train; and when it steamed out of the little country station Figgins & Co. were comfortably seated in it, smiling.

Meanwhile, Tom Merry & Co. were having dinner in the School House without the slightest suspicion that the rival juniors were not similarly occupied in the New House.

After dinner, the School House fellows made their final preparations for the expedition. Arthur Augustus had packed a large bag, and the other fellows also had things to take with them. But D'Arcy's bag was of a tremendous size. The things that Arthur Augustus needed for a week-end caravanning were innumerable. He surveyed the bag through his eyeglass, as it lay on the floor in Study No. 6, in a doubtful sort of way.

"I haven't put in any dwess clothes," he remarked, "and the beastly bag is quite full now."

"Dress clothes!" howled Blake. "Do you want dress clothes in a caravan?"

"You nevah know what may turn up, deah boy. We may be asked to dinnah by somebody, you know. Howevah, less I get a largah bag—"

Blake chuckled as he looked at the bag.

"How are you going to get that to the station?" he asked.
 "Bai Jove, I nevah thought of that! It's wathah too heavy for me to cawwy."

"Leave it here," suggested Digby.

"Wats! You can give me a hand with it."
 "I've got my own bag to carry, fathead."
 "I wefuse to be called a fathead. As your things are in Dig's bag, Hewwies, old man, you can help me cawwy this."
 "I've got Towser to look after."
 "Towsah!" said Arthur Augustus, with great emphasis.
 "Towsah!"
 "Yes, ass; Towser."
 "But Towsah isn't comin'."
 "Oh, rats!"
 "Weally, Hewwies, I have alweady stated my objections to the pwesence of that wotten bulldog!"
 "Br-r-r-r!" said Herries. And he went to fetch Towser.
 "Come on," said Blake, as Tom Merry's voice was heard calling in the passage. "The Shell chaps are ready."
 "But what about my bag, deah boy!"
 "Leave it there."
 "You uttah ass! Pewwaps I had bettah ask Taggles to dwive us down to the station in his twap. He will do it for a tip."
 "Fathead! The New House bounders would spot it at once, and we should have a crowd of them on our track. We're going out one at a time, as quickly as possible."
 "But my bag—"
 "Blow your bag!"
 Blake and Digby followed Herries, and Arthur Augustus was left alone with his bag in a state of considerable dismay. He ran to the study window. Tom Merry and Manners and Lowther were crossing the quad, each with a bag in his hand. Arthur Augustus called to them, but they did not seem to hear. They disappeared out of the school gates.
 "Bai Jove!"
 A few minutes later Herries was seen going out with his bulldog. Evidently the redoubtable Towser was to form one of the party, after all. Digby strolled out next, with a bag in his hand. The New House juniors did not seem to be on the alert at all, and nothing whatever was to be seen of Figgins & Co.
 "You coming, Gussy?" Jack Blake called up to the study window.
 "Yaas, wathah! But my bag—"
 "Come on, then. You'll lose the train if you don't buck up."
 "But my bag!"
 Jack Blake did not seem to hear. He walked away towards the gates, whistling carelessly. Arthur Augustus shouted frantically from the window.
 "Blake, Blake, deah boy! I cannot cawwy this bag alone! Blake! Oh, you awful wottah! Blake, you wotten beast!"
 Blake passed out of the school gates and vanished.
 The whole party, with the exception of the swell of St. Jim's, had started now. Arthur Augustus looked at his watch. The time was getting on.
 "Bai Jove, what am I goin' to do? It is weally too uttably wotten of those wottahs to desert me in this wotten way? I suppose I shall have to pack a smallah bag? Bai Jove!"
 There was evidently no help for it. Arthur Augustus yanked out the contents of the big bag, and packed a small one with hurried hands. He looked at his watch again, and jumped. He had barely time to get to the station. Breathing hard, the swell of St. Jim's jammed the bag shut, and tore from the study. Arthur Augustus was usually the neatest and tidiest of youths. But on this occasion he left the study carpet strewn with shirts and ties and silk socks. He rushed downstairs, his bag banging against the banisters, and rushed out of the house into the midst of a crowd of juniors in flannels bound for the cricket-field.
 "Hallo!" exclaimed Glynn of the Shell. "I thought you were going with the party."
 D'Arcy gasped.
 "So I am! Good-bye!"
 "Ha, ha, ha! Run for it!" yelled Kangaroo. "Your train's going!"
 "Hop it, Gussy!"
 "Put it on!"
 Arthur Augustus did not need telling to put it on. He fairly flew across the quad, with his bag swinging in his hand. He rushed out of the gates, and dashed down the road. If Figgins & Co. had been anywhere about they would certainly have spotted that striking departure. But Figgins & Co. were not to be seen. Redfern and Owen and Lawrence, and a crowd of New House fellows, were going down to the cricket. But Figgins and Kerr and Wynn were only conspicuous by their absence.

Arthur Augustus glared along the lane. Tom Merry & Co. were already out of sight. He dashed on. Down the lane he went, breathing fury and dust, the perspiration pouring down his aristocratic brow. The village came in sight, but not his comrades. They were already at the station.

The half-hour chimed from the village church. The train was due! Arthur Augustus panted, and put on a spurt, and went up the old High Street of Rylcombe as if he had been on the cinder-path. He collided with Grimes, the grocer's boy, and Grimes roared as D'Arcy's bag banged on his basket, and there was a scattering of Sands' Special Blend at 1s. 6d. and Sands' Choice Coffee and Special Dairy Butter.

"You hass!" yelled Grimes.
 But Arthur Augustus did not pause.
 "Sowwy!" he gasped, and tore on.
 In his haste he had not fastened his bag very securely, and the collision with Grimes's basket had knocked it open. Arthur Augustus was in too great haste even to notice that the bag was swinging open in his hand. He rushed up to the station, leaving a white shirt and three or four blue silk socks behind him like a trail.
 He dashed into the station.
 "Twain in?" he gasped.
 Old Trumble, the porter, nodded.
 "Yessir, Master Merry 'as your ticket. They're hon the platform. Train's in. 'Urry up, sir. Jest going to start."
 Arthur Augustus tore up to the platform. He tore across it to the train. Tom Merry & Co. yelled to him from a crowded carriage.

"Come on!"
 "Buck up!"
 D'Arcy rushed to the carriage, leaving a perfect shower of socks and handkerchiefs and neckties behind him as he ran.
 "Stand back there!" shouted the guard, who was already signalling.
 But Arthur Augustus did not stand back. Tom Merry held the door open, and D'Arcy bolted head first into the carriage, and collapsed among the feet of the juniors. His bag rolled over on the floor.
 "Done it!" he gasped.
 "Ha, ha, ha!"

The guard slammed the door; the train was starting. Tom Merry & Co. yelled with merriment. Across the platform lay a trail of shirts, socks, neckties, sweaters, slippers, collars, and other articles. Arthur Augustus staggered to his feet as the train glided out of the station, gasping for breath.

"Jollay nearly missed it, deah boys! I had to wun like anythin'. But it's all wight."
 "What did you stop behind for, you ass?"
 "I had to pack a smallah bag. I couldn't cawwy the large one, as you wottahs wouldn't lend me a beastly hand. But I've bwrought my bag all wight."

"And what on earth did you want to bring an empty bag with you for?" demanded Monty Lowther. "What's the use of an empty bag in a caravan? We shall have enough empty bags."

"Weally, Lowthah, I do not quite undahstand you. You are talkin' out of the back of your neck, deah boy. My bag is packed."

"Look at it!" howled Blake.
 He held the bag up to view. Arthur Augustus looked at it. Then he jammed his eyeglass into his eye and looked again. The bag was perfectly empty. Not a single article remained of all that the swell of St. Jim's had crammed into it.

"Gweat Scott! I—I—"
 "Ha, ha, ha!"
 "The—the wotten bag must have come open, bai Jove, and I nevah noticed it."
 "Ha, ha, ha!"
 "Gweat Scott! All my things will be lost. I shall nevah wecover them—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"
 "You uttah asses! There is nothin' to cackle at—"
 "Ha, ha, ha!" yelled the juniors.

And for ten minutes at least nothing was heard from the crowded carriage but yells of merriment; while Arthur Augustus D'Arcy sat and regarded the empty bag through his eyeglass with blank dismay. And the expression upon his noble countenance was, as Monty Lowther remarked, worth a guinea a box.

CHAPTER 7.

Capturing the Caravan.

F IGGINS descended from the train at Abbotsford Station, and the Co. followed him. It was a quarter to two, and the chums of the New House had three-quarters of an hour before them, ample time to stroll to Abbotsford Common twice over before half-past two. Fatty Wynn, who never lost an opportunity of improving the shining hour in his own peculiar way, stopped at the station refreshment-rooms. He had been eating sandwiches most of the time in the train, but he still missed his dinner. The

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loss of that dinner seemed likely to haunt Fatty Wynn, however much provender he devoured in the place of it.

"Come on!" said Kerr.

"Hold on," said Fatty. "We've got lots of time, and I remember that they have jolly good pork-pies here. Have some?"

"May as well have a snack," said Figgins. "After all, we've missed dinner."

And the three juniors did full justice to the pork-pies of Abbotsford. They made a good meal, in fact, and were finished by two o'clock. At all events, Figgins and Kerr were finished. Fatty Wynn could have gone on till further orders. But he received his orders from his two chums, and they dragged the reluctant Fatty Wynn, and marched him out.

"There's lots of time," expostulated Fatty. "We don't need half an hour to get to the common. And even if we're a little late—"

"Kim on!"

"I haven't had enough—only four pork-pies and a cake and a pudding, as well as the sandwiches. No good starting an excursion hungry. It's always better to lay a solid foundation."

"Kim on!"

Fatty Wynn was marched forcibly out of the station, and the Co., carrying their bundles and bags, walked down the street on the way to the common outside the town. They knew that long before this Tom Merry & Co. must be in the train for Abbotsford, booked to arrive at two-forty. It would not do to risk being late. The van would be there half an hour ahead of the School House party at the most, and it would take some time to get off. Tom Merry & Co., on arriving, might walk quickly to the rendezvous, to wait there for the van to be ready at three. Figgins & Co., with all their clever arranging, were cutting it very fine—they had no choice about that. But, at all events, they could be on the spot early.

Outside the old town of Abbotsford, the green common stretched far and wide, bounded on one side by the river, on the other by the high-road. The New House juniors had learned from Mr. Hooker, on the telephone, the precise spot of the rendezvous. They reached the common outside the town, and scanned the broad expanse. There were many objects in sight—nurses and perambulators and playing children, and tramps loafing in the sunshine, but there was no sign of a caravan. Kerr looked at his watch. It was twenty minutes past two.

"Not due here for ten minutes," he remarked.

"Might have stayed for another pork-pie," said Wynn.

"Oh, rats! Lemme see. As the horse is to be put to it here, most likely the man Thompson will take the horse to the station, and let him pull it here," Kerr remarked. "That's the simplest way of getting it here."

"Most likely," assented Figgins.

"Then look out on the road for a caravan coming from the station."

The juniors watched the road.

Half-past two chimed out somewhere, but the van was not in sight. Figgins & Co. began to feel very anxious. It was the time promised for the caravan to be ready, but it was not yet to be seen. Mr. Hooker had promised it "absolutely," but it was probable that his man Thompson was not hurrying himself on a hot afternoon. The man Thompson, of course, did not know what was at stake.

In fact, if the man Thompson had known the circumstances of the case, he certainly would not have hurried himself to be there by the stipulated half-past two.

Figgins & Co. grew almost feverish as the minutes passed.

At two-forty Tom Merry & Co. would be in Abbotsford, and if they hurried, as they might, they would be on the common soon afterwards. And if the van was much later—

The chums of the New House began to look a little blue. Even Fatty Wynn ceased to think of the other pork-pie he might have had. If the van was much later, Tom Merry & Co. would come on the scene at the same time as the caravan. And they would be in force, and the enterprise of the New House Co., planned so carefully, would be U P, as Figgins lugubriously remarked.

"Blow that silly Hooker!" grunted Figgins. "Why couldn't he arrange to have the silly van here at two?"

"Blow this man Thompson!" growled Kerr. "What is the beast late for? Why didn't his parents teach him that unpunctuality is the thief of time?"

"And punctuality is the politeness of princes," said Fatty Wynn. "But Thompson ain't a prince. He's a beast! He's a rotter! He's a slacker! He's a—"

"Hurrah! Here comes the van!"

It was the caravan at last.

At all events, it was a caravan; and Figgins & Co. had

no doubt it was theirs. They fully regarded Tom Merry's caravan as theirs by this time.

It was a large and handsome caravan, too—a really stunning caravan. And it was drawn by a powerful horse of tremendous size. Tom Merry had arranged with Mr. Hooker for the best he could provide, regardless of expense, and Mr. Hooker had "done" him well. Horse and caravan were all that could be desired.

A man with a horsey look, a stubby chin, and a straw in his mouth was driving the caravan. He brought it to a halt by the common-side, glancing at the juniors. It was two-forty-two, and by that time Tom Merry's train was in Abbotsford. The New House juniors had just done it—if they were off in time.

They ran towards the caravan. The horsey man touched his hat. He did not know any of the juniors of St. Jim's by sight; but he had been told to hand over the caravan to a party of schoolboys, who would know his name, and one of whom would give the name of Tom Merry.

"That's our caravan?" exclaimed Figgins.

"Yes, sir. You Master Merry?"

"I'm from St. Jim's," Figgins explained. "Tom Merry will be here in a few minutes. You're Thompson, I suppose?"

"Yes, sir."

"Mr. Hooker told you to meet us here," said Kerr.

"That's right, sir." The driver dismounted from his seat.

"Very 'ot driving in this 'ere 'ot weather, young gentlemen. Makes a man thirsty."

Figgins pressed a half-crown into the hand of Thompson. He felt much more inclined to punch his head for being late, but he was only too glad to see the caravan at all. And that liberal tip enlisted all the sympathies of the van-man at once. He took quite a friendly interest in the juniors and their excursion.

"About the 'orse—" he began.

"Yes, yes; that's all right."

"Which his fodder is in the van," said the driver. "You'll take care of that 'orse, young gentlemen. He's a good 'orse. Wasn't there going to be a party of you 'ere?"

"The others are coming," explained Figgins, climbing into the driver's seat. "Get into the van, you chaps."

Kerr and Wynn tumbled into the van. They threw in their bags and bundles. They were in feverish haste to be off.

Thompson scratched his stubby chin. The half-crown had made him Figgins's friend for life; but he was perplexed.

"I was hordered to 'and that van to Master Merry," he said. "If Master Merry ain't 'ere yet—"

"He's coming."

"But you're starting without 'im—"

"Oh, he'll come after us!" said Figgins, with a grin. There was not really much doubt that Tom Merry would come after him.

The horse had begun to crop the grass along the road. Figgins pulled him out into the high-road, and took up the whip.

"Well, I s'pose it's all right," muttered Thompson.

"All right? Right as rain!"

"But Master Merry— Look 'ere, young gentlemen, p'raps you'd better wait till Master Merry comes. 'Ere come some young gentlemen along the road," said the van-man, shading his eyes with his hand and looking towards Abbotsford.

Figgins stood up, and looked over the van. A number of boyish figures had come into sight, most of them carrying bags.

Figgins's heart beat fast.

They were too far off for him to recognise them, but he knew well enough that they were Tom Merry & Co. There were seven of them.

Undoubtedly they had seen the van in the distance already. There was not a moment to lose. Figgins paid no heed to the van-man. He cracked the whip, and the horse moved on.

