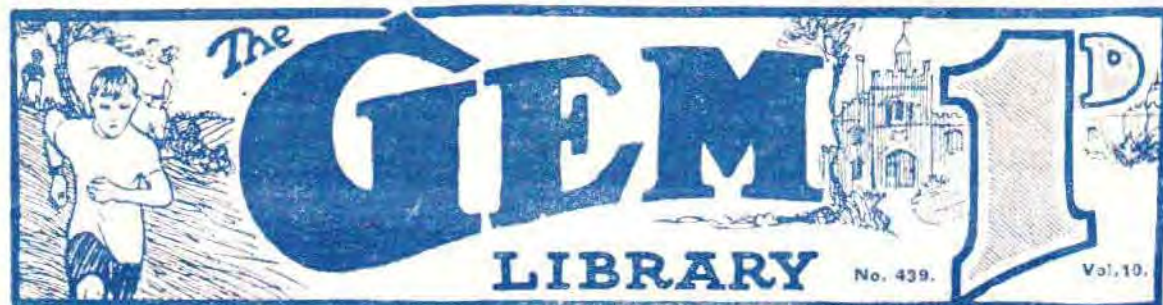


THE SNOB OF THE SCHOOL!

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



THE KHAKI HERO'S DISAPPOINTMENT.

The great secret was trembling in the balance now and the inmates of the study were on tenterhooks. In spite of all their efforts they could not help looking worried. The game was up, with a vengeance!



THIS WEEK'S CHAT

Whom to Write to —

EDITOR "THE GEM" LIBRARY.

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OUR · · THREE · · COMPANION · · PAPERS!

"THE MAGNET" THE "PENNY" CHUCKLES,

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EVERY MONDAY EVERY FRIDAY EVERY SATURDAY.

For Next Wednesday:

"MONEYBAGS MINOR!"

By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

In the grand, long, complete story which appears next week, a new boy makes his debut at St. Jim's. This is Peter Racke—known since his father became a millionaire as "Aubrey" instead of Peter—the son of a purse-proud war-contractor. Young Racke is as full of swank as a boy can be. He imagines that money can buy anything, and is bitterly disappointed to find that its power at St. Jim's has its limits. Such specimens as Levison, Crooke, and Trimble toady to him, of course; but among the decent fellows D'Arcy is the only one who does not bar him completely. It is one of the defects of the generous Gussy that he is too ready to put faith in people who do not deserve it, and his real politeness keeps him from shaking off an unwelcome guest as his chums would do. Racke toadies to Gussy because of his father's title, and comes very near to landing him into a disgraceful scrape. But D'Arcy's comrades put their heads together, and the result is that Racke is shown up as a time-serving cad, and that Gussy loses all faith in the pretended friendship of

"MONEYBAGS MINOR!"

AN IMPATIENT READER.

It is a copy of a letter received this morning:

"Dear Sir,—Having wrote to you last Thursday, asking you to answer me a question, I naturally expected to get an answer in this week's 'Gem'.

"But I saw, with disgust, nothing about it. There were also answers to other readers' queries, so I can safely state you have been unfair.

"If you can answer one person's questions, you should treat all your readers alike. What use is an editor if he cannot be civil to his readers? With nothing to do all day but sit in an easy chair, reading your correspondence, you ought to make a point of answering every single letter that comes to you.

"But I will ask you for the last time. How old is Tom Merry and Kildare? and if you do not give me an answer in next week's 'Gem' I will not only stop reading every paper edited by you, but also stop everybody else from reading your papers; so please do the right thing, as you will see yourself you are acting in a very unfair manner to one who has read your paper for three years.—I remain, yours truly,

"A. B. C."

I have not given my impatient correspondent's real initials—if those he signs are really his—because I have no wish to show him up to his friends. But it would be difficult to imagine anything more absolutely wrong-headed than this letter of his.

Again and again I have asked my readers to give their names and full postal addresses in writing to me, because, as things are at present, a reply through the paper is practically impossible for want of room. "A. B. C." ignores all these warnings. He does not send his name and address. He pays no heed to the statement made time after time as to the absolute impossibility of a reply in the next number, which is in print and ready to go out to the trade before letters coming in the week before its issue are received. He jumps to the conclusion that the replies he saw were to recent letters, whereas they were to letters dealt with months ago, and were kept waiting all this time for want of space. And I really had to see the extreme necessity for urgency in answering his query in any case. It is not one of importance, although he would have had an answer to it within three days or so if he had given his name and address.

The funniest part of a truly comic production is his notion of an editor's life. My dear boy, it is not at all like that. I assure you! I admit the easy-chair. There is no good reason why I should be uncomfortable if it can be avoided. But the rest of it is about as far astray from the facts as anything well could be. Nothing to do but read the correspondence! Oh,

of course not! The papers can themselves! There are no callers to see; no manuscripts to read; no business to be done with authors, printers, block-makers; no plans to think out—no anything but the easy-chair and my readers' letters about the ages of Tom Merry and Kildare, and such high matters!

I am not sure whether "A. B. C." will read this. I fancy he passes the "Chat" page unheeded. It has evidently never occurred to him that it has to be written, anyway. But in case he does see it—and it is just possible that he has confided to his friends the drastic manner in which he "told me off," and that one of them may draw his attention to it—I may tell him that, as a reader of three years' standing, he must have seen the last Christmas Double Number of this paper, and that he could have found the answer to his queries in that. Perhaps other readers who are inclined to impatience will take some of the gentle hints offered to heart, too.

NOTICES.

For Correspondence, Etc.

F. Banks, Primrose Hill, Skipton; D. Holdings, 17, Lambart Street, Skipton; and N. Jackson, 42, Levenshire Street, Skipton, would all like to correspond with other boy readers (16-17).

Alfred Hayes and Herbert Parratt, 65, Hazon Road, Hazon Hill, S.E., would be glad to hear from editors of amateur magazines who want articles of topical interest.

D. Davies, 10490, the Cameronians, Nigg Camp, Ross-shire, would like to correspond with boy readers of his own age (17).

C. F. Piggott, Wilby, Wellingborough, sends his heartiest thanks to the many readers who forwarded back numbers for his invalid girl chum.

Miss Ethel Fitzmaurice, 45, Botanic Avenue, Belfast, would be glad to correspond, for practice in Pitman's shorthand, with other readers who are learning it. She would also like to hear again from Miss Doree Robertson (New Zealand), with whom she corresponded some little time ago.

For Cricket Fixtures.

Kennedy C.C. (average age 16) wants matches after two o'clock Saturdays, and after six week-nights, five-mile radius. Hon. Sec., Jim Hooper, 14, Elwell Road, Larkhall, Lanark, Clapham, S.W.

William Stevens, 55, Downs Road, Clapham, N.E., has dates open, home and away, for his cricket club.

Clarendon C.C. (average age 15) want home or away matches, Saturdays and holidays, four-mile radius of Wood Green. Hon. Sec., R. Antrobus, 57, Traro Road, Wood Green, N.

Mortfield C.C. (average age 15) want Saturday matches, home or away, four-mile radius.—Hon. Sec., W. Warburton, 31, Center Street, Broadwold, Bolton.

Leagues.

Leonard Caine, 5, Farnside, The Cross, Hyde, Cheshire, wishes to form a "G." and "M." League in his locality, with the object of sending parcels of the companion papers to soldiers and sailors.

Miss G. Cooper, 12, Culmore Road, Ballina, S.W., wants more members for her "G." and "M." League, especially girls, though boys will also be welcome.

Back Numbers, &c., Wanted.

W. G. Plaistowe, Tinburn House, 22, Madison Road, Clapham Junction, London, S.W., particularly wants the number containing "Piggie's Pig Pudding." Will any reader oblige him?

Driver D. Nicholas, 74011, No. 1 Section, 14th Division, R.F.A., Divisional Ammunition Column, B.E.F., France, would be glad to have back numbers of any of the Companion Papers.

Herbert MacRae, 151, Burscough Street, Ormskirk, Lancashire, wants to buy back numbers of the "Gem" earlier than July 1, 1925.

Your Editor

PUBLISHED IN TOWN
AND COUNTRY EVERY
WEDNESDAY MORNING

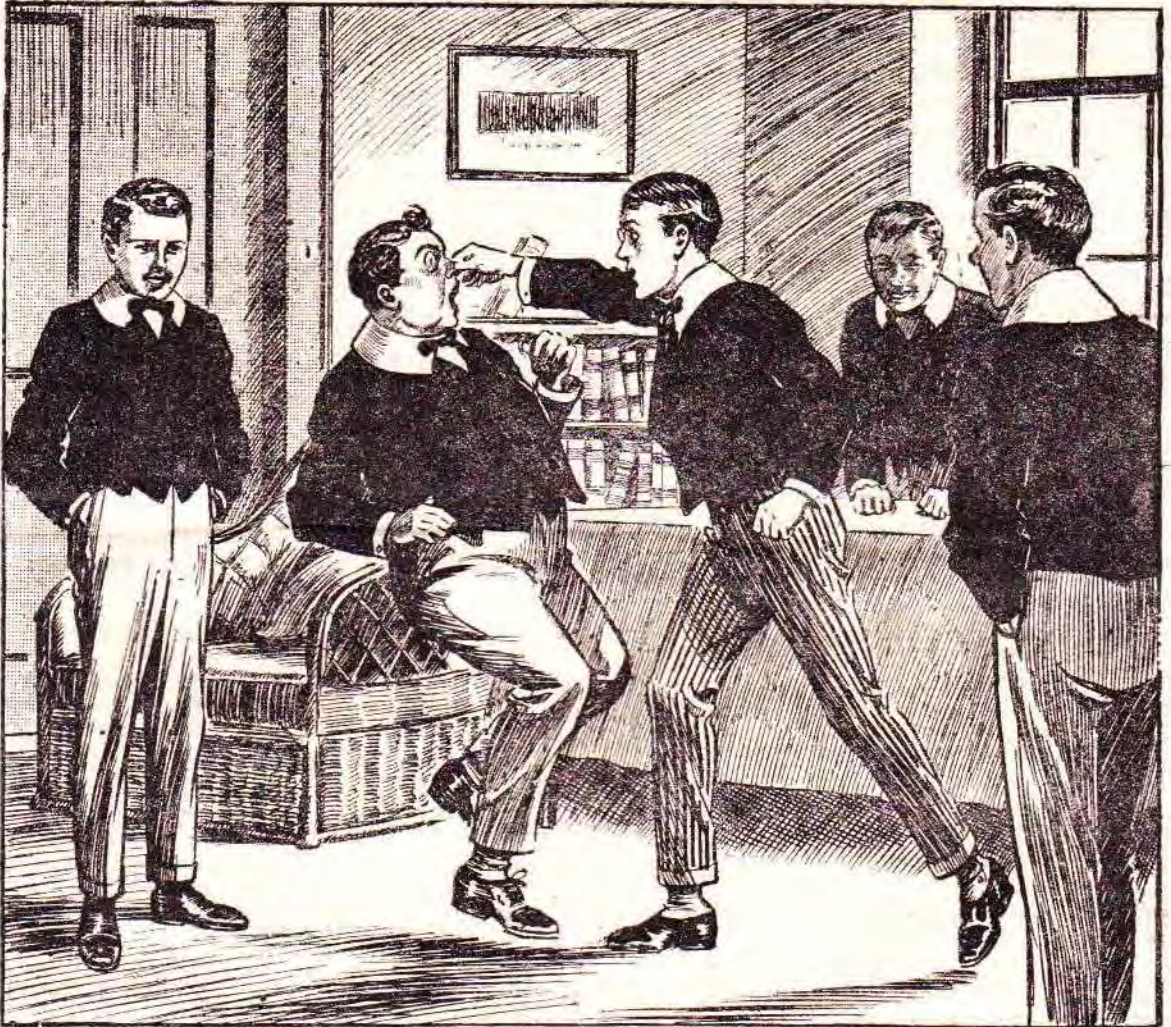


COMPLETE STORIES
FOR ALL, AND EVERY
STORY A GEM!

THE SNOB OF THE SCHOOL!

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

By **MARTIN CLIFFORD.**



Arthur Augustus's slim finger and thumb closed on Trimble's fat nose. Trimble did not cackle any more, but hopped with anguish. "Grooogh! Led go! Yow-ow-ow!" (See Chapter 3.)

CHAPTER 1. A Letter from the Front.

"**L**ETTAH for you, Mellish, deah boy!" D'Arcy of the Fourth was looking over the letter-rack in the School House, when he turned and called to Percy Mellish.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy spoke in an unusually cordial tone.

As a rule the swell of St. Jim's had very little cordiality to waste upon Mellish, the cad of the Fourth. Arthur Augustus did not approve of Mellish. The unfortunate

Mellish was a good deal of a sneak, and a good deal of a snob, and a good deal of a blackguard, and his ways were not D'Arcy's ways.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was a tolerant chap; but he had never been able to find any good qualities in Mellish, and his opinion of him was no secret.

It was, therefore, a surprise to Mellish when the great Gussy turned round from the letter-rack and addressed the cad of the Fourth in cordial tones, and with an agreeable smile.

It was a surprise to Blake and Herries and Digby, Gussy's chums, who stared at him expressively.

Next Wednesday,

"MONEYBAGS MINOR!" AND "INTO THE UNKNOWN!"

"Never mind that," growled Blake. "Is your own letter there, fathead? There won't be any tea unless somebody's got a remittance."

"My lettah is not heah, Blake. Fivahs have dwopped off," said Arthur Augustus. "I suppose that is what my governah would call war-time economy. I wegard it as hardly playin' the game, myself. Howevah, there is a letter for Mellish."

"Chuck it over!" said Mellish.

"Heah you are, deah boy."

D'Arcy took the letter from the rack.

Then Blake and Herries and Dig saw what had brought that unaccustomed cordiality into Arthur Augustus's manner.

Along the top of the envelope was printed in large type:

"ON ACTIVE SERVICE."

The letter bore no stamp. That, and the inscription on it, showed that it came from the Front in Flanders.

The discovery that Mellish had "somebody" at the Front had a remarkably mollifying effect upon Arthur Augustus.

If it was a relation it was a great point in Mellish's favour. Arthur Augustus felt that a chap couldn't be all bad if he had a relation fighting the Germans. There must be some good about Mellish somewhere, though even Gussy's eagle eye had never been able to discern it.

Arthur Augustus did not "chuck" the letter over to Mellish. He approached the cad of the Fourth elegantly and graciously, and handed him the letter.

"Fwom the Fwont, deah boy," he remarked.

"My hat!" said Mellish.

"Hallo!" chimed in Levison of the Fourth. "I didn't know you had a relation out there, Mellish."

"You don't know it now," growled Mellish.

"Bai Jove! I was takin' it for gewanted that that lettah was from a velation of yours, Mellish," said Arthur Augustus. "I don't see that it's any of your business!" snapped Mellish.

Arthur Augustus coloured.

"Not at all, Mellish. I couldn't help seein' what was pwinted on the envelope. It would be wathah intewestin', that's all. If you had a velation in khaki it would show that all your people are not necessarily wottahs like yourself, you know."

"Oh, shut up!" grunted Mellish.

"Weally, Mellish—"

"Well, open the letter, Percy," said Levison, eyeing his chum curiously. "Why don't you open it? Might be great news."

"Oh, rot!"

Mellish stood with the letter in his hand, his face very red. The jammers in the hall eyed him, wondering what was the matter.

Any fellow might have been pleased at getting a letter from the Front, whether it was from a relation or not.

But Mellish did not look pleased. The expression on his face indicated surprise, annoyance, confusion, but certainly not pleasure.

"You never told us you had people in khaki," said Grundy of the Shell. "You ought to have told us, Mellish. We should have thought better of you."

"I don't care twopence what you think of me, you silly ass!" said Mellish.

"If you want a thick ear—" began Grundy wrathfully.

"Oh, rats!"

Mellish thrust the letter into his pocket and turned away. Arthur Augustus looked after him in astonishment.

"Mellish is a wathah peculiah chap," he remarked.

Levison followed his pal down the steps into the quadrangle. All the fellows who had observed Mellish were curious, and Levison intended to have his curiosity satisfied if he could.

"Who's it from?" he asked.

"Oh, a chap!" said Mellish.

"Not a relation?"

Mellish crimsoned.

"No," he muttered.

"Some chap you've been sending parcels to?" asked Levison, with a grin.

"Yes, that's it," said Mellish, evidently relieved.

Levison chuckled. A good many of the St. Jim's chaps expended pocket-money in sending parcels to the Front, but Mellish was not one of them. Mellish did not believe in giving anything away. Mellish's answer was plainly a falsehood, and Levison was more curious than ever about that mysterious letter.

"Let's see what the chap says, then," he remarked.

"Look here, it's no business of yours, Levison!" exclaimed Mellish angrily, and he swung away, leaving Levison staring.

Mellish strode away across the quadrangle, and under the elms he drew the letter from his pocket again. He looked

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at it, with a scowling brow, and as he did so it was jerked from his hand over his shoulder.

Mellish gave a howl of alarm and spun round.

Tom Merry and Manners and Lowther, the Terrible Three of the Shell, smiled at him. The letter was in Monty Lowther's hand. It was Lowther's irrepressible sense of humour that led him to play that little trick on Mellish.

But he was not prepared for the consequences.

Mellish, the funk of the Fourth, who would not face a fag of the Second Form in combat if he could help it, advanced on him with clenched fists and gleaming eyes.

"Give me my letter!" he yelled. "You cad, give me my letter!"

"Hallo!" said Lowther, in surprise. "Keep your wool on! Only a little joke."

"You cad, give me my letter!"

Mellish fairly hurled himself upon Lowther, snatching at the letter. Lowther staggered back from the sudden attack, and the letter was jerked away. Mellish thrust it into his pocket, panting.

Lowther straightened up, his eyes gleaming.

"You silly cad!" he exclaimed. "What's the matter with you? Did you think I was going to open it, you worm?"

"Well, let my letters alone!" growled Mellish.

"Hold my hat, Tommy! It's time this worm had another licking," said Monty Lowther.

But Tom Merry caught his chum by the arm.

"Chuck it, Monty!"

"I'm going to lick him!"

"You're not; he's not worth licking. Come in to tea!"

"Look here—"

"Bow-wow!" said Manners, taking Lowther's other arm. "Come on! You sha'n't be funny outside the family circle, you know."

Monty Lowther grunted and allowed his chums to walk him away. Percy Mellish looked after them, with a savage scowl. Then, after a glance around to make sure that he was alone, he opened the letter.

"It must be from him," he muttered, with puckered brows.

"There's nobody else on active service to write to me. It must be from Gerald Thompson. What is he writing to me for—here, of all places? Confound him! Confound his cheek! It couldn't be from anybody else; nobody out there knows me. The rotter, to write to me here! That beast Levison is suspicious already. Oh, hang it!"

With grim, angry brows Mellish looked at the letter. And as he read it the anger and dismay in his face increased and his jaw dropped.

"Coming here!" He gasped out the words. "Coming here! Oh, erkey!"

He crumpled the letter in his hand in savage anger. His face was the picture of rage and dismay. Evidently it was not pleasant news that Mellish of the Fourth had received in the letter from Flanders.

CHAPTER 2.

An Awful Fix.

"COME in!" sang out Tom Merry.

The Terrible Three were at work on their preparation when a tap came at the study door.

To the surprise of the Shell fellows, it was Mellish of the Fourth who opened the door and entered.

