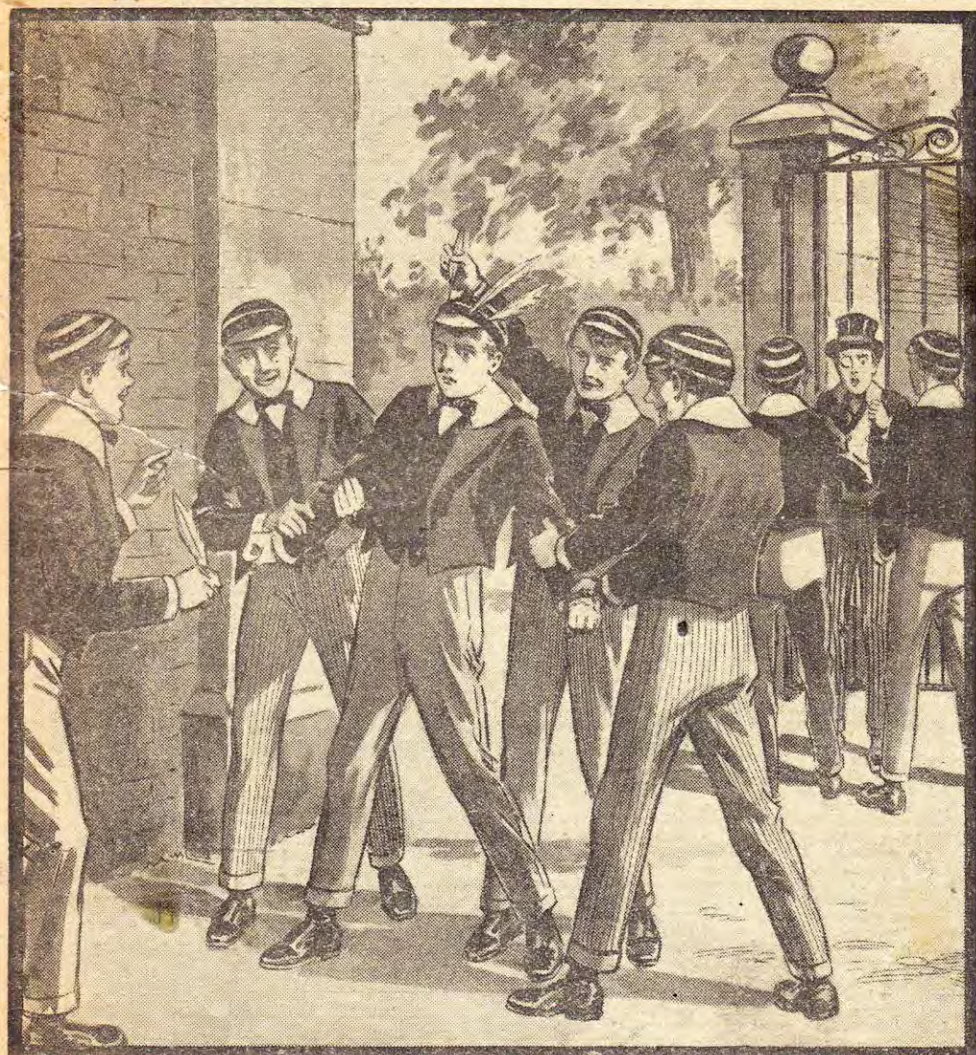


UNDER CUSSY'S PROTECTION!

A Magnificent New, Long, Complete Tale of School Life at St. Jim's.



WHITE FEATHERS FOR THE FUNK!

(An Exciting Scene in the Magnificent Long, Complete School Tale in this issue.)



THIS WEEK'S CHAT

Whom to Write to

EDITOR "THE GEM" LIBRARY.

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EVERY MONDAY EVERY FRIDAY EVERY SATURDAY.



GOOD-BYE TO THE OLD BLUE COVER!

The war has been responsible for many changes—some of them big, some small. I am not going to pretend that the change that I am now obliged to announce is a matter of national importance, though I know that many loyal readers of the "GEM" will regret it. From next week on we shall no longer be able to give the paper its usual familiar blue coat, owing to the impossibility of getting the necessary dye. So you must look out for a white cover like that of the "MAGNET."

I said "GOOD-BYE TO THE OLD BLUE COVER!" but it may be only an revolve after all. In the better days after the war it might appear again.

For Next Wednesday:

"A STRANGE SECRET!"

By Martin Clifford.

Next week's grand, long, complete story tells of the further experiences of Valentine Outram at St. Jim's, and is even more dramatic than that which appears in this number. The mystery surrounding the strange new boy deepens, and when it is made evident that he is not the cowardly schoolfellow had held him, Levison's story finds believers, and Outram has a very miserable time of it. Through all, Arthur Augustus D'Arcy is loyal, and, by a curious turn of fortune, the devotion aroused in the outcast by D'Arcy's unswerving friendship is the cause of the whole truth coming out, and his further stay at St. Jim's is made impossible. But though he goes it is not in disgrace, and Arthur Augustus is not the only fellow who sees him go with regret, or who in later days will remember as true blue after all the boy with

"A STRANGE SECRET!"

A READER'S ZEPPELIN EXPERIENCE.

A reader, from whom I often receive interesting letters, gives me, in a recent one, his experiences during a Zeppelin raid:

"You cannot possibly be unaware," he writes,—"that there was an air raid on—" (Date suppressed in deference to the censor.) "The beastly Zepp came mighty near us that time—as they seem to do every time, for the matter of that. We have in our district an Emergency Corps. I am a member of this corps. We have to wear either uniforms or armbands on our plain clothes. The armband is white with the initials of the corps in red. The members are called out on the approach of hostile aircraft. The idea is to have doctors, nurses, and a working party ready in case any bombs are dropped near at hand. The working party have to erect barricades, see to ruined buildings, and so on. The cadets, of whom I am one, act as messengers. It is our duty to call out the doctors, first-aid men, etc. We have been called out four times up to date, and twice have stayed at the town-hall till 4 a.m. On the date mentioned, I was called up by the messenger who warns the six cadets. I jumped out of bed and dressed post haste. It was about 12 o'clock and pitch dark. I mounted my bike and dashed up the road. At the top of the road I could see the Zepp in the glare of many searchlights. As I turned the corner, I heard a sort of bark, and then something shrieked far above my head. Then came a bang that was hardly more than a pop, and a shell burst quite near the Zeppelin. That was the beginning of the fireworks. Bang! Whiz! Pop! I rode along, watching the display—a very natural thing to do, I still think, but not a very prudent one, as I realise now. I ought to have kept my eyes lower. Whack! I had run right against a tree! I picked myself up, more than half-dazed, and found that my front lamp was a total wreck. So, after all, I called only one man out, for by the time I was fit to start again, I had come to the conclusion that anybody who wasn't aware that there were Zepps about by that time, stood badly in need of the services of an ear specialist, and was not likely to be of much use to us. One

gun was potting at the airship from eight miles away. It did not hit, of course, but quite a lot of shrapnel fell in our district."

HE WANTS TO BE AN EDITOR.

The writer of this letter wants to become an editor, and asks me what he should do to achieve his ambition. "I suppose somebody offers you the job if you show ability. It is necessary, I presume, to work your way up in the office of a newspaper or magazine?" He is quite right. Only in one case in a thousand does a man reach the editorial easy-chair—not always as easy as it might be!—without being pretty thoroughly put through the mill of journalism first. In my correspondent's case, I am inclined to think that an entry into journalism would not be a bad move, for I fancy he has the makings of a journalist in him; but it is about the last thing I would advise to many of those who inquire about it.

NOTICES.

Horace L. Jones, 21, Brunswick Square, Camberwell, S.E., wants to hire, or, if preferred, buy, back numbers of the "Gem" and "Magnet."

F. Hibbard, O.S., H.M.H.S. Galcka, Salonika, Greece, would be glad to have back numbers of the "Cen." and "Magnet," and to have the current issues sent him each week.

Private P. Giles, 4196, 47th Squadron, R.F.C., Beverley, Yorkshire, would be glad of correspondence with readers.

Private Jack Ross, of the South African Scottish, wishes to thank heartily the many readers who replied to his appeal for correspondents. There were so many that he could not possibly answer them all; but he does not want any of them to think him ungrateful, and hopes they will accept this excuse.

H. Lucas, 47 West Street, Warminster, wants to buy copies of the "B. F." 3d. Library issues entitled "King or Kaiser?" and "The Conquest of London."

J. Lee, 63, Elmhurst Mansions, Edgeley Road, Clapham, S.W., wants to form a footer team next season from boys (age 14 to 17) in the South Western district, and will be glad to send particulars to anyone applying.

"The 'Magnet' and 'Gem' Social League, 163, Abbeyfield Road, Sheffield, will be glad to enrol more members from any part of the United Kingdom. Will those writing please enclose stamped and addressed envelopes?"

F. T. Pratt, Solo Grange, Hertford, wants to form a local club in connection with "Chuckles" Club, and would be glad to hear from anyone who would like to join.

Private E. Arnold, 2911, C Coy., No. 1 Section, 12th Platoon, 16th Middlesex Regiment, B. E. F., France, would like to correspond with a girl reader of about 18, and would also be pleased to receive back numbers.

Private F. Gough, 14 Seaforth Highlanders, Y.O.T.C., Hut 27, South Camp, Ripon, would be glad to correspond with a reader or two.

H. Wade, 7, Butts Grove, Armley, Leeds, thinks of starting a small amateur magazine, and would be glad to hear from readers interested.

Private Smith, 4157, and Private Kelsey, 4123, C Coy., 3/7 Batt. Essex Regiment, Hut 25, H Lines, Hulton East Camp, Tring, would both be glad to correspond with readers.

Miss Millicent Honeyman, 29, Park Square, Leeds, wants to buy the "B. F." 3d. Library stories of Dalton Redcastle & Co.

Miss Freda Leal, 73, Willow Bank Road, Prenton, Birkenhead, wishes to start a Correspondence Club for readers under 17 anywhere in the United Kingdom, and asks anyone writing to enclose a stamped and addressed envelope.

Your Editor

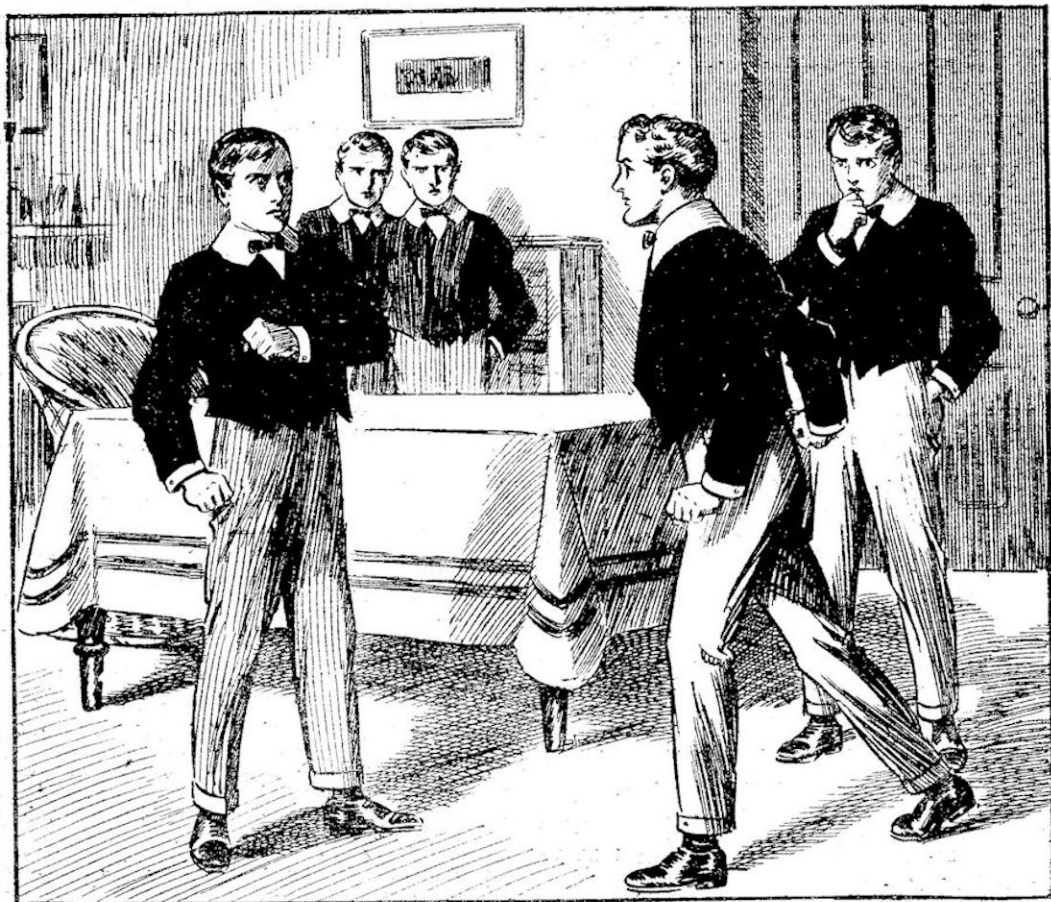
PUBLISHED IN TOWN
AND COUNTRY EVERY
WEDNESDAY MORNING



COMPLETE STORIES
FOR ALL, AND EVERY
STORY A GEM!

UNDER GUSSY'S PROTECTION!

A Magnificent New, Long, Complete School Story of Tom Merry & Co. at St. Jim's.
By MARTIN CLIFFORD.



Levison's eyes became glued upon the new boy's face, with so startling an expression that Blake and Co. stared at him. "You!" yelled Levison. "You here! My hat!" (See Chapter 3.)

CHAPTER 1.

A Rough Welcome.

"**B**AI Jovel! What a weally feahful wow!"
D'Arcy of the Fourth was exasperated.
It was really too trying.
The swell of St. Jim's was alone in Study No. 6,
in the Fourth-Form passage in the School House.
He was grinding.
There was a Latin grammar stuck against the inkstand on

the table, and there was a sheaf of impot paper before the swell of St. Jim's. There was ink on his fingers, and a dab of ink on his aristocratic nose. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was hard at work. His noble brain was grappling with the ablative absolute.

For the ablative absolute Arthur Augustus did not care two pins personally. But his indifference to the ablative absolute did not meet with the approval of his Form-master. Arthur Augustus would have preferred to join Tom Merry & Co. on the cricket-field. But he had to deal with the ablative

Next Wednesday,

"A STRANGE SECRET!" AND "INTO THE UNKNOWN!"

absolute first, and show the results of his labours to Mr. Lathom before teatime.

And while Arthur Augustus was getting to grips with the ablativ absolute, there was a terrific din proceeding in the Fourth-Form passage.

Bump, bump, bump!

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Give him another!"

"What a blessed funk!"

"Frog's march!"

Bump, bump!

"Ow!"

It was evident that a ragging was proceeding in the passage outside. Arthur Augustus had borne it patiently for some time. He was trying to concentrate his noble brain on the ablativ absolute.

That would have been hard enough in any case. But with such a terrific din going on outside the study door it was impossible.

"It's weally too bad!" groaned Arthur Augustus, throwing down his pen in despair. "How can a chap grapple with this awful wot with that feafhul wow ginn? The fellahs might shut up when I'm doin' howwid Latin gwammah. I've a jollay good mind to go out and give them a feafhul thwashin' all wround!"

"Bump him!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Bump, bump!

"Nil despendandum Teucwo juce et auspice Teucwo," mumbled Arthur Augustus.

Bump!

"Yah!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Arthur Augustus jumped up. He was not going to stand it any longer. He rushed to the door and threw it open.

"You uttah asses!" he shouted. "Not so much feafhul wow when a fellah's twyin' to work!"

Bump, bump!

Arthur Augustus put up his eyeglass, and surveyed the scene outside in astonishment. Half a dozen fellows were there, and it was evidently a ragging of an unusually rough kind.

Crooke and Clampe of the Shell, Mellish of the Fourth, and Piggott of the Third, were bumping another fellow along the passage amid shouts of laughter.

The victim was a junior in dusty Etons, a fellow whom Arthur Augustus had never seen before.

He guessed that it was a new boy.

The new fellow was struggling in the grasp of the raggars, and seemed to have been hurt considerably, but he was not hitting out. And his non-resistance encouraged the raggars to proceed to greater lengths. The new boy was rumped and dusty and dishevelled, and panting for breath.

Arthur Augustus's brow darkened at the sight. A little gentle ragging of a new boy was harmless enough; but the four cads of the School House, finding their victim unresisting, were growing rougher and more brutal.

It was curious, too, for the new junior was a sturdy fellow, with broad shoulders and strong limbs, and looked as if he could easily have "knocked out" any two of the raggars in a fair fight.

Arthur Augustus strode out of the study, his eye gleaming behind his eyeglass.

"Stop that at once, you wottahs!" he rapped out.

Crooke of the Shell turned on him.

"Mind your own business!" he snapped. "Come on, you chaps, give the funky cad the frog's march!"

"Let me go!" gasped the new boy. "Let me go! You've hurt me!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"We'll hurt you some more!" grinned Mellish.

"What-ho!" chuckled Piggott. "Bump him!"

Excepting for Arthur Augustus, the raggars had the place to themselves. Everybody was out of doors on that sunny afternoon. Arthur Augustus himself would have been out but for the claims of Mr. Lathom and the ablativ absolute.

But D'Arcy had forgotten the ablativ absolute now. His eyes gleamed with wrath as he pushed back his cuffs.

"You uttah wuffians!" he exclaimed. "How dare you treat a new kid like that? Let him alone at once!"

"Rats!"

"Get out of the way, you tailor's dummy!"

"Bring that funk along! Frog's march!"

And, unheeding the wrathful swell of St. Jim's, the raggars rushed the new boy along the passage again, struggling in their grasp.

Arthur Augustus did not waste any more time on words. In spite of his immaculate attire and his elegant ways, Arthur Augustus prided himself upon being a fighting-man.

THE GYM LIBRARY.—No. 436.

He sailed in.

His left caught Crooke of the Shell, and his right landed on Clampe's chin, and the two Shell fellows roared, and rolled over their victim.

Then Mellish caught D'Arcy's left with his eye, and sat down yelling, and Piggott of the Third reeled away from a terrific backhanded, and fell.

Arthur Augustus looked down upon fallen foes on all sides. Like Caesar of old, he came, he saw, he conquered.

He stooped and helped the victim of the raggars to his feet.

"Buck up, deah boy!" he said kindly. "They shan't wag you any more. Why didn't you hit out?"

The new junior panted:

"I—I—I—"

"You can cut off, you uttah wottahs," said Arthur Augustus. "You ought to be ashamed of yourselves, bai Jove! What will the new kid think of the mannahs of St. Jim's, at this wate?"

The raggars staggered up. D'Arcy's charge had bowled them over, but they were not at all satisfied. They were four to two, even if the new boy stood up for himself, as he did not seem inclined to do.

"Collar that silly idiot!" panted Crooke. "We'll rag him the same as that funk Outram!"

"Hands off, you wottahs!"

"Rush him!" yelled Clampe.

"Back me up, deah boy!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus, as he put up his hands and met the rush of the raggars.