"'Ere, sir!" called out Thompson. "I say—"

"Tell Tom Merry we're gone on!" called back Figgins.

"Yes, but—"

"Tell him I'm driving. My name's Figgins—George Figgins. He'll understand."

"But—"

The vanman's voice died away, as Figgins gave the horse a flick of the whip, and the powerful animal broke into a sharp trot. The caravan rumbled down the road at a good rate, the vanman staring after it and scratching his head.

CHUCKLES ^{1D.}/₂ THE CHAMPION COLOURED PAPER. EVERY SATURDAY.

FERRERS LOCKE, DETECTIVE, is the principal character in one of "CHUCKLES," ^{1D.}/₂

CHAPTER 8.

Dished!

TOM MERRY & Co. had reached Abbotsford at two-forty, and they left the station at once, and walked away to the common. The van was not to be there till three, according to the arrangement with Mr. Hooker—since altered by Kerr on the telephone, but the School House fellows did not know that. But it was just as well to be on the spot in plenty of time, and they made for the common at once. As they came out of the town Tom Merry uttered an exclamation.

"There's the van!"

There it was, in the distance, plainly visible on the white high-road, amid the green expanse of the common.

"Good!" said Blake. "Hooker has been better than his word. He said it would be ready at three, and it's barely ten to three now."

"Looks nobby, doesn't it?" said Tom Merry. "I looked it well over in Wayland yesterday evening. Ripping van—inside and out! We shall have a topping time in it!"

"Yaas; but I weally don't know what I am goin' to do for a change of clobber!"

"You'll do without it," said Blake, with a chuckle.

"And I am afraid a lot of my things will be lost!"

"No doubt about that," agreed Blake cheerfully. "There will be ragamuffins in Rylcombe going about in silk socks and white shirts next week!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Weally, Blake!"

"Hallo! The van's going on!" exclaimed Tom Merry, in surprise. "What the deuce is Thompson going on for?"

The juniors stared after the van. There was no doubt that it was going on. It went down the road at a quick trot.

"The duffer!" said Digby. "I suppose he hasn't seen us, and he's giving the horse some exercise. Give him a yell!"

"That looks like the driver by the roadside," said Manners. "The horse must have bolted."

"Bai Jove!"

"Put it on," said Tom Merry, and he broke into a run.

The juniors ran hard. Something seemed to have gone wrong. The horsy-looking man standing in the road, staring after the departing caravan, was evidently the driver of it. But if the caravan was running away, why did he make no effort to stop the horse? It was very odd.

The juniors ran fast, but the caravan was going faster. It disappeared round a bend of the road, and the trees hid it from sight.

A couple of minutes later the juniors came up, panting. Thompson turned his head and looked at them, still chewing his straw.

"You are Thompson?" asked Tom Merry at once.

"Yes, sir!"

"I'm Tom Merry! Is that our van?"

"That's it, sir."

"Has the horse run away?" demanded Blake.

"Oh, no, sir! That's a good 'orse, sir. You can depend on him not to run away," said Thompson.

"Then where's the van gone?" exclaimed Tom Merry, in amazement. "Who's driving it?"

"Your friend, sir."

"M-m-mum-my friend."

"Yes, sir."

"But—but my friends are with me here!" exclaimed Tom. "What do you mean? You don't mean to say that you've handed over the van to somebody else by mistake?"

"No mistake, sir. It's your friend that's taken it," said Thompson. "He told me you would go after him."

The School House juniors looked at one another quickly. A dreadful suspicion had risen in their minds. It seemed impossible—yet—yet—The thought of Figgins & Co. came into their minds at once. Was it possible—

"How many of them were there?" gasped Blake.

"Three, sir."

"Three! My only hat! What were they like?" shouted Blake excitedly, grasping the stolid Thompson by the arm, and shaking him in his excitement.

"A tall chap, sir, and a fat young gentleman, and—"

Tom Merry gave a yell.

"Figgins & Co.!"

Thompson nodded.

"That's the name, sir—Master Figgins. Which he told me to tell you that Figgins was driving, and he said as 'ow you would understand."

"Oh, my hat!"

"The villain!"

"The burglar!"

"Figgins!"

"They've got our caravan!"

It was a chorus of dismay and fury. Thompson stared at the excited juniors, still chewing his straw.

"Which I asked the young gentleman if he'd wait for you,

Master Merry. I told 'im it would be better, as I was hordered to 'and over the van to you—"

"Oh, you ass! You've let them take our van!"

"How did they get on the track?" howled Blake. "What silly idiot told them about it?"

"Bai Jove! One of you duffahs must have let out the secwet."

The juniors glared at Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. If anybody had let out the secret, they had no doubt as to whom it was.

"You frabjous ass!" roared Blake. "You've told them!"

"Weally, Blake!"

"That idiot Gussy!"

"That crass ass Gussy!"

"Bump him!"

"Scalp him!"

"Slaughter him!"

The juniors were in a state of boiling fury, and they needed a victim. They had no doubt that it was the swell of St. Jim's who had somehow or other let out the secrets. They closed round the alarmed Arthur Augustus.

"Hold on, deah boys—I mean don't hold on! Weally, you know. I have not said a word! That ass Blake has been watchin' me all the time!"

"Yes, hold on," said Blake. "I'm blessed if I see how Gussy could have let it out, unless he got up in the middle of the night to do it."

"Somebody did it!" shouted Herries.

"Some silly ass!"

"They screwed it out of him in Figgy's study yesterday, of course!" howled Lowther.

Tom Merry shook his head.

"They didn't know it last night," he said. "They were tracking me down last night to find it out."

"Bai Jove! That accounts! They must weally have twacked you down, deah boy, and they only pwetended to be taken in by that hat twick."

"Rot!" said Tom Merry. "They didn't follow me to Wayland."

"I feel quite convinced, deah boy!"

"Oh, rats! Look here, how came it that the van was early?" exclaimed Tom Merry. "Looks as if those rotters wangled it somehow, now. How was it you got here early with the van, Thompson?"

Thompson had been listening to the excited exclamations in stolid surprise. Evidently he did not know how to make head or tail of the matter.

"Which we was 'phoned from Wayland this morning, sir," he said. "Mr. Hooker 'phoned that they had telephoned him from the school, asking him to have the van 'ere at two o'clock. He promised it for 'arf-past two."

"'Phoned from St. Jim's!"

"Yes, sir."

"Great Scott!"

"Weally, Tom Mewwy, it was vewy fartheaded of you to telephone and then forget all about it," said Arthur Augustus severely.

"Ass!" yelled Tom Merry. "I didn't telephone. Figgins and Co. must have telephoned. They got on to the little game, and 'phoned to Hooker. They must have cut dinner to get over here before us. Oh, crumbs!"

"But how—"

"Oh, what does it matter how? We're wasting time," said Tom Merry. That, apparently, had only just occurred to him. "While we're jawing here, they're getting away with our van."

"Weally, Tom Mewwy, you are doin' most of the jawin'—"

"Ring off, Gussy, for goodness' sake! Come on, you fellows; we've got to get hold of that van somehow, and slaughter those villains!"

"'Old on, sir," said Thompson. "If so be them young fellers 'ave stole the van, I'll go at once to the perlice-station, and—"

"No, you won't," said Tom Merry. "It's all right. They—they're friends of ours, and they've done it for a joke. It's all right. We'll look after it ourselves."

"Werry well, sir; if you takes responsibility—"

"Yes, yes!"

The stolid Thompson took his way back to Abbotsford. It was no business of his, so long as he was relieved of responsibility.

But he could not help wondering at hearing Figgins & Co. described as "friends" after the way the juniors had been referring to them. He was not aware of the peculiar state of affairs existing between the rival juniors of the two Houses at St. Jim's.

The party went down the road at a run. Some time had been lost, but they hoped to sight the van. It was a big caravan, and it could hardly proceed at a gallop. If they could once overtake it, there were enough of them to make mincemeat of Figgins & Co., and retake possession of the

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caravan. They breathed vengeance as they ran. After all their exceeding care to keep the secret from their rivals of the New House—in anticipation of just some jape as this—Figgins & Co. had spotted the whole scheme after all, and had "dished" them in the most thorough manner possible. How the New House raiders had learned of the scheme was really a matter of slight moment; the important thing was that they had learned of it, and that they had captured the caravan. And they were off in it—fairly off. Tom Merry & Co. had had the pleasure of making all the plans and arrangements for a week-end's caravanning, and Figgins & Co. were going to do the caravanning.

It was simply exasperating.

If they did not recapture the caravan— They thought of Figgins & Co. following shady lanes, camping by shady brooks, enjoying all the pleasures of the countryside—with their caravan! And they themselves would have to return crestfallen to St. Jim's, to confess how they had been dished, and to bear the laughter of the New House juniors. The New House would simply yell over it—they knew that! Never in all the history of the rivalry between the two Houses at St. Jim's had there been such a tremendous score—if Figgins & Co. succeeded in getting away with the caravan.

But they shouldn't succeed; it wasn't to be thought of.

So the exasperated juniors said to themselves. But unfortunately it had to be thought of. For the caravan was out of sight. The afternoon was hot, and the road dusty, and the bags were heavy to carry at a run. The furious pace soon slackened down. Of all the party, Towser was the only one who did not grow fatigued. And they came at a slackened pace to four cross-roads, with nothing to indicate which way the caravan had gone.

And they halted.

"Bai Jove, deah boys!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy dismally, setting down his empty bag and sitting upon it, and gasping. "Bai Jove! It looks to me as if we are really done."

"We're not done yet!" growled Blake.

Tom Merry set his teeth.

"We've got to get that caravan back!"

"How?" said several despondent voices.

But to that question the captain of the Shell could make no reply. He was determined to recapture the caravan; but how was another matter. Tom Merry sat down by the roadside and put his head in his hands, with his elbows on his knees, for a deep think.

Figgins drove on cheerfully. The powerful horse covered the ground at a good rate, and Figgins did not allow him to slacken till a good three miles had been covered.

That Tom Merry & Co. would follow, Figgins had not the slightest doubt; but that they would overtake the caravan he doubted very much.

He took many turnings, right and left, and Abbotsford was left far behind. He followed in a general way the direction of the distant coast. On the dusty high-road the van left no tracks to be distinguished. The keenest of the Boy Scouts of St. Jim's would not have found it possible to follow the trail of the captured caravan.

When a safe distance had been placed between the caravan and Abbotsford, Figgins allowed the horse to drop into a walk.

Kerr and Wynn jumped out, and Figgins descended from his seat, and they walked beside the horse, in the style of true caravanners.

"Looks like a score for the New House," grinned Figgins. THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 342.

And the Co. chortled.

"What-ho!"

"Ripping country this!" said Kerr, looking round over the green and glowing lanes and meadows and woods that surrounded them. "Some parts of Sussex are equal to Scotland—they are really!"

"Go hon!" said Figgins sarcastically.

"When are we going to stop for tea?" asked Fatty Wynn.

"We're going to stop for tea in about three hours!" said Figgins.

"Oh, Figgy!"

"Caravanning doesn't consist entirely of gorging, my fat tulip. We're going to do a jolly good walk this afternoon, and have tea at sunset. Then we'll go on again in the dusk, and camp somewhere near the sea for the night." Figgins mapped out the programme cheerfully. "Tomorrow we'll have a day by the giddy seaside—what?"

"Ripping!"

"I wonder what those fellows are doing?" chuckled Figgins. "If they hurry back to St. Jim's they'll be in time to play in the House match. Better than nothing."

And Figgins & Co. tramped on cheerfully in the golden afternoon beside the caravan, as it rumbled down the long white roads and through shady lanes. The schoolboy caravanners had never felt quite so satisfied with themselves.

CHAPTER 9.

A Hot Chase.

TOM MERRY grunted. It was a grunt expressive of the most complete exasperation. He had had a big think. The other fellows had also had big thinks. But the result was nil. Only Herries looked as if he had thought of anything useful.

"It's N G!" said Blake.

"U P!" remarked Digby.

"We're dished!"

"Stranded!"

"Done to the wide!"

"Up a giddy tree!"

"The only thing I can think of is bumping Gussy!" said Tom Merry.

"Weally, Tom Mewwy —"

"How these rotters bowled us out, I don't know. But they got the first hint from Gussy when they pumped me, you ass. We were talkin' on that occasion simply on the subject of tenah solos—"

"Bumping Gussy," went on Tom Merry, unheeding, "would be some solace; but it wouldn't help us to get the caravan back."

"They're miles away by this time," said Blake. "They couldn't keep on the run; the horse couldn't stand it. But you can bet that Figgy wouldn't slow down till he was at a safe distance. And he may have taken any one of these roads. Most likely he'll make for the seaside, as we were going to do. But he would get off the main roads, and where—"

"Oh, where and oh where can he be?" sighed Lowther. "Echo answers where?"

"Haven't any of you fellows got a suggestion to make?" said Tom Merry despairingly.

"I have!" said Herries.

"Pile in! I don't suppose it's any good—but pile in!"

"As Blake has just said, Figgy will have to slacken down. Caravans go at a walking pace," said Herries. "If we keep on in the right direction, we can depend on tracking down the villains in the long run."

"Jolly long run, I expect; but how on earth are we to get

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Gran



The juniors rose to their feet as a man came towards them. For a moment the latter stood speechless, glaring at the caravanners. "You trespassing scoundrels!" he gasped, at last. "How dare you camp here? You gipsy scoundrels, I'll have you arrested!" "I—I—I say, we had permission to come here!" stammered Tom Merry. (See Chapter 11.)

the right direction? That's what we're trying to think out, isn't it, fathead?"

"My dog Towser——"

"Eh?"

"Now, you see how jolly lucky it is that I brought Towser with me after all!" said Herries. "You fellows all wanted to leave him behind. As it is, it's Towser who will save the situation."

"How the dickens——"

"You know what a splendid tracker Towser is. Show him something belonging to those bounders, and he'll track them down like a bloodhound," said Herries confidently. "Towser——"

There was a general howl from the juniors. They had no belief whatever in Towser's powers of tracking down any thing but an old bone or a dog-biscuit.

"Cheese it!"

"Ring off!"

"Bow-wow!"

"Rats!"

"Well, can any of you make a better suggestion?" demanded Herries defiantly. "Let Towser smell something belonging to them, and he'll lead us straight on their track. Find something for him to smell—that's all that's needed. Then he'll go straight on, and we can follow him, and come up with them sooner or later."

"Come up with your sainted grandmother!" growled Blake. "For goodness' sake, don't talk about Towser now. I'm fed-up with Towser!"

"Yes, ring off, for mercy's sake!" said Manners. "The question is, what's going to be done?"

"We are!" growled Lowther.

"If we had the bikes, we might scounah the countwy for the wascals!" sighed Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "But by the time we fetched them ffrom the school——"

"Figgins & Co. would be ten thousand miles away by that time!" howled Manners.

"Imposs., deah boy. They could not possibly walk ten thousand miles——"

"What about hiring some bikes in Abbotsford?" said Digby, not very hopefully.

"You know what hired bikes are—puncture-collectors," said Blake. "Besides, it's an hour's walk back to Abbotsford from here. Goodness knows where Figgins & Co. will be by that time."

"Bai Jove! I've got it!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus.

"Oh, you've got it, have you?" growled Blake, not at all impressed. "What have you got—the collywobbles?"