The Terrible Three looked at him curiously. Mellish was a very rare visitor to that study. They noticed, too, that he was looking pale and worried.

"Hallo!" said Tom, in surprise. "Well, you can come in. What's on?"

"I—I want to speak to you, Merry."

"Go ahead!"

Mellish looked restless.

"I'd rather speak to you alone, if you don't mind," he said.

"What rot! Why can't you speak before Manners and Lowther? Pile in, and don't be an ass!"

"I'm afraid Tommy's uncles can't leave him alone with a suspicious person like yourself," said Monty Lowther. "Probably your conversation would not be suitable for his young ears."

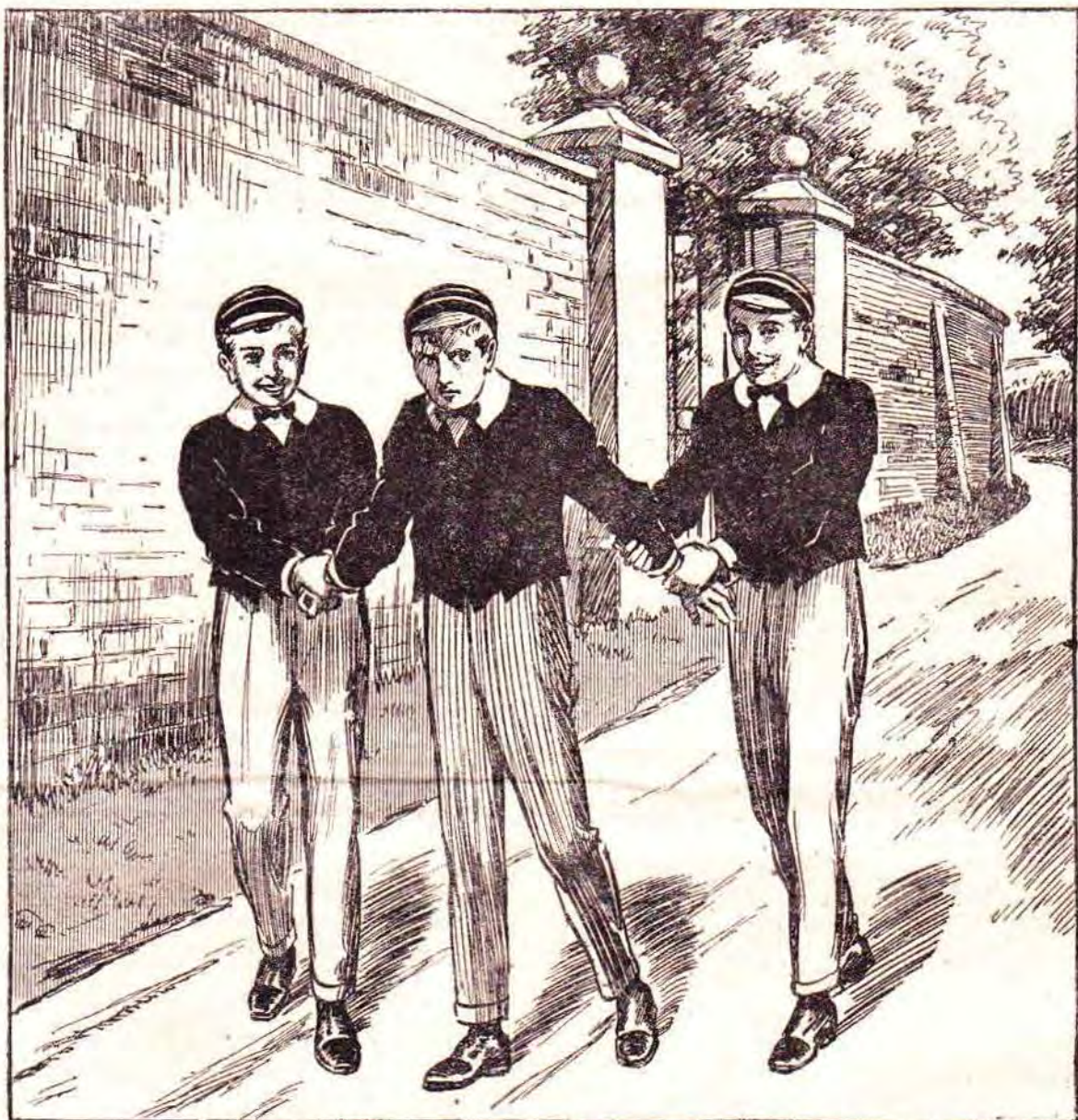
"Oh, don't be an ass!" remarked Tom Merry.

"What's the little game, anyway?" demanded Manners. "Have you been losing on the geesees, and come to Tommy for a loan, Mellish? Because if you have, you can clear out."

"Nothing doing!" said Lowther.

"I—I'm in a bit of a fix," said Mellish, addressing himself to the captain of the Shell. "It's not money; you needn't be alarmed. I'd like you to give me some advice, Merry, if you will. Only I don't want to jaw my private affairs to everybody in the House."

Tom Merry looked, as he felt, puzzled. He was not on



With sulphurous looks, and feelings that would have done credit to a Hun, Mellish walked away between Herries and Digby, who affectionately retained their hold of his arms. (See Chapter 8.)

good terms with Mellish; he regarded him with a kind of contemptuous tolerance, that was all.

"Well, if you want my advice, you can have it, of course," he said. "But why not go to your own pals for advice—Crooke or Levison or Clampe?"

Mellish smiled bitterly.

"I can't trust them not to jaw," he said.

"Nice pals!" murmured Lowther. "Blessed if I see why you should bring your shady secrets to this study, all the same!"

"Oh, I'll go!" said Mellish, turning to the door. "I might have known better than to come here, I suppose!"

"Hold on!" said Tom quickly. "If you're in a fix, and I can help you, I'm your man. You chaps clear out for a minute or two, if you don't mind."

Manners grunted, and Monty Lowther grinned, and they rose to their feet.

"Well, cut it short!" said Manners. "We've got to get our prep done. Blessed if I like mysteries! I suppose Mellish hasn't committed a murder?"

"You never know," said Lowther seriously. "But perhaps it's only a burglary. Have you committed a burglary, Mellish?"

"Oh, don't be an ass!" growled Mellish.

"We'll give you five minutes," said Lowther, looking at his watch. "We can spare five minutes to go and chip Gussy. If Mellish is here when we come back, he goes out on his neck!"

And Manners and Lowther quitted the study, Lowther closing the door with a bang.

"Well, go ahead!" said Tom Merry, in considerable surprise, but somewhat interested, too. "What's the matter?"

Mellish hesitated.

"Of course, you'll keep it dark?" he began.

"Wait a minute! If it's anything rotten, you'd better not tell me. I don't promise to keep it dark if you've been playing the giddy ox."

"It isn't that. It's a family matter—about a relation of mine."

"Oh, in that case, pile in!"

"I—I had a letter this afternoon," muttered Mellish. "A— a letter from the Front, you know."

"Yes, I know—the one Lowther handled—"

"Yes, that's it. Mind, you're going to keep it dark what I tell you!" said Mellish uneasily.

"That's understood. Cut it short!"

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NEXT WEDNESDAY: **"MONEYBAGS MINOR!"** A Magnificent New, Long, Complete School Tale of Tom Merry & Co. By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

"It's a rotten fix to be in!" groaned Mellish. "I don't suppose you'll really understand how it is—your relations are all right. How would you like to have a gang of rotten poor relations disgracing you?"

"What are you driving at?"

"We've always kept the Thompsons dark," said Mellish miserably. "My father never spoke to his younger sister after she married that fellow Thompson. He was as poor as a church mouse, and from what I've heard he was an awful outsider. Of course, I've never seen him—there never was any connection between our families. Old Thompson has been dead for years, and so has my aunt; but they had a son—of course, he's my cousin. 'Tain't my fault if I've got a rotten blackguardly outsider for a cousin, is it?"

"Nunno, I suppose not," said Tom. "You know the chap?"

"Know him? Of course not!"

"Then how do you know he's a blackguard?"

"I've heard my father speak of him. He was always worried about the disgrace of being connected with the Thompsons. He's heard occasionally of the kid—the chap's about ten years older than I am really—must be quite twenty-five now. I've heard my father say that he worked as a painter or something—actually earned his living, you know, with his own hands—"

"Awful!" said Tom Merry, laughing. "But such things can't be helped, you know; we can't all be slackers in this world."

"Oh, don't be funny; this is jolly serious for me! As if that wasn't bad enough, the brute had to go for a soldier!"

Tom Merry knitted his brows.

"As you've come to ask my advice, Mellish, I don't want to thump your silly head," he remarked. "But go easy. My uncle's a soldier."

"Yes, I know all about that. But your uncle's a general—"

"He started as a second-lieutenant."

"Yes, yes; and I wouldn't care if Gerald Thompson had done the same. But the fool went as a private!"

"Well, you thumping idiot, do you think I shouldn't feel all the prouder of my uncle if he'd started as a private?" demanded Tom warily. "You want more grit to start that way than with a commission."

"Yes, if you could help it; but not when you go as a private because you're a poor devil that can't do anything else."

"What rot! I'm afraid you're a silly ass, Mellish. The King's khaki makes any man the equal of a prince."

"Yes, in theory, I dare say," said Mellish. "But—but this fellow—this awful Thompson—is a regular blackguard and outsider—a frightful hooligan, in fact."

Tom Merry shook his head.

"You're mistaken. They wouldn't have that kind of man in the Army. I suppose he's not a conscript?"

"Oh, no; he's been in the Army a long time—before the war was a month old. He was one of the first to go."

"That was jolly decent of him!" said Tom. "It was the pick of the country that went then."

"I dare say it was, in a way. Of course, you wouldn't understand me," said Mellish.

"But what's the trouble, anyway? Even if your cousin is a rank outsider, it can't hurt you."

"He's coming here."

"Oh!" said Tom.

"I've always kept it dark that I've got a relation a private soldier—"

"More fool you!" snapped Tom. "Any other fellow would be proud to have a cousin who went out with the first lot. I know I should!"

"You might!" grunted Mellish. "You're not like me!"

"Thank goodness for that!"

"We've always held ourselves rather high," said Mellish. "We're a good family. It was a horrible disgrace getting connected with that Thompson gang. So long as they kept their distance it didn't matter much. I never expected to meet Gerald. I never thought he'd have the cheek to write to me. My father was always uneasy lest he should get letters from them for money."

"Oh, they used to borrow cash!"

"Well, no, they never did actually; but the pater always thought they might if he gave them any encouragement, you see. It's horrible having poor relations! You haven't got any."

Tom Merry grinned.

"Well, no; the boot's on the other leg with me—I'm a poor relation myself," he said. "If it weren't for my uncles, I don't know where I should be, since the money my pater left was lost in a swindling company. I'm glad that my uncles have never treated me as your pater seems to have treated your Cousin Gerald."

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"It's different!" grunted Mellish. "Look here, here's the fellow's letter! Look at that!"

"You want me to read it?"

"Yes, yes!"

Tom Merry took the letter. It was written in pencil on thin paper, with "Y.M.C.A." printed at the top. It ran:

"Dear Cousin Percy, I dare say you will be surprised to hear from me, as I have never written to you before, and we have never met. The fact is, I am expecting my leave soon, and I shall be in England in a week or two. I have had some good luck out here—more than I deserve, I think. When I come home I am coming down to the school to visit an old comrade who is a master there, so I suppose I shall see you."

"You are my only relation, and I should like to make your acquaintance. However, that rests with you. You will know me when I come, and you can suit yourself about claiming me as a relation. I will drop you a line later to tell you exactly when I am coming."

"Your affectionate cousin,

"GERALD THOMPSON."

"That's a jolly nice letter," said Tom Merry, as he handed it back. "He must have been in Railton's regiment, Railton's the only master at St. Jim's who's been to the Front."

Mellish nodded.

"Yes, you know Railton went out as a private—like a silly ass—he could have got a commission if he'd waited and pushed a bit—"

"The Germans wouldn't have waited while he got it," said Tom drily, "and don't call old Railton names, Mellish! I've said I don't want to hit you."

Mellish scowled.

"Well, Railton was a private in the Leamshire Rifles, and that seems to have been my cousin's regiment," he said. "Thompson seems to have made his acquaintance out there, and found out something about me. He knew I was at St. Jim's. I dare say—or he may have mentioned to Railton that he had relations named Mellish—bragged of it, very likely—and then Railton may have mentioned that there was a Mellish here. Anyway, he's coming here."

"But he's coming to see Railton, not you," said Tom.

Mellish made an irritable gesture.

"He's only putting it like that, of course. Do you think Railton wants to be visited by every Tommy Atkins he rubbed shoulders with in the trenches? The cheeky rotter is coming to see me, and making his acquaintance with Railton an excuse, of course."

"Well, I suppose you know your own cousin better than I do," said Tom. "I must say that letter seems quite straight to me."

"He's a rotter all through, I know that—a regular blackguard—eats with his knife, very likely," said Mellish. "Spits and swears, I dare say."

"But he says he won't recognise you unless you recognise him. If you don't want to know him, keep mum."

"That's only what he says," muttered Mellish. "Of course, it's all rot. He's coming here to see me—to get hold of me if he can. If I'm civil to him, he'll be able to brag about his relation at a public school, and make out that he's chummy with me, and mix with his betters here for a bit. If I cut him, he'll get ratty, and show me up before all the fellows. That's his game!"

"I suppose you know," said Tom. "I shouldn't have thought he was that kind of chap, from his letter. He says he's had luck out there—he may have become a sergeant, as Railton did."

"That wouldn't make any difference. I shouldn't mind so much if he'd got a commission. But there's no chance of that—a vulgar rotter like that. I don't know what I'm going to do. I—I thought you might give me some advice," said Mellish wretchedly. "You're a pretty keen chap. If it gets out that my cousin is a private soldier, Crooke and the rest will never let me hear the end of it. And—and I could deny it, only—if he comes here—I dare say he's like me, too, and the fellows would see the resemblance, even if he didn't give me away. I—I don't know what to do."

Tom Merry looked at the wretched mob with a mingling of compassion and contempt.

"You want my advice?" he asked.

"Yes. Tell me what I'd better do. I can't think of anything—and I daren't say a word to Levison or Crooke—they'll chip me to death, and spread it all over the school."

"There's only one sort of advice I can give you. Take this letter at its face value, and trust the chap's word. If he's decent, and I believe he is by his letter, treat him as your cousin. If he's really an outsider, don't have anything to do with him. You'll see when he comes."

"I tell you that's all bunkum, and he means to know me, whether I like it or not," said Mellish savagely. "I want to keep him away from the school. He can't come here. How can I stop him, that's the question?"

"You can't. He's coming to see Railton."

"I tell you that's only an excuse."

"Whether it is or not, you can't stop him, if he chooses to come. If he's decent, there's nothing to worry you. As for his being a private soldier, only a silly fool and snob would mind that—excuse my speaking plainly. Anybody but a cad would be proud of it."

"So that's all you've got to say?" snarled Mellish.

"That's all. I suppose there are black sheep in every flock, so he may not be decent. But it's not likely. Railton wouldn't know him unless he was all right."

"He's forced himself on Railton, just as he's trying to force himself on me, of course."

"It's possible, though I shouldn't suppose so. But, dash it all, Mellish, you can't be uncivil to the chap," said Tom hotly. "Suppose he's a bit of a hooligan, even, as you believe, you can't deny that he's been fighting the Germans, and that covers everything."

"I might have expected that of you," said Mellish bitterly. "I thought you might have been able to help me out of this awful fix. Of course, you won't! You'll cackle when you see me disgraced, like the rest."

Tom Merry flushed.

"If you want some plain English, Mellish, I'll give you some," he exclaimed. "If I were a man in khaki, from the trenches, I should think twice before I recognised a chap like you as my cousin."

"Oh, you're a dashed fool!" said Mellish.

And he swung out of the study and slammed the door.

Tom Merry shrugged his shoulders, and settled down to his prep. He was frowning over it when Manners and Lowther came in. But they did not ask him any questions, and Mellish and his "awful fix" were not referred to.

CHAPTER 3.

Arthur Augustus is Wrathful.

HE, he, he!" Thus Baggy Trimble, of the Fourth Form. Trimble seemed to be enjoying a tremendous joke. He was doubled-up with mirth, when Blake & Co. came along to have tea in Study No. 6. Blake and Herries and Dig and D'Arcy all looked at him inquiringly, as Baggy went off into a series of explosive cachinnations.

"Bai Jove! What's the mewwy joke, deah boy?" asked Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

"He, he, he!" exploded Baggy.

"He's in a fit, I think," remarked Blake. "Bang his head against the wall—that's the way to handle a chap in a fit."

"Here, hold on!" exclaimed Trimble, backing away. "Look here, you know; it's a regular scream. Mellish—He, he, he!"

"Something happened to Mellish?" asked Herries. "Why, you fat rotter, you're his pal. What are you cackling at?"

"He, he, he! Mellish—Oh, crumbs!" gasped Baggy, with tears of merriment in his eyes. "Poor old Mellish! Poor old Percy! The House will simply howl over this."

"But what's happened?" exclaimed Digby.

"Mellish's cousin, you know—"

"Eh? What cousin?"

"He's had a letter from him," gasped Trimble, "and the chap's coming to see him here. And—he, he, he!—his cousin he, he, he!" Trimble yelled again. "Poor old Mellish! Mellish prides himself on being a stuck-up ass, you know. He's actually had the cheek to tell me that the Mellishes are an older family than the Trimbles—he says the Trimbles aren't mentioned in the Domesday Book, and that they didn't come over with the Conqueror, you know—"

"More likely came over with the Rothschilds," grunted Blake. "But where does the cackle come in?"

"He, he, he! Poor old Mellish! He's kept his cousin awfully dark, and now it's all coming out. I happened to hear him telling Tom Merry—"

"Keeping it dark, and telling Tom Merry?" said Blake, puzzled. "Your tale don't hang together, Trimble."

"Oh, he told Tom Merry in confidence, of course!" said Trimble. "I happened to be passing Tom Merry's study and heard him, that's all. Quite by chance, of course; I wouldn't listen. You see, Mellish has been so cut-up by getting that letter from the Front, that a chap wanted to know what was the matter, so—"

"So you listened, you uttah wottah!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus, in great disgust.

"Certainly not. It was quite by chance. I say, fancy

Mellish's cousin being a private soldier!" cackled Trimble. "Chap in the ranks, you know, and according to Mellish, he's a frightful outsider—eats with his knife, and spits and swears—he, he, he! And he's coming here, and he's going to show Mellish up—he, he, he!"

And Trimble went off into a paroxysm of merriment.

The chums of Study No. 6 eyed Trimble grimly.

"You sneaking worm—" began Herries.

"Pway leave him to me, Howwies," said Arthur Augustus, pushing back his cuffs. "As my bwotah is a soldiah, I am the suitable fellah to deal with this person. Twimble, am I to undahstand from your remarks that you considah that Mellish's cousin, bein' a pivate soldiah, is not a person entitled to rank with any othah person in the kingdom?"

"Oh, don't be funny!" said Trimble. "A Tommy, you know—a Tommy—he, he, he!—and Mellish is a regular snob—he, he, he!—and the bounder's coming here to show him up—he, he, he!"

"Twimble, you uttah worm—"

"He, he, he!" yelled Trimble. "He—he—wheep! Yoop! Groooh! Leggo by dese! Yow-ow-wooop!"