The new boy stood hesitating. As he stood beside D'Arcy, it could be seen that he was bigger and more powerful in every way than the swell of St. Jim's. But he did not put up his hands. Arthur Augustus hit out valiantly, but he was borne over by the rush of the four, and jammed against the wall.

"Scrag him!" yelled Piggott.

"Yawooh! Wesene!"

"Hallo, what's the row?" asked a cheery voice.

Tom Merry and Manners and Lowther, in cricketing flannels, came along from the stairs, on the way to their study.

"Four to one!" exclaimed Manners. "Pile in!"

The Terrible Three rushed to the rescue.

Thump! Crash! Bump! Yell!

In three seconds Crooke and Clampe and Mellish and Piggott were fleeing down the passage for their lives. The Terrible Three had come just in time. Arthur Augustus sat gasping on the floor. The new boy, whom he had so gallantly rescued, had not raised a hand.

CHAPTER 2.

Under Gussy's Wing.

"GWOOH!"

Thus Arthur Augustus.

The Terrible Three, grinning, helped the swell of the Fourth to his feet. Arthur Augustus leaned against the wall and panted. Crooke & Co. had disappeared along the passage and round the nearest corner. They were not looking for a "scap" with the Terrible Three.

"Now, what's the row about?" demanded Tom Merry. "Getting quarrelsome in your old age, Gussy, and taking on four at a time?"

"Gwooh! The uttah wottahs! Wow! They have wumped my collah feafhully! Look at my hair! Ow!"

"And look at your face!" said Monty Lowther, in a horrified tone.

"Is it vevy bad, deah boy?"

"It looks frightful."

"Bai Jove! Have they damaged my face?"

"Oh, no," said Lowther cheerfully; "it's the same as usual!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You uttah ass, I do not want any of your wotten jokes!" gasped Arthur Augustus. "I feel quite breatheless! Gwooh!"

"But what were you scrapping with those cads for?" asked Manners.

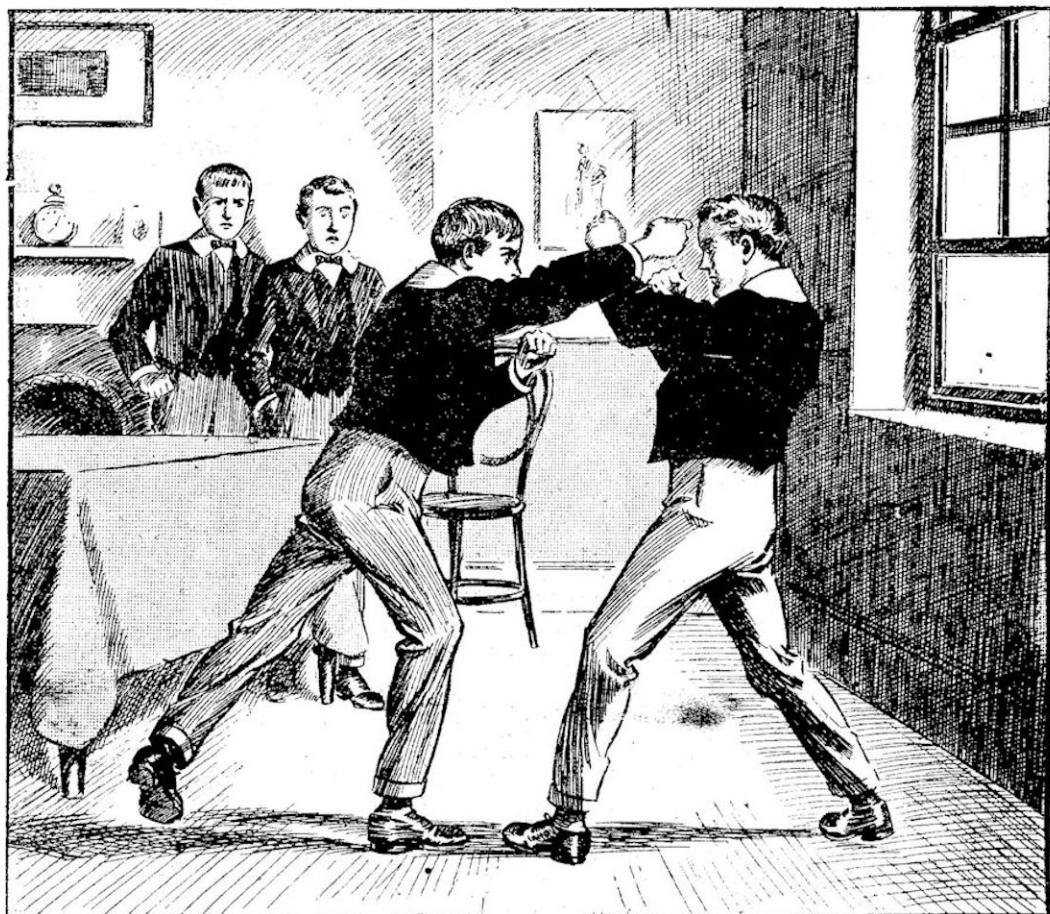
"They were waggin' this kid, and I came to protect him," said Arthur Augustus.

"Looks as if he could protect himself," said Tom Merry, with a glance at the new junior, who stood with crimson cheeks. "By Jove, you look dusty, kid! You've had a pleasant welcome to St. Jim's, and no mistake!"

"Why didn't you back up, you boundah?" demanded Arthur Augustus warmly. "We could easily have handled those four wottahs! Why didn't you help me?"

"I—I'm sorry! I—I was hurt—I—I—"

"Yaas, I suppose you were," said Arthur Augustus, more amicably. "What did the wottahs pile on you for?"



Mellish attacked hotly, and Outram guarded. The new junior did not hit out in return, but he stopped every blow Mellish aimed at him, with a skill and success which showed that he was a pastmaster of the boxer's art. Crooke and Clampe looked on in wonder. (See Chapter 9.)

"I don't know. Because I'm a new kid, I suppose. They said they'd take me to my study after I'd seen Mr. Railton," said Outram. "They brought me here, and then started."

Tom Merry laughed. "You fell into jolly bad hands, kid," he said. "Those four are howling cads—the biggest rotters at St. Jim's! You mustn't think we're all like that."

"No; I can see you're not," said Outram. "I'm much obliged to you for helping me!"

"Oh, don't mensh!" The Terrible Three went on their way. Arthur Augustus was left alone with the dusty new boy. He put up his eyeglass, and surveyed him with some curiosity.

The ragging had been going on for ten minutes or more before Arthur Augustus had come on the scene. There was no doubt that Outram was hurt. But what puzzled D'Arcy was that he had not put up a fight. It looked as if the new fellow was a funk of the most pronounced variety. But Arthur Augustus was willing to make every allowance for a new fellow, alone and unfriended in a big school, and finding himself suddenly attacked by a gang of ragers. Crooke & Co. were the only fellows at St. Jim's, excepting Levison of the Fourth, who would have done so cruel and cowardly a thing. Arthur Augustus was warm with indignation.

"I didn't know the wottahs were waggin' a new kid, or I'd have come out befoah," he said. "I didn't know a new kid was comin'. I am sowwy you have had a weception like this." Arthur Augustus felt called upon to apologise for the exceeding bad manners of Crooke & Co. "Those

chaps who were waggin' you are all funks, and if you'd stood up to them they'd have left you alone. As you are a new chap, I'll give you a tip. When a chap hits you, hit him hardah!"

"Thank you!" stammered the new boy. "You look wathah an athletic chap, too," said D'Arcy, eyeing him. "You could make wings wound Cwooke!"

"I—I never fight."

Arthur Augustus laughed. "You'll have to learn heah, deah boy, or you'll be in lots of twouble," he said cheerily. "What Form are you in?"

"Fourth."

"That's my Form. I'm D'Arcy."

"My name is Outram—Valentine Outram," said the new boy.

"Bai Jove! What a wippen' name!" said Arthur Augustus. "You look wathah in need of a bwush-up. Shall I take you to the dorm?"

"You're very kind."

"Not at all, deah boy. This way!"

The ablative absolute was neglected in Study No. 6. Arthur Augustus was in the habit of showing polite courtesy to new boys. He felt called upon to be more Chesterfieldian than ever in this case, to make up for the rowdy manner of Crooke & Co. He led the new junior to the Fourth-Form dormitory, and helped him to put himself to rights.

"Know anybody heah, deah boy?" he asked, as Outram brushed his hair.

"No; I—I think not."

CHAPTER 3.

An Astonishing Recognition.

"Have you been heah long?"
"About an hour and a half. I was some time with the Housemaster."

"You haven't had your tea, I presume?"

"No."

"Pewpaw you would bonah us by comin' to tea in Studay No. 6. My friends would be vewy pleased."

"You are very kind. I'd be glad."

"Not at all, deah boy! It's a wotten shame that those cads piled on you like that. They are a disgrace to the House. If the Head took my advice, he would transfer Cwooke and Mellish and Piggott to the New House. That's the pwopah place for them!" said Arthur Augustus. "I am sowny you have weevied such a wotten impression of St. Jim's. After tea we'll go and see Cwooke, and we'll see fair play while you thwash him, Outwam!"

The new boy started.

"No," he exclaimed—"no!"

"Bettah begin by thwashin' him. You can take my tip as an old hand, you know!" said Arthur Augustus, in his most fatherly way.

"No, no! I—I don't bear any malice!"

"Well, that's all wight, of course! But I heard those wottahs callin' you a funk. It would be bettah to give Cwooke a fealful thwashin', to show that you are not a funk."

"I'd rather not."

"Oh, vewy well!" said Arthur Augustus, in a somewhat stately manner. "I was onely givin' you a tip, as an old hand."

"The—the fact is, I'd rather not fight anybody!" stammered the new boy. "I—I don't like it! I'm not afraid, but I don't like it! I'd rather not."

"If you tell the fellows that, I'm afraid you will have a good many fights on your hands," grinned Arthur Augustus. "Cwooke will bully you no end if you say you can't fight, you know."

The new boy was silent.

Arthur Augustus scanned him curiously. Outram was a handsome lad, and one could not help liking his face. And he looked so well-built and sturdy that it was absurd to suppose that he could be afraid. He was just like Cwooke of the Shell.

"It's all vewy well to be a forgivin' chap," explained Arthur Augustus. "I'm a forgivin' chap myself. But you can cawwy good tempah too fah, you know."

"I'm not good-tempered. I—I've got a beastly temper," muttered Outram. "I'm trying to learn to keep it in check."

"Vewy good ideal," said Arthur Augustus, puzzled a little. "I'm a vewy good-temperah chap myself, though I'm wathah a demon when I'm weally woused. If you're finished, we'll go down to the studay. Blake and Hewvies and Dig will be comin' in soon; the match must be ovah as those Shell boundahs have come in."

The two juniors returned to Study No. 6.

"I've got a wotten detention task," said Arthur Augustus, as he sat down at the table. "I've got to get it done befoah tea. Would you like to woot in the armchair till tea, or take a wot woud?"

"Perhaps I could help you?" suggested Outram.

"Bai Jove! Do you know anythin' about the wotten ablativ absolute?"

Outram smiled.

"Lots," he said. "I was grindin' it only last week with my tutor. Let me lend you a hand; I'm well up in it, really."

"Huwway! I'm gettin' tied into a beastly knot with the beastly thing!" said Arthur Augustus dolorously. "Lathom insists upon wamin' it into my head, you know; but there doesn't seem woom for it. Pewpaw you can explain the uthal wot if you undahstand it."

Outram dropped into a chair at the table, and the two juniors were soon busy.

To Arthur Augustus' surprise, the new fellow seemed to have the ablativ absolute at his finger-tips. Valentine Outram was as "well up" in Latin grammar as the veriest "swot" in the School House. Arthur Augustus' noble face brightened up wonderfully. The new boy had knowledge and a clear way of explaining, and the difficulties that had beset Arthur Augustus' path seemed to melt away like snow in the sunshine.

"Bai Jove, Lathom will be surprised when he sees my papah!" smiled Gussy. "You are a bwick, Outwam! I am goin' to surprise Lathom with this!"

And Arthur Augustus carried off his finished paper to Mr. Lathom's study, and did indeed succeed in surprising the Fourth-Form master with his masterly exposition of the ablativ absolute. He returned to Study No. 6 in great spirits.

THE NEW LIBRARY.—No. 436.

JACK BLAKE of the Fourth came into his study, and pitched his bat into a corner. Herries and Digby followed him in. The three were looking ruddy and warm, and very satisfied. School House had beaten New House, and Piggins & Co. had to hide their diminished heads; and Study No. 6 had contributed a handsome total of runs to the victory, in spite of the enforced absence of Arthur Augustus.

"Hallo, you ass! Why haven't you got tea ready?" said Blake, as he tossed away his bat.

There was a junior in the study, and Blake did not see for a moment that it was not Arthur Augustus. The swell of St. Jim's was in his Form-master's study at that moment.

"Hallo! Who are you?" he added, as he became aware of the fact that he was addressing a stranger.

Outram smiled.

"I'm the new kid," he said.

"Oh, you're a new kid, are you?" said Blake, eyeing him.

"Well, I suppose new kids will come—there's no stoppin' 'em. But—" Blake looked alarmed. "They haven't shoved you into this study, I suppose? We're four already, and we're jolly well not going to stand five. Little room enough as it is, with Gussy's toppers and Herries' feet."

"Silly ass!" growled Herries.

"I'm going into No. 7," said Outram.

"Oh, good!" said Blake, in great relief. "Nothing against you, you know; but a chap don't like to be crowded out of his own study. No. 7's next door up the passage."

It was a hint for the new boy's departure.

"I—I'm waiting for D'Arcy," said Outram, colouring a little.

"Oh, you've made Gussy's acquaintance already, have you?" said Blake. "Did he tell you to wait here for him?"

"He asked me to tea."

"Oh, he did, did he? Just like Gussy."

"If you don't want me, I'll clear off," said Outram, his colour deepening.

Blake laughed.

"My dear chap, don't be an ass! If Gussy asks you to tea, you're welcome; but all the manners in this study aren't so polished as Gussy's. You have to take us as you find us, see?"

"I see," said Outram.

"If you're stayin' to tea, you may as well lend a hand getting it," said Blake. "Know how to poach eggs?"

"Yes, certainly."

"Got the eggs, Dig?"

"Here they are," said Digby.

"What's your name, kid?"

"Valentine Outram."

"Well, Valentine Outram, poach the eggs, and make yourself useful. There's a spirit-stove in the grate—too jolly warm for a fire. Pile in!"

"Right-ho!"

"By the way," said Blake, struck by a sudden thought, "you're the new kid—I've just been hearing about a new kid; Mellish was telling Levison. He says there's a new kid who's a howling funk. Is that you?"

"I hope not."

"I suppose you're the only specimen who's come along today?"

"I suppose so."

"Then you're the chap Mellish was talking about. He says you said you couldn't fight, and then some of them collared you and ragged you, and you never raised a finger."

"They were four to one," said Outram, crimsoning.

"Oh, I see—just like Mellish and his set," said Blake.

"I'd advise you to give Mellish a hiding. Can you box?"

"I—I—I don't care for it."

"You look as if you could box. I'll give you a round with the gloves after tea, if you like, and see what you can do," said Blake. "Mellish is a worm and anybody could lick him. Buck up with those eggs."

Outram, with a troubled face, turned to the cooking. Blake laid the cloth, and Herries sawed the loaf, and Digby scraped jam out of a jar into the soap-dish. They were thus occupied when Arthur Augustus D'Arcy returned, with a beaming face.

"Oh, heah you are, deah boys! Did the New House beat you?"

"Beat your grandmother!" said Blake.

"Bai Jove! You've beaten the New House, with me left out?"

"Because you were left out," said Blake cheerfully.

"Wats!" Arthur Augustus changed the subject. "This chap is Outwam, the new kid in the Fourth. He's been helpin' me with that wotten ablativ, and old Lathom was

very pleased. He says that he will know what to expect of me in future," chuckled Arthur Augustus. "Fairly astonished him, bai Jove!"

"Oh, we've got a swot here, have we?" grunted Horrie. "Weally, Hewwies, Outram has helped me very wippily. Pway be a little more civil than Cwooke, Hewwies! By the way, I am goin' to thwash Cwooke aftah tea. He was waggin' the new kid—"

"Can't the new kid fight his own battles?" demanded Digby.

"You're not going to fight them for him, anyway. Outram," said Blake. "How are those eggs getting on, Outram?"

"Done," said Outram.

"Well, you can poach eggs," said Blake, looking at the results of Outram's labours critically. "That's better than swottin' over the giddy ablativie absolute. Stick that spirit-stove on the window-sill—it sniffs. There's a chair for you—mind how you sit in it—one leg's rocky. That's a chair we keep specially for visitors."

Outram grinned, and sat down carefully in the visitors' chair.

The five juniors were all hungry, and they were soon progressing rapidly with tea. There was a sound of footsteps and voices in the passage outside.

"He's in there." It was Mellish's voice. "The rottenest funk you ever heard of!"

Blake & Co. looked uncomfortable, and Outram flushed.

"Well, I'm going to have a look at him," said another voice; that of Levison of the Fourth. "It will be interesting to see a bigger funk than you, Mellish."

"Why, you rotter, Levison—"

The study door opened, and the thin, keen, hard face of Levison of the Fourth looked in. Outram was seated with his back to the door, and only the back of his head was visible to the new-comer.

Blake jumped up angrily.

"Don't you ever knock at a door?" he demanded.

"I want to see the funk," said Levison coolly. "You fellows chumming up with a champion funk, what?"

Levison, you uttably wude wascal—"

"Come in!" said Blake. "Come in, and Outram will chuck you out. Get up, Outram, and let's see you chuck that heeler into the passage."

"Let's see it!" said Levison, with a sneer.

Outram did not move.

"Outram, deah boy—" murmured Arthur Augustus.

Blake stared at the new fellow.

"Do you hear me, Outram?"

"Ya-a-ss."

"Then why don't you get up?"

Outram crimsoned, but he did not rise.

The juniors exchanged glances of disgust. Outram's tameness bore out only too fully Mellish's description of him. Arthur Augustus looked distressed. He had befriended Outram, and it was distressing to discover that the fellow he had taken under his aristocratic wing was a funk.

Blake sniffed contemptuously.

"Well, if you're a funk, Outram, the sooner you get out of this study the better!" he said. "We don't like funks here."

"I trust, Blake, that you will not forget your manna's to a visitah."

"He's not my visitor," growled Blake.

Outram rose to his feet with evident reluctance. Levison burst into a mocking laugh. It was a great pleasure to Levison's peculiar nature to torment and humiliate some unfortunate victim who could not stand up for himself.

"Is he going to chuck me out?" grinned Levison. "I fancy I'm going to do the chucking."

He grasped the new boy by the shoulder, and spun him away from the table, amid a roar of laughter from his friends in the passage.

Outram's eyes blazed, and his fists clenched hard, and for a moment he looked as if he would spring on Levison. The change in him was so startling that the cad of the Fourth backed quickly away. Then Levison's eyes became glued upon the new boy's face, with so startling an expression that Blake & Co. stared at him.