"Weally, Blake——"

"If you've got an idea, chuck it off your chest," said Tom Merry. "Of course, it won't be any good. But out with it. Out of the mouths of babes and sucklings——"

"I wefuse to be wegarded as a babe and sucklin'," exclaimed Arthur Augustus indignantly. "I wegard the term as extremely dispawagin'. I have thought of a dodge——"

"Out with it, then!" yelled Blake.

"What about a motah-car?"

"A which?"

"A motah-car. Suppose we twot back to Abbotsford, hiah a motah-car, and scounah the countwy all wound?"

"No good!" said Herries promptly.

"Why, not, Hewwies?"

"Towser couldn't keep up with a motor-car."

"Wats! You could put the beast inside."

"But inside he couldn't follow their track. Even Towser couldn't follow a track inside a car. He has to be on the ground—"

"Will you give Towser a rest?" roared Blake. "By Jove, if you talk about Towser any more, I—I'll brain Towser!"

"Look here, you thundering ass—"

"Pway wing off, Hewwies! My idea is to scouah the country. We can waise the money to hiah a car. The only difficulty is that we shouldn't be able to start at once. I suppose it would be an hour befoah we could get started—"

"Even if we found a car all ready at the garage," growled Tom Merry; "and most likely we'd have to wait for one. Seat!"

"There are taxi-cabs in Abbotsford, you know. We could cwam ourselves into a taxi-cab at a pinch."

Hoot-toot-toot!

"Bai Jove, you know, talk of angels, and you heah the wustle of their wings!" exclaimed D'Arcy excitedly. "Look at that!"

From the direction of Bunchester came a taxi-cab, scooting along the road towards Abbotsford. The juniors looked at it. It was empty, evidently returning from a journey. Tom Merry's eyes gleamed. He jumped out into the road and waved his hand, without stopping to think.

"Hi!"

The taxi-cab slowed down.

"Hallo!" said the chauffeur.

"Have you passed a caravan on the road?"

The chauffeur glared.

"My 'at! 'Ave you stopped me to inquire arter a blessed caravan?" he demanded wrathfully.

Tom Merry laughed.

"Not quite! We want your cab too."

"Oh! 'Ow many of you?"

"The whole family," said Blake.

"Seven in a taxi-cab!" said the chauffeur. "Can't be done, sir."

"Oh, wats! Half-a-sovereign for the extwas!" said Arthur Augustus.

"Oh!" said the chauffeur again. "Well, one of you could ride beside me, and six inside. Bags on top. Where do you want to go?"

"We're looking for a caravan," Tom Merry explained.

"Some—some friends of ours have gone off in our caravan and left us behind. We want to hunt for it round about and up and down, you know. If you find it we'll pay double the amount registered on the taximeter."

"Yaas, wathah!"

The taxi-man looked businesslike at once.

"I'm your man, sir. Wot was the caravan like? Might be the one that passed me on the Bunchester road."

"Hurrah! You've passed a caravan?"

"Yes; about four miles from 'ere, as I was coming back from Bunchester. Three young fellows with it."

The juniors gave a whoop of joy. Their luck had been out—very much out—but the fickle goddess Fortune seemed to be smiling upon them once again. They had little doubt that a caravan with three young fellows with it was the caravan of which they were in search.

"One of them a fat chap?" asked Blake.

"Yes; wery fat, one of them."

"And one a long-legged bounder, with a face like a kite?"

"One of them suttingly 'as long legs, sir."

"That's it. We're on the track."

"Yaas, wathah! Huwway!"

"Pile in!" said Tom Merry. "Double fare if you run it down!"

"Right-ho, sir!"

The bags were piled on the top of the taxi-cab, and the juniors piled inside. Tom Merry took the seat beside the driver. The taxi-cab turned and sped back the way it had come. The driver was as keen as the juniors to run down the caravan. Double fare and half-a-sovereign for extras quite sufficed to arouse his keenness.

The juniors felt their spirits rise as the taxi-cab sped away. They were on the track, and they were going at a speed that the caravan could never equal if they once sighted it. Once the caravan was in sight, all was well.

Only Herries was a little dissatisfied. He sat with Towser snuggled against his knees, frowning. Herries would have preferred to trust to Towser's sagacity for tracking down the caravan. But Herries was quite alone in his opinion on that point.

The taxi simply ate up all the ground. It went along with a whiz, and in a very short space of time the juniors were on the spot where the chauffeur had passed the caravan. As the caravan had then been going at a walking pace, it was not likely to be very far away. It was only a question of finding the right direction.

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Tom Merry scanned the country anxiously. But they were in a wooded country now, and the views were short.

But again their luck held good. A country policeman was resting against a stile near at hand, and the chauffeur inquired of him. The policeman had seen the caravan—in fact, one of the caravanners had asked him which was the shortest route towards the coast. He had advised them to take the Hamley road, and they had taken it.

"Oh, good!" said Tom Merry. "What luck!"

The taxi-cab sprang forward again, buzzing off in the direction of the little town of Hamley. Hamley was eight miles away, and if the caravanners were going there, they had most likely not reached it yet. Miles flew under the wheels of the taxi. The juniors' hearts were beating hard. Even if they did not sight the caravan before they reached the village, they could make further inquiries there. But it was not likely that Figgins & Co. had covered the eight miles yet.

Tom Merry watched the road with gleaming eyes. It was a wooded lane, shaded by big trees most of the way, with many windings. As they came round a bend in the lane Tom gave a sudden chirrup of joy.

"Hurrah!"

Ahead of them on the road loomed up a caravan, and beside the horse three juniors were walking and chatting cheerfully.

"Figgins & Co.!"

"Our caravan!"

"Oh, ripping!"

"Hurrah!"

CHAPTER 10.

Tom Merry & Co. Triumph.

FIGGINS turned his head as he heard the sound of a car on the road behind. Figgins was not thinking of the School House juniors—not at all. He had not the slightest belief that Tom Merry & Co. would succeed in seeing anything of him until he turned up for lessons at St. Jim's on Monday morning. Figgins grinned at the idea of the juniors scouring the countryside in search of the caravan; they might as well have searched for the proverbial needle in a haystack, in Figgy's opinion. He simply glanced back as he heard a car behind, carelessly, without the slightest suspicion of what he was going to see.

He looked at the taxi-cab, and then his eyes fell upon the junior who was seated beside the chauffeur. Figgins almost fell down.

"Oh!" he gasped.

"What's the matter?" asked Kerr.

"Tom Merry!" yelled Figgins.

"T-T-Tom M-M-Merry!" stuttered Fatty Wynn.

"My hat!"

"They—they're here!"

"Oh, crumbs!"

The taxi-cab was not a hundred yards away, and it was coming on with a rush. Figgins cast an almost despairing glance round. Flight was impossible, with the caravan. The big horse vehicle, at its best speed, would have been run down in a few minutes at the outside. It was useless to think of flight. Indeed, before the New House juniors could think of flight or anything else the taxi-cab was on the spot.

"That there the caravan, sir?" asked the chauffeur.

"That's it!" said Tom, with a chuckle.

The taxi stopped. Tom Merry jumped down, and the doors of the taxi flew open, and the six juniors inside came pouring out in hot excitement.

"Line up!" muttered Figgins desperately.

The New House juniors lined up. But it wasn't much use lining up. There were seven against three, and the odds were hopeless. But Figgins & Co. did not mean to relinquish their prize without a struggle.

"Caught!" shouted Tom Merry gleefully.

"Yaas, wathah! Capchahed, you boundahs!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"This is where the New House gets it in the neck!" chortled Blake. "Collar the cads!"

"Jump on them!"

The chauffeur sat in his seat, looking on in amazement at the excited scene that followed. Figgins & Co. had simply no chance, but they would not surrender. There was a terrific struggle for a couple of minutes.

It ended with Figgins, Kerr, and Wynn lying on their backs in the road, with School House juniors sitting on their chests and standing on their legs to keep them down.

The caravan was stopped. The horse calmly cropped the grass. The chauffeur stared. And the School House party gave a whoop of triumph.

"Hurrah! Hip-pip-hurrah!"

"Bwavo!"

Tom Merry collected cash from his comrades, and the somewhat extensive fare of the taxicab was "whacked" out. The chauffeur, still in a state of great surprise, was however quite satisfied, and he drove away, grinning. The taxicab vanished down the lane, and then Tom Merry turned back to the captured raiders.

"Figgins, old man——"

"Yow! Gerroff my chest, Lowther, you beast!" gasped Figgins.

"Thanks! I'm quite comfy," said Lowther. "Take it calmly!"

"Grooh! I—I'll——"

"Figgins, old man, this is where you sing snail! Who's cock-house at St. Jim's—what?"

"School House!" chorused the victors.

"Who gets it in the neck?"

"Figgins! Ha, ha, ha!"

"You've given us quite a run, Figgy. But all's well that ends well. I'm afraid you'll have rather a long walk home. But these things will happen, if you borrow other people's caravans. Ha, ha, ha!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"How—how did you run us down, you rotter?" gasped Kerr.

Tom Merry smiled loftily.

"My dear chap, you surely didn't think you could do the School House, did you?" he asked, in surprise.

"Oh, rats! We did you—did you brown," said Kerr. "It was sheer luck your getting on to us again—blind luck—fool's luck!"

Tom Merry looked into the caravan. He grinned at the sight of Figgins & Co.'s bags and the handsome supply of tuck the Co. had already stacked in its place. Figgins & Co. were well supplied for the trip, so far as provisions went. Under the circumstances, Figgins & Co.'s provisions were the spoils of war.

"This was really kind of you, Figgy," said Tom Merry. "We have plenty of grub with us, but it was really kind of you to bring us a further supply like this. I really don't know how to thank you."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I—I say!" spluttered Fatty Wynn. "You've got your rotten caravan back. You're jolly well not going to collar our grub!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You may be right, Fatty," said Tom Merry. "You may! But my impression is that we are going to collar the grub. What do you fellows think?"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"To the victor the spoils," chuckled Blake.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Figgins & Co. exchanged looks of utter desperation. Their plans had been so well-laid, and had been carried out so successfully, it was too utterly rotten to be dropped on like this, when the coast had seemed to be clear, and all was calm and bright. That week-end's caravanning—it would never come off now. And the net outcome of their deep and cunning strategy was that they had supplied the School House fellows with an ample store of provisions. Indeed, the captured tuck was worth very nearly as much as Tom Merry had paid the taxi-man.

"You—you can't have our grub!" moaned Fatty Wynn.

"I say, that's rotten——"

"As rotten as collaring another chap's caravan?" chuckled Lowther.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"What are we going to do with these bounders?" asked Manners. "I'm getting tired of sitting on Kerr. He's rather bony."

"Shove 'em in the ditch!" suggested Herries.

"Bump them!"

"Rag them bald-headed!"

"No!" said Tom Merry, generous in the hour of victory.

"We've done them brown! We won't rag the poor little chaps——"

"You cheeky rotter!" roared Figgins.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Just tie their hands together," said Tom. "It will give them a pleasant occupation for an hour or so getting loose. Then they can walk back to Abbotsford. 'Tain't more than ten or twelve miles. They can catch the evening train home, and tell all St. Jim's that they've got it in the neck."

"Oh, you rotters!" gasped Kerr.

The New House juniors struggled again, but their struggles were in vain. Tom Merry took a cord from the van, and tied their wrists together in a bunch. Then they were allowed to rise, and they stood gasping with exhaustion and rage, and quite helpless. The School House juniors, chuckling with glee, started off with the caravan. They waved their hands to Figgins & Co. as they went merrily down the road.

"Good-bye, Figgy!"

"Au wevoir, deah boy!"

"Pleasant walk home!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The caravan and the School House juniors turned a bend in the lane, keeping on towards Hamley. Caravan and caravanners disappeared from sight. Figgins & Co., tied in a group, stood in the lane, watching the caravanners till they disappeared. Then they looked at one another. Their feelings were almost too deep for words.

"What fearful luck!" said Figgins at last.

"It was just luck," said Kerr. "We did them—did them brown! But we couldn't help this. It was blind luck!"

"But we're dishd, all the same."

Fatty Wynn groaned.

"All the grub gone. Ow!"

Figgins snorted.

"Blow the grub!" he said savagely. "We're dishd; that's what's the matter! They've got our caravan!"

"Theirs now," grunted Kerr. "Blow the rotten luck! Let's get this blessed cord off, for goodness' sake! I feel inclined to kick somebody."

The juniors used their teeth on the cord. But it was merely half an hour before they had their hands loose.

"Well, what are we going to do?" said Figgins.

"Jolly long walk to Abbotsford," said Fatty Wynn. "But we can get something to eat in some village we pass through."

Figgins gave him a ferocious glare.

"If you talk about eating again, you fat idiot, I—I'll punch your fat head! We're not going back to Abbotsford."

Kerr whistled.

"I don't see what else is to be done, Figgy. The caravan's gone. And there are seven of the beasts, even if we could get up to it——"

"We're not going back," said Figgins resolutely. "The Head's given us leave for the week-end, and we should look silly idiots going back to-night. And we should be laughed to death for mucking up a good jape like this."

"But——"

"We're going to follow the caravan," said Figgins fiercely. "Anyway, I'm going to. You fellows can sneak off home if you want to. I'm going on."

He started on. The Co. followed him at once.

"Well, in for a penny, in for a pound," said Kerr philosophically. "We may be able to turn the tables on them yet—with luck! After all, we're not beaten yet."

"Things might be worse," said Fatty Wynn thoughtfully. "It's awfully lucky that I've got a packet of sandwiches in my pocket, isn't it?"

Figgins only snorted in reply. He tramped on, frowning; and the Co. tramped on. And Fatty Wynn's cheerfulness returned, to some extent, as he munched the sandwiches.

CHAPTER 11.

No Objection!

TOM MERRY & Co. smiled cheerfully as they walked on with the caravan.

All was going well at last.

They had had a narrow escape of losing the caravan and the caravanning, but luck had befriended them, and now, as Blake remarked, everything in the garden was lovely. Indeed, now that all was serene, they were not sorry for the little tussle with their old rivals of the New House—not at all. The triumph over the foe gave an added zest to their enjoyment.

And caravanning was certainly enjoyable. The weather was perfect. It was a golden afternoon, and the sun was setting in a blaze in the west. The surrounding country was beautiful, the smell of flowers and the hay was very sweet. The horse pulled contentedly at the caravan, and the caravanners walked on with equal contentment.

A good many miles lay behind them now, since they had left Figgins & Co. in the road. They concluded that the defeated New House juniors had gone back to St. Jim's. They did not see that there was anything else for them to do. And they dismissed Figgins & Co. from their minds, and gave all their thoughts to caravanning.

"Bettah look out for a suitable spot to camp, deah boys," Arthur Augustus D'Arcy remarked, as the sun sank lower.

"I'm gettin' wathah tiahd, you know."

"Not going to camp till sundown," said Tom Merry. "All fellows who crack up on the march can get into the van."

"I have not cwacked up," said D'Arcy indignantly. "I would undahtake to walk you off your beastly legs, Tom Mewwy."

"Keep it up, then," grinned Tom Merry.

Arthur Augustus walked on determinedly. He would have walked till his aristocratic legs fell off before he would have admitted that he had cracked up. Tom Merry was keeping his eyes open for a suitable spot for camping. Towser, who

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didn't mind admitting that he had cracked up, sat in the van and blinked sleepily at the landscape. The sun sank lower in the golden west.

"One of us might scout ahead, and look out for a camp," Jack Blake remarked.