Arthur Augustus' slim finger and thumb had closed on Trimble's fat nose, and compressed it as if in a vice.

Trimble did not cackle any more. He hopped with anguish.

"Grooogh! Led'go! Yow-ow-ow!"

"You uttah wastah!" said Arthur Augustus, in measured tones. "You are not worth lickin'. I wufuse to soil my hands on you. But I cannot allow you to uttah remarks wectectin' upon his Majesty's Army, and therefore I have no wescource but to pull your nose."

"Grooogh!"

"Go it, Gussy!" said Jack Blake admiringly. "You talk like a picture-book! Have his nose off while you're about it! He's always shoving it into something that doesn't concern him. Have it off!"

"Yooogh! Led'go!" wailed Trimble, in anguish.

"I shall not let go your wotten nose, Twimble, till you have expressed wogret for your caddish remarks!"

"Yow-ow-ow!"

"Hallo! What's the row?" asked Mellish, coming along the passage. "You leave my pal alone, D'Arcy!"

"I wufuse to do anythin' of the sort, Mellish!"

"Yow—make him led'go!" howled Trimble.

"Punch his head!" said Mellish. "You're bigger than he is, Trimble!"

"Yow-ow-ow-ow!"

"Are you goin' to apologise, Twimble?" asked Arthur Augustus calmly. "I am afraid your wotten nose may be sewiously hurt, unless you do."

"Yow-ow-ow! I was only j-j-joking!" gasped Trimble.

"Do you withdwaw your disgustin' remarks?"

"Yow-ow! Yes!"

"Vewy well," said Arthur Augustus, releasing Trimble's nose, which was a fiery red by this time. "In that case, I will not tweak your wotten nose off!"

"Grooogh! Yah! Oh!" moaned Trimble, caressing his nose. "Rotter! Ow, ow!"

Arthur Augustus turned his noble back contemptuously on Trimble, and accorded Percy Mellish a gracious smile.

"I congwtatulate you, Mellish, deah boy!" he said.

Mellish stared at him.

"Hallo! What's biting you?" he asked.

"Nothin' is bitin' me, Mellish. I congwtatulate you heartily. I certainly undahstood you to wemark that you had no wotahon in the Army, but appawently I misundahstood, if what Twimble says is correct. I congwtatulate you on havin' a cousin in the twenches."

Mellish changed colour.

"Has Tom Merry been telling you—" he began.

"Tom Mewwy has told me nothin'. Twimble has just told me."

"Trimble never knew!" shouted Mellish. "Tom Merry promised not to say a word—I was a fool to trust him. Oh, the cad! The rotter—"

"Weally, Mellish, I fail to compwehend. Twimble has just told us that he listened to you speakin' to Tom Mewwy—"

"Oh!" stuttered Mellish.

"But I do not see any weason to be watty. Twimble has told us that your cousin is a soldiah—"

"It's a lie!" yelled Mellish.

"Weally, deah boy—"

"I—I was only pulling Tom Merry's leg. It's all rot! I haven't a relation in the Army at all. As for that cad, I'll smash him!"

Mellish rushed at Trimble, who promptly dodged and fled down the passage. From the end of the passage came sound of anguish. Trimble's head was in chancery. The infuriated Mellish was pommelling him as if he were a punchball. Trimble was the Paul Pry of the School House, and Mellish realised that now he knew the story, it would not be long

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before all the House knew it. He pounded at the unhappy Baggy's features with tremendous energy, and Baggy roared and squirmed and wriggled.

"Bai Jove! Twimble is a wotten eavesdrippin' cad, but that is weally wathah too wuff!" remarked Arthur Augustus.

The swell of St. Jim's hurried along the passage, and dragged Mellish away from his victim. Twimble staggered against the wall. One of his eyes was closed, and his nose was streaming crimson.

"Yow-ow-ow-ow!" he gurgled.

"Lemme get at him!" panted Mellish. "I'll teach him to spread lying yarns about me. I'll smash him—I'll—"

"Wats! Hands off!" said Arthur Augustus. "Twimble has had enough. And I weally fail to undahstand you. Mellish. Twimble has said nothin' that is not entirely to your credit!"

"It's a lie, I tell you. I haven't a cousin—" howled Mellish. "It's a lie!"

"Yow-ow!" gasped Trimble. "You told Tom Merry! You've got a cousin, and he's a private Tommy, and he's in the Loamshire Rifles—ow!—and his name's Thompson—yaw!—and he eats with his knife—groch!—he was in Railton's old regiment, and he's coming here to show you up—yooch!"

"It's a rotten slander!" panted Mellish.

Arthur Augustus' eye glittered behind his eyeglass.

"I fail to see where the slandah comes in, Mellish."

"Oh, rats!"

"If your pwesent attitude, Mellish, is intended to be dewogatory to the pwofession to which my bwothah belongs, I must wequest you to put up your hands," said Arthur Augustus, pushing back his cuffs again. "It appears to me that you are as wotten a cad as Twimble. If you have a cousin in khaki, you ought to be pwound of the fact—it is pwetty cleah that your cousin is a bettah kind of chap than you are."

"Hear, hear!" said Blake.

"Oh, shut up!" growled Mellish furiously. "It's a lie—a rotten slander, I tell you!"

"Put up your hands, Mellish!"

"I won't, you silly idiot!"

"Then I shall tweak your sillay nose—"

"Leggo, you silly ass! Take that, then!"

"Yarcooh!" roared Arthur Augustus, as he received Mellish's fist on his aristocratic nose. "You uttah wottah!"

The next moment the two juniors were fighting. Mellish of the Fourth was not a fighting man as a rule; but he was roused to fury now. They staggered along the passage, thumping and pommelling with a terrific din, and fellows came crowding out of the studies on all sides. The Terrible Three were the first to arrive, and then came Talbot and Skimpole and Gore, and then Kangaroo and Dane and Glyn, and Reilly and Julian and Kerriush and Hammond, and a crowd more. The passage was thronged.

"Go it, Mellish!" chuckled Monty Lowther. "Behold the funk on the warpath! Blessed if I thought Mellish had it in him!"

"Mop him up, Gussy!"

"What's it all about, anyway?"

"Hurrah! Gussy's down! Jump up, Gussy!"

Arthur Augustus bumped on the floor. But he was up again in a twinkling, and rushing on his antagonist. Hammer and tongs again, amid cheers and shouts of excitement.

There was a sudden yell from Wally D'Arcy of the Third, from the stairs.

"Cave!"

But the combatants were too excited to heed the warning. "Look out, here comes Mr. Railton!" exclaimed Tom Merry.

The Housemaster of the School House, with a frowning brow, and a cane in his hand, strode down the passage. The combatants were still struggling and pommelling.

"Stop this at once!" exclaimed Mr. Railton angrily.

Half a dozen juniors grasped the two, and dragged them apart. Panting and flushed and dishevelled, they glared at one another, and Mr. Railton glared at them both.

CHAPTER 4 The Secret Out.

MR. RAILTON fixed his eyes on the flushed and excited juniors, and there was a hush in the passage. The School House master looked stern and angry.

"Now, what does this mean?" he exclaimed.

"How dare you fight in the passage like a couple of heeling-gangs? Are you aware that you could be heard over the whole House?"

"Sowwy, sir!" gasped Arthur Augustus.

"He went for me!" muttered Mellish sullenly.

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"Indeed! Did you begin this, D'Arcy?"

"Yaas, sir!"

"D'Arcy!"

"I felt bound to administah a fearful thwashin' under the eires, sir. The uttah wottah left me no othah wesource, sir!" explained Arthur Augustus.

"Indeed! I shall cane you severely, D'Arcy."

"Bai Jove!"

"Hold out your hand."

"Weally, Mr. Waiton—"

"Do you hear me, D'Arcy?" thundered the Housemaster.

"Oh, vewy well, sir!"

Swish, swish, swish!

"Oh, crumbs!"

"You will take two hundred lines of Virgil, D'Arcy!"

"Gwoogh! Yes, sir."

"And if there is any recurrence of this, D'Arcy, I shall punish you very severely. I am surprised that you should attack a boy who, as you admit yourself, was not willing to fight with you!" said the Housemaster sternly.

"I am sowwy, sir," said Arthur Augustus, rubbing his hands. "But I had no othah wesource. If Mellish should wepeat his wemarks, I should be bound to wepeat the thwashin'!"

"What!"

"Shurrup, you ass!" murmured Blake.

"I wefuse to shut up, Blake! I am bound to tell Mr. Waiton the twuth. As an old soldiah himself, I should wathah expect Mr. Waiton to back me up!"

"What does this mean?" said the Housemaster quietly.

"You see, sir, as my bwothah is a soldiah, I cannot allow any wotten cad to make wemarks dewogatory to the dignity of his Majesty's Army!" said Arthur Augustus. "It would be quite imposs!"

"Do you mean to say that you struck Mellish for that reason, D'Arcy?"

"I did not exactly stvike him, sir. I thwashed him!"

"Was it for the reason you have mentioned?"

"Certainly. Othahwise, I should have wefused to soil my hands upon such a wottah!"

"You need not do the imposition I mentioned, D'Arcy."

"Thank you, sir!"

"Neither must you, however, take the law into your own hands in this manner. Mellish, it appears that D'Arcy attacked you under provocation, and if I had heard you make such remarks myself, I should have caned you severely!"

"Hear, hear!" murmured Kangaroo.

Mellish was sullenly silent.

"Your conduct is all the more reprehensible, as you have yourself a near relation in the Army!" said Mr. Railton severely. "I am surprised at you, Mellish. I trust you will reflect upon the matter, and be properly ashamed of yourself. But let there be no more of this, please!"

The Housemaster strode away.

"Von howling duffer!" growled Blake. "Why didn't you tell Railton before he licked you? He wouldn't have licked you then!"

"Bai Jove! I nevah thought of that!"

"So it's true about Mellish's relation," said Levison maliciously. "Railton knows about it."

"Of course it's true!" howled Trimble. "I heard him telling Tom Merry—quite by chance!"

"You spying worin!" said Tom Merry savagely. "You must have listened at my door, then!"

"Mellish was so jolly mysterious about that letter from the Front!" chuckled Lumley-Lumley. "Baggy couldn't rest till he knew all about it. So you've got a cousin in the ranks, Mellish?"

"Find out!" snarled Mellish.

"Not much finding out needed!" grinned Lumley-Lumley. "But what's the row about? Was Mellish bragging of it?"

"He was pwetendin' to be ashamed of it," said Arthur Augustus, breathing hard through his nose. "He was talkin' like a disgustin' wottah! It is vewy hard lines on us to have such a feahful cad in the House!"

Mellish swung away with a moody, savage brow. Levison followed him, grinning, as the crowd dispersed.

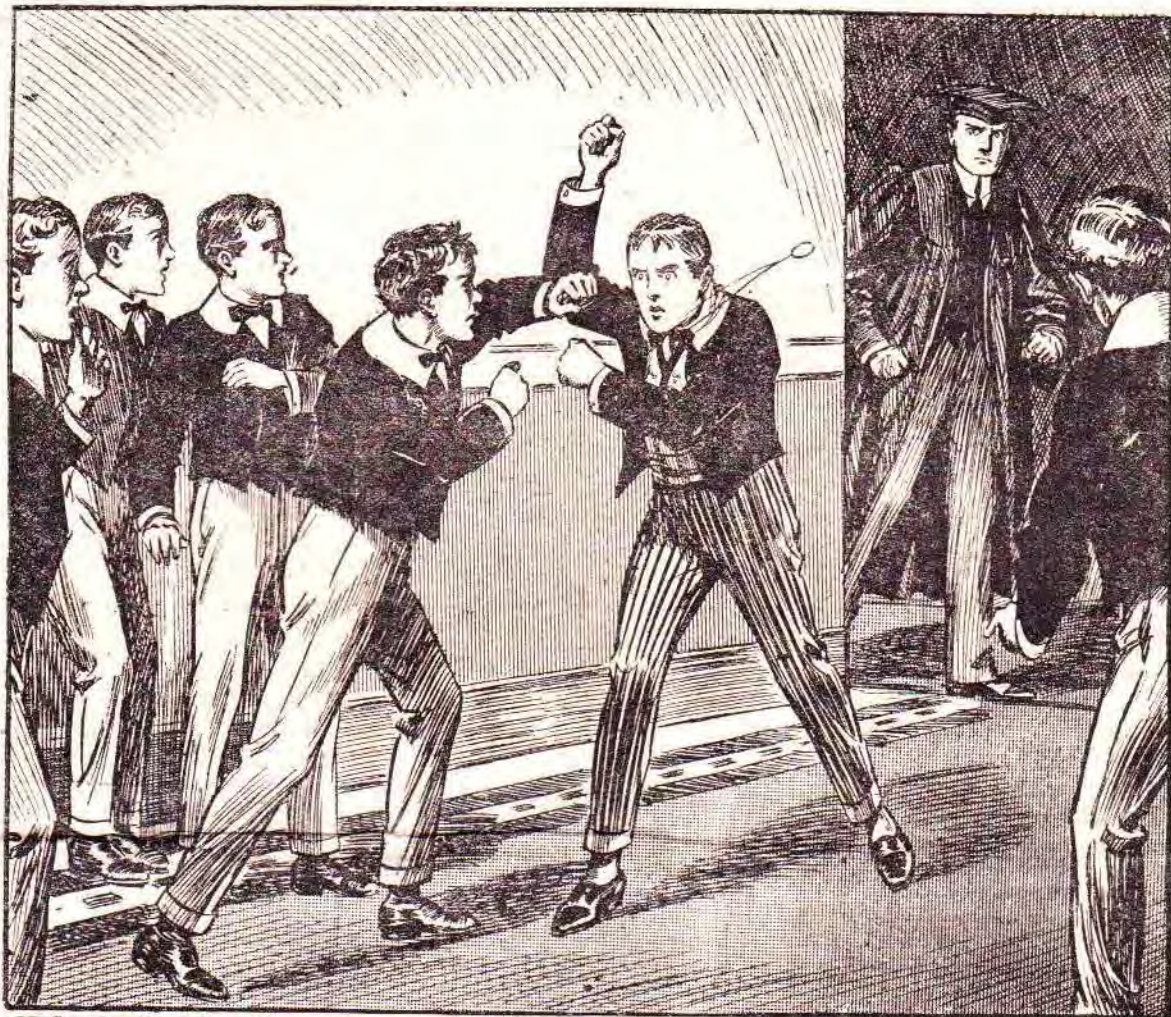
"So it's true?" said Levison, as he followed Mellish into the study they shared. "A cousin in the ranks, by Jove! And you've gassed and bragged about your people as if they were all dukes and marquises at least! You spoofing bounder!"

Mellish turned on him with a snarl.

"I don't want any of that from you!" he said thickly. "If you want a fight on your hands, Levison, you've only got to say so!"

Levison whistled. The funk of the Fourth seemed to have changed his character entirely. It was very unlike Mellish to be hurling out challenges in this reckless way.

"Keep your wool on!" said Levison. "I suppose the chap



Mr. Railton, with a frowning brow, strode down the passage. "Stop this at once!" he exclaimed angrily.
(See Chapter 3.)

must be some awful hooligan for you to be cutting up rusty about it like this! You shouldn't have swanked so much!"

Mellish flung himself sullenly into a chair. Levison regarded him with an amused smile.

"But what's the matter with the chap?" asked Levison.

"Everybody's got relations in the ranks in these days, since conscription came in. Old Railton himself went out in the ranks!"

Mellish did not reply.

"Is he some awful out-and-outer?" asked Levison. "Is he really coming here to show you up, Percy? That's hard lines!"

"Mind your own business, confound you!"

Levison chuckled.

"I shall be glad to see him when he comes," he said maliciously. "I say, we'll have him to tea in the study? If he eats with his knife, I'll borrow Manners' camera, and catch him in the act. Ha, ha, ha!"

Mellish groaned.

"He's not coming here," he muttered. "That—that was only Trimble's gas. You know what a liar that fellow is!"

"Well, if he isn't coming, what's the worry? You've kept him dark a jolly long time; why couldn't you keep him dark a little longer?"

Mellish did not reply.

"So he's coming!" grinned Levison. "My hat! I'll keep an eye open for him! Shall we get a brass band to meet him, same as the chaps did when Railton came home winged? Does he drop his 'h's'? Ha, ha, ha!"

Mellish sprang to his feet, and seized a cricket-bat from the corner. Without a word he charged at Levison, and Levison promptly dodged out of the study, and fled, yelling with laughter.

Mellish glared savagely after him, and then hurled the bat to the floor, and flung himself into the chair again. It was out now. Trimble knew all the facts, and Mr. Railton's remark had confirmed the story. Further concealment was impossible.

Of his cousin, Mellish knew nothing but what he had learned from the disparaging remarks of his snobbish relations at home. If the unfortunate Thompson had been an ogre, the wretched snob of the School House could not have thought of him with greater horror.

A more decent fellow would have read that letter from the Front in quite a different spirit. But it was like Mellish to place the worst possible construction upon it, and he was looking forward to the expected visit with utter dismay and loathing.

After that awful outsider, that rank hooligan, had visited St. Jim's, how could he ever hold his head up again? Judging other fellows by himself, Mellish could already picture the sneering glances, the sarcastic remarks, and that evening Percy Mellish of the Fourth was the most miserable snob to be found within the borders of the three kingdoms.

CHAPTER 5.

Mellish Makes a Resolve—And so Does Tom Merry.

THE next day Mellish of the Fourth was an object of considerable interest to all the School House fellows.

Trimble had spread the story far and wide; Levison had added artistic embellishments.

The fact that Mellish, a notorious funk, had stood up to D'Arcy of the Fourth drew all the more attention to the matter.

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But for the wretched fellow's own snobbishness and folly, he would have seen that most of the fellows regarded it as being very far from derogatory to have a relation "in the ranks." In fact, since the Derby groups had been called up, most of the St. Jim's fellows had relations or connections serving as privates.

But Mellish's lying and shuffling on the subject gave a wide impression that his relation was some "awful out-and-outer." As Levison maliciously remarked, now that everybody was shoved into the Army, they weren't so particular as they used to be, and Mellish's cousin might be some frightful rotter, who would never have been admitted into the old Army before the war.

If it wasn't so, why was the dear Percy so awfully touchy about it?

That was not at all how Mellish looked at it. If his cousin had been an Oxford man, a banker, or a stockbroker, lauded off unwillingly as a conscript, Mellish would not have minded at all.

The fact that Thompson had gone as a private of his own accord was what worried the aristocratic Mellish. He had sneered at Mr. Railton for doing so. As for the fact that it was a man's duty to rise up and face the enemy, Mellish did not think about that at all, or, if he thought about it, it was with a sneer.

The worst of it was that, now so much attention had been drawn to the matter, the fellow would be known to be his cousin as soon as he arrived. Mellish had nourished a secret hope that perhaps the unspeakable Thompson meant what he said in his letter—that if Percy did not want to know him, he would not claim him as a relation.

If he meant that, Mellish had only to ignore his visit, and he would have come and gone without inflicting the "disgrace" Mellish feared so much; but there was no hope of that now.

As soon as Mr. Railton's former comrade-in-arms appeared, all the school would know that this was Mellish's cousin. The wretched junior was still keeping up his denials; but as soon as the man was actually seen, his denials would not be of much use.

There was only one question in Mellish's mind now—how to keep his shady relation away from the school.