"You!" yelled Levison. "You here! My hat!"

"Hallo! Do you know him?" exclaimed Crooke, from the passage.

Levison backed out of the doorway hastily.

"Know him! Rather! I'm not taking on that blessed prizefighter. But what's he doing here?"

"Prizefighter!" repeated Mellish. "What the dickens do you mean? That's the chap who can't fight—that's the funk!"

"Oh, don't be an ass!" said Levison. "He could kill me

with one punch if he liked, as he very nearly did another chap once."

"What!"

"What the dickens—"

"What are you dwivin' at, Levison?" exclaimed Arthur Augustus, in utter astonishment. "What do you mean by his nearly killing a chap? You don't know Outram."

"Outram! So he calls himself Outram?" grinned Levison.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"His name is Outram."

"Ha, ha! So that's his yarn!" sneered Levison. "He's got the cheek to come here calling himself Outram—here, to St. Jim's! Oh, my hat! The Head must have been dotty to let him in; but he must have taken the Head in, though."

"What do you mean?" exclaimed Blake. "Isn't the chap's name what he says it is?"

"No."

"Then what is it, if you know so jolly well?"

Levison grinned.

"His name's George Purkiss, and last year he was a prisoner in Hilstall Reformatory," he said.

CHAPTER 4.

Schoolboy or Convict?

"WHAT!"

"Gammon!"

"You silly ass, Levison!"

"Hilstall Reformatory!" repeated Arthur Augustus dazedly. "You must be wavin' mad, Levison!"

All eyes were glued on the new boy now. There were a dozen juniors in the passage, craning their necks to see him. The four chums of Study No. 6 regarded him blankly.

Levison's extraordinary statement had fallen like a bomb-shell in the study.

A fellow under an assumed name—a fellow who had been a prisoner in a reformatory—at St. Jim's! It was quite incredible.

The new boy did not speak.

He gazed at Levison with a stony gaze, his eyes fixed, his face deadly pale, and his breath coming in almost a sob.

Jack Blake shook him by the shoulder.

"Wake up, Outram, you ass! Tell him he's a liar, punch his silly head!"

"Yaas, wathah! Punch his head, Outram, deah boy!"

Outram seemed to pull himself together.

"Look at his face!" chuckled Levison. "Can't you see it's true?"

"My hat! It looks like it," said Crooke, with a whistle. "It sounds rather thick, but if it isn't true, why can't he say so?"

The Terrible Three came down the passage, attracted by the tumult. They shoved their way cheerily through the crowd with their elbows, unheeding the wrathful expostulations that rose on all sides.

"Mind my ribs!" roared Mellish.

"Mind 'em yourself, dear boy!"

"Keep your elbow out of my neck, Lowther!" howled Piggott.

"Keep your silly neck off my elbow!" said Monty Lowther.

"Now, what's the row?" asked Tom Merry, when the three had shoved a way into the study. "Ragging this study—what?"

"Catch anybody ragging this study!" said Blake disdainfully.

"It's Levison, talking out of his hat again," said Digby.

"He says this new kid is a chap escaped from a reformatory."

"Oh, crumbs! That's thick, even for Levison."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"It's true," sneered Levison. "Look at his face! The Head ought to be told! He's taken in the Head."

Tom Merry and Manners and Lowther, like all the rest, looked curiously at the new junior. A faint flush of colour was coming back into Outram's face now.

"Speak up, kid," said Tom Merry encouragingly. "Nobody here believes Levison. We all know he's a Prussian born in England by mistake."

"You rotter—" began Levison furiously.

"Shush! Let the new kid speak up," said the captain of the Shell. "Don't be nervous, young 'un. We know it's a lie."

"I'll prove it," said Levison.

"Shut up, and give the new kid a chance to speak."

Outram found his voice at last.

"I—I hardly know what to say," he stammered. "I—I'm rather taken aback. I—I suppose this is a joke on me because I'm a new chap. I suppose I can take a joke, if it is a joke."

"Of course," said Arthur Augustus, with a breath of

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relief. "It's a wotten joke; just one of Levison's wotten jokes. Of course, it couldn't be true."
 "It's the truth!" said Levison. "And all St. Jim's ought to know it. We don't want reformatory kids here, I suppose."

Tom looked at the cad of the Fourth.
 "We'd better have this out," he said. "You say that seriously, Levison?"

"Yes, I do!"
 "It isn't one of your queer, rotten jokes on a new kid?"
 "No, you ass!"
 "Are you willing to repeat it before the Housemaster?"
 "I'm going to the Housemaster about it, anyway."
 "You uttah ass, he will lick you for sayin' such a wotten thing!"

"I fancy he will thank me, when I prove it. I suppose Raitlon doesn't want to turn the School House into a home for criminals?"

"Of course, it can't be true," said Blake. "We all know that Levison never tells the truth if he can help it. This is a bit bigger one than usual."

"I'll prove it!"
 "Well, prove it, then," said Tom Merry. "Of course, you deny it, Outram?"

Outram laughed. He seemed to have recovered from the shock now.

"I hardly think it needs denying," he said. "That fellow says my name is George Purkiss. Did you say Purkiss?"

"You know your name's Purkiss!" snarled Levison.

"Very good! Well, my name is Valentine Outram," said the new Fourth-Former. "My father is Major Outram, now at the Front. He wrote to the Head about my coming here. He is personally known to Mr. Raitlon, the Housemaster here, who met him when he was at the Front."

"That wathah settles it," grinned Arthur Augustus.

"My uncle, Sir Robert Outram, came down to the school with me this afternoon, and saw the Head and Mr. Raitlon," went on the new junior. "A dozen fellows must have seen him come in with me. It was just after he left that those cads collared me and began ragging me, and D'Arcy chipped in to help."

Tom Merry laughed.

"I'll settle it if I wanted settling," said Levison.
 "That settles it," said Kangaroo, of the Sixth, who had joined the excited crowd in the passage. "I saw the old boy with the new kid, and saw him speaking to Mr. Raitlon. An old Johnny with white whiskers."

"That's my uncle," said Outram. "He's an old St. Jim's chap, too; he was in the Fourth Form here thirty-five years ago."

"Well, what do you say now, Levison?" asked Tom Merry, fixing his eyes on the cad of the Fourth.

Levison shrugged his narrow shoulders.

"I say that that fellow's name is George Purkiss, and that last year he was a prisoner in Hilstall Reformatory," he replied.

"Bai Jove! Are you still stickin' to that?" ejaculated D'Arcy.

"I'm sticking to the truth."

"You couldn't," said Monty Lowther, with a grave shake of the head. "Don't pile it on too thick, old man!"

Levison's eyes gleamed.

Outram's explanation had settled the matter for everyone but Levison.

Several fellows in the thickening crowd recalled having seen the "old Johnny with white whiskers" who had brought the new boy to St. Jim's. Some of them had heard Mr. Raitlon address him as Sir Robert Outram.

Even Crooke and Mellish and Piggott, ill-natured as they were, were not inclined to back up the cad of the Fourth in an accusation which seemed, on the face of it, groundless and dictated only by a perverted malice.

"Better chuck it!" murmured Crooke, in Levison's ear. "A rag's a rag, but it's no good piling it on."

Levison pushed him back roughly.

"That fellow is George Purkiss, of Hilstall Reformatory," he said. "I don't say he's escaped; his sentence has run out all right. He was there for six months."

"And how do you know anything about it?" asked Herries, with a snort. "Have you been in a reformatory yourself? You ought to be!"

"I have been there. My uncle is governor of Hilstall," said Levison. "Last year I visited him in a vac. I stayed with him a week. I saw a lot of the reformatory boys. I mightn't have noticed Purkiss especially, but there was a row while I was there, and I saw it. Purkiss broke out into a fury, and knocked one of the warders about. I saw it all."

"That chap knocked a warder about!" grinned Blake. "And he let himself be ragged by funks like Mellish and Crooke!"

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"I don't quite catch on to that," admitted Levison. "He could knock out Crooke and Mellish and me, too, with one hand, if he liked. He's as strong as a horse, and a splendid boxer."

"You were calling him a funk ten minutes ago," said Digby.

"He isn't a funk, whatever he is," said Levison. "I knew all about him. He was sent to Hilstall under the First Offenders' Act. He had knocked out a fellow at Brighton—a row on the sea-front. He has a vile temper, and he got into a row, and nearly killed a rough fellow who tackled him. That's why he was sent to Hilstall. There, as I said, he tackled a warder, and had to stay six months instead of three."

"Is that all you've got to say?"

"That's all," growled Levison.

"Can't you make up a little more?" asked Monty Lowther persuasively. "You are awfully entertaining."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Do you fellows mean to say that you don't believe me?" demanded Levison.

"Why, of course we don't," said Kangaroo, in surprise. "Does anybody ever believe you, Levison?"

"There was a laugh."

"Well, I repeat it," said Levison savagely. "Let him deny it if he dares!"

"He has denied it," said Blake.

The new boy was smiling now.

"I can only repeat that my name is Valentine Outram," he said. "Any fellow who doubts it can ask Mr. Raitlon. He knows my relations."

"Well I shall jolly well ask Mr. Raitlon!" said Levison.

"You can go and do it," said Blake. "We're fed up with you here! I should advise Outram to give you a jolly good licking for your lies."

Levison backed away hastily.

"I'm not going to fight him!"

"Ha, ha, ha! Who's the funk now?"

Levison gritted his teeth.

"I'm not a funk! But I'm not going to fight a reformatory rotter—a young priggish, who can knock a man out! There isn't a chap here who could stand up to him. I'm not going to hit him. He could knock out any fellow in the Sixth if he liked."

"I dare say he might if he's George Purkiss of Hilstall," grinned Blake. "But, as the matter stands, I'd undertake to knock him out, with you thrown in, Levison!"

"He's fooling you!" howled Levison. "I can see now why he's pretending that he can't fight. He doesn't want to get recognised as a bruiser!"

"Oh, rats! Outram, why won't you knock him down?"

"I—I'd rather not!" stammered Outram. "I—I'm not a funk, really, but—but I'm not a fighting chap. I don't want any row!"

Blake snorted.

"You'll get out of that soon enough in the Fourth," he said. "Why, you'll have fags in the Second punching your nose if you take up that line."

Outram's face set doggedly.

"I'm not a fighting chap, and I won't fight," he said.

"You can think me a funk if you like."

"Weally, Outram—"

"I only want to be let alone," said Outram. "I'm a peaceful fellow. And whether you think me a funk or not, I won't fight anybody."

"Well, either you're a rotten funk, or you're too good for this world," commented Tom Merry. "Levison, you ass, you'd better chuck that yarn! If Outram were the fellow you say he is, he could knock you out."

"I know he could. He won't do it because he's afraid it would prove what I say!" sneered Levison.

"Bow-wow!"

Levison gritted his teeth, and strode away. Crooke hurried after him, and caught him by the arm.

"You're not going to Raitlon?" he asked.

"Yes, I am."

"But, you ass, Raitlon will lick you for saying such things! He'll call it a slander—and so it jolly well is!"

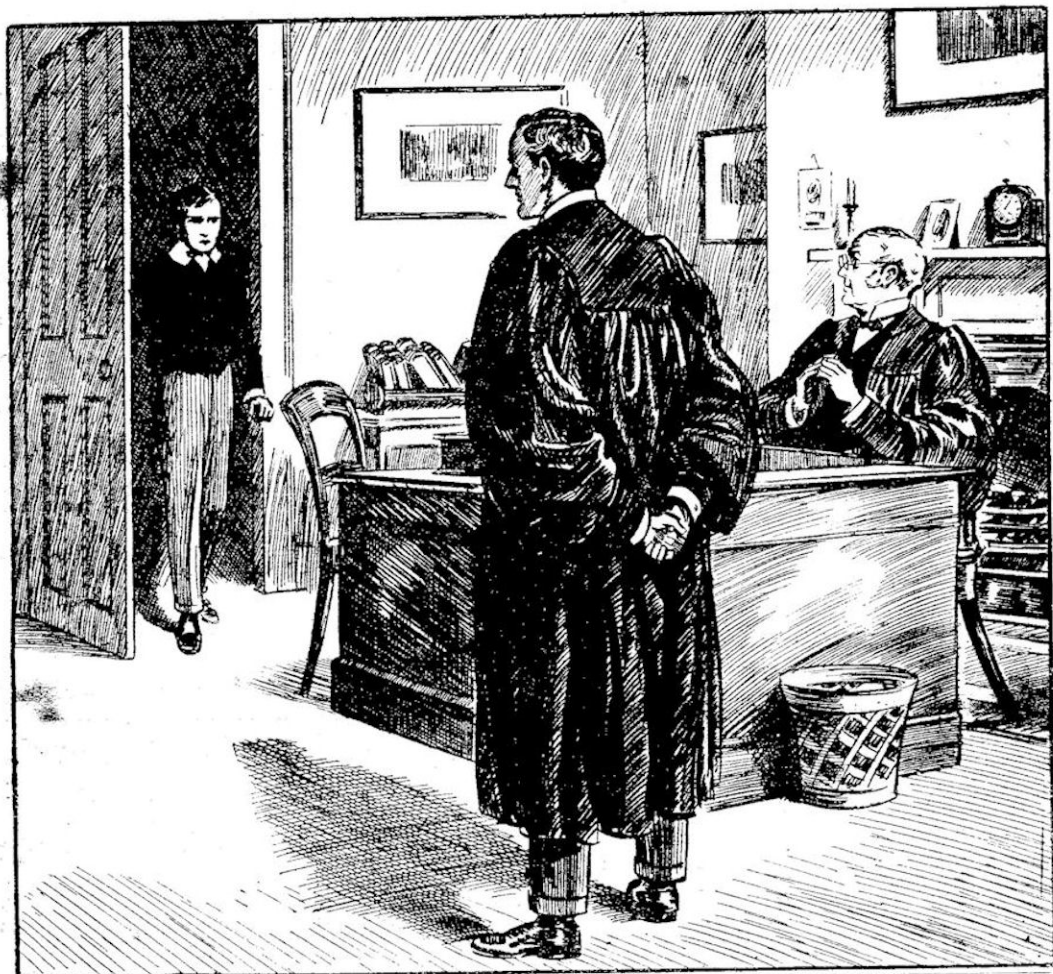
"You don't believe it, then?"

"Of course I don't!" said Crooke. "Nobody does!"

"They will when I've proved it."

"Well, you're an ass if you go to Raitlon with a yarn like that!" said Crooke. "You'll get ragged!"

ANSWERS



"Come in!" said Mr. Railton. The Housemaster was chatting with Mr. Lathom, the master of the Fourth, when Ernest Levison presented himself. (See Chapter 5.)

Levison jerked his arm away, and strode on. A minute later Crooko saw him knocking at the Housemaster's door. However baseless Levison's extraordinary accusation might be, there seemed to be little doubt that he firmly believed in it himself.

CHAPTER 5.

No Luck for Levison.

"COME in!" said Mr. Railton. The Housemaster was chatting with Mr. Lathom, the master of the Fourth, when Ernest Levison presented himself. He glanced round.

"Well, what is it, Levison?"

"If you please, sir, there is something that I feel bound to tell you," said Levison very respectfully.

The School Housemaster raised his hand.

"One moment, Levison! I will listen to you, but I warn you that I do not desire to hear any tales about your school-fellows."

"It isn't that, sir. It's the new chap——"

"Are you referring to Outram of the Fourth?"

"Yes, sir. I have recognised him."

Mr. Railton looked puzzled.

"Do you mean to say that he is an old acquaintance of yours?"

"Yes, sir."

"I fail to see why you should take the trouble to acquaint me with the fact," said Mr. Railton drily.

Mr. Lathom blinked curiously over his glasses at the corner of the Fourth. Both the masters could see that Levison was labouring under suppressed excitement, and it puzzled them.

"He is a criminal, sir."

"What!"

Mr. Railton almost jumped, and Mr. Lathom started.

"Are you out of your senses?" exclaimed Mr. Lathom.

"I know what I'm talking about, sir," said Levison firmly. "I recognised that fellow as a criminal who was a prisoner in a reformatory last year."

"You are dreaming, Levison, unless you are out of your senses. Unless, indeed, this is sheer insolence!" exclaimed Mr. Railton sternly.

"I felt it my duty to come to you, sir," said Levison. "I knew you could not know that a sentenced criminal had been allowed to enter the school."

"It would be your duty if it were true!" snapped Mr. Railton. "But it is not true. You will explain at once what grounds you have for this accusation."

Levison explained.

The two masters listened to him attentively.

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"You see a resemblance, then, between this boy and the Purkiss you speak of?" said Mr. Railton.

"It is not a resemblance, sir. He is the same chap."

"You appear to be sincerely convinced of what you say, Levison, so I will not be angry with you," said the Housemaster. "Have you told this wild idea to anyone else?"

"All the House, sir."

"You should not have done so, Levison."

"I thought he ought to be shown up, sir," said Levison. "He isn't wanted here."

"He is not the person you take him for, Levison. I am willing to believe that you have been deceived by a chance resemblance. I should be sorry to think that you were wicked enough to invent such a story."

"He is George Purkiss, sir!"

"He is Valentine Outram," said Mr. Railton. "In order to put an end to the story you have already spread, Levison, I will explain that I know the boy."

"You—you know him, sir?" stammered Levison, taken aback.

"I know him. I was acquainted with Sir Robert Outram, his uncle, in whose charge he has been placed while his father is abroad. Sir Robert brought him to this school this afternoon. Moreover, I saw the boy about two years ago at his father's house. He was then thirteen years old."

Levison staggered.

"But—but—but—" he stammered. "He is George Purkiss, sir! If you asked my uncle to come from Hilstall, sir, he would identify him at once."

"I repeat, Levison, that there is no shadow of foundation for your absurd story. Do you suggest that a reformatory boy named Purkiss has palmed himself off on Major Outram as his son and on Sir Robert Outram as his nephew?"

"I—I suppose, so, sir!"

"And what do you suggest has become of the real Valentine Outram whose place he is taking?" said the Housemaster ironically.

"I—I don't know."

"And how do you account for the fact that I saw him two years ago in his father's house, and know him to be the same lad?"

"E—I—I—"

Levison's tongue clove to his teeth. In the face of such overwhelming evidence he could not keep to his story.

"I have been patient with you, Levison," said Mr. Railton, "because I think you really believed this nonsense yourself. It is possible that there is a resemblance between Outram and the boy Purkiss you speak of. But now that you see you are mistaken, you will explain that fact to your Form-fellows who have listened to your foolish accusation. You may go."

Levison simply limped from the study.

"What an extraordinary thing!" said Mr. Lathom, when he was gone.

The Housemaster knitted his brows.

"I have given Levison the benefit of the doubt," he said. "But I cannot overlook the possibility that he has invented this story; he has a peculiar and revengeful nature, and possibly has quarrelled with the new boy. If he should repeat this slander, I shall deal very severely with him."

"Undoubtedly," said Mr. Lathom, in hearty agreement.

Levison's face was white as he left the study. Crooke met him in the passage, with a grin.

"Well, what luck?" he asked.

Levison panted.

"I—I can't understand it. Railton knows his people. He says he knew the kid himself two years ago, and it's the same kid."