"Yaas, wathah!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy immediately. "Bettah leave it to me. We have to be wathah particular where we camp, and you can't do bettah than wely on a fellow with judgment."

And, without waiting for his opinion to be endorsed, Arthur Augustus walked briskly ahead.

Tom Merry smiled.

"I expect Gussy will select a spot with a stagnant pool, or marsh, or something," he remarked. "Keep your eyes open."

Arthur Augustus walked on ahead. As a matter of fact, he had a tired feeling in his noble legs, and he was anxious to camp. He walked on sharply, however, scanning the country through his eyeglass. He was some little distance ahead of the caravan when he spotted a spot that was eminently suitable.

"By Jove, that would be wippin'!" he exclaimed.

A wooden gate gave access to a wide lawn sloping down to a rippling stream. In the distance, over the trees, the roof of a large mansion could be seen. The lawn was evidently part of the grounds of a very large estate. It was an excellent spot for camping—dry and high, with a supply of water near at hand, and a slope for drainage in case of rain. But as it was evidently private land, Arthur Augustus realised that it would be necessary to obtain permission before camping there.

A young man in shooting costume was leaning on the wooden gate, with a gun in the hollow of his arm. Arthur Augustus saluted him politely, and the young man gave him a nod.

"Lovely evenin', my deah sir!" said Arthur Augustus.

"Lovely!" assented the sportsman.

"We're cawavannin'," said Arthur Augustus.

"Sure, it's a fine sport," said the young man, with an accent which seemed to hint that he originally hailed from the sister island.

"Yaas, wathah! Lookin' for a camp, you know. That looks a weally wippin' spot for a camp!"

"Faith, it does!"

"It would suit us down to the gound. Any objection to our campin' there?"

"Not that I'm aware of. Looks a splendid place."

"You have no objection, my deah sir?"

"Not at all!"

"You are vewy kind."

"Oh, don't mench!"

"You are suah you do not mind?"

The young man shook his head, with a most agreeable smile.

"Not in the least! Faith, I should think you couldn't find a better spot; and as for me, I haven't the least objection in the world!"

"Thank you vewy much! Pewwaps it would do some damage if we lighted a fiah—"

"Pooh! The grass would grow again."

"Then you do not object to our lightin' a fiah?"

"Certainly not!"

"Bai Jove! That's wippin'. All cawavanners don't have this luck," said Arthur Augustus jubilantly. "Pewwaps you would honah us by shawin' our suppah, sir?"

"Thanks, I should be glad, but I have to get in to dinner. Much obliged, all the same. Make yourself at home here, and if you do a little damage, I don't mind in the least. I've been a caravanner myself, you know. Good-evening!"

"Good evening, my deah sir, and thank you vewy much!"

The young man raised his cap slightly, and walked away, still with that genial smile upon his face. Arthur Augustus, with great satisfaction, opened the wooden gate wide, for the passage of the caravan, which was rumbling down the lane near at hand now. Arthur Augustus waved his hand to the juniors.

"This way, deah boys!"

"By Jove!" said Blake, looking in at the gate. "That's a ripping spot for camping! But I don't suppose the owner would want caravanners camping there."

"I've just seen the ownah, deah boy, and he has given me permish, in the most agweeable mannah imaginable."

"That's ripping!" said Tom Merry. "Gee-up! Come on!" The caravan turned in at the wide gateway. "I suppose we can't very well light a fire—"

"There's the spirit stove—"

"On the contwawy, deah boy, we can light a fiah. The ownah said we could—I asked him. He says he has been a cawavanner himself."

"Jolly lucky to drop on an old caravanner," said Tom

Merry, with great satisfaction. "Still, we'll be careful not to do any damage. He must be a jolly good-natured chap. Halt!"

The caravan halted, and the horse was at once taken out of the shafts, and tethered. Then the juniors proceeded to camp out.

Two or three big trees afforded a pleasant shade against the red glow of the setting sun.

In their shirt-sleeves, the juniors prepared the camp.

They had had a good deal of experience in camping-out as Boy Scouts, and they knew how to make themselves comfortable.

Cooking utensils and provisions were brought out of the van. Wood was gathered along the lane for a fire, the campers considerably sparing the trees that adorned the lawn they had camped on. Stones were brought from the brook for a fireplace, and a wood-fire was soon burning away cheerfully, and a pot slung over it, gipsy-fashion, sent out an appetising odour—very appetising indeed to the hungry campers. Jack Blake, who prided himself upon his abilities as a cook, took charge of the pot, announcing that he was going to produce an Irish stew that would beat Banagher.

Meanwhile, the kettle was boiled on the spirit-stove. Plates and cups and saucers and knives and forks galore were set out, and even serviettes had not been forgotten. All, as Tom Merry cheerfully observed, was calm and bright.

The calmness and brightness, however, were destined to be interrupted. Blake had just announced that the famous Irish stew was ready, when a tall man with a shining bald head, and a face that seemed transfigured with rage, came striding on the scene from the direction of the distant mansion.

He came up to the caravanners, and gazed at them speechlessly. His face was so red that it really looked as if his blood had been pumped into it. He had a riding-whip in his hand, and his grasp closed on it till his knuckles were white.

The juniors looked at him and rose to their feet. It looked like trouble; but as they had full permission to camp there, they did not see what the old gentleman was angry about. But he was certainly angry, not to say infuriated. There was no doubt whatever upon that point.

"Bai Jove!" murmured Arthur Augustus, mechanically raising his hat. "Good—good-evening, sir!"

The man found his speech at last.

"You—you trespassing scoundrels! How dare you camp here with your blackguardly caravan, by Jove! You gipsy blackguards, I'll have you arrested! Here, John—George—William! Where are you, you fools? Let the dogs loose!"

CHAPTER 12.

Camping Out.

TOM MERRY & CO. looked dismayed.

The fury of the old gentleman, evidently the owner of the land the caravanners had camped on, was extremely disconcerting.

"I—I say, we had permission to camp here!" stammered Tom Merry.

"Yaas, wathah!" Arthur Augustus recovered his dignity. "My deah sir, pway calm yourself. You should not fly into such a wage—it is weally dangewous at your age!"

The remark of the swell of St. Jim's had no perceptible effect in diminishing the rage of the old gentleman. He waved his riding-whip in the air in a frantic sort of way. He seemed on the point of exploding. Two or three men came from the direction of the house, apparently the John, George, and William whom the old gentleman was summoning in such stentorian tones.

"Turn them out!"

"My deah sir—"

"Seize them! Thrash them! Arrest them, by Jove!"

"Hold on!" said Tom Merry quietly. "Don't lay hands here, my men—you'll get hurt if you do. We had permission to camp here."

"Nonsense! Seize them!"

"Are you the owner of this land?" demanded Tom.

"You know I am, you young blackguard—"

"I didn't know! But—but somebody gave us permission. Who was it gave you permission to camp here, Gussy? It wasn't this chap?"

"No; I have nevah seen him befoah, deah boy. And I should certainly not have asked a favah of a person like that!"

"You—you—you—"

"And I, for one, decline to go until this person pwoves that he has a wight to turn us off," said Arthur Augustus firmly. "I was given permission to camp here by a vewy agweeable young man who was leanin' on the gate. He said there was no objection whatever to our campin' heah—I mean, he said he had no objection."

Blake gasped.

"Oh, my hat! Did you say he was the owner of the land?"

"No, deah boy; but I natuwally took it for gwanted as he said he had no objection to our campin' here."

"You—you ass!" shrieked Tom Merry. "It was somebody pulling your silly leg—somebody who had no right to give you permission to camp here at all."

"Bai Jove!"

"Turn them off!" roared the old gentleman. "Lighting a fire on my lawn, by Jove! Ruining my lawn! A dirty gang of tramps camping in my ground! By Jove! I'll have them prosecuted as vagrants! Turn them out!"

John and George and William looked doubtfully at the juniors. Seven sturdy fellows were not easy to turn out, unless they chose to go quietly.

"You'd better go, young gentlemen," murmured George. "This 'ere land belongs to Mr. Gumpey, and he don't allow no trespassers 'ere."

"Go!" roared Mr. Gumpey. "Do you hear? Go! Men, take that caravan! It shall be detained! Probably these young rascals have stolen it. Take the horse!"

Tom Merry's eyes flashed.

"There has been a mistake," he explained. "One of us was given permission to camp here, and it turns out to have been a joke. But—"

"Nonsense! I don't believe a word of it! Go!"

"Weally, sir," said Arthur Augustus, jamming his monocle into his eye, and turning a severe glance upon the infuriated Mr. Gumpey. "You have no wight whatevah to cast doubt upon my fwiend's statement!"

"Silence! Go!"

"I wepeat, you are actin' like a wottah, sir, and but for my wespect for your age, sir, I should give you a feahful thwashin'. Pewwaps we had bettah go, deah boy. I decline to wemain on that unpleasant person's gwound any longah."

"Take that caravan away, man!"

"Hold on," said Tom Merry; "we're going! If you touch our property, you'll get knocked into the stream. Hands off!"

Blake and Herries put the horse into the shafts again. The rest of the juniors began packing up their property. It took some time, and while they were occupied the irate Mr. Gumpey raved and threatened, and ordered his men to seize the trespassers. But John and George and William betrayed no disposition to do anything of the kind.

Tom Merry stamped the fire out, and Mr. Gumpey went off into a fresh explosion at the sight of the blackened patch on the lawn. Doubtless it was annoying. The caravan was put into motion, and the horse pulled it out through the gateway again into the lane. Mr. Gumpey followed it with infuriated gestures and observations. John and George and William grinned when their master's back was turned, but their faces became grave and sedate when he looked round. Mr. Gumpey brandished his riding-whip after the juniors as they went out with the caravan.

"Trespassers! Gipsies! Scoundrels! Rascals! Ruffians!"

Mr. Gumpey's furious voice died away behind as the caravan rolled on down the lane in the thickening dusk of the evening.

"My hat," murmured Blake, "what a giddy adventure! I suppose the old boy would be annoyed at finding us camped there without leave."

"Ha, ha, ha! Perhaps!"

"He had no wight to apply such oppwobwious expwessions to us!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus indignantly. "I wegard him as bein' an extwemely wude and unpleasant person. The young man who gave me permish to camp there was a much more polite person, and vewy gentlemanly in ewewy way."

"I'd like to fall in with that gentlemanly young man," murmured Blake. "I'd give him something in return for his giddy permission to camp on somebody else's land. If you hadn't been a howling idiot, you'd have asked him whether it was his land."

"Weally, deah boy, I natuwally took that for gwanted when he gave me permish to camp there. I suppose he was a wotten pwactical jokah."

The caravanners would have been very glad to meet that humorous young man again. But they did not see him as they walked on; probably he was careful not to fall in their way. He would certainly have received some treatment from the exasperated caravanners which would have diminished his humorousness.

Tired and hungry, the caravanners tramped on, looking for a suitable place to camp. Darkness had now fallen, and it was not so easy to select a place. Blake's lovely Irish stew was getting cold in the van. They passed the time by telling Arthur Augustus what they thought of the state of his intellect; and Gussy's offer to go ahead and select a suitable spot for camping was greeted with a yell of wrath.

"Here's a place!" Tom Merry exclaimed at last. "We must have somewhere. We sha'n't find a better place than this after dark."

It was a wide common, closed by a thick wood in the distance. There was a stream at hand. It was not so favourable a spot as Mr. Gumpey's lawn, certainly; but it fulfilled the requirements of the caravanners. The caravan was drawn off the road, and the horse taken out and tethered to crop the grass. Once more sticks were gathered, and a camp-fire lighted, and the juniors prepared supper.

This time there was no interruption.

As they sat round the camp-fire, enjoying a substantial supper, the good spirits of the caravanners returned. Round them was darkness, a few stars only gleaming in the sky overhead. There was no town in sight, only a slight glow in the sky at a great distance hinting of habitations there.

"Bai Jove," said Arthur Augustus, as he settled down comfortably in the grass after the meal, "this is all wight, deah boys! Not quite so good a place for campin' as the one I found; still, you have not done so vewy badly, Tom Mewwy."

"Ass!" said Tom Merry.

"I wonder where Figgins & Co. are?" chuckled Blake. "What the time—past nine! Just thinking of going to bed at St. Jim's."

"Poor old Figgins! Ha, ha, ha!"

Little did the caravanners dream how near the New House juniors were to them at that moment.

"Bai Jove, I'm wathah tiahd!" Arthur Augustus remarked. "I suppose some of us are goin' to keep watch, deah boys."

"Towser will do that," said Herries.

"Yes, Towser's good for that, if for nothing else," agreed Tom Merry. "He can keep watch. We don't want to risk having the horse stolen in the night. Towser will wake us up fast enough if tramps come around."

"Didn't I tell you—" began Herries triumphantly.

"Yes, you did. Don't tell us again!" yawned Blake. "I say, do we wash up after a meal or before the next meal? I'm fagged."

"Well, we wash up immediately after a meal, that's the rule," said Tom Merry thoughtfully. "But as it's late—ahem!—we'll leave the washing-up till to-morrow. But we've got to get going pretty early. We've promised the Head not to miss morning service to-morrow, and we have got to get to some place that's civilised enough to have a church. But there'll be time for washing up before we start. Let's see about bed. That will take some time."

"It won't take long to get the annex rigged up to the caravan," said Blake. He looked up at the sky. "It's not likely to rain. But it might."

"Yaas, wathah! No good pwovidin' a covah if we don't sleep undah it."

"Pile in!" said Tom Merry.

The canvas annex was soon rigged up to the caravan. Then the juniors turned in, some of them in the caravan, and some of them under the shelter of the annex. The horse was tethered close at hand, and Towser remained loose on guard. Towser did not like strangers, and he was not likely to let any stranger approach the camp without giving the alarm. For the first time in his history, as Blake remarked, Towser was coming in useful.

And in a few minutes after they had lain down the school-boy caravanners were sleeping the sleep of the just.

CHAPTER 13.

The Amateur Horse-Thief.

"SHUSH!"

Figgins whispered the word cautiously.

Darkness lay upon the wide common, broken only by the fitful gleam of the stars overhead; and a dull glow from the remnant of the camp-fire.

The camp of the schoolboy caravanners was buried in silence and slumber.

But the enemy were at hand.

Figgins & Co. were on the track. Ever since the recapture of the caravan by the School House juniors Figgins & Co. had been on the track. As the caravan had proceeded at a walking pace, it had been quite easy. The caravanners had a start, but the New House trio had soon sighted them again; and after that they seldom lost sight of the caravan for more than a few minutes at a time. It was large enough to be seen at a considerable distance; and, besides, it was easy to get news of it in the villages they passed, and from pedestrians in the lanes. Figgins & Co. did not venture too near. They did not want the caravanners to suspect that they were on the track.

Figgins & Co. had watched from a distance with great enjoyment the scene at Mr. Gumpey's gate. Then they had

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NEXT
WEDNESDAY—

"THE HOUSE-MASTER'S BODYGUARD!"

A Magnificent New, Long, Complete School Tale of
Tom Merry & Co. By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

followed the turned-out caravanners to the wide common where the final camp had been made. The trio were pretty well tired out by this time; but they were quite keen. They had made purchases of provisions in villages as they came on, and eaten as they walked; but Fatty Wynn was thinking with a heavy heart of the excellent things they had packed in the caravan for the benefit of the caravanners. Fatty was sighing for the fleshpots of Egypt, and he was ready for almost anything to recover the spoils of war.