He debated that question with almost furious energy, trying to find a satisfactory answer to it.

It was impossible to write to Thompson. The unspeakable bouncer hadn't put his number in his letter. It was not much use addressing a letter to "Thompson, Loamshire Regiment, British Expeditionary Force." He did not know which battalion Thompson was in—and there were a dozen battalions, and probably two or three Thompsons in each of them. It was, as a matter of fact, the Thompsons and Johnsons and Jacksons, the Smiths and Joneses and Robinsons, who were doing the bulk of the work in keeping the Germans out. Mellish did not feel in the least grateful to them for doing it. He would not have been sorry to hear that this particular Thompson was reported "missing." And the oddest circumstance was that, while other fellows would have looked on Thompson as a feather in Mellish's cap, it was Mellish's attitude that made them take a different view. If Mellish was so ashamed of his cousin, he must be an awful rotter, considering what a rotter Mellish himself was—that was how the fellows looked at it.

Mellish waited anxiously and savagely for the next letter from his cousin. It was likely enough that the awful person was home already, and he might come down to St. Jim's any day. If he could only learn his address, he could write him such a letter that he would be glad to keep away. Even Thompson's thick skin—Mellish did not doubt that he was thick-skinned—would be penetrated by the things the cheerful Percy would say to him—if he only knew the beast's address!

Mellish watched the letter-rack and the postman daily, with almost haggard face.

So did his dear pals, Levison and Trimble and Crooke of the Shell, and Clampe and Piggott of the Third.

The celebrated cynical philosopher has told us that there is always something satisfactory in contemplating the misfortunes of our friends. That was true, at least, of Mellish's kind of friends.

His dear pals were rejoicing in the prospect of that visit from the awful Thompson, and they were determined to "rub it in" as hard as they could. Mellish's touchiness and snappiness only amused them, and added to their determination.

Levison and Trimble had agreed to ask the fellow to tea in the study, if only to catch him eating with his knife. Mellish had said that he ate with his knife, and Mellish ought to know. They pictured Mellish's feelings when he saw his awful cousin there, and chuckled over it with great glee.

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It was two or three days later that a letter arrived for Mellish. He was on the look-out for the postman, and he took it from old Blogg with his own hand. Trimble and Levison were watching him, and they joined him as he opened the letter.

"Is he coming?" chorled Trimble.

"Let's hear the giddy news!" grinned Levison.

Mellish scowled at them.

"The letter is from my father," he growled.

"Let's see it," said Levison. "I know your father's fist."

"Mind your own business!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Mellish strode away, with the letter crumpled in his hand. He did not open it till he was alone. He knew that it was from his cousin.

He gritted his teeth as he read:

"Dear Percy,—I told you in my last letter I would let you know when I was coming down to the school to see my old comrade. It will be on Wednesday afternoon. I shall get to Rylecombe by the three train. If you care to come and meet me, I shall be very glad to see you.

"Your affectionate Cousin,

"GERALD THOMPSON."

Mellish shook his fist in the air.

The envelope bore the postmark of Southampton, but there was no address on the letter inside. It was a hasty note dashed off in pencil. Probably Private Thompson's time was pretty full up during his short spell of leave from the Front.

Had a fellow like Tom Merry received that letter, his one thought would have been to make the soldier as comfortable and cheery as possible during his leave. That idea never entered Mellish's head.

"I can't stop him!" he muttered. "Three to-morrow afternoon! Oh, crumbs! There's no stopping him now! Meet him at the station. That's likely!"

A gleam came into his eyes.

"By Jove, that's an idea! If I meet him, and explain to him—I'll put it plainly enough, too—he won't come here. I'll let him see that he can't fix himself on me! I'll tell him he'll be refused admittance, by thunder! Even that rotter will keep away then!"

Mellish felt a little cheered up as he made that amiable resolution.

After all, the other fellows did not know when Thompson was coming; it would be quite easy to meet him at the station, and turn him back. Mellish's tongue would be bitter enough; after that interview, Gerald Thompson would not be likely to want to cultivate his acquaintance. However "pushing" he was, Mellish could penetrate his thick hide, and make him glad to go.

Mellish thrust the letter into his pocket, and sauntered back to the School House, looking quite cheery. After all, that was a simple way out of the difficulty; all was plain sailing now.

The Terrible Three were on the steps as he came in. Levison and Trimble had already been talking. The chums of the Shell looked curiously at Mellish, and Tom Merry joined him as he went up the staircase.

"Just a word, kid," said Tom quietly.

"Well?" snapped Mellish.

"Levison's saying you've had a letter from your cousin, and that he's coming."

"That's my business, I suppose!"

"Yes, yes. You asked my advice the other day—"

"And precious advice you gave me!" growled Mellish.

"I'd like to give you a tip now," said Tom, taking no notice of the Fourth-Former's unpleasant manner. "If the chap is coming, you can't hurt his feelings, you know."

Mellish sneered.

"Can't I?"

"It wouldn't be quite the right thing, would it?" urged Tom. "Remember, even if he is the kind of outsider you believe, he's been out there facing the Germans. You can't wound his feelings. I'll tell you what, Mellish. We'll all stand by you, and help you entertain him."

"Thank you for nothing!"

"We'll have him up to our study, if you like—"

"I don't like!"

Tom Merry paused. It was really not his business, only that Mellish had asked his advice the previous week. But the thought of a bluff and hearty man, fresh from the trenches, being wounded and hurt by a miserable cad like Mellish, made Tom feel that he would have done anything to avert such a happening.

"As a matter of fact, he's not coming," said Mellish, eyeing the captain of the Shell. "He's going to keep away, after all."

Tom looked relieved.
 "Oh, good! But—but you couldn't hurt his feelings, you know. I hope you haven't said anything—"
 "I'd have said something fast enough if I'd known his address," said Mellish, between his teeth. "I couldn't, as it happened."

"Then you haven't written to him?"

"How could I?"

"Then how do you know he's not coming?"

"Because I'm jolly well going to stop him!" sneered Mellish. "I'm going to meet him at the station, and say things to him that'll make him glad to keep away, if he has a hide as thick as a rhinoceros. See?"

Tom Merry started.

"Mellish, you couldn't—you wouldn't——"

"And I'll put in a bit extra on your account, as you're so concerned about it," said Mellish, with a grin. "I'll make him sorry he's thought of making my acquaintance! I'll make him sorry he's given me all this trouble, and made my affairs the talk of the school! I'll tell him he's a cadging rotter, and a disgraceful bound, and tell him I'm ashamed of him, and ashamed to let people know he belongs to me, and——"

Mellish rattled on cheerfully, enjoying the expression on Tom Merry's face.

"You couldn't!" muttered Tom. "Even you couldn't be such a cowardly, rotten, sneaking cad as that, Mellish?"

Mellish smiled sneeringly, and went on up the stairs. Tom Merry rejoined his chums in the doorway, his face quite pale.

"Hallo! What has the noble Percy to say?" asked Manners, looking at him curiously. "You look ratty, my son!"

"Don't talk about him!" muttered Tom. "He makes me sick! I'd never have believed there was such a low cad in the world! I hope his cousin will give him a thumping good hiding. Perhaps he will. Pah!"

It really was not Tom's business; but he could not drive the matter from his thoughts that evening. The reception the man from the trenches was to meet with made him shudder when he thought of it. He was tempted to give Mellish of the Fourth such a handling that he would not be in a condition to go to the station and meet his cousin. And before that evening was out the captain of the Shell had come to a resolution—that whatever measures he had to adopt to prevent him, Mellish should not be allowed to carry out his rascally purpose.

Upon that point Tom Merry, after long cogitation, was resolved. It only remained to decide upon the measures to be taken.

CHAPTER 6.

Tom Merry & Co. Take a Hand.

"WIPPIN' weathah for cricket!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, with satisfaction, as the juniors came out after morning school the next day.

The sun streamed down in a blaze on the old quadrangle of St. Jim's. The juniors looked out with cheery faces. They had cause to feel cheery. It was a half-holiday, and a cricket match was on, and the weather was perfect.

"I feel that I shall get a century this afternoon," said Arthur Augustus confided to his chums. "Weally, the New House won't have a look in this time. What time do we pitch stumps, Tom Mewwy?"

"Soon after dinner," said Tom.

"You are not lookin' vewy chippay, deah boy," said D'Arcy, surveying him critically. "Nothin' wong with the team—what?"

"Oh, no!" said Tom. "The team's all right. I'm not sure whether I shall captain the side this afternoon, though."

"If you prefer to leave it to me——"

"I don't!" said Tom Merry cheerfully. "If I stand out, I shall ask Talbot or Blake."

"Better ask me," said Blake at once. "Talbot's all right, but he's only a Shell chap, anyway. For a really good skipper, you want to come to Study No. 6."

"Hear, hear!" said Herries and Digby.

"I don't know whether you'll be playing, Blake."

Blake stared.

"Off your rocker?" he asked.

"Nunno!"

"Some wonderful cricketer turned up who plays better than I do?" asked Blake sarcastically.

"Not at all."

"Then why aren't you sure that I shall be playing, you howling ass?"

"I think you might come with me."

"Thomas, dear boy, your society is fascinating, but not

fascinating enough to make a chap cut a cricket match in this weather."

"Oh, don't rot!" said Tom. "There's something on. I want to consult with you chaps—before dinner, too. It's rather important."

"Blessed mysterious!" yawned Blake. "What's the row?"

"Come up to the study, and I'll tell you."

The juniors, in considerable surprise, followed Tom Merry to his study. Lowther and Manners were as surprised as Study No. 6. Six pairs of eyes were fixed inquiringly on Tom Merry when the juniors were in the study and the door was closed.

"Now expound!" said Manners. "What's the trouble?"

"It's about Mellish."

With one voice, and wonderful unanimity, the juniors responded.

"Blow Mellish!"

"Yaas, wathah!" added Arthur Augustus D'Arcy warnly. "Blow Mellish! I wefuse to mention Mellish's name! I have thwashed him, and the uttah wottah has been goin' about sayin' that he thwashed me. I decline to recognise the existence of a person whom I regard as a weptile, and vewy little bettah than a Pwnssian!"

"Oh, ring off, Gussy!" urged Blake. "We didn't come here to hear you talk, you know. This isn't the House of Lords, and you're not down for a speech."

"Weally Blake——"

"Go on, Tommy! If Gussy doesn't dry up, I'll biff him with this cushion."

"I wefuse to be biffed with a cushion——"

"It isn't only about Mellish," said Tom seriously. "It's about his cousin."

"Oh, that atlahs the mattah, deah boy. It is vewy surpwin' that a howlin' cad like Mellish has a wclation in khaki."

"According to Mellish, that cousin is a regular rip-snorter," grinned Blake. "I'm rather curious to see the bouncer."

"How do you know he is a boundah, deah boy?"

"Well, he's Mellish's cousin."

"Conclusive evidence," said Monty Lowther. "On the other hand, Mellish does not like him, so he probably has his good points."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"But what about Mellish and Mellish's blessed cousin?" said Blake. "I wouldn't miss the House match for the whole giddy family."

"You know the cires," said Tom. "That ass Mellish told me the story in confidence, and Trimble listened at the key-hole and spread it all over the House. So there isn't any confidence about it now. I can't tell you anything you don't know."

"We know all about it," chuckled Digby. "The aristocratic Percy is ashamed of his poor relation. He isn't ashamed of telling lies and sneaking and being a scrubby worm generally. But he's ashamed of Thompson."

"Well," said Lowther judicially, "it's something to discover that Mellish has a sense of shame at all. I never thought he had. But get on with the thrilling yarn, Tommy."

"I spoke to Mellish last night," said Tom. "That wasn't in confidence, of course—I've had enough of the cad's rotten confidences. His cousin is coming here soon—perhaps to-day."

"Yes; I heard Levinson saying so. Dear Percy's had a letter or something——"

"That's it! Well, Mellish is determined to keep him away from the school."

"If the chap's the hoodigan he thinks, he won't be kept away," remarked Manners, with a shake of the head. "He's got the excuse that he knows Railton—met him, anyway, somewhere in France."

"I think Mellish misjudges him," said Tom. "Anyway, he must be pretty decent—he was one of the first that went when the war started, and he wasn't forced to go. Anyway, he's coming, and Mellish means to keep him away by meeting him at the station, and insulting him."

"My hat!"

"The chap may be a blackguard, of course—we don't know him. But I wouldn't take Mellish's opinion. He's more likely to be decent, if Mellish thinks so badly of him. You see, the rotter has never seen him, even—they've never met. His opinion of him is founded on tattle he's heard at home. The chap may be thoroughly decent—very likely is. Whether he is or not, he's a soldier home on leave—a chap from the trenches—and if he were a peaky blinder, he ought to be treated decently, I think."

"I should wathah say so!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus.

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wrathfully. "Pewraps you had better adjourn this meetin' for a bit, while I go and give Mellish a fearful thrashin'!"

"Hold on, Gussy! We can't settle this by thrashing Mellish. The question is, have we a right to interfere in what is really a family matter—between that cad and his cousin?"

"Yaas, wathah! The man is our friend."

"How on earth do you make that out?" ejaculated Blake.

"We've never even seen him, or heard of him till last week."

"Every man in khaki is a friend to a pwopahly-constituted mind, Blake," said Arthur Augustus loftily.

"Oh, I see! Well, the chap's a friend, so we have a right to interfere," said Blake. "In fact, we can regard him as a pal—an old pal. Mellish certainly isn't going to be allowed to insult a pal of ours!"

The juniors grinned assent.

"Well, granted that we've a right to interfere," said Tom, "what's the programme? It makes me sick to think of that cad and what he intends. Fancy the chap's feelings, you know, fresh from fighting the Germans, and being insulted by a crawling worm like Mellish—"

"It's got to be stopped," said Blake decidedly. "Suppose we thump Mellish so that he can't go? I could knock him out with one hand. His cousin may be a fighting man, but Mellish jolly well isn't."

"I've thought of that, but—"

"It's a jolly good idea," persisted Blake. "And I should enjoy it, too."

"We can collar Mellish, and make him tell us exactly when his cousin's coming," said Herries. "Then one of us can knock him out on the spot."

Tom Merry laughed.

"Yes, that sounds simple; but the chap would come on here all the same, and he would see Mellish here. We can't quite kill Mellish, you know. There's a law against slaughtering that kind of vermin. I've been thinking. Suppose we make Mellish tell us just when he's coming, and then we can take Mellish out for the afternoon, and keep him out till his cousin's gone."

"Perhaps he wouldn't come."

"He would come if we took him by the ears."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Well, that's not a bad idea," assented Blake. "But if it's this afternoon, it means cutting the House match."

"That's serious, of course. But the soldier chaps are doing a lot for us, and if we can do anything for one of them—"

"Oh, all right! Talbot can captain the School House side," said Blake, with a sigh. "It's up to us!"

"Bai Jove!"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy uttered that exclamation suddenly. His eye glimmered behind his eyeglass.

His chums looked at him. It was evident that an idea was working in the mighty brain of the Honourable Arthur Augustus.

"Well?" grunted Blake.

"Wippin'!"

"Eh?"

"Toppin', bai Jove!"

"What are you burbling about, image?" inquired Digby.

"I refuse to be called image, Dig, and I refuse to have my remarks chawacterised as burbin'!"

"Well, the matter's settled," said Tom Merry. "We've got to get out of Mellish just when his cousin's coming—"

"The mattah is not settled, Tom Mewwy. You have not heard my wippin' ideah yet."

"Never mind your idea, Gussy. Now, suppose some of us go and invite Mellish to step in here?"

"Will you walk into my parlour?" said the spider to the fly," murmured Lowther.

"I'll do that," said Blake.

"You come, too, Herries. We may have to persuade Mellish."

Blake and Herries left the study. Arthur Augustus turned his eyeglass on the other fellows, more in sorrow than in anger. There was a plentiful lack of interest in D'Arcy's ripping idea, whatever it was.

"Weally, you fellahs, I must remark that you are uttah duffahs!" said Arthur Augustus. "You know vewy well that a mattah of this kind ought to be

left in the hands of the fellah of tact and judgment. I have decided to awwange the whole thing."

"Bow-wow!"

"I do not wegard that as an intelligent remark, Tom Mewwy. Do you want to hear my toppin' ideah, or do you not want to hear my toppin' ideah?" demanded Arthur Augustus, somewhat excitedly.

"Oh, you can run on while we're waiting for Mellish," said Tom indulgently.

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—"

"Here they come!" chuckled Lowther.

The door of the study was thrown open, and Mellish of the Fourth came in—headlong. He landed on the study carpet with a terrific bump. Blake and Herries followed him in and closed the door, and the cad of the Fourth sat up, crimson with rage, and blinked at the assembly.

CHAPTER 7.

Stunning!

PERCY MELLISH staggered to his feet.

"You rotters—" he began.

"If you chawacterise me as a wottah, Mellish—"

"Bai Jove, stop him!"

Mellish made a rush for the door.

Herries grasped him without ceremony, and hurled him back. The cad of the Fourth collapsed on the hearthrug, with a howl.

"Better take it quietly," advised Tom Merry.

"Ow! Yow!"

"We caught him in his study," said Blake. "He wouldn't come at first, but he decided to come after I got hold of his ear."

"You rotters!" howled Mellish. "What do you want? You're not going to keep me here! I'll yell for help!"

Blake picked up a cricket stump.

"Yell away!" he said. "I'll give you something to yell for if you do! But go ahead!"

Mellish wriggled away.

"Look here, Mellish—" began Tom Merry.

"Pway leave it to me, Tom Mewwy—"

"Oh, dry up, Gussy!"

"I refuse to dwy up! As I have thought out a toppin' ideah for dealin' with the whole mattah, I wegard it as necessary for me to take it in hand. You can rely on my tact and judgement."

"Shut up!" roared Blake.

"Pway don't wear at me like that, Blake! You throw me into quite a fluttah. And it is wathah bad form to wear at a chap."

"Oh, sit on him, somebody!"

"I refuse to be sat on! I repeat that I am the pwopah person to take this mattah in hand, as my bwathah is a soldiah. Mellish, you uttah wottah, you have been layin' plans for insultin' a friend of mine!"

Mellish stared at him.

"I haven't, you ass!"

"My friend Thompson, I mean."

"You—you silly chump!"

"Your cousin Thompson is my friend," said Arthur Augustus. "I refuse to allow a friend of mine to be insulted by a cwawlin' wottah like you, Mellish! As I do not know when my friend is awwivin' at St. Jim's, I request you to tell me pwecisely when he is comin'."

"Find out!"

"Yaas, that is what I am goin' to do," said D'Arcy calmly.

"What station, and by what twain does Pwivate Thompson awwake, pway?"

"Go and eat coke!"

"Blake, deah boy, may I request you to thrash Mellish with that stump until he answers my questions?"

"Certainly!" said Blake.

"Where will you have it, Mellish?"

"You—you rotter! Lemme alone!" gasped Mellish, dodging round the table.

"Hold him by the neck, Tommy!"

"Certainly!"

"Yaroooh!" roared Mellish, as the stump came into play. "Yow-ow! Stop it! I—I'll tell you if you like! Yarooop!"