"Well, I suppose that settles it, even for you!" said Crooke, laughing.

"It doesn't," said Levison, clenching his hands. "He's Purkiss; he's a reformatory rotter, and he's taken them all in somehow!"

"Oh, draw it mild!"

"I'll prove it—I'll prove it yet!" snarled Levison. "The reformatory cad is making me out to be a liar! I'll prove it somehow!"

"What rot!" said Crooke. "Better chuck it! I'm willing to believe you've seen a chap like him at the reformatory, but most of the fellows think you invented the whole yarn!"

"Hang them!"

"But, look here, we can have lots of fun with the rotter!" said Crooke. "He's a funk, a howling funk, and can't fight for toffee. He's afraid of his own shadow. We can have no end of fun with him!"

"Not for me," said Levison promptly. "Suppose he hits out?"

"Pooh! He can't hit!"

"He could kill you with one blow if he wanted to."

Crooke laughed.

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"Well, I'll give him a chance pretty soon," he said. "Do you mean to say you're going to let him alone?"

"Yes, rather."

"Well, you must be a bigger blessed funk than he is!" said Crooke.

And he sauntered away, whistling.

Levison went to his study, and slammed the door, and threw himself into a chair, his brows knitted savagely. He was trying to think it out. The conviction was firmly fixed in his mind that the new junior was the boy he had seen in the reformatory at Hilstall; yet it was clearly proved that he was Valentine Outram, son of a major in the Army, nephew of a baronet, and personally known to the Housemaster of the School House.

What was the meaning of it? It was a problem which it required all the cunning of the cad of the Fourth to solve.

CHAPTER 6.

The Funk!

OUTRAM of the Fourth came in for a good deal of attention during the next few days. Levison's accusation was known all over the school, and it directed general attention upon the new boy.

Outram could not, therefore, drop into his place unnoticed, as new boys usually did. Every fellow took an interest in the junior who was accused of being a young criminal released from a reformatory.

Figgins & Co. of the New House came over specially to see him the first evening. All the New House fellows stared at him the next day.

Even the seniors took special notice of him.

He was soon quite well known to everybody in the Fifth and the Sixth—an honour that fell to few juniors, especially new-comers.

Levison's story was treated with derision on all sides.

In order to nip the matter in the bud, Mr. Lathom made a statement to his class in the Fourth Form-room the first morning.

He explained that Outram's people were well-known to the Housemaster, who had also known the boy himself at an earlier age. This knocked on the head Levison's accusation, and some of the fellows advised him to apologise to Outram and have done with it.

To the general surprise, Levison persisted in his story.

In the face of the plainest evidence, he persisted that Valentine Outram was George Purkiss of Hilstall Reformatory, and when he addressed him he never called him anything but "Purkiss."

As the two were not, of course, on friendly terms, Levison had no reason for addressing him at all; but he found opportunities.

At the breakfast-table he would say, "Pass the salt, Purkiss." In the dormitory he would say, "Good-night, Purkiss!"

He lost no opportunity of addressing that name to the new junior, till the other fellows were as tired of it as Outram himself.

Levison did not convince anybody of anything, except that he was a persistent slanderer.

He was known, in the first place, to be untruthful, and it was pretty evident that he had taken a dislike to the new Fourth-Former. That accounted for his persistence, to the satisfaction of the St. Jim's fellows.

Had Outram been of a quarrelsome nature, had he, indeed, "stood up" for himself, as any other fellow at St. Jim's would have done, there would have been serious trouble between the two.

But the new junior took everything quietly.

Sometimes his good-looking face would flush under Levison's taunting words, but he did not retort, and he did not hit out.

His patience had only one possible explanation, so far as the St. Jim's fellows could see. He must be a hopeless funk!

But that, in itself, made Levison's accusation absurder than ever. Levison's contention was that Outram could have knocked him out with a single blow if he had chosen, and that he was a desperate character, who had been sent to a juvenile prison for ruffianism and contempt of law and order. It was not likely that such a character would take Levison's taunts quietly.

Indeed, Blake declared that Levison would never have dared to repeat his accusation if he believed it to be true.

But in that he did the cad of the Fourth an injustice. Levison flattered himself that he was acting from a sense of duty, and he was in hopes that the young ruffian, as he called him, would betray himself by some brutal outbreak. If that came to pass, Levison was certain to be the sufferer, but he would have gained his point.

And he was running the risk in order to prove sooner or later that he was in the right.

Meanwhile, Outram's life was not a happy one. Apart from Levison's persecution, he had found other enemies. The fact being fully established that he was a funk, and could not stand up for himself, he was at the mercy of fellows like Crooke and Mellish.

He was ragged, and tricks were played upon his property. His books torn or hidden, his bicycle damaged, his clothes sewn up, his Sunday topper stamped upon. Tom Merry & Co. frowned upon these proceedings, but they did not feel called upon to interfere.

If the new boy had been an invalid, or a fellow with glasses, like Skimpole, they would soon have put an end to the persecution. But Outram was a strong and well-set-up fellow, and there seemed no reason at all why he could not take his own part.

Tom Merry offered to teach him to box, in a good-natured moment, but Outram declined. He did not want to learn to box.

He played cricket, and played it well, and before a week was out his name was down as a reserve for the junior House Eleven.

Most of the fellows let him alone, though they could not help despising his pusillanimity.

But a few ill-natured "rotters" like Crooke and Mellish and Piggott found a constant amusement in tormenting him, feeling safe from consequences.

Tom Merry took him to task on the subject one day. Levison had called him "Purkiss" in the passage, and Outram had gone out into the quad with flushed cheeks. The captain of the Shell went after him.

"Look here, Outram!" he said sharply.

"Well?" said Outram.

"Why don't you knock Levison down, and shut him up?"

"I don't want to fight."

"Well, it wouldn't be much of a fight between you and Levison. He's a weedy waster," said Tom. "You look twice as strong as he is!"

"All the more reason why I shouldn't hit him," said Outram quietly.

"H'm! Yes, in a way. But—but a fellow is expected to stand up for himself," urged Tom. "I suppose it isn't pleasant to you to be called a coward?"

Outram crimsoned.

"I'm not a coward," he said.

"Well, then, don't make fellows think you are one. It's pretty rotten for the House," said Tom. "Nobody believes that lie of Levison's. But the New House fellows chip us about having a funk here!"

"I'm sorry."

"Clampe's a New House chap," said Tom. "He was ragging you the day you came. I saw him knock your hat off this morning, and you let him do it."

"I didn't mind."

"Oh, rats! Would you have let him punch your nose?"

"I—I don't know. They haven't gone so far as that yet."

"They jolly soon will, if you don't hit back. If you're not a worin and a funk, what are you playing this game for?"

"I'm a peaceful chap. I'm determined not to get into a fight."

"But why? There's no harm in a mill with the gloves on."

"It's a principle."

Tom Merry rubbed his nose.

"Well, if it's a principle, and you believe in it, you'd better stick to it, I suppose," he said slowly. "But I'm blessed if I catch on! Most fellows would think that principle was another name for funk!"

"You think so, I suppose?" said Outram quietly.

"Blessed if I know what to think!" said Tom. "You don't look like a coward, but you act like one."

Outram was silent.

Tom Merry left him, feeling perplexed. That evening, in the common-room, when Outram came in, Levison greeted him as usual:

"Hallo! Here's Purkiss!"

"Oh, shut up!" said Tom Merry irritably. "We've had enough of that, Levison."

"Yaas, do wing off, Levison!" said Arthur Augustus. "You are growin' to be a feahful bore, you know!"

"When Purkiss has had enough of it he may clear out," said Levison. "We don't want reformatory kids here!"

"You know what you'd get if Railton heard you say that," said Manners.

"He's taken Railton in."

"And taken Major Outram in, and Sir Robert Outram, you ess?" hooted Blake.

"He must have, as he's Purkiss of Hilstall."

"For goodness' sake, don't be such an ass, Levison!" said Talbot of the Shell. "I suppose you don't deny that there is a real Valentine Outram somewhere?"

"I suppose there is."

"Well, if a chap named Purkiss has taken his place, where is he?"

"I shouldn't wonder if this fellow's ruffianly friends have kidnapped him, and are keeping him out of the way," said Levison coolly.

"Well, you are an ass!"

"Bai Jove! D'waw it mild, Levison!"

"The rotter would say anything rather than own up he was lying," said Tom Merry.

"You can call me what you like!" sneered Levison. "I shall go on calling that fellow Purkiss, as his name is Purkiss."

"Now, look here," said Talbot, "be reasonable, Levison! You are suggesting that this kid has palmed himself off on Valentine Outram's people as the real Outram?"

"Yes."

"Then he must be just like the real Outram, or he couldn't do it?"

"Yes."

"That's the same as saying that there's a strong likeness between the real Outram and the Purkiss you speak of?"

"Yee-es," said Levison more slowly, as he realised Talbot's drift.

"Very well. The likeness exists," said Talbot, "and that's what made you take this kid for Purkiss."

"Bai Jove! That is wondrously out remarkably well!" said D'Arcy.

"Only it isn't merely a case of a likeness," said Levison obstinately. "This fellow is the real Purkiss."

"Then you claim to know him better than his own father?"

"It looks like it—yes."

"Oh, it's no good talking to you!" said Talbot impatiently.

"I think it's time you chucked it, Levison."

"I sha'n't chuck it till Purkiss owns up."

"Outwam, deah boy, I wemmend you to take Levison by the scuff of the neck and wub his wotten nose in the coal-lockah!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

"He hasn't the pluck!" sneered Crooke.

Certainly Crooke's remark seemed to be well-founded, for Outram turned away without a word. He had listened to the discussion, with burning cheeks, but without speaking.

Outram sat down by the window, and as he did so Mellish of the Fourth hooked his chair away from behind, and the new junior sprawled on the floor with a crash. It was a dangerous trick. Outram's head struck the floor hard, and he lay dazed for some moments. He rose slowly, and Mellish grinned at him. Outram rubbed the back of his head, his eyes glinting.

"What did you do that for, Mellish?" he said between his teeth.

"Why shouldn't I, funk?" said Mellish insolently.

Outram strode towards him, his fists clenched. He caught Levison's eyes fixed on him expectantly. It was the anticipated outbreak at last, the cad of the Fourth told himself gleefully. But Outram paused.

Mellish had shrunk for a moment from the blaze in the new junior's eyes. But as Outram turned back he recovered his courage, and, with a mocking chuckle, he struck the new junior in the face with his open hand.

"Now come on, you funk!" said Mellish.

"Go it, deah boy!" sang out Arthur Augustus.

There was a breathless pause. Then Outram turned quietly and walked out of the Common-room.

CHAPTER 7.

Arthur Augustus Thinks It Out!

"PENNY for 'em!" said Blake humorously.

It was a half-holiday, and the chums of Study No. 6 were sauntering along the towing-path beside the shining Ryll.

It was a sunny afternoon, and the chums of the Fourth were looking very cheery, with the exception of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

The swell of St. Jim's had a wrinkle in his brow, and had seemed in a brown study for some time. Hence Blake's offer of the small sum of one penny for his thoughts—probably their full value, in Blake's opinion.

"I've been thinkin', deah boys," said Arthur Augustus, breaking his long silence at last.

"Oh, good!" said Blake. "Have you found out how to get tea in the study for threepence-a-penny? If you haven't, we'd better get in time for tea in Hall."

"I have not been thinkin' about tea, Blake."

"I have," said Herries feelingly. "I'm getting hungry now."

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"I've been thinkin' about the new chap, Blake."
 "Oh, that funk!" said Blake carelessly. "I hope you haven't asked him to tea. Threepence-a-penny won't go far among five."

"And we don't want any funks in No. 6," growled Herries.
 "I told you that plain enough last time, Gussy."

"So did I," agreed Dig.
 "The fact is, dear boys, I don't weally believe that chap is a funk at all," said Arthur Augustus.

"Rate!"
 "You are awah that I have wathah a gift of tact and judgment," I have come to the conclusion that Outwam is not a funk."

"Bow-wow!"
 "He told me the day he came that he had a vewy bad tempah, and was twyin' to learn to keep it in check. For that reason he is determined not to fight anybody. It is a mattah of high principles with him."

"High rats!" said Herries.
 "Waalay, Hewwies!"

"About tea—" said Blake thoughtfully.
 "Nevah mind tea, Blake! I trust you can rely on my judgment, and will agree with me that poor old Outwam is not a funk. I admit that his principles are wathah peculiar, and that I wogard them as mistaken. But a chap has a right to have his principles respected—like those Pacifist chaps, you know, who don't believe in sheddin' blood for any reason whatever. I wogard Outwam as an ass, but I don't wogard him as a funk."

"There's plenty of bread for toast," said Blake, "and some of the sardines are still fairly fit. But as for anything else—"

"Pway don't intewwupt me with that wot, Blake! I am suah that Outwam is not a funk. Look how he plays cricket. At pwactice the othah day Clampe was bowlin' to him, and we all know he meant to hit Outwam for one of his wotten jokes. Outwam knew it, too, but he stood up without flinchin'. And you know that beast Clampe caught him a smack on the head with the ball."

"I'd have busted a stump over Clampe for that!" said Herries. "Outwam didn't, because he's a mensty funk."

"Wata! I am suah it was his principles!"
 "Well, that's enough about Outwam," said Blake. "Now about tea—"

"I have not quite finished, Blake. You will acknowledge that poor old Outwam is bein' led a dog's life."

"Funks usually are," said Digby. "A school isn't the place for a funk. It made me sick to see him let Mollich punch his face the other day. I was jolly inclined to give him another myself for taking it quietly."

"But if it was a mattah of pinciple—"

"Oh, ring off!"

"I wogard that remark as wude, Dig. But to come to the point—"

"You're really coming to a point?" exclaimed Blake, in astonishment.

"Yaas, you ass! To come to the point, I wogard it as bein' up to this studay to look atfah Outwam."

"Wha-a-at!"

"He is bein' led a dog's life for his peculiar principles"

"His peculiar funk, you mean."

"His principles, dear boy. I suggest that Studay No. 6 takes him undah its pwotection, and puts down all that wotten waggin'."

Whenever a chap goes for poor old Outwam one of us can fight the chap—we will take it in turns. Then the wottahs will leave the kid alone."

Arthur Augustus propounded this surprising proposition with great seriousness. His chums simply blinked at him.

"Well, you ass!" gasped Herries.

"Yes," stuttered Blake, "I can see myself turning into a day-murse for a funk—I don't think!"

"I've a jolly good mind to give him some myself for being such a worm," said Dig. "That's how I look at it!"

"I trust you will back me up?" said Arthur Augustus, with dignity.

"If you start chumming with that funk we won't back you up—"

"We'll knock you down!"

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"And jump on you!" added Herries.
 "I should uttally wufuse to be jumped on, Hewwies! I wogard this as a duty, and if you fellahs don't back me up I shall do the duty on my own. I am not goin' to see a chap wagged for his high pinciple."

"Fathead!" howled Blake. "It isn't principles, it's funk."

"Blue funk, you ass!" growled Herries.

"Wats! I considah—bai jove!" Arthur Augustus D'Arcy broke off suddenly. "There is that wascal Weekes."

A fat man, with a bowler hat cocked on one side of his head, was sitting on a stile, which gave access to a field beside the towing-path. The juniors knew him well enough. It was Mr. Weekes, a bookmaker of a particularly disreputable kind, who lived in Wayland. Owing to certain of Mr. Weekes' practices, he was unable to show himself on the race-course, and he turned a more or less honest penny making bets in public-houses and such resorts. And it had come to the knowledge of the Cb. that he had inveigled into his shady practices a junior belonging to St. Jim's, and he had been solemnly threatened with a tremendous ragging if he showed himself anywhere near the school again.

The four juniors stopped at the sight of him. Arthur Augustus' noble eye gleamed behind his eyeglasses. He forgot all about Outwam of the Fourth. There was other business in hand now.

"That wascal again!" he said. "You wemembah what we pwomised him, dear boys! It looks to me as if he is waitin' heah for somebody. We told him we would wag him if he came wound St. Jim's again."

"We've got time before tea," said Blake, consulting his watch.

"Yaas, wathah."

The four juniors advanced upon Mr. Weekes. That gentleman lifted a large and knobby stick into view.

"Ande off!" he said truculently.

"You uttah wottah!" said Arthur Augustus, in measured tones. "I have vewy little doubt that you are waitin' heah for a St. Jim's chap, and you are cawwysin' on your wascally games again."

"Oh, go 'ome!" said Mr. Weekes.

"I wufuse to go home. I am goin' to 'thwack you!"

"Ande off!" roared Mr. Weekes, flourishing his stick. Blake dodged under the stick, and the next moment Mr. Weekes was yanked off the stile and was sprawling on his back in the grass.

CHAPTER 8. A Licking for Two!

"YOOOOP!"
 Thus Mr. Weekes, as he came down on the hard, unsympathetic earth.

There was a patter of feet on the towing-path, and Levison of the Fourth came running up.

"Let the man alone!" he exclaimed savagely. "What the dickens are you meddlin' with him for?"

D'Arcy's eyeglasses turned on the flushed, panting cad of the Fourth.

"So you are the wottah he was waitin' for, Levison?"

"Might have guessed that," grunted Herries.

"Mind your own business!" said Levison fiercely. "It's nothing to do with you, I suppose?"

"That's where you make a little mistake," said Blake cheerily.

"We're not going to let you disgrace our school more than we can help, Levison. Turn that fat rotter over, and we'll wallop him!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Ande off!" yelled Mr. Weekes.

"Elp, Master Levison!"