Figgins led the chase with undiminished determination. Exactly what Figgins intended to do the Co. did not know, for it was hardly feasible to attack seven with a force of three. Figgy had said something vaguely about a night attack, and with that the Co. had to be satisfied.

Now they were watching the sleeping camp from a clump of bushes within twenty yards of the dying camp-fire.

It was half-past ten now, and the caravanners had long been in bed, and were undoubtedly fast asleep.

The Co. waited for instructions. They could not quite see the use of a night attack themselves. For the caravanners would certainly wake up as soon as they were attacked, and then the odds of seven to three would be irresistible. But Figgins was the leader, and the Co. followed the great Figgins loyally.

"They're all fast asleep," whispered Figgins.

"Looks like it!"

"Then now's our chance."

"But," murmured Kerr, "when they wake up they'll down us, Figgy. They're more than two to one, you know."

"It's all right," murmured Fatty Wynn. "I know what Figgy's thinking of. We are to make a sudden rush and capture the grub, and be off with it before they can tackle us. It's a jolly good idea, Figgy."

"Oh, is it?" growled Figgins.

"H'm! Isn't that the idea, then?"

"No, it isn't!"

"But the grub—"

"Hang the grub!"

"I know I'm hungry," said Fatty Wynn plaintively. "I've had nothing to eat since we started, excepting a few sausages and a pie and some bread and cheese and a cake and—"

"Shut up! Look here," whispered Figgins. "They're all asleep. I've been spotting all their arrangements, and we can work this all right."

"There's the dog," said Kerr. "If they haven't left anybody on the watch, it's because they rely on that blessed bulldog."

Figgins chuckled softly.

"Exactly! Towser would keep guard all right against strangers; but he knows us. He won't give the alarm on our account. I'm jolly good friends with Towser. He won't even blink if I go into the camp. And they're all asleep in the van or in the annex, and they won't hear me; I shall take good care of that. You fellows stay here—"

"Here!" ejaculated Kerr.

"Shush! I'm going alone!"

"But I say, Figgy!" murmured Fatty Wynn. "You won't be able to carry much of the grub alone. It's as much as the three of us could do—"

"Will you shut up, you gormandising cannibal?" said Figgins, in a ferocious whisper. "I'm not going to capture any grub. Bust the grub! I'm going to steal the horse."

"The—the—the horse!"

"Yes, fathead!"

"Bb-b-but we can't eat the horse."

"Shurrup! Don't you see?" muttered Figgins. "They're miles from anywhere on this common. It would take them pretty nearly all to-morrow to find a new horse from somewhere. What good is a caravan without a geegee? They can't pull it along themselves. If they have the van, and we have the horse, it's honours divided. They can't go caravanning without a horse—"

"Can we go horsing without a caravan?" murmured Kerr.

Figgins frowned.

"Don't be funny. We shall have them nicely, when we've got hold of their geegee. We shall clear off with it, and when they wake up in the morning they'll find it clean gone. Then we can make terms with the bounders."

"But—"

"Nuff said!" said Figgins. "You chaps stay here, and I'm going to try my luck as a horse-thief. I think I can keep Towser quiet. Don't say a word."

Figgins crept away as he finished speaking. Kerr and Wynn remained in cover in the bushes, looking anxiously towards the caravan camp. Exactly what terms Figgins intended to make with the caravanners they could not guess; but evidently it all depended on the possession of the horse. Certainly without that valuable animal the caravan would not be of much use to the caravanners. At least, the New House

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chums would be able to "muck up" the trip, as their own trip had been mucked up. That was something!

Figgins crept cautiously towards the sleeping camp. Dimly, in the starlight and the faint glow of a few red embers, the caravan and the annex loomed in view. The horse, with a long tether, was lying in the grass close by the wheels of the caravan. There was a rustle in the grass, and two bright eyes gleamed upon Figgins. He started for a moment, but recovered himself instantly.

"Towser!" he whispered. "Towsy, old boy! Good old Towsy! You know your old pals, don't you, Towsy?"

Figgins, who was fond of animals and always kind to them, was on friendly terms with Herries' bulldog. It was fortunate for his plans at this moment. Towser rubbed his big nose against Figgins's leg, and the junior stroked him gently, and Towser lay down again quite contented. Figgins chuckled softly. From the annex of the caravan came a sound of deep and regular breathing.

Figgins stooped and cut the tether with his pocket-knife, and pulled upon the horse gently. The animal rose, and the amateur horse-thief led it away into the darkness. The hoo! made hardly a sound in the thick grass.

In a few minutes, Figgins reached the bushes where his chums were concealed.

"What price this?" he murmured.

"Good egg!"

"You—you didn't manage to get any of the grub, Figgy?"

"Br-r-r-r-r!"

"I say, I think I'll have a cut at it," whispered Fatty Wynn. "I could make a sudden rush, you know, and—and—"

Leggo my collar, Figgy!"

"You'll make a sudden rush along with me, my son," said Figgins grimly. "We're going to clear off now. Never mind the grub. We've got to get this geegee to a safe distance before any of those bounders wake up. Come on!"

"Yes; but—"

"Come on, you fat cannibal!"

Fatty Wynn sighed and gave in. With cautious tread, Figgins & Co. vanished into the darkness, Figgins leading the captured horse. And in the camp of the caravanners seven juniors continued to sleep peacefully—dreaming of many things, but never dreaming for a moment that the enemy had been within the gates.

CHAPTER 14.

Honours Easy.

TOM MERRY awoke, and yawned.

The sun was streaming down upon the wide moorland, and it glimmered into the interstices of the annex attached to the caravan. Tom Merry left his blankets, and looked at his watch.

"Half-past seven!" he exclaimed. "We're late! Up with you, you fellows! No slacking allowed in this caravan!"

Arthur Augustus yawned portentously.

"Bai Jove! I'm sleepay! Pewwaps anothah half-hour, deah boy—Ow—ow! Leggo my hair, you wottah! Can't you see I'm gettin' up?"

And the chums of the School House turned out. Merrily the morning sunshine was streaming down upon the wide common.

In all directions the wild moorland stretched for miles. Across it ran the road to the south and the sea. Tom Merry drew in a deep breath of the keen fresh air.

"Oh, this is ripping!" he exclaimed.

"Yaas, wathah!" Arthur Augustus looked round with his famous eyeglass. "I pwesume we can venchah to bathe in the steam, deah boys. There does not appeah to be anyone in sight."

Herries patted Towser's head, as the bulldog came up to greet him.

"Well, and hasn't old Towser kept watch all right?" said Herries. "Shouldn't wonder if half a dozen tramps have been round here during the night. Good old Towser!"

"Hallo!" exclaimed Tom Merry suddenly.

"What's the row?"

"The horse!"

"Eh?"

"Where's the horse?"

"My hat!"

"Gweat Scott! The geegee's gone!"

There was a chorus of dismayed exclamations. The juniors rushed to the spot where the horse had been tethered. Most of the rope was there, but the horse was conspicuous by its absence. The juniors gazed at the vacant spot in utter dismay. There was the visible sign where the horse had pressed the grass over-night in slumber. But the animal had vanished now.

Tom Merry swept the common anxiously with his eyes, under the impression that the horse had wandered away, and might be grazing in sight. But the animal was not to be

seen. Unless he was hidden from view by the bushes in the distance, he was not upon the wide common at all.

"Well, what rotten luck!" growled Monty Lowther. "I must say you might have tied him up safely over-night."

"He was tied up safely!" exclaimed Blake. "I looked carefully at the rope."

"Then he's untied himself," said Lowther sarcastically. "I've read a lot about the intelligence of horses, but I never read of one that could untie a rope. Must have been a very unusually clever beast!"

"Oh, rats! I tell you——"

"The rope's been cut," said Digby, lifting the loose end.

"Look here!"

"Phew!"

"Bai Jove!"

"Cut!" shouted Tom Merry.

"Well, look at it!"

Tom Merry took the end of the rope. There was not the slightest doubt that it had been cut. The clean cut of the knife was only too plain.

"Stolen!" said Blake.

"Yaas, wathah! We ought to have kept watch aftah all, deah boys. Some feahful wottah has been here and stolen our horse."

"Oh, crumbs!"

Utter dismay fell upon the juniors. They were stranded miles from everywhere—with a caravan and without a horse to pull it. It was a tremendous blow.

"Can't have been stolen," said Herries, with a shake of the head. "Must have jerked the rope and broken it somehow. Can't have been cut."

"It was cut, ass—look at it!"

"Impossible! Couldn't have been cut without somebody cutting it, I suppose? And nobody has been here in the night. Towser would have given the alarm."

"Towser!" snorted Blake. "Towser! The silly brute! About as good for keeping watch as a stuffed monkey. Towser! The silly idiot's been asleep, and let the horse be stolen under his silly nose."

"Rot!"

"Well, it's been stolen," said Tom Merry. "And the question is, what are we going to do? We must get it back somehow. I suppose we can follow the tracks; but it may have been done hours ago."

"May be sold by this time!" groaned Lowther.

"Bai Jove! It's quite poss! Follow the twacks, deah boys!"

It was easy enough to follow the tracks in the grass for the juniors, who had learned tracking as Boy Scouts. They followed the tracks for a couple of hundred yards, and were led to the high-road. There, on the hard high-road, the track ceased. Evidently the stolen horse had been taken along the road, but to follow the track further was impossible.

The caravanners returned disconsolately to the camp. They were stranded.

There was no doubt whatever about that. They had a caravan on their hands; but, as they could not move it from the spot, it was not of much use to them. And if the horse was not recovered, they had the prospect of having to pay Mr. Hooker for it, and the horse was worth quite a large sum. It was a heavy misfortune.

"Well, it's no good crying over spilt milk," said Tom Merry, with enforced cheerfulness. "We shall have to walk to a village somewhere, and see if we can hire a horse, anyway, to drag the van as far as a railway station!"

"Nice way to spend the day!" growled Blake.

"Yaas; we weally ought to have kept watch. We'll keep watch next time——"

"Yes; let's lock the stable door after the horse is stolen," said Monty Lowther, with doleful humour. "Stick to custom!"

"That wotten bulldog ought to be bwained!"

"It would be some comfort to drown Towser," said Blake ferociously. "Let's pay Herries his value—tuppence—and drown him!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

A suggestion to which Herries replied at great length, and in a very uncomplimentary strain. Herries still held that the horse could not possibly have been stolen, or Towser would have given the alarm. Nothing could possibly alter Herries' fixed opinion on that point.

"Well, we'd better have brekker, anyway," said Tom Merry. "We'll see what we can do after that!"

"Plenty of time for washing-up, anyway, if we're done caravanning!" groaned Blake.

"Oh, it's wotten—weally wotten!"

The juniors relighted the camp-fire, and cheered up a little under the influence of tea and hot rashers and eggs. They were just beginning breakfast, when Blake gave a sudden yell. Three boyish forms had appeared from a clump of bushes at a distance; but, distant as they were, they were easily recognisable.

"Figgins & Co.!" yelled Blake.

"Bai Jove! The New House boundahs!"

"They've collared our horse!" roared Tom Merry, a flood of light breaking upon his mind at once.

"My hat!"

The three New House juniors were advancing towards the camp, with smiling faces. Each of them held a stick aloft, and to each of the sticks floated a more or less white handkerchief. The colour of the handkerchiefs might be a little doubtful, but there was no doubt as to what they represented—flags of truce.

Tom Merry & Co. were on their feet at once. They were astonished to see Figgins & Co. there—and glad, too! For it was a great relief to discover that the loss of the horse was only a jape, and that its recovery was possible.

"Good-morning!" said Figgins politely, as he walked up to the camp.

"Good-morning!" smiled Kerr.

"Good-morning!" chortled Fatty Wynn.

Tom Merry & Co. glared at them. But for the white flags, the New House trio would have been seized and bumped hard on the spot. But the caravanners were in honour bound to respect the flag of truce.

"Good-morning, you rotters!" growled Tom Merry.

"Good-mornin', you beastly boundahs!"

"Flag of truce?" said Figgins. "We've come for a little talk!"

"You've collared our horse?"

Figgins smiled.

"Have you missed a horse?" he asked pleasantly.

"You know we have, you spoofer!"

"It's an odd coincidence," said Figgins blandly, "because we've got a horse to dispose of, you know!"

"It's our horse, you wottah!"

"I say, you might ask a chap if he's hungry," said Fatty Wynn, eyeing the eggs and bacon with a ravenous eye.

Tom Merry burst into a laugh.

"You've done us this time, Figgy. Sit down to brekker!"

"But where's our horse?" demanded Blake. "We're jolly well going to have our horse back!"

Figgins grinned.

"I'm going to make a proposition to you," he explained. "We started out caravanning, and so did you. Both of us have—ahem!—made rather a muck of it so far. Now, you've got a horseless caravan, and we've got a caravanless horse, at a good distance from here, I may observe, and in a safe place, where you couldn't find it in a month of Sundays. Now, my idea is to strike a bargain!"

"What sort of a bargain?" asked Tom Merry suspiciously.

"We've got a horse, and you've got a caravan," said Figgins. "Let's combine resources, and go it together. We're willing to bury the hatchet if you are. We've stood our whack of the supplies, and we'll stand our whack in paying the exes of the caravan. That's a fair offer. And you'll enjoy the trip ever so much better with three nice fellows like us along with you, to show you how the thing should be done!"

"Wats! But it's weally a good ideah. I do not object!"

Tom Merry laughed.

"It's a go, Figgy. No reason why we shouldn't have a jolly time together. And there's plenty of room in the annex, if not in the van. It's a go!"

"The hatchet is buried!" said Monty Lowther solemnly.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Good egg!" said Kerr, grinning. "With your van and our horse, we shall be able to get along all right!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I say, these rashers are ripping!" said Fatty Wynn, who had started already. "Try 'em, Figgy, old man!"

"Pile in!" said Tom Merry.

And the deadly rivals of St. Jim's joined one another round the camp-fire on the best of terms. The rival caravanners had buried the hatchet, and during the caravan trip, at all events, School House and New House were shoulder to shoulder.

And after breakfast Figgins & Co. hurried away for the horse, which was concealed in a hollow at some distance, the School House juniors washing up while they were gone. The horse was harnessed, and the caravan pulled out into the road, and the schoolboy caravanners started on their route once more.

In the bright morning sunshine ten merry juniors tramped along with the caravan with smiling and contented faces. The hatchet was buried deep. And in all the smiling countryside, the sun did not shine upon a merrier party than the Schoolboy Caravanners!

THE END.

(Another Splendid, Long, Complete Tale of the Chums of St. Jim's next Wednesday, entitled "THE HOUSEMASTER'S BODYGUARD!" By Martin Clifford. Order early. Price One Penny.)

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NEXT WEDNESDAY—**"THE HOUSE-MASTER'S BODYGUARD!"** A Magnificent New, Long, Complete School Tale of Tom Merry & Co. By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

ST. JIM'S JINGLES.**No. 12.—ERIC KILDARE.**

The shining star of all the school
Is good and genial Eric,
Whose influence to reign and rule
Is mighty and mesmeric.
A thorough sportsman—fair and free—
He makes a splendid skipper;
And boys and "beaks" alike agree
That Kildare is a "ripper"!

His winning ways and sunny smiles
Have oftentimes succeeded
In lifting others over stiles
When help was sorely needed.
And many, by misfortune wrecked,
Their own depression wrapt in,
Have learned to honour and respect
Their sympathetic captain.