TUCK HAMPER

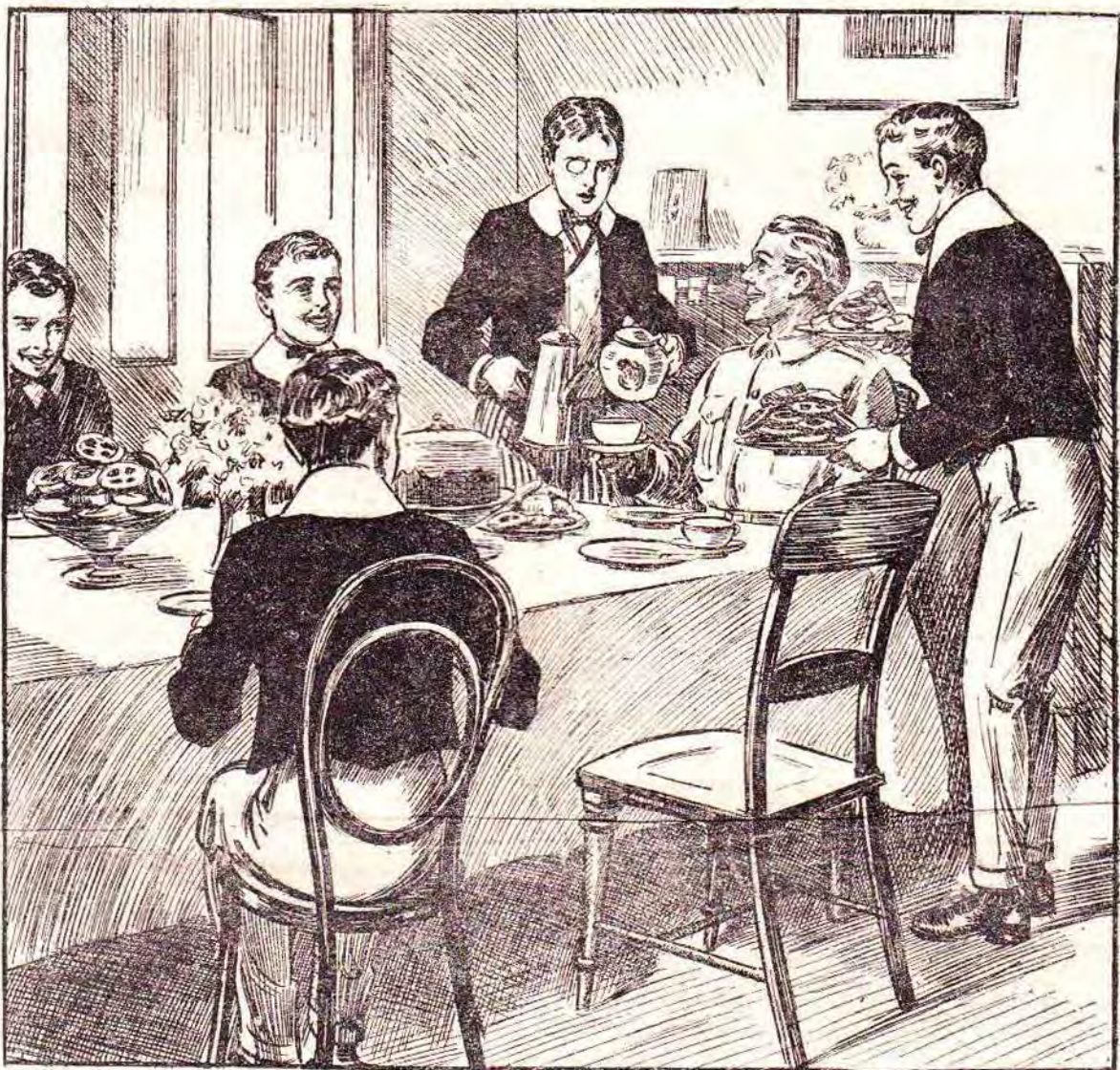
FOR READERS OF

THE

BOYS' FRIEND

ONE PENNY.

OUT TO-DAY!



Arthur Augustus had taken up the teapot in one hand, and the coffee-pot in the other. "You ass!" gasped Blake. "Don't shove tea and coffee in the same cup!" (See Chapter II.)

"Go ahead, then, you wottah?"
 "Look here, mind your own business——"
 Whack! Whack! Whack!
 "Yow-ow-woop! Stoppit, you beast! I'll tell you!" shrieked Mellish. "He's coming by the three train to Rylcombe—— Yaroooh!"
 "This aftahnoon, deah boy?"
 "Yow-ow! Yes. Yoop!"
 "Vewy good! You are goin' to meet him, I midahstand?" Mellish glared savagely at the juniors, his eyes burning.
 "Yes; and I'm going to make him fairly squirm!" he hissed. "I'll give him all the more for this, because you've meddled in the matter. Let my affairs alone, hang you!"
 "It is not quite your affair, Mellish, as the gentleman is a friend of mine."
 "Oh, don't be a silly idiot!"
 "We have finished with that wepyle, deah boys. Pway kick him out! He makes me feel ill!"
 Herries opened the door, and Mellish left the study. He left it on his neck, and Herries' heavy hoots gave him a start down the passage.
 "That settles it," said Tom. "Some of us have got to cut the match this afternoon and look after that cad."
 "You have not heard my ideah yet, Tom, Mewwy."
 "Jolly near dinner-time," remarked Blake. "You can tell us your ideah next week, Gussy, or save it up for a rainy day. Good-bye!"

"I insist upon your wemainin' while I explain my ideah, Blake! It is a tiptop, toppin' wheeze—weddly quite the thing, you know. We have agweed that that wepyle is not goin' to be allowed to meet our friend Thompson and insult him. That is all vewy well. But that is not suffish."
 "We can't do anythin' else," said Lowther.
 "Yaas, wathah. It would please Pwivate Thompson if his cousin met him at the station, and was vewy civil and polite and chummay."
 "We can't make Mellish act decently," said Tom. "There's a limit."
 "I am not speakin' of Mellish now."
 "Thompson hasn't any other cousin here, fathead!"
 "I wufuse to be called a fathead!"
 "Look here! What are you getting at?" roared Blake. "We shall be called down to dinner in two ticks."
 "I am explainin' as fast as I can. You are awah that Mellish has nevah seen his cousin Gewald, and his cousin Gewald has nevah seen him."
 "What about it, ass?"
 "I object to bein' called an ass, Blake! Now, suppose when Cousin Gewald awwives there's nobody to meet him at the station, and his cousin keeps away—or is kept away, which comes to the same thing. He is bound to feel wathah slighted, and left out in the cold."
 "Better than being insulted by that cad!"
 "Yaas; but not so good as my wippin' ideah. On the othah

land, suppose that Gewald had a cousin like me at St. Jim's?"

"But he hasn't," said Blake. "It's lucky for the poor chap, too, isn't it?"

"I wegard that remark as asinine, Blake! My ideal is, that Gewald should suppose that he has a weally decent cousin heah, who is glad to see him. That will make him feel awfully comfy, you know. Suppose his cousin greets him vewy affably, and pals with him, and bwings him to tea in the studay, and all that, and everybody gives him a gweat send-off? He will go away with a wippin' impression of St. Jim's, and won't think that we're an unwatful lot of wottahs, you know. For these reasons it is vewy necessary for Pwivate Thompson to be met at the station by a first-wate cousin—a weally cweaditable chap—like me, f'instance."

"Are you going to manufacture a cousin for him?" asked Blake.

"Yaas."

"Eh?"

"You are wathah dense, deah boy! Pwivate Thompson has nevah seen Mellish—and he is not goin' to see him—we have awwanged that. He is goin' to see me, and I am goin' to be pwesented to him as his cousin, Percy Mellish."

"Oh, holy smoke!"

"That is the wippin' ideah, deah boys," said Arthur Augustus complacently; "and, though I say it myself, you know, I weally wegard it as a corkah!"

CHAPTER 8.

Mellish Goes for a Walk.

TOM MERRY & CO. stared blankly at the swell of St. Jim's.

They could not speak for a moment.

The Hon. Arthur Augustus was evidently in deady earnest.

He had thought of that ripping way out of the dilemma, and he evidently expected great admiration and applause. He turned his eyeglass from one astonished face to another.

"Well, what do you think, deah boys?" he asked at last.

"Oh, crumbs!"

"Fathead!"

"Ass!"

"Blithering jabberwock!"

"I wefuse to be called a Blithewing jabberwock," said Arthur Augustus indignantly. "I wegard the ideah as wippin'. Pwivate Thompson won't know me by sight, so it is as easy as wollin' off a form. He will have a gwand weception, and a wippin' welcome, and his feelin's won't be hurt. We don't want a soldiah chap to know that there is such a weptile as Mellish in this school. You must wemembah, deah boys, that St. Jim's would have been burned to the gwound befoah this but for the soldiahs and sailors keepin' the Huns out. It's up to us to do anythin' we can, and I am goin' to do it. I twust," added D'Arcy with dignity—"I twust that you wegard me as a cweaditable sort of a cousin for a chap to have!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"There is nothin' whatevah to cackle at. If I were a chap cussin' home fwom the wah, I should like to be met by a weally nice, good-lookin', nice-mannahed cousin!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"By Jove, there's something in it!" said Tom Merry thoughtfully. "Thompson doesn't know Mellish, you know. He's never seen the cad. If a decent chap met him and gave him a hearty welcome, it would please him. He can't stay

here very long, and some of us can keep Mellish away all the time."

"But Gussy hasn't brains enough to keep it up!"

"Weally, Blake, you know vewy well that I have pwactically all the bwaains in Study No. 6."

"It's not a bad idea," said Herries. "But you'd better leave the job to me."

"Wats! It is necessary to pwovide a cousin who will do the chap cweedit, you know!"

"Shouldn't I do a chap credit?" roared Herries.

"Pway don't woad at me, Hewwies!"

"Well, it's Gussy's idea," said Blake. "But what will the chap think if he's made to believe that his cousin here is a movable tailor's dummy?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I wefuse to weply to that remark, Blake. I wequish all you fellahs to back me up in givin' my cousin Gewald a splendid weception."

"Your cousin Gerald! Ha, ha!"

"Yaas, my cousin Gewald. Jatah on, when Mellish has welected on the mattah, I dare say he will be glad we have saved him fwom actin' like a howwid cad, and he will thank me with teahs in his eyes."

"Bow-wow! Hallo, there goes the dinner-bell!"

"And here go us!" grinned Lowther.

There was a rush from the study.

In the dining-room Percy Mellish scowled at Blake & Co. as they sat down at the Fourth Form table. Mellish's eyes were glittering. The view Tom Merry & Co. took of his cousin might have made him modify his absurd attitude on the subject had he been a little more decent himself. As it was, they only made him more bitter and rancorous. And the chipping he had received from Levison and Crooke and some others had embittered him to such an extent that his feelings towards his unknown cousin were now feelings of hatred. He felt, too, that the juniors did not know what the unspeakable Thompson was like. They regarded him as an ordinary Tommy; while Mellish, fed on snobbish and ill-natured tattle at home, was convinced that he was some terrible hooligan, probably a disgrace to his regiment, and assuredly a disgrace to the lofty and aristocratic Percy.

For every gibe from Crooke & Co., and every word of contempt from Tom Merry and his friends, Mellish resolved to repay the unsuspicious and innocent soldier who was coming that afternoon. If bitter and scornful words could wound Gerald Thompson, he would be sorry that he had ever come to Rylecombe.

But Mellish's amiable programme was not destined to be carried out. After dinner he lounged in the quadrangle until it was time to start for the station. Then—after making sure that he was not observed by Crooke or Levison, or Trimble—he slipped out of the school gates and started for Rylecombe.

A dozen yards from the gates Herries and Digby detached themselves from a grassy bank, and met him in the road. Mellish would have pushed by, but the two Fourth-Formers took his arms.

"In a hurry?" smiled Dig.

"Let me go! I—I've got to meet a train!"

"Sorry! Wouldn't you rather come for a walk with us?"

"No, I wouldn't!"

"Sorry again!" grinned Dig. "But if you won't march on the voluntary system, we shall have to apply compulsion."

"Look here—"

"You can imagine that you're eighteen years old, and that I'm the recruiting-sergeant," said Dig blandly. "Kin on!"

Mellish began to struggle.

"You silly fools!—Let me go! I've got to meet a train!"

"You've got to come for a walk. We're going to have a

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bit of a picnic in the old Priory," said Herries. "We'll let you have some, if you're good. You're not going back to the school till calling-over!"

"You—you rotters! I've got an appointment—"

"That's all right! Somebody else will keep your appointment," grinned Dig. "We want to enjoy your company this afternoon. If you won't walk, we shall have to twist your arms—like that!"

"Yaroooh!"

"Or like that!" said Herries.

"Yow-ow-ow!"

"Are you coming, Percy dear?"

Mellish decided to come. With sulphurous looks, and feelings that would have done credit to a Hun, he walked away between Herries and Digby, who affectionately retained their hold of his arms.

CHAPTER 9.

D'Arcy's Cousin.

THEY'RE off, dear boys!"

From the gates of St. Jim's Tom Merry & Co. watched Herries and Dig as they started on that little walk with Mellish. The three turned into the pathway through the wood and disappeared, and the ebriums of the School House smiled at one another.

"Safe for the afternoon," said Tom Merry. "It's time we were off, too."

"Yaas, wathish!"

Tom Merry, with heroic self-sacrifice, had given up the House match that afternoon. It called for sacrifice, as a matter of fact. Figgins & Co., of the New House, were in great form, and Tom Merry was wanted on Little Side.

Talbot of the Shell was captaining the School House junior team. Julian and Hammond and Reilly and Kerruish were in the team, with Kangaroo, Clifton Dane, Gore, Glyn, and Lunley-Lunley. It was a good team, but, of course, Tom Merry and Blake were missed. However, it could not be helped. Cousin Gerald had to be looked after that afternoon, and Tom Merry could only hope that his reserves would put up a good game, with Talbot to lead them.

The Terrible Three, with Blake and Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, started together for Rylcombe.

There was plenty of time to meet the three o'clock train, and they were walking. But Arthur Augustus declared that when they met Cousin Gerald, a taxi was the proper "caper." Cousin Gerald would have had enough marching in Flanders, and he was to come to St. Jim's in style. And Arthur Augustus, being in funds, he was "given his lead," as Blake expressed it.

Whether Gussy's stunning idea was to be carried out, the Co. had not decided. But Arthur Augustus had decided.

It was, according to Gussy, the only thing to be done. Otherwise Cousin Gerald would feel neglected and slighted. St. Jim's reputation for hospitality and good manners was at stake. With so much at stake, a little harmless "spoof" was evidently excusable. As D'Arcy declared, it was impossible to allow his friend Thompson to go back to Flanders with the belief that he was fighting in defence of such a reptile as Mellish of the Fourth. He would, on the other hand, feel "no end backed" by the belief that he had a cousin like Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. He would feel that it was worth while keeping the Germans out, after all.

As Arthur Augustus was determined to carry out that stunning wheeze, the Co. had very little choice in the matter. They could not very well give Gussy away when he claimed Private Thompson as his cousin. They would have to back him up, and they could only hope that it would turn out well.

The five juniors arrived in the village a quarter of an hour before the train was due. Arthur Augustus promptly telephoned to Wayland for a taxi. As he explained to his comrades, he did not approve of the reckless use of taxis in war-time, but this was a special occasion, very special indeed.

He did not have a friend home from the trenches every day in the week.

Satisfied that the taxi was coming, the party entered the station, and took up their position on the platform to wait for the train.

"Mind you back me up, dear boys," said Arthur Augustus impressively. "Call me Percy, you know?"

"Better call you fathead, as usual," said Blake.

"Weally, Blake—"

"But you can't tell the chap a whopper, you know," said Manners. "Even George Washington couldn't tell whoppers, and he was a Yank. You can't do it, Gussy!"

"If you imply that I am capable of tellin' a whoppah, Mamamah, I shall have no resource but to give you a fearful thrashing!"

"What do you call it, then?" demanded Manners.

"Nothin' of the sort. You fellows will call me Percy. You have a wight to call me anythin' you like—"

"Fathead!" said Blake. "Ass, duffer, clump, bumbler, jabberwock, jossie—"

"You uthah ass!"

"That's all right," said Blake affably. "I have a right to call you anything I like. You've said so!"

"I mean any name you like, you howlin' ass! I shall address Private Thompson as Cousin Gerald? He is Cousin Gerald, isn't he—Mellish's cousin Gerald? He will conclude that I am his cousin. I am not responsible for his conclusions."

"You ought to be a Jesuit, Gussy," said Lowther admiringly, "or a Prussian, at least!"

"I am statin' the facts. Bal Jeev, heah comes the twain! Now, mind you play up, you duffahs, and don't give me away!"

The local train from Wayland came buzzing into the station. It stopped, and the juniors scanned with interest the passengers who alighted. There were five or six passengers; but there was only one in khaki, so they had no doubt about Cousin Gerald.

A tall, handsome young fellow of about twenty-five, with a sunburnt face, stood on the platform and glanced to and fro. He caught sight of the group of schoolboys, and his face lighted up a little. He came over towards them just as they moved to meet him.

"Excuse me," he said. "May I ask if you belong to St. James' School?"

"We belong to St. Jim's," said Tom.

"Perhaps my—" The soldier checked himself. "Perhaps one of you is here to meet me?"

The juniors understood. Unless Mellish wanted to recognise his cousin, the gentleman in khaki did not intend to make the relationship known. But Arthur Augustus answered at once emphatically.

"Yaas, wathah, dear boy, if you are Cousin Gerald!"

"I am Gerald Thompson."

"Awfully glad to see you, dear boy," said Arthur Augustus, gracefully extending his hand. "We have nevah met befoah. I am sowwy. Pway allow me to introduce Cousin Gerald, dear boys. Cousin Gerald, these fellahs are friends of mine—Tom Mewwy, Lowthah, Mamamah, and Blake. They have come with me to meet you heah."

Private Thompson looked pleased as he shook hands with the juniors.

"I'm glad you came, Percy," he said simply.

"It was a weal pleasurah to me, dear boy!"

"We're very glad to meet Percy's cousin," said Monty Lowther solemnly. "Percy has been making quite a fuss about your coming, Mr. Thompson."

Gerald Thompson laughed.

"I hardly knew it would be such a pleasure to you, Percy," he said. "I'm very glad. You are my only relation, you know, and I've often thought about you while I've been out there."

"That was vewy kind of you, dear boy," said Arthur Augustus. "This way, old chap, I think I can heah the taxi."

Arthur Augustus and his "cousin" walked out of the station, Tom Merry & Co. bringing up the rear, a little doubtful, but very cheery. There was no help for it now. Private Thompson believed that Arthur Augustus was his cousin Percy, and the game had to be played out. And the honest pleasure in the soldier's face when he received the greeting of his supposed cousin, reconciled the chums to the little game of "spoof." The difference between this reception and the reception Percy Mellish had intended for his cousin, justified Arthur Augustus' little game.

The taxi had arrived from Wayland, and was snorting outside the station.

"Heah we are!" said Arthur Augustus. "Of course, Cousin Gerald, you must not suppose that we generally use taxis in war-time. But on an occasion like this, you know—"

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NEXT
WEDNESDAY:

"MONEYBAGS MINOR!"

Private Thompson smiled.
 "Percy doesn't have a cousin in khaki come to see him every day," said Lowther. "Are you going outside with the driver, Percy?"

"You can go outside, Lowther. I am goin' to talk to my cousin."

Lowther took the outside seat, and four juniors and Private Thompson crowded into the taxi. It buzzed away in the direction of St. Jim's.