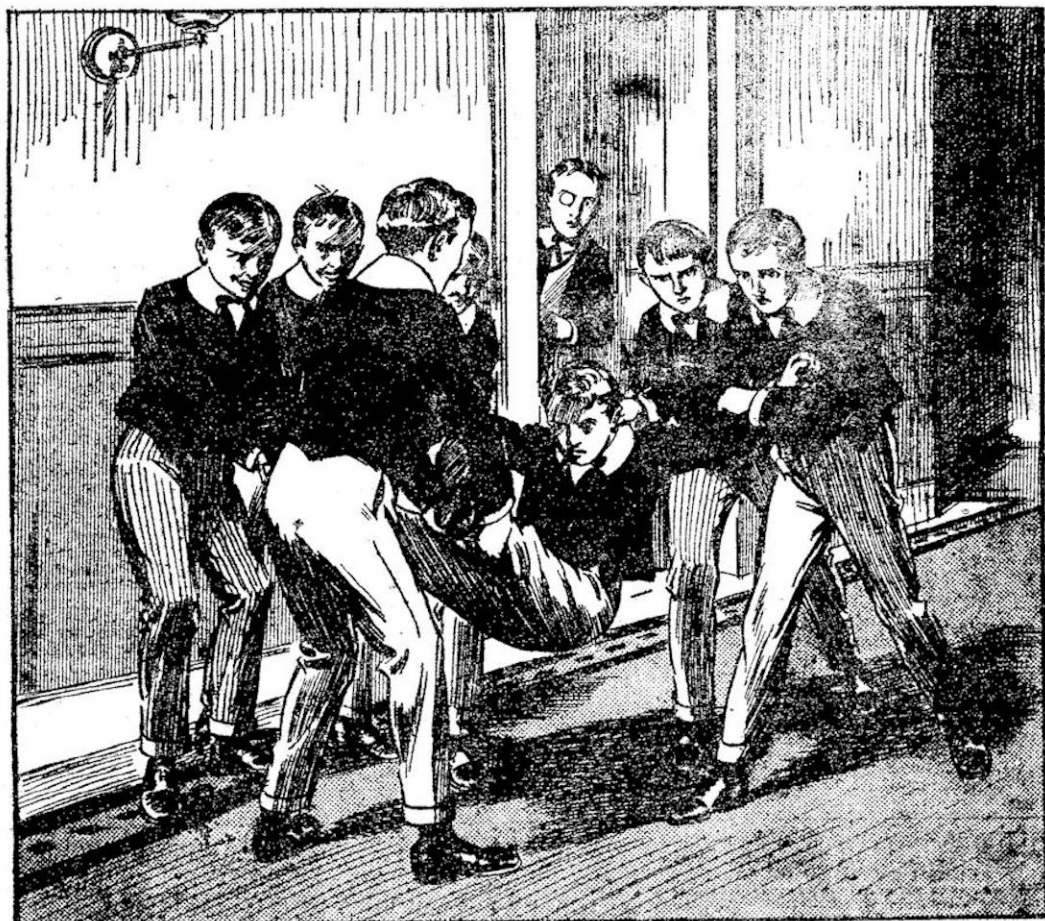
Levison clenched his fists. But he hesitated. His hesitation was cut short by Jack Blake, who put up his hands and advanced on him.

"Both these cads want a lickin'," said Blake. "You lick that blackguard while I attend to Levison."

"Hear, hear!"

Mr. Weekes was struggling in the grasp of Herries and Digby; but he struggled in vain. He was rolled over on his face in the grass, and Arthur Augustus picked up the big stick he had dropped. Arthur

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OUT TO-DAY!



D'Arcy put up his eyeglasses and surveyed the scene outside in astonishment. Half-a-dozen fellows were there—and it was evidently a ragging, for Crooke and Co. were bumping another fellow along the passage, amid shouts of laughter. (See Chapter I.)

Augustus's aristocratic face was very grim. He felt it a stern duty to administer corporal punishment to Mr. Weekes, and he was not the fellow to falter in the execution of a duty.

"Hold the wottah, deah boys! I will give him a dozen!"

"Go it!"

Whack! whack! whack!

"Yoop! 'Elp! Perlice!" yelled Mr. Weekes. "'Elp, Master Levison!"

But Levison was in no condition to render aid. Jack Blake was driving him back into the rushes beside the river, under a shower of heavy drives. Levison caught one with his nose, and one with his eye, and one with his chin. Then he went down with a crash into the muddy rushes, and stayed there.

"Get up again if you want some more!" said Blake invitingly.

Levison did not get up. He squirmed in the rushes, nursing his nose and eye, and muttering furious words.

Meanwhile, the drastic punishment of Mr. Weekes was proceeding.

Whack! whack! whack! whack!

The fat bookmaker squirmed, and wriggled, and yelled under the infliction. He howled with anguish and howled for mercy. But he received the dozen cuts right up to the end of the dozen.

"There!" said Arthur Augustus breathlessly, throwing down the stick. "I wathah think that will be enough."

"Is that enough, Weekesey?" asked Blake.

"Yow-ow-ow!"

Mr. Weekes sat up, perspiring and crimson. He shook a knucky and exceedingly dirty fist at the juniors.

"I'll make you squirm for this 'ere!" he gasped. "You especially, Master Glas-eye D'Arcy. You young 'ound—"

"Pway let us go, deah boys! That wotten wascal's language is quite inolewable."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Kemme get a chance at yer on a dark night, and a few pals with me!" shrieked Mr. Weekes. "I'll lay yer up for a lifetime."

"Bai Jove! If you fellahs are weady, we will go. That feahful person has a most waucous, unpleasant voice. It weally jabs on my nerves."

And Arthur Augustus walked away gracefully down the towing-path with his grinning chums.

Levison of the Fourth crawled out of the rushes. His nose was crimson, but his cheeks were almost white with rage. The bookmaker sat up and glared at him.

"Nice thing you've got me into!" he snarled.

"What about me?" snarled Levison in turn. "Look at my nose! Look at my eye! I warned you it wasn't safe to meet, so near the school, too."

"Ain't it a free country?" demanded Mr. Weekes. "Can't an honest man go where he blessed well likes?"

"An honest man, perhaps," sneered Levison. "Don't blow off gas, Weekes—that doesn't do any good. Think of some way of getting even with them."

"I'll make 'em squirm for it, if I go to chokey over it!" hissed Mr. Weekes, struggling painfully to his feet. "Wot

business is it of theirs if a man 'as a bet on with a sporting young gent-wot?"

"None at all," said Levison.

"Course it ain't! Let me come on Mister Stuck-up D'Arcy on a quiet night, in the lane, with two or three of us to 'andle 'im!" said Mr. Weekes. "I'll make 'e sorry he's raised 'is 'and to me!"

Levison's eyes glittered.

"Do you mean business, or are you only gassing?" he asked.

"I'll show you whether I mean it, if I get a dog's chance," said Mr. Weekes, wriggling with pain. "I'll show 'im, too!"

"Suppose I could fix it for you?"

"Eh?"

"If you mean what you say it would be easy enough," said Levison, sinking his voice, and his eyes glittering greenly. "I could easily find out some time when he's going out alone—or only one other chap with him, and—if I sent you word—"

"Only gimme a chance!" said Mr. Weekes hoarsely. "I tell yer that if I get a chance he won't be able to crawl 'ome arterwards!"

"It's a go," said Levison.

"Give me the chance, that's all. I'll 'ave Dick 'Ogg with me, and the Ferret, and Bill the Smasher," muttered Mr. Weekes, "and one or two other coves, and 'tween us we'll make him 'op—if we git him nice and quiet to ourselves."

"Done!"

When Levison turned homeward Mr. Weekes went limping away across the fields towards Wayland, still wriggling with pain and muttering vengeance. Levison's eye was darkening, and there were grinning looks turned upon him as he came into the School House.

He was rubbing his eye and nose alternately in his study when his study-mates came in for their preparation. Lumley, Lumley and Mellish and Trimble grinned at the sight of him. "Has Outram hit out at last, then?" chuckled Lumley-Lumley.

"It wasn't Outram—it was Blake," grinned Trimble. "I saw it all from the river. Levison met a bookmaker, and those chaps licked the pair of them. He, he, he!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Lumley-Lumley.

Levison did not speak, but his eyes burned. The next morning Blake and Levison received a hundred lines each from their Form-master for fighting. For the next two or three days Levison's eye changed to all colours of the rainbow before it settled down to an art shade in purple. But the cad of the Fourth had one consolation. He felt that he would be indemnified for his injuries when one, at least—perhaps two—of the chums of Study No. 6 were betrayed

into the hands of Mr. Weekes and his rowdy friends. And Levison waited and watched for his opportunity.

CHAPTER 9.

A Peculiar Fight.

OUTRAM of the Fourth stood at the window of his study, looking out towards the cricket-field.

It was Saturday afternoon, and the bright summer sunshine streamed down upon the playing-fields of St. Jim's.

A House match was proceeding on Little Side, between Tom Merry & Co. and Figgins & Co. of the New House.

Outram could see a part of the cricket-field from his window, and he was watching the white-clad figures moving on the level green.

The scene was cheery and inspiring, but the junior's brow was dark, his mouth drooping.

He was alone in the study. Both his study-mates were on the cricket-field.

Outram's heart was in his eyes as he watched the cricketers. He was down on the list of reserves, and he had shown good form at cricket, and could expect to have a chance in the House matches ere long. But—there was a big "but." The reputation of funking that clung to him did not make any difference to his form as a cricketer; but it was likely to make a good deal of difference to his prospects of playing for his House.

Tom Merry would certainly hesitate to include him in the eleven, at least, unless he was very hard up for a player. It was very likely that the other fellows would raise strong objections to his inclusion, too.

Outram had become a "rank outsider" in his House.

His active persecutors numbered only half a dozen, but most of the fellows despised him, and did not take the trouble to conceal their opinion. Nobody wanted to chum with a funk. He had no friend.

His study-mates tolerated him, that was all. They were good-natured fellows enough, which was fortunate for him. But they did not want to "pal" with a fellow who allowed a cad like Mellish to hit him at his own sweet will.

Since that scene in the Common-room, a week ago, hardly a fellow had taken any notice of Outram. Tom Merry & Co. sometimes gave him a greeting, from sheer good-nature; but they did not want to have anything to do with him. His study-mates were ashamed of him, though they kept civil.

Indeed, if Levison's strange accusation had proved true, the School House fellows would probably have thought more highly of "George Purkiss" than they did of Valentine Outram. Even a hooligan was better than a funk.

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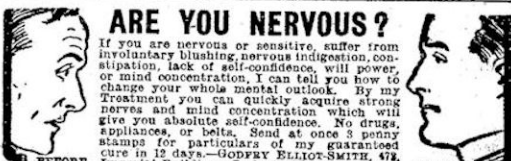
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Crooke & Co. did not trouble Outram in his own study.

Outram stared from the window, his brow growing darker and darker.

He wanted to be on the cricket-field himself, to watch, if he could not play. But he was aware that the merry ragers were lying in wait for him in the passage.

Crooke and Clampe and Mellish were not cricketers, and took no interest in House matches. They preferred smoking and playing nap. On this particular afternoon, having nothing special to do, the idle young rascals had planned to amuse themselves by ragging the funk. Outram certainly had given them no cause of offence; but he did not defend himself, and that was enough for the cads of the School House.

They were waiting in the passage ready to collar Outram as he came out. The House was almost deserted that bright half-holiday, and the opportunity was excellent.

Several times Outram had heard whispering and soft footsteps in the passage. He did not leave the study. He wondered whether Crooke & Co. would lose patience and come there for him.

The door opened at last, and Outram turned wearily from the window. George Gerald Crooke grinned into the study. Mellish and Clampe grinned over his shoulders.

"Ain't you coming out this lovely afternoon?" grinned Crooke.

Outram shook his head.

"Blessed if the funk isn't afraid to come out of his study!" said Clampe.

"We've come to see you, Outram, as you won't come to see us!" chortled Mellish.

"I wish you'd let me alone," said Outram quietly.

The three juniors laughed in chorus.

"No fear!" said Crooke. "We don't like funks in this House. Why don't you get out of St. Jim's? You know you're a disgrace to the school!"

"I'll tell you what," said Clampe. "Mellish punched your head the other day. Why don't you fight Mellish?"

"Yes, come on!" said Mellish valiantly.

Outram shook his head.

"I am not a funk," he said quietly, "but I have made up my mind to fight no one. I think you might let me alone."

"Well, we're going to make you fight Mellish!" chuckled Crooke. "Now, stand up to him!"

"I will not!"

"Then you stand up to him, Percy, and punch his nose till he begins!"

"He, he, he!" cackled Mellish.

Percy Mellish was as brave as a lion—when he had to deal with a fellow who was quite at his mercy. He advanced upon Outram with his hands up.

"Mind he doesn't dodge out," he said.

But Outram showed no inclination to dodge. He faced Mellish calmly, though he did not put up his hands.

"Here goes for your nose!" said the cheerful Percy.

And he let out his right full at Outram's handsome face.

Outram's arm came up like a flash, and the blow was guarded. Mellish gave a yelp of pain; the knock on his wrist had hurt him. Crooke and Clampe stared; Outram could have knocked the cad of the Fourth flying if he had liked. But he did not strike.

"Go for him, Percy!"

"Mop him up!"

"By gad, I will!" snarled Mellish. "I'll smash the funky cad!"

And Mellish attacked hotly.

Outram guarded.

He did not hit out in return, but he stopped every blow Mellish aimed at him, with a skill and success which showed that he was a past-master of the boxer's art.

Crooke and Clampe looked on in wonder.

That a fellow who could box like this should allow himself to be bullied by Percy Mellish was simply astounding. It was clear that Mellish was at his mercy if he chose to hit out. But he did not.

"Blessed if I ever saw such a rotten coward!" said Crooke.

"Too funky to hit out, by gad! He could make hay of Mellish if he had the pluck to hit him!"

"He's making hay of him now," grinned Clampe.

Mellish was getting hurt, from the sharp raps that knocked his clumsy drives aside. He was getting furious, too. Not a single blow had reached the new junior, and Mellish had bellows to mend. His two companions were laughing loudly at his failure.

Mellish backed away at last, gritting his teeth. He was breathless and winded, and scowling with rage.

"I'm fed up with the cad!" he growled. "He won't fight! He hasn't pluck enough to fight a white rabbit. Collar him, and we'll ink him!"

"Good egg!"

The three ragers advanced upon Outram together. Just

then the study door opened again, and an eyeglass glimmered in. Behind the eyeglass was Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, the swell of the Fourth.

"Bai Jove! I thought I should find you wottahs heah!" said D'Arcy, as he came into the study.

CHAPTER 10.

Arthur Augustus Comes, and Sees, and Conquers.

ARTHUR AUGUSTUS D'ARCY peeled off his elegant jacket, and threw it upon a chair. Then he removed his eyeglass, and pushed back his cuffs.

Crooke & Co. watched those proceedings in angry astonishment; Outram with a very peculiar expression.

"Look here, you can clear out, D'Arcy!" snapped Crooke.

"It is you who are goin' to clear out, Cwooke! I am goin' to give you three wottahs a feishful thwashin' all round," said Arthur Augustus calmly. "I wegard Outram as a fiend, and I am not goin' to allow him to be wagged!"

"So you choose a blue funk for a pal?" sneered Mellish.

"I do not wegard Outram as a funk. I wegard him as a fellah with vewy queeah pwiniciples."

"Silly ass!" said Clampe.

"He's a rotten coward," said Crooke, "and we're going to rag him as much as we like. And you can mind your own business."

"Which of you is comin' on first?" asked Arthur Augustus calmly. "I am goin' to thwash the lot of you. As you are all wotten funks and slackahs I am willin' to take two togethah, if you like."

"You'll take three together if you don't clear off, you tailor's dummy!" said Clampe.

"I wufuse to be called a tailah's dummy, Clampe! Upon the whole, I will thwash you first. Put up your hands, you wottah!"

The three ragers exchanged a quick glance, and closed in on D'Arcy together. They did not expect any interference from Outram, who had not spoken a word, but was looking on with a pale and harassed face.

"Faish play, you wottahs!" said Arthur Augustus indignantly. "Thwee to one is like wotten Pwussians!"

"Will you get out, then?" demanded Crooke.

"Certainly not! Outwam, deah boy, I suppose it is no use wequestin' you to take one of these cowardly wottahs off my hands?"

"I am not going to fight," said Outram quietly. "I don't ask you to interfere, D'Arcy. It's very kind of you, but I don't want you to."

"Wats! Suppose you take Cwooke by the neck, and hold him while I thwash the othah wottahs?" suggested D'Arcy. "He is a weedy beast, and you could hold him quite easily."

Outram hesitated.

"Let him touch me, that's all!" sneered Crooke.

"Come on, Outwam! You can hold the wottah by his beastly neck without wowwyin' about your weird pwiniciples, you know."

"I will do that," said Outram.

He advanced on Crooke. The cad of the Shell stared at him, taken quite by surprise. Then he put up his hands and hit out furiously, expecting Outram to cower away. But he was disappointed. The new junior guarded his blows with cool skill, brushed his clumsy hands aside, and gripped him.

Crooke simply shrivelled up in that powerful grasp. His wrists were seized and held together, and, struggle as he would, the cad of the Shell could not release them. He glared at Outram in rage and dismay.

"Let me go, you rotten funk!" he bawled.

Outram did not reply, but he dragged Crooke across the study, still gripping his wrists with a grip like a vice. Crooke howled with pain under that grip. But he resisted no longer, for that grasp betrayed a tremendous physical strength that scared him.

Arthur Augustus chirruped gleefully. Mellish and Clampe would have gone to Crooke's aid, but they had no time. The swell of St. Jim's was attacking, and they had to defend themselves.

If the two young rascals had equalled Arthur Augustus in pluck, they would have had the best of the combat—two to one. But they were weedy and flabby and out of condition, and by no means of the stuff of which heroes are made. And Arthur Augustus, elegant and nutty as he was, had simply unlimited pluck.

He sailed in like a hurricane. Clampe and Mellish met him savagely, hitting out with furious force. But two or three drives did not suffice to stop the swell of St. Jim's. He drove his right at Mellish's chin, and sent the cad of the Fourth spinning like a top across the study. Mellish crashed

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down in the fender, and stayed there, groaning. He had had enough already.

Then Clampe was driven right round the study under D'Arcy's whirlwind attack. He defended himself in vain. Blow after blow crashed upon him, and he dodged and twisted and yelled.

"Lend me a hand, Mellish! Yaroooh! Back up, you funk! Yoop! Oh, my nose! Yow-ow-ow!"

Crash!

A terrific drive on the chest sent Clampe crashing down on Mellish in the fender. He sprawled there, groaning and clapping his nose.

Arthur Augustus grinned down at them a little breathlessly. "Get up, you wotthas, and have some more!" he gasped.

"Ow! Ow! Ow!"

"If you do not want any more you can cleah out!" said Arthur Augustus. "And if you do not depart immediately, I shall kick you fworm the studey!"

Mellish and Clampe picked themselves up and slunk out of the room. They had had more than enough. Arthur Augustus threw the door shut after them and turned to the scowling Crooke.

The Shell fellow was still helpless in Outram's iron grasp. He blinked apprehensively at D'Arcy.

"Look here, I'll—I'll go!" he panted.

"I am goin' to give you a fearful thwa-hin' first, Cwooke. Pway wese him, Outwam, deah boy."

Outram let the Shell fellow go. Crooke made a rush for the door, but he found Arthur Augustus like a lion in his path.

"Put up your hands, you wotthah!"

"Look here—Ow—yow—yah!"

Crooke put up his hands promptly to stop the rain of blows. But he did not succeed in stopping many of them. He backed round the table under the hot attack, panting, and as he came near the door he made a sudden spring for it, tore it open, and bolted.

Arthur Augustus rushed after him, and his foot crashed on Crooke as he went through the doorway, and the Shell fellow sprawled in the passage.

D'Arcy closed the door.

"All sewene!" he remarked.

Outram laughed.

"I do not think they will come back so long as you are here," he said.

"Wathah not! And I do not think they will wag you any more, deah boy. I am goin' to thwash them ewevy time."

"You're very good," said Outram gratefully. "I don't quite know why you're chipping in like this for me."

"I wegard it as a dutay," said D'Arcy loftily. "I do not believe you are a funk, deah boy, but only a howlin' ass with vewy queeah pwpinciples. I am goin' to look aftah you. Besides, you helped me with that wotten ablativ absolute the day you came, you know, and got me out of a wov. I suppose you don't want to stick indoors on a half-holiday? Come and watch the cwicket."