"Uneasy lies the kingly head,"
Was Shakespeare's sad admission;
And Kildare stands in daily dread
Of losing his position.
For others in the Sixth enrolled,
Who shine in skill and knowledge,
Would give a wealth of good red gold
To rule the famous college.

Monteith was one who tried the most,
And oft his brain was teeming
With ways and means to get the post
Of which he'd long been dreaming.
His prospects for a while were bright,
Till Fate's mysterious finger
Brought all his cunning schemes to light.
And not a hope did linger.

In summer-time the skipper turns
His thoughts to other channels,
For then his manly bosom burns
To garb himself in flannels.
In healthy sport he soon forgets
Each former care and worry,
And, posing proudly at the nets,
He smites like Hobbs of Surrey.

To coach his team he always strives
With patience and precision;
While all his daisy-cutting drives
Are pleasing to the vision.
And when his side seems doomed and done
No foolish fear attacks him;
"A game's not lost until it's won"
Is Eric's sporting maxim.

Here's health to him! May nothing mar
His glorious reputation!
Young England views him from afar
With pride and admiration.
Long may he stand for what is good,
Abhor the mean and brutal,
And play the game, as sportsmen should,
Until the final "tootle."

**"THE GEM" LIBRARY FREE
CORRESPONDENCE EXCHANGE.**

The only names and addresses which can be printed in these columns are those of readers living in any of our Colonies who desire Correspondents in Great Britain and Ireland.

Colonists sending in their names and addresses for insertion in the columns of this popular story-book must state what kind of correspondent is required—boy or girl; English, Scotch, Welsh, or Irish.

Would-be correspondents must send with each notice two coupons, one taken from "The Gem," and one from the same week's issue of its companion paper, "The Magnet" Library. Coupons will always be found on page 2 of both papers, and requests for correspondents not containing these two coupons will be absolutely disregarded.

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The Editor specially requests Colonial Readers to kindly bring the Free Correspondence Exchange to the notice of their friends.

OUR GRAND NEW WAR SERIAL.



READ THIS FIRST.

Paul Satorys, formerly a nobleman in the State of Istan, is the principal witness against a clever criminal named Jem Stanton, and upon his evidence Stanton is sent to prison. Later he manages to escape, and, coming across Paul Satorys, who is out for a walk with his fiancée, Grace Lang, follows them until they separate, and then attacks Satorys. Taken by surprise, Satorys is overpowered, and Stanton changes clothes. In Paul's clothes, the escaped convict finds papers relating to State affairs in Istan, and learns that Paul, being the rightful heir to the throne, is going to push forward his claim. Being the exact double of Satorys, Stanton has no difficulty in securing the throne of Istan. It is some time before Paul can prove his identity to the police in England, and by the time he reaches Istan he finds Stanton firmly established on the throne. Grace discovers the deception, but is helpless. Having once captured Satorys, Stanton uses him as a weapon to induce Grace to marry him, stating that unless she complies, he will kill Paul. Lara, a priest, hears of this, and persuades her to marry Stanton, giving her a powder to take immediately after the ceremony. This is done, and the powder brings on a state of coma, and all believe her dead. On the way to the temple the priests are attacked by a tribe of natives, who are amazed by the beauty of the girl. They make her their queen, and events move quickly. Satorys, in company with a faithful old sailor, Peter Mardyke, and a gentleman of his own class, Duvigny, escape from Stanton's clutches, only to fall into the hands of the very natives who captured Grace Lang. They are brought before her, but as her face is hidden by a thin gauze, they do not recognise her, and Paul is astounded at her knowledge of his private affairs. She is known as Nada, and offers to help him in getting back his throne, an offer which Satorys gratefully accepts. The troops are called up, and Paul reviews them. They are a wonderfully efficient body of men, and Paul is more hopeful. "We will carry our banner into Istan City, and prove we are masters of the land!" he says, amidst tumultuous cheers.

(Now go on with the story.)

The Advance.

A few minutes later an order rang out, which resulted in the leading column moving forward amidst the crash of music. Regiment after regiment swept past Satorys and his staff. Orderlies stood with horses ready for the leaders to mount. Peter moved slowly towards where Satorys was standing.

The latter saw him and called to him.

"You will ride with me, Peter," he said.

The sailor shifted the little bundle he was carrying.

"If you say so, sir," he said, "I will; but it doesn't matter to me where I get to. I am all right anywhere. For I have taken the liberty to bring away that fiddle, and I have a bit of food and a twist of tobacco. That's as much as I shall want."

"What do you think of them, Peter?" said Satorys, as the seemingly everlasting line of men swung past.

A Bid for a Throne.

A Thrilling Tale of Adventure and International Intrigue.

By CLIVE R. FENN.

"All right, I suppose," said the sailor, "but I would sooner they were sailors. Sailors do the work, and make no fuss about it. These chaps are big as houses, and I am not the man to say they can't fight, but I never did believe much in show, Mister Satorys. I hope you have a nice edge on your sword—that's the most important thing. Between you and me and that big nutcracker chap there," he went on, indicating the massive figure of Raya, "I don't like this business."

"You confounded old croaker!" cried Satorys, laughing.

He turned away to speak to one of the officers, and Peter was alone, for Anton Duvigny was engaged in the work of preparing for the departure.

"Yes, it is all very fine," said the sailor meditatively, as he placed a plug of tobacco in his mouth; "but some of these chaps don't know what they are in for, bless me if they don't! Very pretty to look at and all that, but let them just wait a bit, that's all!"

The sight was impressive to a degree. Certain it was that the armed resistance which had come to Satorys so suddenly and dramatically was no mere shadowy thing. The force which marched past its new leader looked capable of anything, leave alone cutting a way to the crown for the rightful king.

"I wonder," muttered Peter, "what he would say if he knew what I know? No; that's wrong. For I don't know it, I am only thinking it, and Mister Satorys can't know it, because I have given my word not to say a word about what she said to me. Bah! it's like playing the fool; but I suppose I had better stick to it now I am in for it all, and maybe I shall be wanted yet."

Satorys had mounted the charger which was brought for him, and he found time to make a sign to his faithful follower to do the same. Peter swung himself into the saddle of the horse provided for him, and rode slowly in the wake of Satorys, and as he rode he shook his head. Perhaps it was partly the effect of the motion of his mount, but, as Satorys turned and addressed a word to him, the sailor shook his head again.

"Don't do it!"

"Do what, sir?"

"Shake your head. It might come off," said Satorys cheerily.

"I must, sir," said the sailor oracularly. "You see, I am thinking of what lies before us all."

There was cheering now on all sides. The people ran alongside the troops, waving flags and shouting. There was a burst of music, and the never ending line streamed on out of the city towards the vast wilderness which separated the up-country city from the region nominally governed by the man who had usurped Satorys' rights.

For himself Satorys maybe cared but little; but he lived, took a new grip on life after the disasters which had assailed him, out of sheer strength of character, and the keen sense that there was duty to be done.

The scoundrel Stanton was a menace not alone to the happiness of Istan, but to the world; and as the troops left the city and the march for the coast began in grim earnest—

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"THE HOUSE-MASTER'S BODYGUARD!"

A Magnificent New, Long, Complete School Tale of Tom Merry & Co. By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

NEXT
WEDNESDAY—

the line extending over a couple of miles of country—Satorys felt assured of triumph, and he was glad, not alone for the land he loved, or for himself, but also because of the great lady who had come so nobly to his aid.

Satorys dispensed with all parade and show. For the time being he was a soldier. He forgot his former life—the life of retirement in London—and as the army advanced, its leader lived the same life as the men under him, and every day his popularity increased.

"I would not give much for the chances of old Bun-face when we get near him, sir," said Peter one night, as, according to custom, and the wish of Satorys, the sailor visited the chief in his tent. "These black chaps seem to think you are a sort of a god, and they would go through fire and water for you—not as that would make much difference, or do any good. Chaps always talk that kind of tosh, and it is pretty rank. Of course, it stands to reason that if you go through a fire you will need to drop into the water afterwards to put it out."

Anton Duvigny was present in the tent, which was pitched on the side of the hill where the main body had encamped; but Anton paid little heed to the sailor's chatter, being too accustomed to it, and, moreover, he was busy over a map.

Satorys leaned back against a box which had served as a table.

"You are a positive wonder, Peter," he said. "It surprises me all your knowledge doesn't keep you awake of nights."

"Now you are getting at me, sir, and I don't like it. Very little pleases me, I know; and, of course, there are times when I feel sorry to get what is yours. For, if you take me, sir, every man in this world ought to have his rights, and no questions asked, but they don't, and that's the worst of it. We have to go bothering about after things we need, and then most likely don't get them. As for me now, take my case; I want a bit of 'bacco mighty bad, and—"

"Why didn't you say so before, Peter? Here you are!"

"Thank you kindly, sir." The sailor drew out his pipe and lit it. "There are plenty of foolish-looking things in the world, but, believe me, there is nothing quite so bad as a pipe without anything to put in it."

Peter puffed out a cloud of smoke, which hung in the tent like a miniature cloud. From outside came the murmur of the forest and the musical splash of a cascade.

"It's this way, sir," the sailor went on. "I am always thinking that I ought to do more for you."

"That's ridiculous nonsense, Peter, my man. Why, you have been my shadow ever since we started, three days ago."

"And a fat lot of use a shadow would be if it came to a row, sir. Why, a shadow is no good. You can sit on it, snuff it out, and there is folks, sir, who want you to be very safe."

Peter screwed up one eye and gazed thoughtfully at Satorys.

The latter smiled. Anton rose from his camp-stool, folded up the map he had been glued to for the past hour, and moved to the door of the tent.

"I am going to turn in," he said. "Good-night!"

"Good-night!" said Satorys lazily.

The day had been an arduous one, the march one of the longest yet; but as Peter went on to speak of what lay ahead, Satorys could not find it in him to dismiss his faithful followers.

"What beats me," said the sailor, "is the way these black fellows go on. They might be white, so far as that goes, and though I know two blacks don't make one white, and never will, any more than a summer will make a swallow—it's something like that, but it doesn't signify—yet you might think that colour made no difference at all."

"I don't fancy it does," said Satorys.

"But where I come from, sir, people always used to make fun of the blacks. Maybe it was because the black fellows dressed up so extraordinarily. There, I will be off to my duty."

Peter was at the entrance of the tent, his piece over his shoulder. He had stuck out on one point. It was he who, night after night, insisted on mounting guard over the place where Satorys rested, and the leader had had to give way.

But that night Satorys protested once more.

"You should let the guard take on the work, Peter," he said.

"Not if I know it, sir. You see, I promised."

"You promised? Promised whom?"

Peter gave a start.

"Just myself, sir. I took myself aside, and said out plain and straight, same as people ought to talk, 'You are going to keep watch over the master every night, because one can't be too careful, and one never knows.' That's how the situation is, sir, and this indiaviddle is satisfied if you are; and as for being sleepy in the day—bah!—that ain't nothing at all. I can shut my eyes for five minutes and get all the sleep I want, for it isn't quantity what folks need, but paying attention to it when they are asleep."

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The sailor passed out of the tent, and Satorys threw himself down on the skin rug with which the tent was furnished. He slept, and then woke with a start. The side of the tent flapped in the wind. No; it could not be the wind. Satorys drew himself up without making a sound. On the far side of the tent there was a rustling sound, and as he watched Satorys made out a snaky arm glide through the darkness, followed by the head and shoulders of a man.

The next moment Satorys saw the intruder raise himself, and there was the flash of a knife as the weapon descended, and had it done its work the fate of Istan would have been sealed; but Satorys sprang forward, gripping the assassin by the throat and bearing him back.

Peter dashed into the tent, to see his master struggling with the stranger, and as the sailor tried to seize the assailant the two men swayed out of the tent into the open, where the ground fell away steeply to the river below.

Satorys fell back as the pressure on his arms was removed. He was looking at Peter. The other had fallen into the ravine.

"You are not hurt, sir?"

"No, no!"

"I shall never forgive myself for this!" cried the sailor.

There was a grunt from Satorys, who was gazing into the darkness.

"Not your fault. We have been too secure, but there's no harm done."

Followed by Peter, Satorys began to climb down the rocky slope. Twenty feet below them they found the victim of the fall lying across a jagged rock.

"He's dying," said Peter, "and he wants to speak to us. The miserable scallywag!"

Satorys made the sailor a sign to be silent. The injured man tried to struggle up.

"Listen!" he said hoarsely. "I can see you are the real king, but I was sent to kill you; and I know you are the true king, for I was not allowed to succeed."

"You come from Istan?" said Satorys.

"Yes; the word has gone. There is an army coming to sweep you away. I am sorry—" The man waved back the flask Satorys was holding to his lips, gave a deep sigh, and sank back to lie there dead.

"And I was supposed to be on guard!" growled Peter.

"No; I shall never forgive myself for this night's work."

"Polla!"

"Well, if I had got a face like that there, sir," said Peter, as he rested his arms on the barrel of his piece, and looked at the weird-looking object who stood back amidst the trees, "I think I'd stop at home, just out of charity to my fellow-creatures."

"The brave fellow can't help his face, Peter," said Satorys as he stooped and examined the body of one of the huge snakes with which the land abounded. "If he had not nipped in and divided this reptile as he did, there would have been an end of me."

Days had passed since the attempt on Satorys' life by a nocturnal assassin. The march had been continued, and the leaders had one and all scouted the likelihood of there being any formidable resistance until Istan City was reached, and the sense of security had been so deep that Satorys had left the camp to enjoy a day's sport with Anton, Peter, and a few of the men.

Peter gave a snort as the weird individual who had suddenly sprung out of the thicket and killed the big snake came slowly forward. Satorys went to meet him with hand extended.

"Very much obliged to you," he said.

The man began to talk excitedly.

"You not make me prisoner?" he cried.

"Most decidedly not!" said Satorys. "I am very grateful to you."

"It's an accident, sir—that's what it is!" snarled Peter.

"Look at his nose, scattered all over his physiognomy. Why, he isn't fit to be seen in decent company. I don't say as he isn't pretty nippy with that long blade of his, but what call had he to be following of us? This isn't his road home, I'll be bound. Don't you talk to him, sir; I have asked you not to before."

Anton gave a laugh. Satorys advanced amidst his black followers, and the man who had leaped from nobody knew where, and slashed the serpent just as it was about to drop from a tree on to the leader, backed away, a look of abject fear on his misshapen visage.

He was a half-breed, and was obviously scared by the attentions of Satorys; but as he made a feint to glide away into the depths of the jungle, Peter dashed forward and grasped his bare arm.

"None of that, mister, if you please," he said. "I don't like the look of you, and you are no friend of mine; but if the chief wants to have a chat with you just because you are

so handsome—well, you can make up your mind to it. We aren't going to eat you, or stew you down for soup!"

The savage-looking man glanced at Peter out of his gleaming eyes, nearly hidden under bushy eyebrows, and then started jabbering in a strange patois, words of English occurring now and then.

"Afraid!" he said. "Afraid!"

"And I don't wonder at it!" cried Peter. "Are you mother's joy, or merely looking for trouble? There, don't wriggle."

Satorys was taking stock of the stranger. The latter was calming down now that he realised no harm was intended to him.

"Why, he's half starved, Peter!" said Satorys. "Here, just give him something to eat!"

"It's wasting good food on a chap like him!" growled Peter, as he obeyed the order.

The wild-looking fellow grabbed at the bread and meat Peter handed to him from his well-filled wallet, and began to devour the food voraciously. While he ate he gazed quickly from one to the other, and the group of black soldiers next held his attention as they stood gazing stolidly on.