A group of juniors in Grammar School caps were passed in the lane, and Gordon Gay & Co. waved their caps to the taxi. They looked with interest at the stalwart, sunburnt man in khaki. In the presence of that distinguished stranger the Grammarians forbore to make the personal remarks with which they would otherwise have greeted their old rivals of St. Jim's.

"Wathah pretty country about heah, isn't it, Cousin Gewald?" said Arthur Augustus.

"Ripping!" said Private Thompson, his eyes dwelling with pleasure on the green Sussex landscape. "Rather a change after what I've seen lately."

"Yaas, I suppose so. It would be wathah different if the Huns got heah," said Arthur Augustus.

"They won't get here," said Private Thompson, smiling.

"You know our Housemaster?" said Tom Merry, as the taxi buzzed along Rylecombe Lane.

"If Mr. Railton is your Housemaster—"

"Yes."

"Yes, I know him," said Thompson. "It was really to see him that I was coming, in the first place, and then I wrote to Percy. We made friends out there in the trenches, when Mr. Railton was a private. A splendid fellow—splendid! He roughed it as cheerfully as anybody, and never dreamed of a word of complaint—and there were some hard times, too. He kept three Germans off me once, when I was knocked over in a charge."

"Good old Wailton!"

"My hat! Old Railton was actually in a charge!" said Blake, his eyes sparkling.

"Yes; we had to rush a trench, and Railton was one of the first."

"You took the trench, deah boy?"

Thompson nodded.

"We took it," he said. "I shouldn't be here to-day, Percy, if Railton hadn't been there that night. The same night he was shot down. I never saw him after that; but he wrote later that he had been invalided home, and had taken up his old position at the school. Talking with him in the trenches, I heard about you."

"About me? Did Wailton mention me?" exclaimed Arthur Augustus, considerably flattered. He had forgotten for a moment the part he was playing.

"Yes; when I happened to mention that I had relations named Mellish—"

"Oh, I—I see!"

"He remembered there was a kid of that name in his House at St. Jim's, and asked me if it was a connection. I'm sorry, Percy, that I haven't written to you before—very sorry indeed—but—but—" He broke off. He did not want to refer to family troubles in the presence of so many fellows.

"I—I undahstand, deah boy," stammered Arthur Augustus. "But now we're goin' to be—be great friends, I hope. I hope you'll be able to give us some time at St. Jim's. We were thinkin' of tea in the study. It will remind you of your own schooldays, old chap."

"It will be very pleasant, but not for that reason. I was not a public school man, you know," said Thompson, smiling.

"Bai Jove, no! I forgot! Hallo, here we are at St. Jim's."

The taxi stopped at the gates. The juniors alighted, and marched their new friend in with great pride. Old Taggles saluted the stranger respectfully. Taggles had a nephew "out there," and any man in khaki was "persona grata" to Taggles. And the chums of the School House marched Private Thompson across the quadrangle with as much pride as if he had been a field-marshal at least.

CHAPTER 10. Thompson Arrives.

GERALD THOMPSON dropped a little behind with Arthur Augustus as the party crossed the old quad. Arthur Augustus realised that Thompson might like to speak confidentially to his cousin, finding him so hearty and friendly, and he had tried to avoid any occasion for confidence. But this was not to be avoided.

"I can't say how glad I am about this, Percy," said Thompson, in a low voice. "I was hardly prepared for such really kind feeling from you. I feel that I owe you an apology."

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"Not at all, deah boy!" stammered D'Arcy.

"Out there a chap gets to thinking sometimes," said the soldier. "I've got no relations but you and your father. I should not have forced myself on you; but if you wanted to be friendly, I hoped you might use your influence at home to help me get on better terms with your father. There has been some bitterness, but this isn't the time for family troubles to be continued, is it? If I'd known the chap you were, I'd have written to you long ago. But I was afraid to be thought—well, pushing. I don't want anything, of course, but your friendship. But it's pleasant to feel out there that there's someone at home who cares whether a chap is bowled over or not."

"I—I undahstand perfectly," almost growled Gussy, half-repenting himself of his game of spoof. Yet he could not quite repent, for he pictured this simple, kind-fellow at the mercy of Mellish's buffer, sneering tongue, and the picture made him shiver.

"I've had some luck, too," went on Thompson. "I mentioned that in my letter, I think."

"Ye-es!"

"I'm glad you're interested in it, Percy. I have been offered a commission."

"Bai Jove!"

"That's really what I want to consult Mr. Railton about," said Thompson. "As I am single, without dependents, I can afford to take it up, but I want my old friend's advice about it first."

"I congwatulate you, deah boy!"

"Yes, it is luck," said Thompson. "I shall go back to Flanders as an officer, I think. Of course, that means less roughing it; but I don't care for that. I think I shall be useful."

"I am suah of it, Cousin Gewald!"

They reached the School House. Mr. Railton was in the hall, and Arthur Augustus jumped as he sighted him.

"Pway excuse me a minute. I've got to speak to a chap!"

He gasped, and he bolted before the Housemaster saw him. He was quite in a flutter when he arrived on the cricket-field.

If the Housemaster had seen him with Thompson, a word would have been enough to give away the little game.

"Bai Jove!" murmured Arthur Augustus. "That was a newwow escape!"

Mr. Railton had advanced to meet Thompson, as soon as he saw him. He shook hands with the stalwart soldier, under the curious eyes of a dozen fellows in the hall.

"That must be Mellish's cousin," Levison whispered to Crooke.

"Looks decent enough," said Crooke, in wonder.

"What on earth was Mellish so fussy about?" said Levison, equally surprised. "Old Railton seems to like him all right."

"I'm glad to see you, Thompson," Mr. Railton was saying cordially. "It's good of you to give me a look in during your leave. Have they given you long?"

"Only a week," said Thompson.

"Well, I suppose they can't spare your sort for long," said the Housemaster, with a smile. "How fit you are looking! It seems only the other day we were in the trench together. You remember picking me up after I got the German bullet? We'll fight some of our battles over again this evening—what?"

"Yes," said Thompson cheerfully. "By the way, my cousin—"

"You have seen your cousin?" asked Mr. Railton, a slight shadow coming over his face.

The Housemaster feared that the man from the trenches would see little to be proud of in his cousin at St. Jim's.

"Yes; he met at the station with some friends of his. A splendid young fellow!" said Thompson warmly.

Mr. Railton repressed a movement of surprise. How on earth Mellish of the Fourth could strike anybody as a splendid young fellow, was a mystery to him.

"I'm glad you like the lad," he said.

"One of the finest lads in the school, I should say," said Thompson. "Perhaps a little fastidious, but as good as gold. But, of course, you know."

"I—I never noticed that Mellish was a little fastidious. So he has made a good impression on you?"

"Yes, indeed; and it was a pleasure to me to be greeted with such heartiness by a relation I had never seen before. I've often thought of my young cousin, out there, and wondered what he was like. A lad any chap might be proud of!"

"I—I—I am glad to hear you say so," murmured Mr. Railton, feeling that he would need to revise his own opinion of Mellish of the Fourth. For Gerald Thompson, kind and simple as he was, was keen enough, and he certainly was not the fellow to be taken in as to a boy's character. It was evident that his cousin's kind greeting had touched the soldier's heart.

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

"Come into my study," said Mr. Railton, showing the way.

"Excuse me, sir," said Tom Merry diffidently. "Mr. Thompson is—is— We want him to come to tea in the study, sir, if—if we may. His—his cousin wants him—"

Mr. Railton laughed.

"Quite so—quite so. That will be an experience for you, my dear Thompson—the feasts in the junior studies are, I believe, fearful and wonderful; but the hospitality is unbounded. After Mr. Thompson has had a chat with me, Merry, I have no doubt he will be at your service for a time."

"I should enjoy it," said Thompson, with a smile; and he followed the Housemaster into his study.

The chums of the School House looked at one another as the door closed upon Mr. Railton and Private Thompson.

"Lucky Gussy cut off in time," murmured Blake. "I shouldn't have thought he'd have had sense enough."

"Jolly lucky!"

"So that's Mellish's cousin?" said Levisen, coming up.

"That's the merchant," said Lowther.

"Can't see anything the matter with him."

"That's easily explained," said Lowther urbanely.

"There happens to be nothing the matter with him."

"What the dickens was Mellish so ratty about, then?"

"The mysteries of a mind like Mellish's are past fathoming, my dear chap."

"Is Mellish really going to have him to tea in the study?" said Crooke. "We were going to do that, to watch him eat with his knife and drop his h's."

"Well, we're going to do it, and you can keep off the grass," said Tom Merry gruffly. "You can go and eat coke! Come on, you chaps!"

The Co. left the School House. Private Thompson was likely to be some time with Mr. Railton, so they had plenty of time to prepare for the little feed in Study No. 6. They walked down to the cricket field to see how the match was getting on, and found Arthur Augustus D'Arcy there.

"How's it going?" asked Blake.

"New House all down for sixty," said Arthur Augustus. "School House twenty for three wickets, and Talbot battin' like half a dozen Gwages. dear boy! I wishah think the School House will pull the match off."

"Bravo, Talbot!" shouted Tom Merry, as the Shell fellow cut the ball hard, and he and Kangaroo ran, and ran again.

"Come on, Percy!" said Lowther. "You can't stay here watching cricket, Percy. You've got to come and lay in supplies for Cousin Gerald, my dear Percy."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Bai Jove! I hope Hewwies and Dig won't let that wottah Mellish get away till aftah Thompson is gone," murmured Arthur Augustus. "It would have been a fearful shock to that splendid chap to meet Mellish. I am vewy glad I stepped into the bweach. He told me he's been affahed a commission."

"Good luck! Perhaps the aristocratic Percy will deign to notice him now," grinned Lowther. "He's good enough for us as he is, but the noble Percy is so aristocratic. Come on, Percy minor!"

And the juniors marched off to the school shop, where supplies were laid in on a really lavish scale, for the delectation of Cousin Gerald.

CHAPTER 11. Tea in Study No. 6.

STUDY No. 6 presented an unusually festive appearance. That celebrated apartment was sometimes, it must be admitted, in an untidy state. Sometimes it was a little dusty, and sometimes it looked as if a dog-fight had raged within its walls. But on the present occasion it was newly swept and garnished.

There were flowers in the jam-pots on the mantelpiece. There was a spotless cloth on the table, specially borrowed from the house-dame. There was a sufficient number of chairs for every guest. There was a saucer to every cup, and a spoon to every saucer. The soap-dish in which the jam reposed was as bright as a new pin. Jack Blake surveyed the study with an eye of rapture. Blake did not often take the trouble to be "high-jantinn." But he prided himself

upon being able to do a thing in style when he chose. Study No. 6 was doing it in style now.

And the feed was a real stunner.

There was ham and cold beef and tongue for the solid fare. There were poached eggs on toast, and the toast was beautifully crisp, done to a turn. There were sprats—Arthur Augustus had suggested whitebait, so Blake had provided sprats as the nearest thing possible. There was coffee as well as tea, and a huge jug of Dame Taggles' best home-made lemonade.

And—wonder of wonders!—there were cigars!

Study No. 6, it need hardly be said, did not smoke. But Mr. Thompson was twenty-five, and a soldier, so it was probable he smoked. Smoking in the study was not exactly agreeable to the juniors, but their hospitality knew no bounds. And Blake had rushed down to Rylcombe on his bike especially for those cigars. He had given twopence each for them, and each of them had a strong smell which Blake fondly believed was the aroma of Havana. Three cigars, at twopence each, with beautiful gold bands; reposed on a little plate beside Mr. Thompson's cup and saucer. Fortunately, Mr. Thompson was a remarkably fit and healthy young man, and it was possible that Blake's cigars might be smoked without casualties.

"I'm not the chap to brag," remarked Jack Blake. "But really this is good enough for the Prince of Wales."

"Quite," said Monty Lowther. "Study No. 6 is keeping up its reputation. And Railton will let you use his telephone if necessary."

Blake stared.

"Eh! I don't want to use his telephone."

"I mean to call in the doctor, if necessary," explained Lowther, his eyes resting on the cigars.

Blake breathed hard through his nose.

"On an occasion like this," he said, in measured tones, "I don't want to punch a fellow's head. But if Lowther is going to be funny—"

"Yes, keep all that for the 'Weekly,' Monty, old man," urged Manners.

"I dare say Thompson can smoke those cigars," said Blake, in rushing tones. "The man had some at three-halfpence, and I refused them."

"They're ripping," said Tom Merry pacifically. "Hallo! What do you want here, Tubby?"

"Not here yet," he said. "Where's Mellish?"

"Go and eat coke!"

"The fact is I'm coming," said Trimble. "I'm not a sign. A chap with high connections like mine can afford not to be snobbish. I'm coming to tea with the soldier."

"Bai Jove! Are you?"

"Certainly! After all, the chap's been fighting for us, hasn't he?" said Trimble tolerantly. "I don't mind sitting down to table with him."

"But he might mind," said Blake grimly. "The fact is, we're trying to give him a decent impression of St. Jim's. We're not going to let him know that there are any cad or reptiles in the school if we can help it. When a cad or a reptile puts his nose into this study I'm going to punch it—like that!"

"Yoooop!" roared Trimble, as he went over backwards into the passage.

"Come and have another!" said Blake invitingly.

"Yow-ow-ow!"

"Hand me a stump, somebody!"

But Baggy Trimble did not wait for the stump. He fled down the passage at top speed.

"We're all weedy now," remarked Arthur Augustus. "If those fellows come in twon the ewicket, the word must be passed wound about our little game. Bai Jove, heah's Cwooke!"

Crooke of the Shell grinned in at the doorway.

"I've come!" he announced.

"And now you can go, Cwooke!"

"I don't want any of your feed," said Crooke disdainfully; "I'm going to see the chap eat with his knife, you know."

"All hands on deck!" said Lowther.

What happened next seemed like an earthquake to George Gerald Crooke. Four pairs of hands were laid on him, he was whirled off his feet, and he went along the Fourth Form passage with a series of terrific bumps. Bump, bump, bump! he went to his own study in the Shell passage. Blake kicked



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the door open, and bump, bump, bump! went Crooke into the study. With a final tremendous bump! he was landed on his study table.

The juniors left him there. Crooke of the Shell was not likely to pay another visit to Study No. 6.

"I trust Thompson won't be late," observed Arthur Augustus, as the juniors returned a little breathlessly to No. 6. "The toast will dry up."

"Here he comes!"

A soldierly figure appeared in the passage from the stables. Tom Merry met the distinguished visitor and guided him into the study.

Blake could not help glancing at his face to see what impression Study No. 6 made upon him. Blake felt that even his gracious Majesty King George V. would have been pleased with Study No. 6 at that moment. And certainly Private Thompson of the Loamshire Rifles looked pleased. Arthur Augustus handed him his chair—the best chair in the study, warranted not to collapse under a sudden weight. Private Thompson sat down.

"Tea or coffee, dear boy?" said Arthur Augustus, with a thrill of pride in his voice. Junior studies generally had tea, and sometimes coffee; but tea and coffee together—that was what Gussy would have described justly as a "corkah."

Arthur Augustus had taken up the teapot in one hand, and the coffee-pot in the other.

"You ass!" gasped Blake. "Don't share tea and coffee in the same cup!"

"Bai Jove! My mistake!"

"Leave that to me," said Blake.

"Weally, Blake—"

"Pass Cousin Gerald's plate this way, Lowther! Make yourself useful, old chap!"

"Pewwaps I had better carve—"

"Perhaps you had better not, Gussy. I—I mean—ahem!"—glimpsed the carving-knife, you duffer!"

"You uthah ass!" said Arthur Augustus, in a stage-whisper. "I have warned you not to call me Gussy!"

That remark was as audible to Private Thompson as to Blake. The juniors' hearts stood still for a moment.

To their relief, Private Thompson laughed.

"A nickname of yours, Percy?" he said.

"Ya-a-s, wathah!" gasped Arthur Augustus. "My friends sometimes call me Gussy."

"And sometimes Aubrey or Adolphus," said Monty Lowther, coming to the rescue, "and sometimes Vere de Vere. Percy is the glass of fashion and the mould of form in the School House. He is our member for Bond Street."

"Weally, Lowther—"

"What ripping quarters you have here!" said Thompson. "I should think you are in clover here, Percy!"

If anything had been needed to make Private Thompson popular in Study No. 6, that remark would have done it. Evidently the gentleman in khaki knew how to appreciate that celebrated study.

"Yaas, it's wathah wippin'," said D'Arcy. "We have a fire-gate in this study, you know. They don't all have. And this window looks on the quadrangle, and we can see the cricket-ground from heah."

"You play a lot of cricket?"

"Yaas, wathah! I'm in the House junior team, of course. I'm standin' out this afternoon because I've got a distinguished visitah, you know."

Private Thompson laughed.

"That's jolly kind of you, Percy!"

"A pleasuah, dear boy! Look aftah Cousin Gewald's plate, Blake. Yaas, you're wight about the studay, Cousin Gewald. We bag it ewery term, you know. Once some wotten boundahs twied to bag it from us, as we were late comin' back aftah a vacation—Levison and Mel—ahem!—ahem!—I—I mean, what lovely weathah we're havin' for the time of yah!"

"Fill Mr. Thompson's cup," said Tom Merry hurriedly.

And D'Arcy, in his confusion at his slip of the tongue, poured coffee with a liberal hand into Private Thompson's tea.

However, the little celebration went off remarkably well. It was evident that Private Thompson enjoyed tea in Study No. 6. He had brought a good appetite from Flanders, and he did full justice to the goodly fare provided. If he had eaten one half of the good things the hospitable juniors pressed upon him, however, he would have been provisioned for a long siege.

When Private Thompson could not be induced to accept another tart or slice of cake, Blake drew attention to the cigars.

"I suppose you smoke, sir?" he remarked diffidently.

"Yes, sometimes, when not on duty," smiled Gerald. "It's a comfort to us out there. But I won't smoke here."

"Ahem! I'd like you to try the cigars."

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"Yaas, we weally don't mind smoke a bit," said Arthur Augustus. "In fact, we—we wathah enjoy it. Do try the cigars, dear boy."

Private Thompson looked at the cigars. But the man who had faced the German guns without flinching could face a twopenny cigar, and he selected one of them without turning a hair.

"Thanks, I will," he said gracefully.

Blake joyfully struck a match, and the cigar was lighted.

Private Thompson puffed away at it with an air of considerable enjoyment. The Honourable Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was not the only spoofer in the study.

"You haven't been wound the school yet, Cousin Gewald," Arthur Augustus remarked. "Aftah you've had your smoke pewwaps you'd like to—"

"Well, Mr. Railton has asked me to take a walk round with him after tea," said Cousin Gerald.

"Oh, in that case, we wesign in favah of Mr. Waitton. It is weally wathah good of him to let us have you to tea, dear boy. I suppose you had an awfid lot to talk about—killin' Germans and things? How do you like the cigar?"

"Ripping!"

"Yaas, the smell is wathah—wathah fwagward," D'Arcy coughed violently. "There is nothin' like the scent of a weally good cigar!"

"Nothing!" agreed Private Thompson. He was smoking rather slowly now, however. "I don't know how to thank you young fellows for looking after me like this. I shall think of this afternoon when I'm back there. Ah, here comes Mr. Railton, I think!"

There was a step in the passage.

The juniors started up in dismay.

"Is—is Mr. Railton coming here for you?" gasped Tom Merry.

"Yes, he said he would look in—"

"Bai Jove!"