"You've given up cwicket this afternoon to look after me?" said Outram, eyeing the swell of St. Jim's curiously.

"Yaas."

"But why?"

"I wegard it as a dutay. I am goin' to stand by you."

"Every other fellow in the House is down on me."

"Yaas. You can wegard me as the champion of the oppwessed, you know," said Arthur Augustus cheerfully.

"And—and you don't despise me like the rest?" said Outram slowly.

"No; I only wegard you as a howlin' ass. Let's go down to the cwicket."

"Right-ho!"

The two juniors left the study together. Outram was silent and thoughtful, but Arthur Augustus chatted away cheerily as they walked down to Little Side.

CHAPTER 11.

A Lesson for Levison.

TOM MERRY'S wicket had just fallen to Fatty Wynn's bowling. Talbot and Jack Blake were at the wickets now, and batting well. Most of the juniors of both Houses were gathered round the field, looking on.

Arthur Augustus and Outram came up to the pavilion with a good many eyes on them. The swell of St. Jim's had linked arms with Outram. It was seldom that D'Arcy linked arms with anybody. But the lofty Gussy desired all the world to see that Outram was his friend. That would be enough to convince all St. Jim's that Outram was the right sort, in the great Gussy's opinion.

"What the thunder are you doing with that chap, Gussy?" growled Herries.

"Are you weferin' to my fwend Outram, Hewwies?"

"I'm referring to that funk!" said Herries truculently.

"Weally, Hewwies—"

"Are you playing the giddy ox again?" demanded Digby.

"Weally, Digby—"

"Hallo, Gussy!" said Tom Merry cheerily. "Have you come to see the duck's egg you've saved us from?"

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—"

"Hallo, Purkiss!" chimed in Levison of the Fourth. "Bit of a change here after Hilstall Reformatory, isn't it?"

Outram did not speak, and some of the fellows laughed. But Arthur Augustus frowned. He made a step towards Levison.

"Levison, deah boy, you have addressed an offensive wemark to my fwend Outwam," he said quietly.

"Your friend Purkiss, you mean," said Levison.

"I should wecommend Outwam to knock you down, Levison, but his extraordinary pwpinciples stand in the way."

"His extraordinary funk, you mean?" grinned Kangaroo.

"Pway do not intewwupt me, Kangaroo. Levison, I wish you to undahstand that I shall not allow you to address my fwend Outwam in that offensive mannah."

"I don't know any chap here named Outram," said Levison. "I know a chap named Purkiss—George Purkiss."

"You have wepeated the offence, Levison!"

"If Purkiss doesn't like it, he can say so," suggested Levison. "What are you chipping in for?"

"I am chippin' in because Outwam is my fwend—"

"He isn't!" hooted Herries.

"You are undah a misapprehension, Hewwies. He is. I am not goin' to allow you to be impertinent to Outwam, Levison."

"Do you mean Purkiss?"

"May I wequest you, Levison, to come into the gym with me?" asked Arthur Augustus, with elaborate politeness.

"You can request anything you like, you tailor's dummy, but I am going to call Purkiss Purkiss!" said Tom Merry.

"Don't begin a row now, Gussy," said Tom Merry. "Watch the cwicket, old chap, and tell us about that century you wouldn't have got."

"Wats! I am goin' to thwash Levison for insultin' my fwend!"

"Can't your precious friend stand up for himself?" bawled Herries.

"No. It is a mattah of pwpinciple."

"A matter of sneaking funk, you mean!"

"I do not mean anythin' of the sort, Hewwies. I do not pwpofess to compwehend Outwam's weird pwpinciples, but I wespsect them."

"Fathead!"

"Ass!" said Digby.

"Wats! Levison, will you, or will you not, come into the gym?"

"Go and eat coke!" said Levison.

Arthur Augustus pushed his cuffs back.

"Then I shall thwash you beah, Levison!"

"I say—" began Outram, pulling at D'Arcy's sleeve.

"Pway don't intewwupt me, Outwam. I am going to put an end to that wascal's wotten insinuations. Levison, I wequest you to apologise to Outwam at once!"

"Yes, I'm likely to apologise to a reformatory criminal. I don't think!" sneered Levison.

"Then come on, you cad!"

And Arthur Augustus rushed at Levison, hitting out.

Levison backed away; but he had to put up his hands. The other fellows gathered round in a ring.

"Go it, Gussy!" chirruped Digby.

Dig was "down" on his noble chum making friends with the funk. But he was quite in favour of licking Levison, anyway. Dig's opinion was that the more lickings Levison had, the better it would be for him.

"You silly fool, let me alone!" howled Levison.

"Wats! I am goin' to give you a fearful thwashin'!"

"Give him beans, Levison!" howled Piggott.

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But Levison did not look like giving the noble Gussy beans. He began to fight, as he had no choice about the matter. But he had little chance against the swell of the Fourth.

He was knocked right and left. Panting for breath, he receded before Gussy's hot attack, and went down at last in a heap, spluttering. "Too many cigarettes, dear boy," grinned Monty Lowther. "You never have your wind when you want it."

Arthur Augustus waited for Levison to rise. The cad of the Fourth sat up, scowling in a circle of grinning faces. "Do you wish to go any further, Levison?" asked Arthur Augustus politely.

"Hang you!"

"Will you have the extreme goodness to answer my question?"

"No, hang you!"

"Vewy well. I do not desiah to cwow ovah you in any way, Levison; but I must insist that you do not address my friend Outram as Purkiss any more, and do not utter any of your wotten insinuations. If you do so, I must warn you that I shall give you a fearful thwashin' every time."

Levison staggered to his feet. His face was black with rage.

"Hang you! The fellow's name is Purkiss——"

"Biff! Levison measured his length on the ground again, with a yell.

He blinked up furiously at the gleaming eyes of Arthur Augustus.

"Wepeat that remark, Levison, and I will wepeat that thump," said the swell of St. Jim's. "Every time, you know."

"Hang you!" groaned Levison.

"I am vewy sowwy to have to wesort to such wuff methods, Levison, but you have left me no othah resource."

Levison scrambled up, but he did not renew the conflict. He was not looking for a fight to a finish, and there were safer methods of vengeance—al! went well. He gave D'Arcy a black look, and strode away from the pavilion. Tom Merry clapped the swell of St. Jim's on the back.

"Well done, Gussy! What a ripping chap you are for minding other people's business!" he remarked.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Weally, Tom Mewwy——"

"And now leave that worm Outram alone!" growled Herries.

Arthur Augustus looked distressed.

"I should be awfully sowwy, Hewxies, to thwash an old pal——"

"Eh!"

"But I cannot permit you to address opprobrious remarks to my friend Outram," said Arthur Augustus firmly.

"You silly chump!" roared Herries. "I've a jolly good mind to mop up the ground with you, and knock a little sense into your silly head!"

"Man in!" rapped out Tom Merry. Talbot's wicket was down. And Herries had to take his bat and go to the wickets, which was perhaps fortunate just then.

Many curious glances were cast upon Outram as he stood watching the cricket with Arthur Augustus. Gussy's quixotic sense of the "funk" evoked tolerant smiles. The juniors agreed it was just like Gussy. But that a strong, healthy, fit fellow should stand idly by while another fellow fought his battles for him, caused nothing but disgust, and it added, if possible, to the contempt with which the unlucky Outram was already regarded.

But the despised outcast had a friend now, at all events. Arthur Augustus was loyal to the core, and he intended to stand by his new pal through thick and thin. But it was probable that Study No. 6 would have something to say about that!

CHAPTER 12. Trouble in Study No. 6.

"IT'S a disgrace to this study!"

Thus said Herries emphatically.

Blake and Digby nodded assent. Tom Merry and Manners and Lowther, who had been called in to give their valuable opinion had to concur.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy sniffed. Evidently he did not concur.

It was several days since the "row" on the cricket-field. Blake & Co. had hoped that Gussy's new idea would "blaze out" of its own accord. But the swell of the School House was a stickler.

He had chummed up with Valentine Outram, and wild horses would not have dragged him aside from the path he had marked out for himself.

It had been a good thing for Outram. The curious new boy, who either could not or would not stand up for himself, certainly needed a pal to stand up for him. Arthur Augustus had taken up the cudgels in his cause in the most unlike manner.

Crooke and Clampe and Mellish had ceased to rag. As they were booked for a row with D'Arcy whenever they meddled with Outram, they soon tired of that amusement. They were still showing signs of the "scrap" in the study.

Neither did Levison continue to address him as "Purkiss" or make references to the reformatory. Only once had he tried it on since the fight at the pavilion. It was in the Common-room one evening, and Arthur Augustus had immediately got his head into chancery, and hammered till Levison howled for mercy. After that, the cad of the Fourth let the matter drop, so far as open taunts went. He was no match for D'Arcy, either in fitness or courage, and he had to give way.

So the persecution had dropped. But the new junior was despised for allowing another fellow to fight his battles, and no one but Arthur Augustus attributed his curious conduct to his "weird principles." As Blake remarked, the long and the short of it was that he was a rotten funk; and Study No. 6 didn't want to have anything to say to a funk. If the poor beast couldn't help it, they were sorry for him, but they wanted him to keep clear of their study.

Hence the meeting in No. 6, at which the Terrible Three had been called in to assist in reasoning with the swell of St. Jim's. Blake & Co.'s view was that Gussy should drop the funk like a hot potato. Gussy's obstinate opinion was that he wasn't going to drop a chap because of his high principles.

"Leave it to your Uncle Tom," suggested the captain of the Shell. "Now, Gussy, are you willing to put it to the vote?"

"Wats?"

"Well, I agree to that," said Blake, feeling secure of a majority. "Put it to the vote, Gussy. That's fair."

"Wubbish! You are prejudiced against my friend Outram. I am goin' to stand up for him and look after him. It's no good arguin', dear boys. It is uttah wot to say that the chap is a funk. His patah is fightin' the Germans at this vewy moment."

"What difference does that make, ass?"

"I wufuse to be called an ass. And his uncle was distinguished in the South African War."

"Never mind his pater and his uncle. The fellow himself is a worm," said Digby. "I don't want to rag him, as far as that goes. But let him keep to himself."

"Chuck up chumming with him, that's all," said Blake.

"Impos, dear boy!"

"Look here, you'll have to chuck him up, or chuck us up!" exclaimed Herries excitedly. "We're not going to pal with a funk. The New House rotters were chawing us about him only this afternoon."

"Blow the New House wottahs!"

"But they're right this time," said Blake. "Outram's a disgrace to the House, and a disgrace to anybody who knows him. Now, look here, Gussy, we ask you in a friendly way to chuck him. These Shell chaps agree."

The Terrible Three nodded. They sympathised with Blake.

"I don't mind being civil to the chap," said Blake, greatly aggrieved. "I'm not the fellow to be down on a funk, even. But we can't pal with him. And if he's with you, he's with us."

"That's all right, if you come wound and back me up. Then we can pal with him," suggested Arthur Augustus.

"Fathead!" howled Blake.

"Ass!" hooted Digby.

"Duffer!" said Herries.

"I wufuse to weply to those opprobrious remarks," said Arthur Augustus, with dignity. "I trust you will agree with me when you are coolah. You weally might weep on a fellow's tact and judgment."

"Rats and piffle!" said Blake. "Look here, we mean

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business, D'Arcy! If you go on palling with that outsider, you needn't speak to us, and that's flat."

"Agreed!" said Herries and Digby together. Arthur Augustus rose to his feet, and turned his eyeglass on his old chums, more in sorrow than in anger.

"Vewy well," he said quietly. "I must do what I wegard as a duty, of course. If you chaps do not approve, you are at liberty to dwp my acquaintance. I have the honah to wish you a vewy good evenin'."

And Arthur Augustus walked out of the study, with his noble nose considerably elevated. Blake & Co., and the Terrible Three looked at one another, and Jack Blake gave a dismal groan.

"Now the silly ass is on the high horse," he said. "What the merry dickens are we to do with the idiot?"

"Suppose you swallow Outram whole?" suggested Tom Merry.

"No fear!"

"He isn't really a bad chap, if only he wasn't such a funk," remarked Manners.

Blake snorted.

"This study don't pal with funks. If Gussy chooses to go off, he can go; I'm fed-up with his rot. I expect he'll come back to tea, anyway."

But D'Arcy did not come back to tea. The six juniors had their tea. And when they strolled out into the quadrangle afterwards, they found Arthur Augustus there, chatting with Outram.

"So you're still keeping it up, you ass?" growled Blake.

Arthur Augustus looked at him coldly.

"Are you addressin' me?" he asked.

"You know I am, you fathead!"

"Am I to take that as a respectful wequest to wenev my acquaintance?"

"Not unless you drop that funk."

"Then pway do not take the twouble to address me at all, Master Blake." And Arthur Augustus walked away with his new friend.

"Master Blake!" stuttered Jack. "I'll Master Blake him, the frabjous ass!"

"Oh, let 'em both go and eat coke, and let's go down to the cricket," said Herries. "I dare say Gussy will get tired of playing the giddy goat in the long run."

Outram was looking troubled and distressed as he walked away with the swell of St. Jim's. D'Arcy was calm—loftily calm.

"I can't have this," said Outram abruptly. "You're quarrelling with your friends on my account, D'Arcy."

"Oh, that's nothin'."

"You'd better do as Blake asks you, and leave me alone," urged Outram. "I don't want to be the cause of trouble for you."

"Wubbish! I shall nevah speak to those chaps again unless they wequest me to wenev the acquaintance. And I shall not dwp your acquaintance, Outram," unless you assuah me that you do not wish to speak to me."

"I'm not likely to do that," said Outram, laughing a little.

"It makes a lot of difference to me. But on your account—"

"That's all wight; they'll come wound."

"Will they?" said Outram doubtfully.

"Yaas, I think so. But if they do not, it is all the same. I shall wefuse to wecognise them," said Arthur Augustus, loftily. "Let's go and watch the ewicket."

Outram still looked troubled; but his champion was determined to be cheery. The dispute in Study No. 6 was soon known all over the School House, and many curious eyes were turned on D'Arcy and Outram when they came into the Common-room that evening together. Blake and Herries and Dig were there, but they did not speak to their old chum, and D'Arcy did not seem to be aware of their existence. The two strangely-assorted friends played chess till bedtime.

The other fellows did not all follow Blake's line. Hammond of the Fourth was devoted to the noble Gussy, and he was prepared to "swallow" the funk rather than cut his chum. And Julian and Kerruish spoke to them both. But most of the fellows let Outram severely alone; and as D'Arcy was with him, they let D'Arcy alone, too. The swell of St. Jim's did not seem to mind. The noble Gussy was sufficient unto himself.

Levison of the Fourth stopped to speak to D'Arcy in the passage when they were leaving the Common-room. D'Arcy eyed him coldly.

"Pway do not detain me, Levison!" he said.

"Just a word," said Levison, with an evil grin. "It's something that concerns your dear friend—ahem!—Outram. I mustn't say Purkiss now."

"Not unless you want to be knocked ovah, you wottah!"

"I'm going to get my uncle from Hilstall to visit me."

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here," grinned Levison. "He will see Outram. I think that will be the finish, what?"

"Kindly allow me to paas, Levison."

"And if my uncle recognises him as Purkiss—"

Biff!

Arthur Augustus followed Outram down the passage, leaving Levison of the Fourth sitting on the floor. Outram had heard Levison's words, and his face had gone white. D'Arcy glanced at him in surprise.

"It makes no difference to you if that wottah's wotten uncle comes heah, of course?" he remarked.

"Of—of—course not."

"In fact, it may turn out a good thing," said Arthur Augustus thoughtfully. "The governah of Hilstall will be able to say quite positively that you are not the fellah Levison took you for, and even Levison will be satisfied then."

Outram did not reply.

CHAPTER 13.

Back Up!

TOM MERRY tapped Arthur Augustus on the shoulder as the juniors came out after dinner on the following Wednesday. Tom Merry was somewhat concerned about the trouble in Study No. 6, which showed no sign so far of healing.

"You're playing this afternoon, Gussy?" asked Tom.

D'Arcy shook his head.

"I'm afraid I shall have to stand out, Tom Mewwy."

"But you're not going to cut a Form match?" urged Tom.

"What will the Fourth do without you?"

"They'll be simply lost sheep, you know," said Monty Lowther solemnly.

"Yaas, I feah so," said Arthur Augustus unsuspiciously. "But I weally have no choice in the mattah. Blake is captainin' the Fourth, and Hewwies and Digby are playin'. I cannot vewy well play when I am not on speakin' terms with them."

"It isn't really necessary to speak during cricket," remarked Manners. "You could give your lower jaw a rest during the match."

"Weally, Mannahs—"

"Better play," urged Tom. "Why not make it up with Blake? Haven't you often said that an apology sets anything right?"

"Yaas, but Blake won't apologise."

"Well, you apologise to him instead! So long as there's an apology, it doesn't matter about trifling details."

"I wegard you as an ass, Tom Mewwy!"

Arthur Augustus joined Outram and walked away with him. The Terrible Three looked for Blake. The Shell were playing the Fourth that afternoon, and as a rule D'Arcy played for his Form in these matches. But the swell of St. Jim's was willing even to give up cricket rather than surrender.

"Gussy won't be playing for you, Blake," Tom remarked.

Blake grunted.

"No, I suppose not. It won't hurt the team match, reckon. The silly ass is still sticking it out. He doesn't—his prep in No. 6 now."

"It's jolly decent of him to stick to that fellow Outram like this."

"Jolly fatheaded, you mean!" growled Blake. "I've had a hint that the New House kids are going to chivy the funk this afternoon. That means another row for Gussy, and we can't look after him while we're playing cricket. Why can't he let the rotter alone?"

"Do you want to look after a fellow you don't know?" grinned Lowther.

"Oh, rats! We can't, anyway."

But Blake was looking worried as he went down to the cricket-field with his team. If the New House juniors "chivied" the funk, Arthur Augustus was certain to stand up in his defence, and it meant a ragging for Gussy. The noble Gussy never counted his foes; and Blake expected to see him looking a wreck after the match. As the Honourable Arthur Augustus was no longer an acquaintance of his, it really did not concern Jack Blake—but he felt concerned all the same.

From a distance, D'Arcy watched the beginning of the Form match, and he could hardly suppress a sigh. It was the second match he had "cut" on Outram's account, and it looked as if there might be many more to follow.

"Let's have a twot along the wivah, deah boy," he said, with resolute cheerfulness. "We'll have tea at the Feathahs, and walk back by the towin'-path."

They walked out of the gates; and a number of New House juniors, who were looking for the "funk" shortly afterwards, were disappointed. The merry youths of the New House regarded it as a great lark to "chivy" the School House

funk. But the funk was not to be found, and they went to watch the Form match instead. But as the summer evening was closing in, Diggs and Pratt, and the rest waited at the school gates for D'Arcy and his chum to come in. The two juniors, when they came back from their walk in the cool of the evening, found seven or eight fellows waiting for them.

"Here they come!" chorled Diggs.

"Never mind D'Arcy," said Owen. "Let D'Arcy clear off! It's the funk we want! I've got the white feathers ready to decorate him!"

The New House party chuckled. They lined up in the gateway as D'Arcy and Outram arrived.