"Come, come! The poor fellow can't help his name!" said Satorys, as he clapped his hand on the shoulder of the man who had come so providentially to his aid. "Very much obliged to you, Polla!" he said again.

"Polla!" cried Peter. "Who ever heard of a man walking through the world with a name like that? Just fancy when he was given it! Well, I suppose it doesn't run to visiting-cards with him, so he need not have to print it or use it on his cheques."

"You are precious hard on him!" said Anton.

As he spoke he raised his gun to examine the breech. This action caused the stranger to give a wild cry, and the next moment he was dashing for the sanctuary of the forest, to be speedily lost to view.

"Poor fellow!" said Satorys. "You frightened him, Anton, and we sha'n't see him again."

"I hope not, sir," said Peter. "One has to put up with no end of things one doesn't like in this world, but at least one ought to be spared the sight of things like that. We couldn't have done anything with it, except lead it home on a string and ask the gentleman at the Zoo to give it a home."

Satorys had swung round, and was tramping on by the



There was a rustling sound on the far side of the tent, and as he watched Satorys made out a snaky arm glide through the darkness towards him, followed by the head and shoulders of a man. (See Page 24.)

"You've taken on a nice thing, I must say, sir," said Peter, as, the food finished, the stranger dashed towards Satorys and threw himself down prone at the leader's feet, placing one hand on the high boot Satorys wore. "I believe he is grateful to you now, and we shall have him bothering us with his monkey tricks all the time, if we are not precious careful."

"Poor fellow!" said Satorys, as he looked down at the prostrate wanderer.

The man looked up.

"You, the master!" he said quickly. Then he glanced at Peter. "I come from far, live alone, nobody else."

"Oh, yes, he's the master right enough!" said Peter. "And now you sling it! Buzz off! We've done with you. Hop it—quick!"

Satorys waved his over-zealous follower aside.

"Here, what's your name?" he asked.

The man rose to his feet, and shifted the loose skin he wore across his body.

"Name?" he repeated.

"Well, you heard!" said Peter.

"Polla," said the man.

"And a pretty rotten name, too!" chimed in the sailor.

side of Anton, and Peter followed in their track, grumbling all the time about nightmares and ugly things. He missed some of the wondrous beauties of the forest, but ere the camp was reached the sailor had done his part in making up a useful bag for the mess, numbers of the vividly-plumaged birds the size of pigeons being brought down, as well as a couple of animals resembling pigs.

The following day the march was resumed, the men seeming unaffected by the tropical heat, and at night the camp of the headquarters detachment was pitched once more amidst the hills.

Peter was driven back on himself for company for a considerable part of the time, for Satorys and Anton seemed to live for their plans, and at night the work of arranging for the operations, which now could not be long delayed, went steadily on, the chiefs seated in the tent, charts and papers before them, and Raya indicating the most favourable route.

Peter was standing by the fire, and he kicked a piece of wood into the heart of the flame, when suddenly he saw, squatted in the shadow on the other side of the flame, a quaint, dumpy figure. It was not one of the outer ring of sentries; that much was plain.

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A Magnificent New, Long, Complete School Tale of Tom Merry & Co. By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

NEXT
WEDNESDAY—

"THE HOUSE-MASTER'S BODYGUARD!"

Peter strode round, and his heavy hand came down on the shoulder of the unwanted guest.

"Here, I say!" he cried. "None of that, if you please! Well, of all the cheek!"

He was gazing into the flat and hairy face of the unbeautiful Polla—Polla, who rubbed his hands together and began chattering to him.

"Polla follow," came quietly.

"Indeed? Strikes me Polla will holler if he doesn't take himself off. I never learned Latin, but I know a bit, and that bit is 'carpe diem,' and you will be like the carp in another brace of shakes, young fellow, if you don't clear. You get back to your branch, and be mighty quick about it! There aren't any more snakes for you to play snicker-snee with, so you get!"

It was abundantly obvious that Polla did not understand Latin, and was not in the least interested in the fate of the shining carp.

"Polla follow," he said again contentedly, as he smiled up into the sailor's angry face. "Polla follow all the time. Polla work for the gentleman and for Peter. Polla very good."

"You'll drive me mad in another minute!" said Peter savagely. "Don't you be so ready with my name. And let me tell you that you are not going to follow us. I wouldn't trust you round the corner with a sixpence, unless it was a bad one."

As he spoke the sailor glanced at the tent, to see his master bent over a paper which he and the others were studying attentively.

"Polla follow," said the strange visitor once more.

"If you say that again I shall break your ugly head, and you will have to close your sinful face for alteration and repairs."

There was a smile and a nod from Polla, who stretched out his hands to the fire, as if he were glad of the warmth, though the night was sultry in the extreme.

"Polla follow," he said again, as though he fancied the other had been paying him pretty compliments. "Polla good man, and he work for the gentlemen."

Peter advanced upon him with his fist clenched.

"There is going to be a sudden disappearance of a miserable black imposition!" he said fiercely. "Mind you, you have brought it on yourself. We aren't playing at a cinema now. This is real and in earnest, and there is going to be a terrible accident. I don't suppose you have got a lot of aunts and cousins and mothers and such like people to be anxious about you if you don't get back home to your tea and kipper. Anyway, you won't be seen any more, and I reckon that I shall be doing the world a good turn."

Polla was listening eagerly to the sailor's words, his eyes and white teeth glistening in the rays of the fire. From some distance away came the sound of orders being given, and then, sounding clear, the blast of a bugle.

"The wretched heathen!" muttered Peter. "Thinking just because I gave him a bit of grub that I was going to take him on as a bottle-washer or something, I suppose. Well, it will be only one less. I know he is up to no good. If he were what he makes out himself to be, he would never have been following us, as he must have been to have chipped in as he did the moment that crawly item tried to give trouble!"

He caught Polla by the arm, and jerked him to his feet, holding the man before him helpless.

"Now, see here, Polla, I can put up with a good idea, and I have been in places where they take any boodle you may happen to have while you are enjoying forty winks; but there are limits, as the man said when fourteen hungry relatives came to stay for a month. You think you are coming along with us, and I say you are not, so there's an end to it. There's not going to be a medal for you, and you are not going to live on our cheap teas and ninepenny lunches. You can go and boil your own pot, or eat it raw. You see, I am very particular about the company I keep. There isn't any floor to scrub; and if there was one, we shouldn't want a flaw like you to do the job. So out you go!"

As he spoke Peter gave the native a thrust. Polla only smiled, and as he was released from the firm grip of the sailor's hand he bounded back like a rubber ball.

"Polla very good," he said persuasively.

Peter puffed out his cheeks.

Polla smiled again. Peter advanced threateningly; but the native only retreated a few steps, and then came back to the fire.

"Here, I say, isn't it any use speaking to you?" roared Peter, now in a rage. "You go back home to mother, and you can take my love. We are going to Istan, and you are not fit to be seen in good society!"

"Yes, Istan," said Polla, with a grin.

"Absquatulate!" cried the sailor. "I don't want to tread on you; but, as I said, there will be a terrible accident in a minute, and it won't be my fault!"

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Polla may not have been a student of French history; but, whether he understood the character of the late Marshal MacMahon or not, he was putting into practice the example of the illustrious soldier in that where he stood he intended to remain.

"Like Peter very much," he said softly, as he placed the fire between himself and the man for whom he had so much affection. "Polla do anything!"

"And, from the look of you, you would do anybody as well," said the sailor grimly. "Yes," he went on to himself, "this is a nice kettle of fish! The dirty dog! And if I know anything of the governor, he will be soft-hearted as anything when that black cuss says he is very fond of him. Ah, and if he isn't calling to me!"

There was a hail from the tent, and the next moment Satorys came to the entrance, a cigar between his lips.

The Spy.

"Anything wrong, Peter?" Satorys asked. "Heard you talking?"

"You—you might have done, sir," said the sailor, as he placed himself between Polla the unwanted and Satorys.

The sailor seemed to be regarding the visitor as so much what the printers call "overmatter," to be dealt with later, as the occasion may call for.

"I heard you talking to someone, Peter," said Satorys—"that is, unless you were breaking your usual silence by speaking to yourself!"

It was then that Satorys caught sight of the stranger. Polla, despite his cringing attributes, was evidently not an individual to hide his light under a bushel. He came forward, and the next moment was bowing humbly before the chief.

"Polla come to serve great man," he said, in a supplicating way.

"Oh, have you?" said Satorys, without betraying any enthusiasm.

Peter took a step forward.

"That's just what I have been telling of him, sir. I hinted to him just now that we could do without his services, but he is that obstinate that he would not take it from me. He's as dull and stupid as an old ram. Just give me the word, sir, and I'll tip him over the side of the rocks there. I am sure he is up to no good, and we may as well be on the safe side."

"Oh, come now," said Satorys, "he hasn't done any harm!"

He looked down at the man who was crouching at his feet, stroking the heavy riding-boots Satorys wore.

"That's his artfulness, sir," said Peter. "He thinks he is on to a soft thing if he comes along of us. I know a chap just the very spit of this varmint, who came to see my old mother down at Wapping; said he was her long-lost brother, who had been away in China for about a hundred years, and, if you will believe me, sir, we was pretty nigh eaten out of house and home before it was found that the chap was no relation at all, except from Adam, and that don't count in civilised communities. He rang for his dinner and his tea, finished my hair-oil, wore out my clothes, and then vamoosed, and we was very near being ruined."

"Well, I don't think Polla will trouble you for any hair-oil, Peter," said Satorys. "There, I haven't the heart to send the poor fellow adrift! He has been following us out of sheer devotion, and we can't drive him off. Look after him, Peter, like a good fellow!"

Peter groaned. He knew Satorys, knew exactly what would happen if his master saw the black; but the order was given, and he had to make the best of a bad job. Polla certainly seemed to be very teachable, very eager to learn, avid of kindness, and intent on reciprocating same; and as the march was continued into the wilderness amidst scarred hills, and through dense forests which were a perfect riot of colour with gorgeous flowers, and many-hued birds, Polla settled down to be the handyman of the central camp.

"I am as eager as you to get to grips, Peter," said Satorys one day.

"Which I hope we may, sir," said Peter. "At present it is just marching on, like that chap called John Brown, what I heard them sing about down at Portsmouth. I am not battle scared or scarred, except the remains of a dig in the chest I got in China some years ago—Hallo! What does Polla want?"

Peter had never been quite reconciled to the stranger; but he had made the best of what he considered a bad job, and his suspicions had died down. He had come, as time went on, to regard the strange being as a sort of harmless joke.

And now here was Polla dashing up to Satorys, and catching him by the arm, pointing as he did so in the direction they were marching.

Satorys had some five hundred men with him, the rest of the force proceeding towards Istan away on the right and left flanks.

"What's wrong, Polla?" said Satorys.

The man was trembling with tense excitement.

"Not that way—not that way!" he cried. "Polla know the way! Polla understand, and it is not safe! A trap that way!"

"My only Oddlestiek!" soliloquised Peter. "What does he think he is talking about?"

Polla went on gesticulating; and Raya, the native commander, strode forward.

"This man says we are walking into a trap," said Satorys, as he gazed at Raya and then at the ravine towards which the force was moving.

"Yes. True, all true," said Polla excitedly. "Polla heard from others. Great army from Istan coming, and they wait down there."

"Then we will go and save them waiting any longer," said Satorys.

Polla caught his arm.

The man was pointing now up the side of the hill, which rose gently away on their left.

"Friend, Polla," he said quietly. "Polla know all, though Mister Peter think Polla one fool. You go up there and take them by surprise. All safe."

Raya tugged at his moustache. He was thinking deeply.

"Perhaps the man is right," he said. "I will send out scouts. I had not imagined there was a force near. My patrols have learned nothing."

A halt was called, but it was not deemed necessary to communicate with the two big wings of the army which were proceeding through easier country miles away.

The scouts brought word of the presence of the enemy where Polla had stated, and as he heard this Satorys realised that those who held the power in Istan must have been well-informed of his movements since his daring escape from the fortress prison months before.

Polla was questioned again, and the man's sincerity was apparent to those who examined him as to his knowledge. How did he know? Word had been carried in ways which were obscure, intelligence which was conveyed by natives passing through the wild country.

"Polla, show the way," he said, as he pointed once more up the hilly side of the route. "Polla know. Polla show how his friends can win."

There was a council of war, and Satorys fell in with the views of Raya—Raya, the imperturbable, who was disposed to trust the man. Orders were issued, and the force moved forward to the ascent of the rocky heights, from which, according to the guide, a path led down which would enable the enemy to be surprised and taken in the rear. The men toiled on through the intense heat, and Satorys, who was behind, stopped time after time, glass in hand, trying to locate the hidden foe.

"Make anything of it?" he said to Raya, as he handed the native commander his glass.

The other looked long and carefully.

"No, sir."

Just then Peter came hurrying back from the front of the column.

"Seen him, sir?" he asked, as he drew his hand across his face, which was shining with the heat.

"Seen whom?" snapped out Satorys.

"Why, old Polla, sir. They are asking for him away there, but nobody has set eyes on him for the last hour, and they want to know what it means."

Raya sprang forward. He met a patrol dashing back from the advance guard.

"We are trapped, sir!" cried the man. "There is no pathway down the other side, only a drop of a thousand feet."

Satorys swung round as from the valley they had quitted came the flash of a rifle-shot, and a bullet hissed through the trees. The party on the height saw the gleam of steel far below.

"Trapped we are, sir," said Raya, as he gave an order, the result of which was a sharp volley aimed low, the shots tearing their way through the brushwood, sending leaves and branches flying, and being replied to by the enemy safely entrenched in the ravine.

"Polla was a spy, sir. I knew it all along," said Peter.

Satorys nodded. He knew it, too, now.

The Istan leaders had displayed great skill in their tactics, and by their manœuvre had imprisoned a part of the advancing army, if only a small part—but the man whose destiny was wrapped up in the fortune of the country was of the number—in a place from which, as Satorys and Raya

now saw only too well, retreat was impossible, and could only lead to a *saufte qui peut*.

Another volley rang out. The entrance to what proved to be a rocky promontory was effectually closed by the enemy's sharpshooters. Satorys dashed on ahead with Anton, and Peter kept close. It was just as the patrol had said. The van was marching straight for the brink of what was really a chasm, while beyond lay the smiling plains.

"If I had that chap here, sir," said Peter, "I'd—" He stopped there, too intent on the action of Satorys, who was gazing over the edge of the rock, to trouble further as to the fate of the infamous Polla if the scoundrel happened to fall into his hands.

There seemed no likelihood of that occurring, for Polla had faded away like a mist of the morning.

Raya ran forward.

"They have surrounded us," he said bitterly. "Why did we ever trust that wretch? Nothing for it now but to fight our way through with the loss of half our men, picked off one by one as they descend. Oh, if we could get them in the open!"

"But you can't," said Satorys. "Look there!"

"I have no need to look, sir!" cried Raya. "There is no egress that way."

He began to rage out anew against his folly in trusting the man who had made himself scarce.

Satorys caught the commander by the arm.

"You are wrong, Raya," he said. "There is an exit this way, and we are not going to lose half our men, or any of them, this journey, not until we get to grips with the foe."

"What do you mean?"

Anton and Peter followed the actions of the chief.

Satorys was pointing to the long, sinuous, tough lianas and other vine-like creepers, and then he gave a gesture to the valley, for at that moment speech was impossible, the air being rent with the crash of the firing behind them.

The reverberation died away.