"Oh!"

There was a tap at the door, and it opened. The pleasant face of the Housemaster smiled into Study No. 6. The juniors stood frozen.

Private Thompson rose to his feet, the half-smoked cigar in his fingers.

"I am ready," he said. "I have had a very pleasant tea. My cousin has killed the fatted calf on my account."

Mr. Railton glanced at the juniors.

The great secret was trembling in the balance now, and they were on tenterhooks. In spite of all their efforts, they could not help looking worried.

"I shall see you again, Percy," said Private Thompson.

"Ya-a-s, dear boy!" mumbled Arthur Augustus.

Mr. Railton started a little.

"Mellish is not here, I see," he remarked. "You have been doing the honours, D'Arcy?"

Arthur Augustus fell into his chair.

The game was up now, with a vengeance!

CHAPTER 12.

Mr. Railton is Not Angry.

PRIVATE THOMPSON glanced at Mr. Railton, and then at the dismayed, crimson face of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. Monty Lowther looked out of the window. Manners was deeply interested in an oleograph on the wall. Tom Merry stared into his teacup as if he were trying to read his fortune in the dregs. Jack Blake regarded his knees with a fixed and almost painful attention.

The silence in Study No. 6 could almost have been cut with a knife.

Mr. Railton looked surprised.

So did Private Thompson.

It was only too evident that something was wrong, though the Housemaster could not guess what it was.

"I spoke to you, D'Arcy!" he said, a little severely.

"Ya-a-s, sir!" gasped Arthur Augustus.

"D'Arcy!" repeated Private Thompson. "Is that another of your nicknames, Percy?"

Mr. Railton jumped.

"Your Cousin Percy!" he ejaculated.

"Yes."

The Housemaster's brow grew stern.

"Is it possible, D'Arcy, that you have ventured to play a foolish trick upon my friend?" he exclaimed. "Have you had the impertinence to do so?"

"Oh, ewikey!"

"If not, what does this mean? You appear to have made Mr. Thompson believe that you are his cousin, Percy Mellish."

"But—but—but he is my cousin, Percy Mellish, surely!" exclaimed Gerald Thompson, in amazement.

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"Nothing of the sort! His name is D'Arcy! Is this the boy who met you at the station?"

"Yes, as my Cousin Percy."

"You will kindly explain this, D'Arcy, at once! Where is Mellish?"

"Oh, good gracious!"

"I—I suppose it was a little schoolboy trick—what?" said Mr. Thompson, rather slowly. "Never mind, I can take a joke, though I can't see the point of this one. But I should like to see my Cousin Percy, if possible."

"You shall certainly see him!" said Mr. Railton. "Tell me at once where Mellish is, D'Arcy!"

"Oh, dear!"

"Mum-mum-Mellish has gone out for a walk with Herries and Dig, sir!" stammered Tom Merry. "As as he was prevented from—being here, we—we thought we'd entertain Mr. Thompson in his place."

Mr. Thompson smiled.

"No harm done," he said. "The boys have been very kind, Mr. Railton."

"Very good; but they had no right to deceive you in this way. D'Arcy, I insist upon knowing why you pretended to Mr. Thompson to be his cousin!"

Wild horses would not have dragged the information from Arthur Augustus in the presence of Gerald Thompson. He stammered helplessly.

"The—the fact is, sir," stammered Blake, "Gussy—D'Arcy, I mean—w-w-wanted to swank about having a cousin in—khaki! Didn't you, Gussy?"

"Ya-a-a-as!" gasped D'Arcy. "I—I—I weally did not mean any harm, sir! I—I felt that—that I should be vewy proud to have Mr. Thompson for a cousin, so—so—"

"Was that your reason for this impudence, D'Arcy?"

"Nunno! That was not exactly the weason, sir!"

"Then kindly tell me the reason!"

Arthur Augustus' lips closed. Private Thompson, who was looking at him very curiously, understood—a little, at all events.

"Perhaps the boys would speak more freely if they were not in the presence of a stranger," he remarked. "I will wait for you in the quadrangle, Mr. Railton."

He quitted the study.

His steps died away down the passage before Mr. Railton spoke again.

"Now, D'Arcy, and the rest of you," he said, very quietly, "I must have an explanation of this! You have done a very serious thing, and unless you can furnish some explanation, I shall have no alternative but to report your astounding conduct to the Head for very severe punishment! Why did you take Mellish's name, and impersonate him, and deceive Mr. Thompson in this unfeeling way?"

Arthur Augustus started up.

"I trust you do not considah me capable of actin' in an unfeelin' way towards a chap ffrom the twenches, sir," he exclaimed hotly.

"It is for you to prove that you have not done so," said Mr. Railton sternly. "Tell me at once why you have imposed yourself upon Mr. Thompson as his cousin?"

"I—I had a jolly good weason, sir! I—I thought that Thompson would like to find his cousin a wathah nice chap—"

"What!"

"Yaas, sir, and—and as he was comin' ffrom the twenches, sir, we all felt that he was bound to be twated respectfully at St. Jim's, so we weally had no othah weason, sir."

The Housemaster's expression changed.

"Had you any reason to suppose that Mellish did not intend to give his cousin a cordial welcome?" he exclaimed.

"I weally cannot sneek about Mellish, sir. I should be vewy sowwy to explain to you that he is a 'sneakin', wotten, ewawlin' cad, and does not deserve to have a welation in khaki!"

"Merry, I ask you for an explanation. I must have the facts."

"Well, sir, we meant no harm," said Tom. "We thought the chap ought to be treated well here."

"I think I understand," said Mr. Railton, his lips setting grimly. "Where is Mellish now?"

"He—he went for a walk, sir, with—with Herries and Dig."

"Did he go of his own accord?"

"N-n-nunno!"

"You have deliberately planned to keep Mellish away for the afternoon, while D'Arcy played the part of Mr. Thompson's cousin here?"

"It couldn't be helped, sir!" said Tom Merry desperately. "We couldn't have that decent chap's feelings hurt by a crawling, snobbish cad! It was up to us to chip in for the honour of the school."

"We nevah expected it to come out, sir. We—we thought

Cousin Gawald would go away believin' that he had a decent cousin heah, you know. If that howwid worm had insulted him, what sort of an impression would he have had of St. Jim's, sir? I appeal to you, sir, if you wouldn't have done the same?"

Mr. Railton smiled for a moment, but his face became very grave.

"Knowing you as I do, and knowing Mellish as I do, I think I can understand your motives," he said. "You have acted in a very foolish and thoughtless manner—"

"Oh, bai Jove!"

"But your feelings on the subject do you credit, and I am not angry with you. But you must bring Mellish here at once. Mr. Thompson must see his cousin."

The juniors exchanged dismayed glances.

"It—it's impossible, sir!" blurted Tom Merry. "He musn't see him! You—you don't understand! The measly cad—ahem!—I mean, Mellish is going to insult him, and—and—and freeze him off like that, and—and I'd rather wring the little beast's neck with my own hands than let him do it!"

"I owe you my thanks for having prevented my old friend from being insulted," said Mr. Railton. "But you will bring Mellish here at once, and you will bring him to my study. I shall see him, and talk to him, before he sees Mr. Thompson."

"I trust, sir, that you are not goin' to punish the wottah—I mean, Mellish. That would place us in the position of havin' sneaked!"

"I shall not punish him. I shall speak to him, and, I hope, bring him to a more gentlemanly frame of mind. I need hardly caution you not to let Mr. Thompson hear a word of this. You have acted recklessly and thoughtlessly, but you have proved, my dear boys, that my estimate of you was not a mistaken one."

And, with that unexpected finish, Mr. Railton turned and left the study.

Percy Mellish came into the School House with Tom Merry and Blake an hour later, with a curious expression on his face. Controlling their feelings in a really noble and creditable manner, Tom Merry and Blake had not hit him once on the way home. They had talked to him like Dutch uncle instead. And Mellish, on hearing that his cousin was not a hoodigan, that he had a commission in prospect, and that he was chummy with so august a person as Mr. Railton, had somewhat changed his mind about meting out drastic treatment to Cousin Gerald. He had been told, too, of the little game of spoof, and the fact that so lefty a personage as the Honourable Arthur Augustus, the son of Lord Eastwood, had owned Thompson as a cousin before all St. Jim's could not fail to have its effect on the wretched snob.

Tom Merry tapped at Mr. Railton's door and opened it, and seeing that the Housemaster was alone, Mellish was taken in. The chums left him with the Housemaster. Private Thompson was chatting with the Head. When he came back to Mr. Railton's study, he found his cousin there, and he found a Mellish who was prepared to overflow with civility and cousinly friendliness.

When Private Thompson took his leave, he found a group of juniors waiting for him at the gates to say "Good-bye!" He came down with his cousin, and evidently on very good terms with him.

"I trust you will forgive us, sir," said Arthur Augustus. "I assure you we meant no harm by that little—ahem!—game. We felt it was up to us to do the honours in the absence of our—our pal Mellish—"

Mr. Thompson laughed heartily.

"Bless you, I don't mind!" he said. "I'm glad to see that you have such a high opinion of the khaki. And I am very much obliged to you for looking after me as you did. I shall take away a very agreeable impression of St. Jim's."

And Private Thompson shook hands all round with Tom Merry & Co., and last of all very heartily with his cousin. Then he walked away to the station with Mr. Railton. His visit to St. Jim's had been very pleasant and agreeable, and he little suspected how much of that he owed to Tom Merry & Co. As for Mellish, the next time Tom Merry & Co. had the pleasure of hearing his voice, he was bragging in the Common-room of his cousin, Lieutenant Thompson of the Leamshire Regiment—Railton's old chum!

THE END.

(Do not miss next Wednesday's Grand, Long Complete Yarn of the Chums of St. Jim's, entitled "MONEYBAGS MINOR!" by Martin Clifford.)

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NEXT WEDNESDAY: "MONEYBAGS MINOR!" 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. Here they are captive for some time, and pass safely through many weird and exciting adventures, when they discover that Sing Loo is gifted with hypnotic power. They decide to use this in an attempt to escape from the city.

On a very dark night, after overpowering the giant guards, with Sing Loo's valuable assistance and the use of chloroform, they stealthily creep forth from their dwelling. They succeed in baffling the guards at the city gates, but not before the alarm has been given, and Sing Loo seriously wounded. They are being pursued by the giants, when they are startled by a tearing, rending noise, as if the very earth were being torn asunder.

(Now read on.)

The Boys' Discovery.

Every one of the expedition party knew there had been an earthquake; but there was no time for comment—they had to press on. Every moment of time was precious. And they had to find the llamas, mules, food, and ammunition, which the giants had forced them to abandon on the day of captivity.

Presently a shout from Toothy Jim, who was still bearing the head of Sing Loo's form, and peering with his keen eyes into the gloom beyond, brought the party to a sudden halt.

Quickly the native made it known to Dr. Phenning that he saw some animals looming ahead. No one else could see anything. But the remainder of the party were at once on the alert. Slowly the little procession moved on again, the doctor, Reggie, and Jimmy going slightly ahead. Suddenly a cry of surprise escaped Reggie, and he stumbled up against some animal tethered to a tree-stump. It was a llama. With catlike agility, Toothy Jim, carefully releasing Sing Loo, crawled ahead, and got his lasso ready.

With Reggie and Jimmy and the doctor to help him, the wily native soon spotted more llamas, and mules also. By the greatest good fortune, they had stumbled right on to the spot where the native giants were evidently keeping their beasts and equipment.

But the greatest care and silence had to be exercised. At any moment they might arouse the guard, who, they thought, would be keeping watch over the spoil. But apparently there was no one there. The beasts were all tethered to trees and shrubs, and, with the paling of the dawn, the expedition party saw, with infinite relief, that a great deal

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of the baggage and equipment was intact, save that it had been rudely unpacked, and lay in scattered heaps about the little plateau.

The party were keenly on the alert, lest they should be taken by surprise by any giant guards; but, as far as they could see, no enemy was anywhere near.

Then began almost superhuman efforts to collect the baggage, and to pack it on the mules. Out of thirty mules with which they had started, only fourteen remained. The giant natives had either killed or utilised ten, whilst the rest had been lost when the brutes stampeded near the boiling lake, and when they had crossed the raging river.

Sing Loo had more or less recovered from his fainting attacks, and was being assiduously attended to by Dr. Phenning. The Chinaman's hand, owing to the impossibility of immediate attention, was causing the Oriental great pain; but he bore it with stoical fortitude, and was grateful for the care and skill which Dr. Phenning displayed in attending to it.

They dared not light any fire, lest the smoke might attract the natives to their resting-spot, so contented themselves with some tinned meats and cakes of grain taken from the Rock City. After a hasty meal, they prepared to move on.

Out of the large number of Patagonian natives which accompanied them at the start, not one remained save Toothy Jim. The others had either run away or had been killed by the giants.

"Well," said Mr. Whittaker, addressing the little party after the early-morning meal, "our numbers have sadly dwindled since we set out, and I don't know, I'm sure, whether we shall ever get through. But we can't go back!"

Subdued but hearty cries of "No!" greeted his remark.

"We've had a marvellous escape," went on the leader, "and I don't see why we should not successfully combat the difficulties that must still lie ahead of us, if we have a bit of luck. We have done much, and we'll do more. What man has done, man can do. It's my opinion that we are within a reasonable distance of those districts which, if it is alive, is haunted by the giant sloth; and if he's there, we're going to get him. You all saw the huge giant sloth's skin in the temple of the Rock City. You may depend on it that mighty beast was captured somewhere near here. You also know that there is a possibility of our meeting or having to contend against a rival party. But we'll make the greatest effort we've made yet to be first in the field!"

Everyone would have cheered, had they not feared the sound would carry too far. As it was, the boys and Dr. Phenning grinned and nodded approval; while Toothy Jim, only able to understand a word here and there, caught the drift of the argument, and showed every molar in his great, gaping mouth.

"And I'm convinced," went on Mr. Whittaker, "that Fate is playing into our hands, and that the earthquake which visited this district this morning so frightened our pursuers, the giants, that they turned tail and fled back to the city.

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And I wouldn't be at all surprised to learn that that wonderful turn carved in the rock has been suffering terribly from earthquake shocks. That we may never learn—unless we return the same way by which we came; and if we did this, discretion would force us to give the Rock City a wide berth.

"And now," he added gravely, turning to the north-east, where the sun was rising with superb majesty and splendour, "there lies our path. To mules and llamas, boys, and let us once more start trekking towards the land of the giant sloth!"

Shortly after, the sadly dwindled cavalcade moved on.

Everyone was mounted on a mule, save Sing Loo, who was slung between two of the beasts in a roughly-made hammock. Reggie, Jimmy, and Larry kept the two brutes in order, and at their proper distance from one another. Toothy Jim was in front with Dr. Phrenning, while Mr. Whittaker brought up the rear.

By sunset they had put a considerable distance between themselves and possible pursuers, and halted for the night midst a small clearing among some magnificent tall trees and tropical vegetation. Beyond, a gap in the branches and undergrowth, lying far down in a valley, fringed with marshy land and rotting weeds and vegetation, they could see, glinting in the fierce rays of the setting sun, pools of water.

Reggie, Jimmy, and Larry—who every hour now seemed to be on the mend—went off before the sun had vanished behind the distant hills on a short voyage of discovery to look for water.

Mr. Whittaker knew that at the altitude of their present encampment there would most likely be small pools of water collected in rocky hollows, which, sheltered by the little miniature gorges and stones, would not be quickly evaporated by the hot sun. The boys had no intention of going down to the valley, which lay some four thousand feet below.

As Reggie, with rifle at half-cock, ready for any emergency, crawled under branches and undergrowth, followed by his chums, he was suddenly brought up to a standstill by unexpectedly coming across a tremendously thick barrier of twining undergrowth, through a small gap of which his quick eye caught something glinting and shimmering with dazzling intensity, as, apparently, the bright object caught the rays of the flaming sunset. He put his fingers to his lips, and beckoned his chums to look through the aperture.

Reggie then determined to probe the mystery of the shining thing, and retraced his footsteps back to where the three had come. The boy knew that there must be another way, which would make an easier access to the glittering light.

They found, strangely enough, a path—or, rather, a way round to where the light was glinting so strongly—ready made for them.

The undergrowth and brambles had either been torn and pushed aside by some animal of monstrous size and weight, as the height of the clearing clearly showed, or it had been cut aside and hewn by the hand of man. The latter seemed less probable, as Reggie argued with his companions that it would have been waste of time to shear the tendrils and branches up to such a height.

On looking up, Jimmy discovered something long, red, and straggling hanging on to some of the branches which were quite out of reach.

"What's that?" queried Jimmy, gazing up at the trees.

"Oh, you mean that coarse, fibrous-looking stuff!" said Reggie. "Nothing out of the common. Probably some loose, fibrous bark, which has been torn off some of the trees in a terrific wind storm, and has got entangled in the branches."

"It looks to me like some animal's hair," put in Larry.

"I'm going to swarm up this tree to get a handful!" cried Jimmy.

In a moment his adventurous spirit prompted him to climb the tree, and when he was astride a long branch, rather high up, his chums saw him tear off a considerable quantity of the reddish-brown stuff, and put it in his pocket.

Then he cautiously walked to the end of the branch, which terminated in the direction of the dense jungle through which they had seen the strange light.

Suddenly Jimmy gave a cry, half of exultation, half of bitter disappointment.

"What's up?" asked Larry and Reggie.

"Perhaps I'm wrong in my theory," answered Jimmy. "Anyway, we'll go and see. From where I stand I can, I think, see the meaning of the weird, silver sheen we saw, and I can also see how we can get to the spot to prove whether I'm right."

Then he quickly descended. His eyes looked very bright, and his cheeks were flushed a bit with excitement, when he rejoined his friends. But he put on a superb air of nonchalance, which might not have sat ill on an explorer of

thrice his years and experience. Then he put his hand into his pocket, and pulled out the reddish, fluffy stuff.

"What price this," he said, "belonging to some animal?"

Larry and Reggie examined it minutely.

"It's reddish-brown hair of some sort," agreed Reggie. "There's no bark or fibre about it."

"Do either of you two recollect seeing anything like it anywhere before?" asked Jimmy, almost bursting with excitement.

"I've seen something resembling it at the Zoo," put in Larry. "It's rather like the red-brown hair that grows so thickly round a bison's neck."

"So it is," agreed Reggie. "Fancy if they're bison here—what sport!"

"Bison!" responded Larry, with a touch of scorn and superior wisdom. "Bison, indeed! And how could such a creature leave some of his mane on trees sixteen feet up? By climbing, I suppose?"

"I say, you chaps," he blurted out, "do use your eyes and your brains! Can't you see that this hair or fur is exactly the same as the coat which covered the skin of that mighty beast in the temple of the Rock City. If this fur doesn't belong to a giant sloth, I'll eat it on toast for to-morrow's breakfast."

"By Jove, old chap!" said Reggie, with ready and generous appreciation of his chum's common-sense. "You're right! It's exactly similar!"

"Good old Jimmy!" cried Larry, slapping his chum on the back. "It is the same, and you're the first white man ever to discover such a thing."

"I'm not so sure about that," replied Jimmy rather gloomily, though he thawed somewhat at his chum's demonstration of appreciation for his cuteness.

"How do you mean?" inquired Reggie.

"Come this way and see."