"Pway allow us to entah, deah boys!" said Arthur Augustus mildly.

"Pass in, and all's well!" said Owen, with a wink at his comrades.

Three or four pairs of hands suddenly grasped D'Arcy, and he was "passed in" headlong. The rest closed round Outram.

The latter backed away, but he was quickly surrounded.

"What do you want?" he exclaimed.

"Only a little joke!" said Owen cheerily. "We only want to show the School House what we think of its funk! We've got some nice white feathers for you!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Keep that howling ass off!" added Owen, looking round.

Arthur Augustus was endeavouring to join his protegee. But Clampe and Pratt and Thompson barred the way. Great fighting-man as Gussy was, Gussy could not deal with the three of them, and he was barred off.

"Let me pass, you uttah wottahs!" shouted Arthur Augustus wrathfully, and he charged at the three like a bull.

Three pairs of hands closed on him at once, and he was held.

"All serene!" grinned Thompson. "We've got him! Get on with the decorations, Owen!"

Diggs and another fellow held Outram's arms to his sides. For a moment the new junior looked like resisting, but he did not. Owen proceeded to stick white feathers into his cap and his hair and collar, till he was thickly covered with them, amid howls of laughter from the New House ragers.

"We'll march him round the quad like that!" chorled Diggs.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You uttah wuffians!" yelled Arthur Augustus, struggling desperately with the three who were holding him. "I will thrash you all wound— I'll—I'll— Yawooh! Gwoogh! Oh, cumbus!"

"Bump!"

"Yow! Ow, ow, ow!"

It was just then that Blake sighted the scene in the gateway.

"Rescue!" yelled Blake.

The chums from Study No. 6 had come from the cricket-field a little tired. But they showed plenty of energy now. Blake and Herries and Digby rushed to the rescue, and Arthur Augustus' assailants were knocked right and left.

The swell of St. Jim's sat gasping on the ground. Blake gave him a hand up.

"All serene now, Gussy?" he grinned.

"Yaas, wathah! I am goin' to thrash those wottahs!"

And Arthur Augustus made a rush towards the group in the road.

Herries caught him by the arm and yanked him back.

"Let them alone!" he growled. "They're only sticking white feathers on a funk!"

"Welase me, you ass! Besides, I wufese to allow you to speak to me, Hewwies, and I decline to uttah a word to you!"

"Look here, you ass—"

Arthur Augustus jerked his arm away, and rushed into the fray. In a moment he was engaged in a wild and whirling combat with the ragers.

Blake hesitated for a moment. But the claims of old friendship were too strong. He rushed after D'Arcy, and Herries and Dig followed.

"Back up, New House!" roared Owen.

"Pile in, School House!" yelled Blake.

"Give the wottahs beans! Hawway!"

Tom Merry & Co. came racing out of the gates, and threw themselves into the combat. Then the New House fellows, outnumbered, had to retreat. They were fairly driven off the ground, leaving Outram in the midst of his rescuers, with the white feathers still sticking to him. With a burning face, the unfortunate junior plucked them away, and threw them into the road. Blake's lip curled.

"Bai Jove! We've beaten the wottahs!" gasped Arthur Augustus. "Hawway for us! I trust the boundahs did not hurt you, Outwam, deah boy!"

"No," said Outram, in a low voice.

"White feathers don't hurt—some people!" said Herries, with a snort. "They'd rather hurt me, I think. But Outram don't mind."

"Weally, Hewwies—"

Outram moved away through the crowd of School House fellows to the gate. Arthur Augustus quietly joined him.

"Hold on a minute!" said Blake gruffly. "Look here, D'Arcy, you howling ass, how long are you going to keep up this rot?"

"I fail to undahstand you, Blake."

"You'll be in a fresh row every day so long as you stick to that fellow!" howled Blake.

"Yaas, vewy likely."

"Well, chuck it, then! If the fellow wasn't a worm he would ask you to chuck it himself!"

"I—I have asked him!" faltered Outram.

"Yaas, wathah! But I'm stickin' it out," said Arthur Augustus calmly. "I wogard it as a duty! I wufese to desert a chap because of his high principles!"

"Fathead! Do you think we're going to see you ragged every day?"

"Weally, Blake, as you have dwopped my acquaintance, it does not concern you vewy much," said Arthur Augustus loftily.

"Oh, don't be a goat!" said Blake irritably. "Look here, will you chuck up that chap, and come back to Study No. 6?"

"Imposs!"

"You won't come back to the study unless we swan him—what?"

"I'm sowwy, Blake; but it is imposs!"

Blake sniffed.

"Then we'll swallow him!" he growled. "There! Now come in to tea, and don't play the giddy goat any longer!"

"I wufese to have my conduct chawactewised as playin' the giddy goat! However, I shall be vewy pleased to come to the study to tea, if I may bwing a friend with me!"

Blake and Herries and Dig looked at one another. Then they all three nodded together.

"All right!" said Blake resignedly. "We'll make the best we can of the blessed funk!"

"I—I say—" began Outram.

Blake interrupted him.

"Don't you say anything! If that champion ass sticks to you we shall have to make the best of you, that's all!"

"Pway be a little more civil about it, Blake!"

Snort!

"I am willin' to admit," said Arthur Augustus, turning his eyes on his old chums, "that I have found the sepawation from my old friends vewy painful. But if I come back to the study, it must be undahstood that no opprobrious epithets are to be applied to my friend Outwam."

Snort!

"Unless that is agweed to, Blake, I fear that I shall be unable to renew your acquaintance."

"Any old thing!" groaned Blake. "Let's go and have tea!"

"Vewy good!"

And the re-united chums went in to tea. Arthur Augustus marching Outram in by the arm, and giving him no chance of escape. Tom Merry and Manners and Lowther came in to tea, and it was quite a merry party.

Having "swallowed" the funk, as they expressed it, Blake and Herries and Dig exerted themselves to be civil, and Outram was put at his ease at last. When the Terrible Three took their leave, peace was fully established in that famous study.

THE END.

Jack Blake did not do things by halves, and having made friends with Outram, he backed up Arthur Augustus heartily in "looking after" the unfortunate outsider, and Herries and Dig followed his lead. Funk or not, there were no more raggings for the new junior to fear. Study No. 6, so happily re-united, saw to that. Levison of the Fourth was perforce silent, but he had not forgotten. A dark and threatening cloud still hung over the new boy in the Fourth, and ere long the storm was to burst.

THE END.

(Do not miss next Wednesday's Grand, Long Complete Yarn of Outram and the Chums of St. Jim's, entitled "A STRANGE SECRET!" by Martin Clifford. Order your copy of the "GEM" now.)

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

INTO THE UNKNOWN!

This Week's Long Instalment
of a Magnificent New Serial
Story of Thrilling Adventure.

By DAGNEY MAJOR.

The Previous Instalments Told How

Mr. THOMAS WHITTAKER, accompanied by his son REGGIE, JIMMY REDFORD, LARRY BURT, a Chinese servant named SING LOO, Dr. PHENNING, and a party of natives, of whom Phwaa Ben Hu—nicknamed TOOTHY JIM—is leader, sets out to explore Patagonia in search of a specimen of the giant sloth, which is believed to be still existent there.

The party reaches Patagonia, and eventually fall into the hands of a race of giants.

Dr. Phenning, by performing certain scientific feats and conjuring tricks, inspires their captors with the belief that the captives are fire gods, and the giants then proceed to fete them by carrying them through the populace, supported by shields.

Sing Loo, overjoyed at the turn of events, then commences to dance on the tops of the shields on which he is riding.

(Now read on.)

Toothy Jim's Narrow Escape.

Sing Loo cuts a ridiculous figure; his pudding-basin-shaped Chinese hat was held in one hand, whilst his pigtail, streaming out as the Chinaman whirled round, looked like a long coil of black rope. Every now and again he leapt in the air and landed on the shields in a sitting posture.

"Me no likee boilee lakee!" he kept crying out. "This velly blave Chinaman he no die. Me flighten off devils in lakee." And off he went again into the most extravagant contortions.

"Stop that nonsense immediately!" cried out Mr. Whittaker, in an angry voice, "or you'll land the whole lot of us in the boiling-pot!"

But Sing Loo apparently did not hear, and continued his wild gyrations.

The copper-coloured giants looked on amazed. Most of that vast crowd seemed to be amused. Faint smiles and grunts of approval every now and again were noticeable, and Mr. Whittaker gathered that they supposed the Chinaman had taken leave of his senses—which supposition Mr. Whittaker afterwards learnt was correct.

At a word of command from one of the native leaders the whites and their guards, with a mighty shout of approval from the people, moved on.

They were making for the big building with the pagoda-like tower that stood in the centre of the City of Giants.

Accompanied by the deep-throbbing sounds of hands beating against hide shields, the expedition party in due time arrived at the temple—for such it was, as was evident by the great assembly of copper-coloured priests who were gathered outside.

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Immediately on their appearance, the priests, chanting some strange dirge, led the way to the big, massive carved entrance, and shortly the great concord of priests and natives were within the sacred precincts.

Hoarsely Mr. Whittaker whispered to Sing Loo, who was now near to him, to behave himself; and for once Sing Loo looked awed and subdued, as well he might!

The temple was a mighty building of stone. At the far end, whither the party were conducted, still borne aloft on shields, appeared to be a huge altar, on which burned a big, blazing fire. About fifty feet from the altar steps, hewn out of stone, the party halted, were lowered from their shields, and every native bowed himself to the ground, facing the altar, throwing his shield on the floor.

Mr. Whittaker and his party also made their obeisances. It was then Mr. Whittaker and the doctor made a startling discovery. They were standing on an enormous rug made from the hide of some mighty animal. It measured some forty feet from snout to tail, and the limbs of the monster were spread out as a modern taxidermist fashions a skin for the market.

Here and there on the great skin were patches of coarse, reddish-brown hair, while the inner layer of the skin's substance was filled with small nodules of bone, which were exposed where the hide was worn and decayed.

They were standing on the skin of a supposed extinct monster, the giant sloth.

Though the doctor and Mr. Whittaker were wild with excitement, they dared neither speak nor evince any surprise. Surprisingly the doctor tried to draw Reggie's, Larry's, and Jimmy's attention to the skin by pointing their hands downwards.

Suddenly one of the priests at the altar began to speak. Then there was a tense silence, shortly broken by a chorus of deep growls of approval. Presently there was a stir at the back. Stifled ejaculations of terror and dismay broke from someone, then a smallish, copper-coloured figure was roughly hustled past the group of whites, and the doctor saw, to his dismay, that it was Toothy Jim, with a coil of rope round his neck, and the cut end of a lasso trailing to the ground.

So it was Toothy Jim who had lassoed the priest by the boiling lake.

The native's face, under his copper hue, was a sort of dull green. The man was paralysed with terror.

As he was dragged past, struggling and writhing in the cruel grip of three mighty giants, a low growl of savage anger broke from the vast assembly.

About four feet from the head of the giant sloth skin the prisoner was held firmly.

Then what the whites saw made their blood run chill. Suddenly there appeared in front of the prisoner and his guard a great gaping aperture in the floor of the temple. From the pit arose a great cloud of steam, and then—oh, horror!—there appeared the scalding, muddy slime of lava, bubbling up to the very edge of the hole.

TUCK HAMPERS ARE GIVEN AWAY TO READERS OF THE "BOYS' FRIEND," 1st

Toothy Jim was going to be thrown into the lava river, which apparently flowed under the temple. He was going to be a living sacrifice, to appease their false and dreadful gods.

At that instant the doctor's revolver spoke sharp and quick. Two of the giant guards toppled over into the terrible death-trap. Then Mr. Whittaker sprang forward and dragged back Toothy Jim from the very jaws of death.

Danger!

There followed wild scenes of tumult and pandemonium. Panic spread quickly. In less than five minutes the temple was clear of giant soldiers, and the whites were left standing, alone with four priests at the altar, almost on the very edge of the boiling inferno.

By this time the acrid smoke and sulphurous fumes from the subterranean lava river were filling the temple with noisome smell. Then slowly, very slowly, Mr. Whittaker and the doctor saw, with infinite relief, the big stone sliding back over that pit of hell.

One of the priests then broke out into a long and loud harangue, continually pointing to the whites and the place where the sliding stone had revealed the awful gehenna.

Presently the priests all prostrated themselves towards the whites. When they rose, Mr. Whittaker signalled to the whole of his party to follow his example, and then, all together, the whites made obeisance to the priests.

Night was almost on them. There was scarce a moment of twilight in those latitudes. In a moment, as it were, the temple seemed to be plunged into almost stygian darkness, save for the fitful gleams from the altar fire.

From without there came not a sound. All was silent as the grave.

Then, quite unexpectedly, there filtered through one of the high windows in the temple walls a radiant beam of silver light. It slanted right down on the priests and altar. At sight of it their reverences again bowed to the ground, and remained there motionless.

Noislessly the doctor crept towards Mr. Whittaker.

"What's the date?" he asked hoarsely.

Mr. Whittaker gave him the date.

"Thank Heaven!" replied Dr. Phénning fervently. For a moment he appeared to be making rapid calculations. "Man," he muttered to the leader, "if I'm not very much mistaken, there's a full eclipse of the moon in these latitudes to-night, and if I'm not in error, it'll do us a good turn."

"How so?" inquired Mr. Whittaker.

"Well," replied the doctor, "as these giants evidently think I'm a god of fire, or something, I'm going to take advantage of it, and tell them I will extinguish the moon."

Mr. Whittaker's face lit up with enthusiasm.

"My dear Phénning," he said, "you are a genius. If you succeed, we shall be able to do anything we like with both priests and people."

"What a lark!" whispered Reggie, who had overheard this startling plan.

"Good old doctor!" echoed Jimmy. "Douse the glim for 'em, and the dusky bishop 'll give you all the treasures of the temple."

"And there's some valuables here," put in Larry, who had recovered from his fainting attack.

"I should think there are!" agreed Mr. Whittaker. "Just think of all those gold ornaments and shields and uncut stones that adorn the walls and decorate the altar! Why, they're worth, I should roughly estimate, at least half a million of money!"

"Velly plenty much yen for Sing Loo to go backee to the velly nicee placee of his ancestors," grinned the Chinaman, who was busy with strong, supple fingers trying to extract from the mosaic flooring some wonderful uncut gems.

"Sing Loo," whispered Mr. Whittaker angrily, "leave off doing that instantly!"

With a bland smile, the Chinaman thrust his hands behind him, saying:

"This Chinaman he knowee muchee plenty good stoness when he see one. Hully npeee, old Father Christmas" (this to the bearded priest, who still knelt prostrate) "or Sing Loo'll make you into velly fine chop-chop!"

The boys, after the reaction of the recent strain, began to laugh immoderately. But their leader quickly pulled them up.

"Do you know," he said very seriously, "that if we do anything to offend those old beggars over there"—he pointed to the priests—"they'll finish us off by throwing us into their infernal witches' cauldron!"

This sobered the boys. As for Toothy Jim, he was lying at the doctor's feet, prostrate with terror; but his hands were flung round the doctor's feet, as if he were trying to express in dumb language his gratitude for the medical man's fine shot which had saved his life.

Suddenly the priests arose, and one of them took hold of a large metal shield or gong, and struck it with a stone-headed spear three times.

Instantly there appeared from an inner chamber twenty-four giant guards with shields. Having received their instructions, these soldiers approached the party of whites, and, including Toothy Jim, raised them on their shields, and, followed by their Reverences, bore them out of the temple.

When the whites appeared outside, it was the sign for that mighty concourse which awaited their coming to burst out into wild cries of welcome and delight.

"It is evident that our appearance conveys to them that our lives have been spared," whispered the doctor to Mr. Whittaker.

It was a strange spectacle that met the eyes of the explorers.

A vast concord of copper-coloured giants, women, and children were assembled in that big open space which lay on either side of the molten river. Every spear and every shield was raised high above every man's head as the whites appeared.

The moon, full and big, shed its effulgent glory on to the City of Rock, the strange-shaped houses, turrets, and populace making a weird scene of barbaric splendour.

As the procession made its way towards the rostrum on the far side of the river, from which the priests had first addressed the crowd, Dr. Phénning and Mr. Whittaker, from their platform of shields, looked back.

An involuntary gasp of admiration escaped both men.

The brass or golden-topped pagoda-like tower of the temple scintillated and gleamed in the rays of the moonlight, like a great blazing jewel set in the eternal infinity of the night sky.

As they neared the rostrum, Mr. Whittaker, who was carried quite near Dr. Phénning, whispered to his friend:

"I wouldn't trust any of them for a moment. A sudden caprice of those vindictive old priests might land us in the boiling river at any instant. If Sing Loo starts any of his fool antics we may all be lost."

"I have still to put out the moon," said the doctor.

"Then," answered his chief, "the sooner you set about extinguishing that luminary the better."

"According to my calculations," said the doctor, "the first dark rim at the edge of the moon ought to appear at a minute and two-fifths to nine o'clock."

He glanced at his watch.

"It is now nearly half-past eight," he remarked.

And then their bearers began to slowly ascend the rostrum. What was about to happen?

Dr. Phénning Saves the Party.

Gently the bearers lowered the shields when the platform was reached, and, at a signal from one of the priests, Mr. Whittaker, Dr. Phénning, Reggie, Larry, Jimmy, Sing Loo, and Toothy Jim—the latter still terrified beyond description—left their guards and stood in a little group near two priests, it fell to the lot of Sing Loo to make a fatal blunder.

Mr. Whittaker then discovered that all on the rostrum had removed their sandals and stood in bare feet. Out of respect for their cult, Mr. Whittaker motioned his party to remove their boots. As they proceeded to do this, a general grunt of approval was heard, and Mr. Whittaker gathered that this little act of courtesy was greatly appreciated. For some reason or other, the rostrum on which they were now gathered was sacred ground. But unfortunately, just at the crucial moment, when all were rising bare-footed to face the priests, it fell to the lot of Sing Loo to make a fatal blunder.

Unobserved, he had refrained from removing his big Chinese shoes, turning up at the end, as if the points wanted to become on touching terms with the owner's nose, and stood in this Eastern footgear, smiling blandly at the priests.

Sing Loo refused to remove his shoes to foreign devil priests, and acknowledged no sovereignty to any religious representatives save to followers of Confucius.

One of the priests scowled fiercely, and advanced to Sing Loo with a threatening gesture.

"Take off your shoes, you Chinese fool!" muttered Mr. Whittaker, in angered alarm.

But the warning came too late.

The priest was on Sing Loo before the Chinaman had time to obey his master's order, for obey it he certainly would have done had there been time. But the priest, with threatening gesture, was on the Chinaman before he could say "pig-tail."

"Me velly good Chinaman," muttered Sing Loo. "Sing Loo no takee shoos off for foreign devil priestee, but for Massa Whittaker they come offee muchee velly quick."

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At that moment the priest caught hold of Sing Loo's pig-tail. That was an indignity that no Chinaman could stand without protest. With all his strength Sing Loo brought his great shoed foot—whack, crash!—on to the bare feet of his reverence.

It was the most awful thing the Chinaman, in his ignorance, could have done.