"That is our way," said Satorys, "and Nature has supplied us with the ropes. They have tried to cut us off, to shut us up here to surrender or be starved, I suppose. Well, it isn't going to be either—not if I know it. We descend to the valley, and find them unprepared on the rear. Let some of your men keep up a show of defence. The others will lower themselves down there."

"It is splendid!" cried Raya.

He was giving orders the next moment, and scores of the fibrous creepers, as strong as hempen rope, were being sliced away. The work went rapidly on, and, with intermittent firing proceeding, the process of letting the men down to terra firma, far below, began.

There was no hesitation, no haste, everything being accomplished without a hitch, and Peter assumed command of the party on the summit, whose duty it was to attend to the work of securing the ropes.

"Now, be careful!" he cried, as his turn came at last to descend. "I'm not a joint of meat—please remember that! And don't swing me round!"

He was down at last, and the firing-party drew back to follow their companions. Satorys was discussing the next move with Raya.

"They have no suspicion as yet," he said. "That would be their idea—to lock us up and force us to submit from hunger and thirst."

Raya nodded. He was pointing with his sword to the defile which led from the ground where they stood to the open country. Then suddenly he lowered his sword and looked serious.

"We will not attack," he said quickly, as though relinquishing a cherished scheme.

"Why?" asked Satorys.

Raya bowed to his leader.

"I know my duty," he said. "Your life is precious to the cause for which we fight, and Nada would never pardon me if I needlessly exposed you to peril."

"The time is now!" he said curtly. "I know enough of war for that. We shall win by the surprise. The enemy imagined that they had a portion of our army in their grasp. They would divide us, and then, after having destroyed this force, they would attack the wings one after the other. No, Raya, we are all comrades here, and we are fighting for our common country. And," he went on, as he took the hand of the native commander, "I am in supreme command—remember that!"

"I can only advise, sir," said Raya, "for I know that you command."

"Then we go forward," said Satorys.

(Another splendid, long instalment of this grand serial next Wednesday. Order in advance.)

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THIS WEEK'S CHAT



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For Next Wednesday.

"THE HOUSEMASTER'S BODYGUARD!"
 By Martin Clifford.

In this grand long, complete tale of the chums of St. Jim's, the juniors discover that Mr. Railton, the popular Housemaster of the Schoolhouse, is threatened with grave peril. Arthur Augustus is first out with the news, and plans with his chums elaborate measures for Mr. Railton's safety. Unfortunately, however, the Housemaster pours cold water on their precious plans, leaving them to think out some fresh one. They are determined to look after him, whether he wishes it or not. A garde-du-corps is finally formed, and goes to work in a businesslike manner. D'Arcy is a little unfortunate in his "shadowing," but Tom Merry & Co. are able to "chip in" in a way that completely justifies the existence of

"THE HOUSEMASTER'S BODYGUARD!"

A ROUSING HOLIDAY SONG.

In response to a reader's request for a real good "holiday song," I have recently run through a number of these which were submitted to me, and I am pleased to say that I have discovered one which is the "real thing." This is the "Camp Song," by Frank Witty, and is published by Messrs. Carey & Co., 13 and 15, Mortimer Street, London, at the price of 1s. This fine song is quite new, and is just the very thing for a holiday or seaside "sing-song," or for amateur pierrots or nigger minstrel parties. It breathes the true holiday spirit all through, and has the most rousing and infectious chorus imaginable. I am told that it is already meeting with great success, which, in my opinion, it thoroughly deserves.

HEROES OF THE LIFEBOAT

We might call them the Secret Legion of Heroes—secret because they and their deeds are unknown beyond the immediate circle of their own friends. Who, for example, knows anything of the old boat Rescue, which did duty for a lifeboat in Gorleston for many years. In those days the gallant men who manned her knew nothing of lifeboat institutions—nothing of launching money and payment. The pluck and endurance of those days, when men put out in all kinds of crazy craft to save life, would require many volumes to do justice to the splendour of their deeds.

The Rescue had such a wonderful record for life saving that many said she had a "charmed life."

Her end came in 1866. On the 13th of January, in a furious gale, a vessel was seen making signals of distress, and drifting hopelessly towards a dangerous ridge of sand that puts its head above water at low tides, some three miles or more out to sea from Gorleston. There was a rush of our fishermen to the boat, and soon she was making her way out of the harbour.

The doomed ship was beginning to break up. The coxswain—a youth, Robert Spilling by name—coolly measured the distance, and knew that before they could arrive at the

wreck the cataract seas would have smashed her to match-wood, and beaten out the lives of those on board. There was a short cut across the north sand-bank outside the harbour. It was just possible that the boat with luck might cross it. Their chances of life and death were uneven, and the odds were for death. But there were men perishing, and it was their only chance of saving them.

In a magnificent and mad effort, they tried to force the Rescue across the shallowing, boiling water. Like a gallant greyhound the tiny craft dashed at the white breakers. She had mastered them many a time.

A silent crowd on the pier watched, with bated breath, the reckless daring of it all. The boat, instinct with life, met the breakers bravely and forged ahead. Then she stopped, shuddered for a brief moment like a stricken man, a sea broke over her in triumph, and when the group of watchers saw her again, it was as a helpless, dangerous wreck, floating keel upwards in the boiling swirl of waters.

A crew of sixteen hands were in the boat at the time. Twelve were never seen again. One man, Robert Warner, a big, strong man, struck out for the shore, reached it, and died from exhaustion. Three were picked up by another boat. Some thirty-seven children and mothers were left without their breadwinners.

What a host of names each town and village could supply if all were known of the heroism of daily life! The deeds done daily in our midst at our own doors! Among the cottage homes of the poor is a host of names of those whose deeds will compare with the most brilliant periods of Greek or Roman history. The battlefield, and the cricket and football fields do not possess a monopoly of heroes or heroism.

Eager for the Fray.

Another boat succeeded the ill-fated Rescue, and, nothing daunted, she was given the same name. In less than a year from the great catastrophe we find her and her gallant crew hanging on to a wreck until they had rescued the whole crew. Then near the harbour she was run down by a larger vessel, and rescuers and rescued were drowned. Disaster befel the boat that succeeded her. In 1888 a desperate attempt was made to get out of the harbour on the mission of succour.

A terrible storm raged, and it seemed the height of insanity for men to attempt to try conclusions with it. When there is life to be saved, our Gorleston men never count the odds for or against them. Once more the angry sea was victor. The lifeboat again and again was flung back, but they were determined men, and only when the sea threw them, bruised, bleeding, and dead, back upon the beach, did their efforts cease. Five Gorleston homes had vacant places.

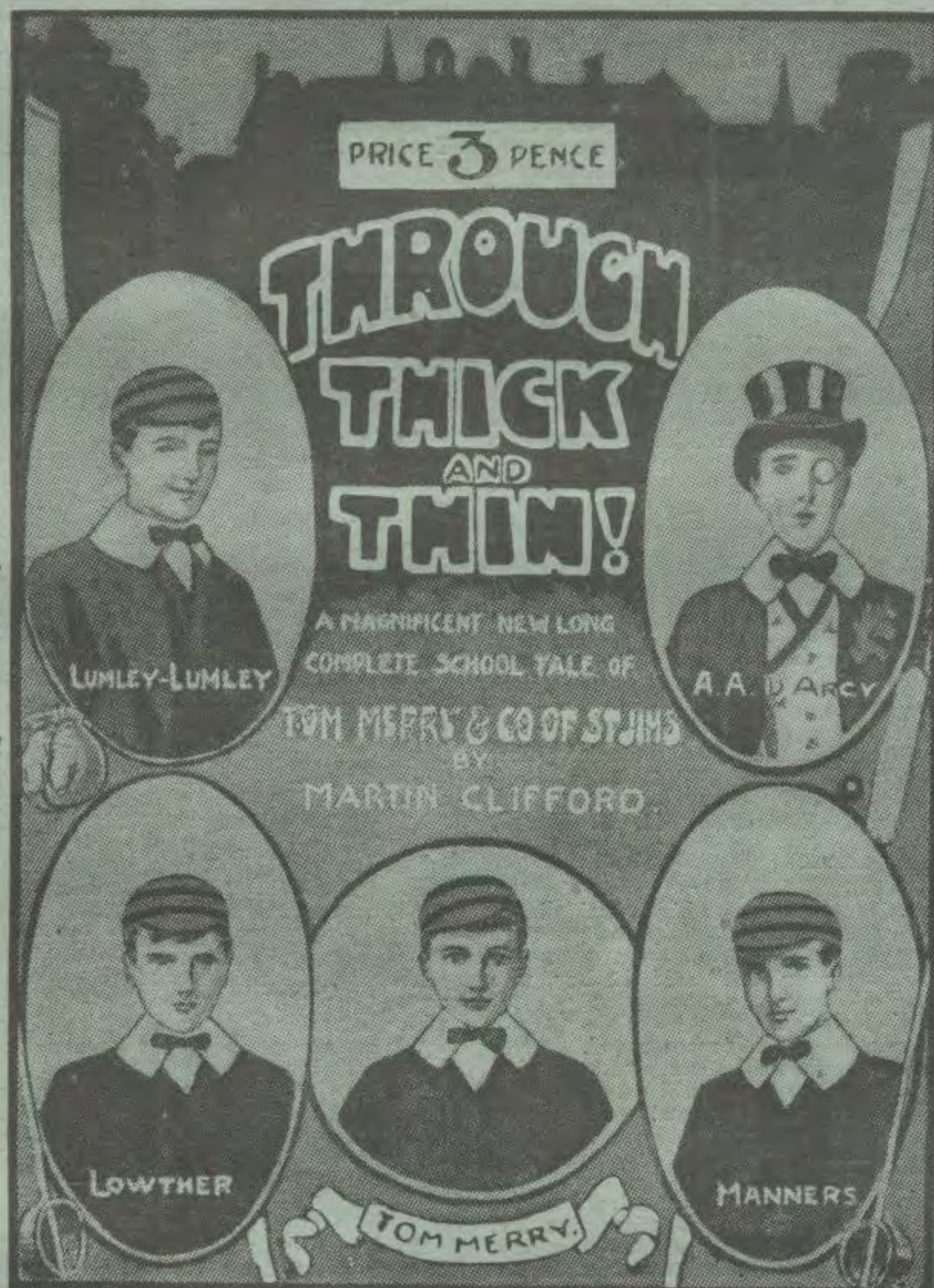
One would think, in the face of such terrible disasters, men would shrink from the danger. Not they. When old Father Neptune challenges them, they are always ready. The light of battle is in their eyes, and they are eager for the battle when the prize is the life of their fellow-men.

(Another Splendid Article
 Next Wednesday.)

The Editor

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WONDERFUL!

Old Mrs. Wilkins prided herself as a student of insect life. One night she was strolling through the church field, listening to the lusty singing of the crickets, which was drowning the sounds of the choir practice that was going on in the church. The vicar, who was proud of his choir, happened to be strolling in the field also, listening to the boys' voices floating over the evening air.

"Good-evening, Mrs. Wilkins!" he said. "How sweet the music sounds out here, does it not?"

"Indeed it does, Mr. Jones!" replied Mrs. Wilkins. "And do you know, it is said they do it by rubbing their hind legs together? Wonderful, isn't it?"—Sent in by A. F. Baker, Erdington.

WEIGHING HIM UP.

Owner of Racehorse (looking closely at scales): "William, you are a trifle overweight. Can't you lighten yourself a little?"

William (the jockey): "Got on my lightest suit, sir; ain't had a bite to-day; and have just trimmed my finger-nails."

Owner of Racehorse: "Well, go and get shaved!"—Sent in by S. Smyth, Belfast.

MARVELLOUS!

A cricket match was in progress, the village team were playing the town team. Just then the town bowler sent down an extra fast ball. The batsman hit it hard, but the man in the slips touched it, and the ball went straight to the man on the boundary, who caught it.

"How is that?" several voices asked.

The umpire, who had not seen a cricket match for years, and was a butcher by trade, said:

"Simply marvellous!"

And the spectators roared.—Sent in by H. R. Maroll, Dover.

HAD THAT TIME.

A boy, on his way to school, was taking his father's dinner in a can, when one of his schoolmates came up and gave the can a kick.

"Do you mind me kicking your can?" said the boy, who was full of mischief.

"No, I don't," replied the other.

"Are you sure?" returned the mischievous rascal.

"No," again replied the boy with the can. "My mother borrowed it from your mother, and you will catch it when you get home for spoiling your mother's can!"—Sent in by J. Kay, London, N.W.

SUF(FISH)ENT.

A well-known solicitor in a Northern town advertised for an office-boy. A lad applied for the situation who had hitherto been employed in the local fish-market. The boy, on being asked if he were a good writer, answered in the affirmative.

"And can you do mental arithmetic?"

"I think so, sir."

"Well, what would thirty-six pounds of salmon at three-pence per pound be?"

"Bad, sir!" was the quick reply.—Sent in by W. Polgreen, Devon.

A PATE-NT CURE.

Barber (to bald customer): "Try a bottle of this preparation, sir? Splendid stuff for baldness!"

Customer: "So it may be, but I've got all the baldness I want, thanks."—Sent in by Robert Crook, Scotland.

RECIPROCAL.

Little Winnie had been sent to the cupboard for some fly-papers—the sticky kind. She was away a long time, and showed no sign of returning, so her mother thought she had forgotten her errand. She called:

"Have you got them, Winnie?"

"No, mummie," came the gentle reply: "they've got me. But we're both coming!"—Sent in by R. Boyham, Newport.

COOL.

An intelligent-looking boy walked into a grocer's shop the other day, and, reading from a paper, said:

"I want six pounds of sugar at twopence-farthing a pound."

"Yes," said the shopman. "That will be one-and-three-halfpence."

"Eleven pounds of rice at three-halfpence a pound."

"One-and-fourpence-halfpenny," commented the grocer.

"Four pounds of tea at one-and-eight a pound."

"Six-and-eight."

And so he continued:

"Five pounds of coffee at one-and-ten; seven tins of milk at fivepence-halfpenny; four tins of tomatoes at sixpence-halfpenny; and eight tins of sardines at one-and-three-halfpence."

The shopman made out the bill, and handed it to the boy, saying:

"Did your mother send the money, or does she want them entered?"

"My mother didn't send me at all," said the boy, seizing hold of the bill. "It's my arithmetic lesson, and I had to get it done somehow!"—Sent in by J. R. Kilshaw, Preston.

EASILY EXPLAINED.

Murphy, the ferryman, had been asked to take a trunk across the river. He placed the trunk in the bow of the boat, with the result that the boat tipped forward.

"What are you rowing with that trunk in the bow of the boat for?" inquired a friend.

"Sure, an' if it was in the stern, wouldn't I be rowin' uphill all the time?" exclaimed Murphy. "An' this way I'm rowin' downhill all the time!"—Sent in by F. Hartford, Durham.

"AY, AY!"

A clumsy sailor, turning a corner, fell into an Italian hawk, knocking a tray of ornaments from off his head. Among them was a statue of Napoleon, which the Italian valued very much. With the fall, the arm of the statue was smashed off. The Italian started to cry and shout:

"Oh, my poor Napoleon!"

To console him the sailor said:

"Never mind, mate; knock his eye out, and call him Nelson!"—Sent in by Miss Elsie Sutton, Gosforth.

MONEY PRIZES OFFERED.

Readers are invited to send ON A POSTCARD Storyettes or Short Interesting Paragraphs for this page. For every contribution used the sender will receive a Money Prize.

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