In an instant the platform was the centre of a storm of angry protest and indignation. Nor could the priest refrain from emitting a howl of pain as the Chinaman's thick shoe came smashing with painful force on to the toes of his reverence.

"Sing Loo," muttered the doctor, who stood next him, "you'll have the whole lot of us murdered—boiled alive—if you resist any more. For pity's sake, you yellow fool, resist no further."

Sing Loo's temper was up. His pigtail had been assaulted and insulted, and he meant to get his own back.

The Chinaman leapt in the air and came down wallop again on to both of the priest's bare toes.

But the next moment he was seized by three giants, and quickly bound hand and foot.

At a signal from one of the priests, a huge giant, over nine feet high, with a hideous mask of a frightful-looking devil-god concealing his face, approached Sing Loo and his guard. In his hand this enormous man held a long, terribly sharp, gleaming bronze knife.

It was the executioner.

Sing Loo's yellow face went green when he saw the weapon glinting in the moonlight.

The doctor and Mr. Whittaker turned pale. The boys, fearing for the life of their good friend and faithful servant, went white. No one could, apparently, do anything to save the situation. The doctor had discharged his last cartridge in the Temple. There was only one thing to be done, and it was up to the doctor to do it. He must make one desperate effort to save the life of the loyal Chinaman.

Slowly Dr. Phenning stepped towards the group of priests, held up his hand, and prostrated himself to the earth.

The priests stayed the executioner, and one of them said very solemnly:

"Baku phatuna Obedi kum lakhto. Opuni thar shadah." Which, afterwards, when a little acquainted with their language, Dr. Phenning learnt meant "Let us hear what the great magician and fire god has to say."

At the priest's words, the executioner stayed his hand, while Sing Loo, as well as his bonds allowed, bowed himself to the earth, saying "This fool Chinaman, Sing Loo, am velly, velly sorry. Sing Loo no wantee join ancestors justice now."

The priest who had spoken muttered something, and assisted the doctor to rise.

Then Dr. Phenning, regardless of whether the assembled priests and people could not understand, burst out into a perfect torrent of words.

"Oh, mighty giants, great people of the earth, with your thrice accursed schemes of boiling lakes, in which you want to give us our evening bath, supply us first with soap and towels wherewith to dry our sacred bodies after our immersion in your hellish bath of boiling mud. Did I not make fire come from my iron tube with the noise of thunder, and did not Toothy Jim"—he pointed to the native—"save the great high stinking priest from falling into your seething cauldron by lassoing his sacred reverence—confound the old meddling beggar—"

The doctor paused to imitate the throwing of the lasso and point to the priest, who was on the rostrum, who had been dragged back by Toothy Jim's wonderful throw.

The priests and natives understood, and loudly grunted approval.

The doctor then broke out into horrid screams, frantically waving his arms and hands and emitting a perfect tornado of utterly nonsensical words, which sounded to the natives like sacred utterances of commands falling from the lips of a mighty god.

The doctor continually pointed to the Chinaman and imitated the cutting of his bonds, but at that there was dissent and much shaking of heads.

The doctor grew desperate.

"Did he"—pointing to Sing Loo—"not dance for you on his platform of shields?" he cried wildly, indicating the native shields that lay near him; and off went the doctor into a wild fandango such as had been danced by Sing Loo scarce two hours ago. But the natives received it all in stony silence, though Reggie, Larry, Jimmy, and Mr. Whittaker endeavoured to conceal their laughter by bowing themselves face to the earth.

Then the doctor became serious. In a flash he brought out his electric torch and played it into the face of the priest

who had had his toes trodden on by the Chinaman. It startled his reverence, and a great shout of fear broke from the throats of that vast concord of people.

Dr. Phenning then made some mysterious passes with his hands over the electric torch, stretched his arm towards the sky, and by a clever quick movement, whilst all were watching his skyward actions, extinguished the electric torch.

A grunt of amazement escaped the priests.

The doctor did this several times, then pointed to the moon, indicating that he would treat that luminary in the same way as he had the torch.

A loud murmur of fear and incredulity escaped the priests, and people at this announcement. Indeed, everyone drew away from the doctor as if afraid of him. At last one of the priests held up his hand. Silence reigned, and he spoke.

The doctor learnt afterwards that his reverence had said that if the god of fire could really put out the moon, the Chinaman should live. If he failed, the whole party should die.

The priests made his meaning quite clear by signs, going to each prisoner of the expedition party and indicating the cutting off of each head and throwing the bodies into the boiling lake afterwards.

Suppose the doctor had failed in his calculations, and the eclipse did not take place! That was the thought that dominated Mr. Whittaker, and for once his stout heart failed him.

Presently, after much exchanging of signs and mighty groans of assent from the assembled people, Dr. Phenning began his strange mission of life or death.

He threw up his hands towards the moon, shining in its full glory, and burst out with the most frightful imprecations and nonsensical words that ever, surely, left the lips of a white man.

Fearfully Mr. Whittaker and the boys looked for that little dark rim round the edge of the moon, the appearance of which would mean the saving of their lives.

What was the time? That was the question which Mr. Whittaker asked himself with feverish impatience and dread. It surely could not be far off that one minute and two-fifths to nine p.m. which would be the signal for the eclipse to commence.

Would that faint shadow never begin to show itself on the edge of the moon?

Those were minutes of dreadful suspense.

The doctor continued to declaim in loud and strident tones at the moon, and continually stretched out his hands and arms towards it, as if in supplication.

Slowly the seconds and minutes passed. Mr. Whittaker felt his heart pounding against his ribs. But he noted that the face of every priest—and, indeed, of everyone assembled—was raised towards the night luminary.

Then, just as the doctor's voice seemed to be failing him, and he showed signs of exhaustion, a tiny, faint rim appeared on the very edge of the moon.

"Thank Heaven!" murmured the leader of the expedition. "You're right, doctor. Keep it up—curse, swear, do anything!"

Slowly, very slowly, the rim began to darken the outer circle of the moon. Suddenly, as the Giant race beheld what was happening, there broke from their throats a long, shuddering sound, as of fear.

As the light gradually faded from the moon, and the shadow deepened, and slowly but surely crept o'er its whole surface, something of the awe and majesty which the spectacle inspired got hold of the boys, Sing Loo, and Mr. Whittaker. Toothy Jim was prostrate with terror.

So, little by little, all light faded from the sky, save for just one bright corner of the night luminary, which had not yet been quite covered.

A deep silence of utter amazement and fear had fallen on that awe-struck city of Giants. The sublime solemnity of the thing got hold of everyone, and every priest and Giant in the city, including women and children, looked at the disappearing moon with feelings of incredulous wonder and paralysing fright.

The doctor continued to shout and gesticulate. When there was not a vestige of light from the luminary, everyone in that vast crowd bowed themselves to the earth, and remained so for a long time.

Exhausted, but relieved and excited, the doctor flung himself down beside Mr. Whittaker.

"Bravo!" whispered his chief, groping for the doctor's hand in the dark, and warmly wringing it. "Your calculations and brilliant idea have saved the lot of us. I'm sure they aren't touch us now!"

"I was three minutes and four-fifths of a second out, I fancy," said the doctor, in an apologetic way, "and I sha'n't

(Continued on page iii. of the cover.)

INTO THE UNKNOWN!

(Continued from page 20.)

st until I learn how I went wrong. Do you know, Whittaker, that I was in the deuce of a funk? I thought I might have miscalculated the time and date altogether when the first faint shadow refused to appear at the precise second that I had forecasted. But 'all's well that ends well'!"

"Good old doctor!" whispered Jimmy.

"You'll be putting out the sun next," echoed Larry.

"Or extinguishing the boiling lake," chimed in Reggie.

"Or puttee out his footie on my backee!" grinned Sing Loo.

The utter darkness, the complete silence, was eerie, uncanny. It seemed as if Nature herself had dropped into a deep slumber, from which there would be no awakening.

But at last there was a faint stir on the part of the priests.

One of them rose, and shouted something to the populace. A great, answering shout came reverberating back.

Then, just as the vast and mysterious shadow began to slowly creep away from the moon, there appeared several men with lighted torches, who seemed to appear from the abysmal depths of the rock on the rostrum side of the lake.

These giants grouped themselves round the priests on the rostrum, and the next second hundreds of similar torches flashed among the crowd, held high aloft.

Solemnly the priests motioned the expeditionary party to rise. Sing Loo's bonds were cut. The chief priest pointed to the whites, and shouted something to the people.

The answer came back in one mighty shout—certainly a cry of unanimous approval—and the next instant the priests bowed themselves to the earth before Mr. Whittaker and his party.

They were then solemnly conducted from the rostrum to the path skirting the lake, on the giants' shields.

"What are they going to do with us now, I wonder?" whispered Mr. Whittaker to the doctor.

"Give us food, I hope," returned Dr. Phenning. "I, for one, could eat a schoolboy's unopened tuck hamper, basket and all; and as for thirst, I wouldn't sell mine for all the wealth we found in that cave this morning!"

"Did we hear you mention tuck?" asked Jimmy and Reggie together, from their raised platform of shields.

"Tiffin!" gasped Larry.

"Chop-chop!" grinned Sing Loo; and, by inserting his finger in his mouth, and quickly withdrawing it, he made the delightful sound of a popping cork, which noise the boys tried hopelessly to imitate.

"I did say to the doctor that I hoped they were going to give us something to eat," observed Mr. Whittaker.

"This Chinaman," began Sing Loo, "am velly hungry. This brave Chinaman, he so hungry he could makkee chop-chop out of devil priestee!"

And he made a savage snap at the legs of a priest walking near him, which made his reverence spring away, thinking Sing Loo was really going to sample his lower extremities.

At length they came to a halt opposite a great, pillared, and quaintly carved building, cut out of the solid rock on one side of the Giant city.

When they were lowered from their shields, Mr. Whittaker by signs made his captors understand that they were all very hungry and thirsty. Four of the giants pointed to the aperture in the rock, and the expedition party were soon inside.

It was a fairly large chamber, void of all furniture, save for water-bottles, made of skins, and wooden platters, which contained food. But what puzzled the doctor and Mr. Whittaker were a number of smallish round holes, cut into the rock on a level with the ground. The holes measured about a foot in diameter. Surprisingly, when inside the cavern, the doctor thrust his hand down one of the holes; but a sudden stoppage, after he had thrust his hand about six inches into the aperture, barred further progress.

Before leaving them, the party were searched, and relieved of everything they possessed, including the doctor's lamp. Toothy Jim, having but very scant garments on his dusky personage, was saved the indignity of a search. Later, the doctor understood the meaning of the native's enormous display of molars as he grinned when his captors did not search him.

The rock chamber was fairly roomy, measuring about twenty feet square.

The priests, before they took their leave, bowed low before the party, and then every one of the giants left the cave.

There came one mighty shout from outside, a glimpse of blazing torches, then a great rock door slowly swung towards the aperture. There was a click, and the expedition party were plunged into stygian darkness.

"Well," said the doctor, with a sigh of relief, "I'm glad that awful ordeal is over. I suppose they're going to imprison us here till their sacred reverences think fit to let us see daylight again."

"I don't know when that'll be," answered Mr. Whittaker. "Personally, I don't like the look of this dark confinement, Phenning. They're up to all sorts of devil tricks, I'll be bound!"

"It's better than the lake of lava!" cried Jimmy.

"I'd rather have it than sleeping on the temple floor over a boiling pot," chimed in Reggie, "when the floor might move away and disclose a fiery furnace underneath."

"Me likee this plenty muckee better than big kniffee of giant priestee," muttered Sing Loo.

"What about you, Larry, my boy?" asked the doctor.

"How are you feeling now? Where are you, boy? I felt I could have killed all those copper brutes when I saw your faint and roll over from the edge of that awful river."

"I'm over here!" said a rather feeble voice.

Larry felt very cheap, though he would not admit it whilst they were all in such a predicament. Every now and again he was seized with violent shivering attacks, and his head felt as if it would split.

"Where are you, Larry, boy?" cried out the doctor again.

"I want to feel your pulse, and ask you quietly exactly how you feel."

"Over here!" came a voice from the far-end of the cave. "I feel all right," he added a little faintly.

Stumbling and groping in the dark, the doctor managed to reach his patient. Directly he felt the boy's hot head, felt his light frame quivering with convulsive shivers, heard him complain of horrid throat and splitting head, he at once diagnosed the case as a bad attack of jungle-fever—very like malaria.

He said nothing, but did his best to try and relieve his young patient by loosening his collar and throwing off his own coat and shirt, in which to wrap the boy and give him greater warmth.

Then he called out to Mr. Whittaker, and whispered the news to him.

Mr. Whittaker heard the doctor's verdict with dread and sorrow.

They had no medicine—nothing requisite—and here they were consigned to black imprisonment!

"I shall take up my position by the boy and refuse to leave him," said the devoted doctor.

At that moment there came a stifling scream of horror and disgust from the other end of the cave. The doctor threw himself down by the invalid.

"What's the matter," asked the chief, in quick, sharp staccato.

Another cry of stifled fear and repulsion came from Reggie, who was near to him.

"Augh!" half-choked Jimmy, with a little cry of dismay; and then the doctor heard something soft and pulpy and yielding fall plop by his feet.

A little shiver of fear, disgust, and loathing ran through Mr. Whittaker. What fiendish thing had those giants devised for their torture?

"Tell me, boy—tell me what's the matter!"

"Some foul, loathly, soft, cold, clammy things are crawling about!" whined Jimmy in a frightened voice utterly unlike his own. "Big, wopping things, heavy and slimy! Ugh! There's another!"

At that moment Mr. Whittaker felt a heavy, inert mass come plopping on to his feet. He stooped down to throw it off. But he cried out in horror and disgust as his hand met soft, clammy, yielding substance. He kicked out with his leg and shook the loathly thing away.

A yell of terror from Sing Loo broke the heavy silence.

"What is it? What is it?" cried out the doctor, in alarm.

"Toads—grat toads!" answered Mr. Whittaker. "And if they're the species I fancy they are, they're poisonous. The fiends! The fiends!" he cried. "Now we know the meaning of the small round holes in the walls of our prison!"

At that moment an unearthly yell broke from Toothy Jim.

The shriek that came from him was a cry born of terror and despair.

"The fiends! The heartless fiends!" muttered the doctor, as he drew his patient closer to him and protected Larry with his body. "Is everybody unhurt?" he gasped, shuddering, as he threw another of those loathly toads from off his feet. Then he broke off into a sort of patois of Patagonian native tongue, with a few English words thrown in, yelling out to the faithful Toothy Jim to ask him whether he were all right.

"Ri, ri, ri!" answered the native, breaking off into his nether tongue, with a few words of which the expeditionary leader was familiar.

(Another splendid long instalment of this grand serial story next Wednesday. Order your copy of the GEM LIBRARY early.)

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Our Weekly Prize Page.

LOOK OUT FOR YOUR WINNING STORYETTE.

DON'T BE "SLANGY."

The rising generation has a tendency to slang; Or else it tries to imitate the Yankee-doodle twang. They say a man "biffs" up the street—they really mean he walks, And when he's had a "gas escape," they merely mean he talks.

Suppose our well-known nursery-rhymes were brought more up to date:

Our mothers would not recognise the tales they did relate. For instance, take the story of Miss Muffet and her wocs, And turn it into schoolgirl talk, and this is how it goes.

"There was a kid called Muffet, who was tucking into grub, When a jolly big, fat spider biffed right down and made her blub.

The little noodle scooted off—it gave her such a scare: She didn't like those beastly things that fell down through the air.

There was a "knut" called Horner—a selfish little beast, Who slunk into a corner to gorge his Christmas feast: He'd got rotten table manners, 'cos his fingers he did use; "Oh, my! I ain't 'arf brainy!" he often used to muse.

The writer hopes that these sad days will soon no longer be, And that the talk of future times from slang will be quite free.

Instead of "Jolly ripping!" we will say, "How mighty choice!"

And the raucous tones of schoolgirls will be changed to dulcet voice.

—Sent in by Miss Ella Paton, Southgate.

HEARD IN A GERMAN MESS-ROOM.

Officer: "Any complaints about the soup to-day?"

Private: "Yes, sir. Schmidt forgot to take the collar off the dog!"—Sent in by R. Brown, St. Helens, Lancs.

TOO RECENT!

It was raining in torrents, and the trench was a quagmire. "This is like the blooming Flood, this is," muttered Private Murphy to his companion.

"The phwat?" queried Malone.

"The Flood," repeated Murphy. "Why, haven't you heard of the Flood, and how the ark landed on Mount Ararat? Haven't you read of it all?"

Malone shook his head mournfully.

"No," he answered, "Fact is, old man, I haven't had a bully newspaper sent me for some days now."—Sent in by J. C. Elder, Kilkenny, Fife.

INFAMOUS!

Teacher: "Now, Tommie, can you tell me one of the most famous charges in history?"

Tommie: "Yessir."

Teacher: "Well, Tommie, what is it?"

Tommie: "The first time the barber charged me fourpence for getting my hair cut." Sent in by H. Kennedy, Bellaghy, Ireland.

A MASTER-LY REMARK.

Mrs. Brown: "Jane, has the master come in yet?"

Servant: "No, mum. It was the dog that was growling!"

—Sent in by W. Mann, Wood Green, N.

EQUAL TO THE OCCASION.

"The evening wore on," continued the man who was telling the story.

"Excuse me," interrupted the would-be wit, "but can you tell us what the evening wore on that occasion?"

"I don't know that it is important," replied the storyteller, quite unperturbed. "If you must know, however, I believe it was the close of a summer day."—Sent in by H. Goddard, Hackney, N.E.

ALL CHANGE!

An inspector, having cause to visit a local railway station, was passing down the platform, when he heard one of the porters shouting lustily:

"All change here for 'Arpenden! All change here for 'Arpenden!"

Going up to the porter, the inspector said:

"Excuse me, my man, what's your name?"

"Brown, sir," was the answer, and the inspector passed on.

Later on he was strolling leisurely down another platform at the same station, and on the arrival of a train, a porter shouted:

"All change here for Helstree! All change here for Helstree!"

"What's your name?" asked the inspector, beckoning to the man.

"Smith, sir," meekly answered the porter. "Hope there's nothing wrong, sir."

"Oh, no!" replied the inspector. "But you change places with Brown."—Sent in by R. Humphries, Battersea Park, S.W.

NOT ALL HONEY.

"Young man," said the magistrate severely, "the assault you have committed on your poor wife was most brutal. Do you know of any reason why I should not send you to prison?"

"If you do, your honour," replied the prisoner at the bar hopefully, "it will break up our honeymoon!"—Sent in by E. Rogers, Balham, S.W.

A NASTY RUB.

"I say, ma," exclaimed little Bobbie through the suck, as his mother scrubbed and scrubbed him with unabating vigour, "I guess you want to get rid of me, don't you?"

"Why, of course not, Bobbie dear," replied his mother carelessly. "Whatever put such a ridiculous idea into your head?"

"Oh, nothing!" said Bobbie. "Only it seems to me you're trying to rub me out."—Sent in by H. Bannister, Melbourne, Australia.

As the "GEM" Storyette Competition has proved so popular, it has been decided to run this novel feature in conjunction with our new Companion Paper,

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