Having observed from his observation-post in the tree a rough passage through the undergrowth which might lead to the required place, Jimmy led the way. In a few minutes, but not without difficulty, the three boys found themselves in a little clearing surrounded by rocks and boulders. Here and there Nature had formed little cups or saucers in the rocks, and tiny pools of precious water were sheening as the fluid reflected the golden sunsets. But what chiefly attracted the notice of the boys, and made them cry out, in a half-startled, half-incredulous way, was the object which they now knew to be the cause of that dazzling light. With a cry, the three boys ran forward and looked at the object. None of them spoke a word.

The thing at which they gazed might well cause them surprise and disappointment.

It was nothing more or less than a perfectly new large, square biscuit-tin, such as are supplied by many of the big biscuit manufacturers in England. There were a few broken biscuits at the bottom of the tin, which lay on its side.

Larry was the first one to stoop down and take one of the broken pieces in his fingers. It seemed quite fresh.

"The rival party's food," said Reggie, at last. "We're up against 'em after all."

A silence of deep significance was Jimmy's and Larry's answer.

Narrow Escapes.

"Well," said Jimmy at last, "it strikes me we'd better go back at once to the camp, and tell of our find. We've simply got to capture the giant sloth if it's alive, and if we don't push on, we may be forestalled."

Such a contingency was not to be heard of. The very thought of being first in the field, after all they had gone through, and the extremely heavy expenditure incurred by Mr. Whittaker in financing the expedition, made the boys' hearts like lead.

As the three young explorers stood gazing at the fateful biscuit-tin, they did not notice how quickly the light was fading.

Suddenly they realised their position, and they left the little clearing, having first filled their water-bottles, taking the same path as they had come by.

Quickly the tropical darkness swooped down upon them. Before they were clear of the deep undergrowth and dense, tropical trees and vegetation, black night had wrapped around all her mantle of mourning.

The boys came to a halt. They knew that it was impossible to find their way to the camp. They had gone at least a mile, and the country, of course, was utterly strange to them.

Their only hope lay in either Toothy Jim, the doctor, or Mr. Whittaker, setting out in search of them. But even if they did that, the chances were ten to one against the relief-party finding them.

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The boys managed to penetrate a few yards further; then were brought to a standstill by an impenetrable tangle of vegetation. There was nothing for it but to climb a tree—and wait for the dawn.

There might be pumas lurking about—a hundred dangers they knew, were around them on every side. Dangerous snakes, and, as likely as not, unknown beasts and reptiles would be prowling and gliding around them, glaring at the boys who could not see them.

Soon the night grew cold and chill. The boys, huddling together for warmth and comradeship, crouched together under a tree. Then one of those sudden, but terrible tropical storms burst upon them, screeching and tearing its way through that vast primeval forest.

The rain came down literally in sheets. The dazzling, vivid fork-lightning zigzagged through the openings, seeming, as it were, to run down the mighty stems and branches like streams of liquid fire, throwing out in strong silhouette the clumps of bushes and brambles, and making dim, phantom-like shadows that seemed to take the shape of horrible things of the nether world.

The thunder, crashing and reverberating through the dense jungle, was a hundred times more terrible than masses of modern artillery at close quarters. It was appallingly magnificent.

The boys shivered and cowed before the devastating storm. Like the sudden onslaught of some inconceivably mighty giant, the wind, with tornado strength, lashed, and tore and bent the trees, howled, screamed and wailed as it hurled itself, sometimes with deafening roar, through the forest, tearing up trees, bending mighty branches like whalebone, leaving destruction and desolation in its pitiless wake.

They had to throw themselves down on their faces, flat on the ground, and cling to some of the low-growing tendrils, so as to keep their places. As it was, their arms seemed to be almost torn from their sockets as the terrible wind, with its awful strength, strove to hurl them from the ground.

Every now and then, when the thunder was silent, the boys would hear a rending crash at close quarters, as some mighty tree was hurled into the abyss of undergrowth.

But each boy thought, as every moment he expected death, that, if he lived through it, it would be an experience which he would never forget.

But at length the storm spent itself out—for tornadoes of such violence seldom last very long—and the boys, drenched to the skin, their teeth chattering, awed by a nameless fear that none need have felt ashamed to own, struggled up.

Then the moon slowly, and as if half-ashamed to show herself, rose, and her silver radiance filtered through the tiny openings of the huge trees. One little clearing, about a hundred yards from where they had lain, was brilliantly lit up by the moon's rays.

The boys made for this, and found, above them, an enormous tree. It seemed easy to climb to safety among its densely-growing branches, for the lower part of the mighty stem was entwined and wrapped round by a mass of tendrils and big leaves, which afforded easy access to the lowest branches.

Reggie declared his intention of going first.

“Carefully stepping over the tendrils that grew low,” he was about to grasp one of the smaller branches that were within reach, when an extraordinarily uncanny thing happened.

Some of the tendrils seemed to spring out at him.

Fascinated at what they saw, unable to move, Jimmy and Larry saw the awful tentacle-like things wrap and twine round Reggie's body, drawing him inwards to the tree.*

The boy cried out in fear and agony. Slowly but surely he was being drawn away from the ground, and the tendrils were pressing him inwards towards the trunk, crushing his frail young body against the stem. He struggled frantically to free himself, but his puny efforts were of no avail.

Then Larry and Jimmy, with a cry of horror and fear, sprang forward, and with their bowie knives began to hack fiercely at the terrible tentacles.

Hacking frantically with their knives, the two boys endeavoured to free their chum from his terrible position. At first, not grasping the real state of affairs, they thought the boy had been caught in the coils of a snake, which lay concealed and entwined among the twisting tendrils and branches.

The victim looked really scared and frightened; and well

* There are certain trees and plants in Brazil and Patagonia which possess an uncanny power of being able to draw living things to them by wrapping their leaves and tendrils round the victim and holding them, completely enmeshed. Some of these plants and trees have been known to seize animals, and the leaves are provided with tiny suckers, which draw the blood from the victim and thus feed the tree.

he might, for he, too, thought that he had been enmeshed in the deadly grip of a serpent.

It was with considerable difficulty that his friends at last freed him. Pale and scared, the victim was at length dragged from the treacherous branches.

“My golly!” panted Reggie. “I thought I was nearly done for that time! I felt cocksure some species of boa-constrictor had got me in his clutches. What in the name of pinchers gripped me like that!”

“I don't know,” gasped Jimmy.

“Nor I,” put in Larry.

All three were puzzled over the affair, for they did not know of the extraordinary powers of these sucking and clinging plant tentacles.

“I vote we get away from this tree,” suggested Reggie.

“So do I,” said the others, in chorus.

And, picking up some of the things they had thrown down, being aided by the light of the moon, which faintly filtered in tiny streaks between some of the trees, the three boys crawled away from the dangers of the twining branches.

“We mustn't get far away from here,” said Reggie. “I admit I was in a blue funk just now, and it's shaken me up a bit. And the further we crawl about here in the dark, the more chance there is in our losing our bearings, and getting further away from the camp!”

The three boys then cautiously proceeded to another small clearing, where some loose wood and branches, blown from the trees during the tornado, were strewn about.

“I wish we could light a fire,” said Larry, stooping down to pick up some of the sticks.

“No good trying,” said Jimmy. “The wood is sodden wet, and so are my matches.”

At that moment Reggie's quick eyes caught sight of two gleaming, yellow points of fire, glowering at them from the impenetrable darkness beyond.

“Hush!” whispered Reggie. “Panther!”

The three boys, quivering with excitement, instantly raised their rifles.

Then some dark, dimly-moving form seemed to loom up just ahead of them.

Simultaneously three rifles spat flame and lead. There was a terrible snarl of pain and rage.

Then that vague, dim form, with its points of gleaming yellow, came at them.

The boys could hear it panting and snarling—could smell that strange, rather sickly odour that emanates from all wild animals of the tiger, lion, and cat tribe.

It was a terrible moment for all. Was it wounded? Was it about to spring?

“Fire!”

Reggie's voice came quick and sharp.

Again the three rifles sent destruction and death towards the great beast.

There was an agonised howl of rage and pain. As well it might, it struck terror into the hearts of the boys, who, in the dread darkness, crouched low on the ground, not knowing what instant the infuriated animal might spring upon them.

The boys, keenly on the alert, with every nerve tingling, heard the savage growling, saw an indistinct, blurred mass moving about the small, open space, noted the still gleaming points of fire—its eyes—as they shifted here, there, with their terrible and treacherous glint always, always upon the boys.

Suddenly there was a crackling of leaves and brambles. The points of yellow glare disappeared. Breathlessly the boys paused and listened. Gradually the sounds died away.

“It's gone!” gasped Jimmy at last.

“It was hit,” said Reggie.

“You bet!” put in Larry.

“The dickens of it is,” said Reggie, “that we don't know where it lies hidden!”

“If we startle it, ten to one it'll spring out at us from some point. I think we'd better stay where we are.”

“So do I,” assented the other two.

“The best thing we can do is to find a tree to swarm,” suggested Jimmy.

The proposition was readily agreed to; so, with the very faint light of the moon to guide them, the three boys at last selected a tall, rather slender stem, without any low-growing foliage, up which they could swarm with their arms and legs till they reached the upper part, where the branches and leaves started.

“I'll go first,” said Jimmy.

And, with his bowie-knife in his teeth, he began to climb the tree as he might have done a flagstaff.

(Another splendid long instalment of this grand serial story next Wednesday. Order your copy of the GEM LIBRARY early.)

GREAT POPULAR TRIUMPH OF "HAIR-DRILL."

BEAUTIFUL MISS ELLALINE TERRISS'S STRIKING ENDORSEMENT.

Says she owes her lovely tresses to this delightful toilet practice, and advises all who wish to keep young to follow her example.

1,000,000 SPLENDID "FOUR-FOLD" HAIR BEAUTY GIFTS NOW READY TO BE SENT GRATIS TO ALL READERS.

MILLIONS of British men and women at home and abroad have a soft corner in their heart for Miss Ellaline Terriss, and her gift of perpetual youth is one that many have longed to learn. Certainly Miss Terriss owes much of her charming appearance to her masses of abundant hair, always so tastefully and beautifully dressed, and it is gratifying to find this daintiest of actresses paying tribute to the value of "Harlene Hair-Drill."

A REMARKABLE HAIR BEAUTY OFFER.

So that readers of this paper may at once commence to test for themselves the wonderful improvement "Harlene Hair-Drill" makes in the hair, Mr. Edwards has decided to give everyone an opportunity of following Miss Terriss's example by sending 1,000,000 of his four-fold "Harlene Hair-Drill" Outfits absolutely Gratis.

We give Miss Ellaline Terriss's letter, knowing it will be read with the greatest interest by those who desire to cultivate a beautiful appearance.

Coliseum, London, W.C.

October 27, 1915.

To Messrs. Edwards' Harlene Co.,
Lamb's Conduit Street, W.C.

Dear Sirs,—Thank you very much for sending the "Harlene" so promptly. As you know, I always like to keep a good supply with me.

I always apply "Harlene" night and morning. It is a delightful exercise. I am careful not to forget, and on my dressing-table at the theatre, as at home, "Harlene" is a constant companion. I always tell my friends of "Harlene," and I think I have made many converts to this natural method of growing hair and keeping the hair healthy. I feel inclined to add that every Britisher should use "Harlene," for we all want to keep young nowadays, both men and women.

Yours faithfully,
(Signed) ELLALINE TERRISS.

WHAT DO YOU ANSWER TO THESE QUESTIONS?

If you answer "Yes" to any of these questions, the "Harlene" Gift is for you.

1. Do you notice any powdery dust when brushing?
2. Do you notice any split or broken hairs in the comb?
3. Is your hair difficult to dress?
4. Does your hair seem dull, lank, and lifeless?
5. Is your hair too dry or too greasy?
6. Do you notice an irritation of the scalp?
7. Is your hair gradually becoming thinner?



Millions of people have taken delight in the charm of Miss Ellaline Terriss and her fascinating art. To-day this world-famous actress gives advice which will enable everyone to double their attractiveness and charm. The secret is "Harlene Hair-Drill" in conjunction with which a Four-fold Gift awaits your acceptance. Fill in and post form given here.

"Harlene Hair-Drill" very quickly remedies such conditions. As every little drop of "Harlene" penetrates to the hair cells, so all the waste, clogging matter is cleared away, and the hair, so to speak, is able to breathe again.

THIS IS YOUR FOUR-FOLD GIFT.

Prove for yourself by accepting one of these 1,000,000

"Harlene Hair-Drill" Outfits exactly how quickly you can regain hair beauty. Send your name and address on this form and you will receive:—

1. A bottle of "Harlene," a true liquid food for the hair, which stimulates it to new growth, building up the very substance of the hair itself. It is tonic, food, and dressing in one.

2. A packet of the marvellous hair and scalp cleansing "Cremex" Shampoo, which prepares the head for "Hair-Drill."

3. A bottle of Uzon Brilliantine, which gives a final touch of beauty to the hair, and is especially beneficial to those whose scalp is inclined to be "dry" or where powdery seurf exists.

4. The secret "Hair-Drill" Manual, giving complete instructions for carrying out this two-minute-a-day scientific hair-growing exercise.

You can always obtain further supplies of "Harlene" from your Chemist at 1s., 2s. 6d., or 4s. 6d. per bottle. "Solidified Harlene" ("Harlene" in solid form for travellers, etc.), 2s. 6d. per tin; "Uzon" Brilliantine,

1s., 2s. 6d.; "Cremex" at 1s. per box of seven shampoos (single packets 2d. each).

If ordered direct from Edwards' Harlene Co., any article will be sent post free on remittance. Carriage extra on foreign orders.

"HARLENE" HAIR-DRILL GIFT COUPON

Fill in and post to

EDWARDS' HARLENE CO.,
20-26, LAMB'S CONDUIT ST., LONDON, W.C.

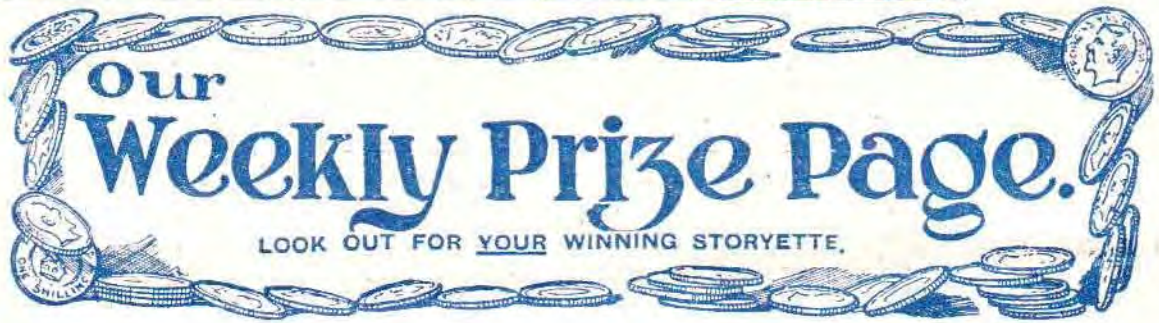
Dear Sirs,—Please send me your free "Harlene" Four-fold Hair-Growing Outfit. I enclose 4d. stamps for postage to any part of the world. (Foreign stamps accepted.)

Name

Address

GEM, July 8th, 1915.

A Cash Prize for Every Contributor to this Page.



Our Weekly Prize Page.

LOOK OUT FOR YOUR WINNING STORYETTE.

LOOK OUT!

Smith met his friend Brown in the street the other day. "Hallo, old fellow!" he exclaimed. "How are you?" "Pretty well, thank you!" replied Brown. "But," he continued, "I've something to say to you—you'll have to keep your eyes open next week!" "How's that?" queried Smith. "Because you won't be able to see if you don't!" retorted Brown. And before Smith could kick, he was out of sight. Sent in by Norman Webster, Glasgow.

SURE SUCCESS!

"If you want to make that song successful you must sing louder." "I'm singing as loud as I can! What more can I do?" "Be more enthusiastic. Open your mouth, and throw yourself into it!"—Sent in by J. A. Poole, Lisard.

RING OFF!

Teacher: "I'm surprised at you, Sammy Wade, that you cannot tell me when Christopher Columbus discovered America! What is the title of this week's lesson?" Sammy: "Columbus—1492." Teacher: "Well, isn't that plain enough? Did you never see that before?" Sammy: "Yes'm, yes'm; but I always thought it was his telephone number."—Sent in by Seah Eng Khoo, Straits Settlements.

NOTHING TO BOAST ABOUT.

Mrs. O'Brien was walking through the village one day when her eye caught the following announcement displayed in a front window:

"WASHING AND IRONING DONE."

She read it through carefully once or twice and sniffed, and, with a very contemptuous expression on her face, remarked: "Sure, it's meself that had me washin' and ironin' done since yesterday, but I don't hang up no bragging sign about it!"—Sent in by R. Butchers, Surbiton.

HE GOT THE JOB.

A situation in an office was advertised for a junior clerk, the chief requirement being a fairly good knowledge of figures. Among the applicants was a boy, who arrived at the office accompanied by his mother.

"Is your knowledge of arithmetic good?" asked the manager of the firm, addressing the boy.

"Yes," replied the lad's mother, before he had time to answer.

"Well, what are twice two?" was the next question.

"Three!" replied the boy.

"There!" exclaimed his mother, "You see, he is only one out!"—Sent in by F. H., Derby.

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,

THE BOYS' FRIEND, 1d.,

Published every Monday,

in order to give more of our readers a chance of winning one of our useful Money Prizes.

If you know a really funny joke, or a short, interesting paragraph, send it along (on a post-card) before you forget it, and address it to: The Editor, THE BOYS' FRIEND and GEM, Gough House, Gough Square, Fleet Street, E.C.

Look out for YOUR Prize Storyette in next week's GEM or BOYS' FRIEND.

STARTLED!

The auctioneer held up a pair of antique candlesticks. "Now, who'll give me a start?" he shouted. "Fourpence!" cried a voice. "What!" howled the horrified auctioneer. "Ah," remarked the joker, "I knew that would give him a start!"—Sent in by O. G. Prosser, Aberdeen.

AFTER A SAFER JOB.

An officer was lecturing a company of soldiers on "How to Use the Bayonet." After a lengthy discourse, in which he had given graphic instructions as to the use of the weapon in a charge, he asked if any man had any questions. After a silence of some moments, a young recruit rose and said: "Please, sir, could you tell me what steps I should take to transfer into the Army Service Corps?"—Sent in by Private J. Hopkins, France.

ETIQUETTE!

Little Charlie had been well brought up, and had received careful instruction in the matter of being polite on all occasions.

One day, in a crowded carriage of the Underground Railway, he was sitting on his father's knee, when a young lady entered. Charlie had been taught that he must never remain seated while a lady stood, so he was instantly on his feet.

"Please take my seat, miss," he said politely.—Sent in by D. M. Jackson, Hull.

DONE BROWN!

The following remarkable advertisement is stated to have appeared recently in an Irish newspaper:

"FOR SALE.—Baker's business; good trade; large oven; present owner been in it for seven years; good reason for leaving."—Sent in by T. Byers, Queensland, Australia.

HE DIDN'T!

An editor recently received from a budding lady poetess some verses, daintily tied up with pink ribbon, and entitled: "I Wonder if He'll Miss Me?" After carefully reading them, he returned the effort with the following brief note:

"If he does, he ought never to be trusted with firearms again!"—Sent in by W. Crowe, County Cavan.

IMPOSSIBLE!

"Two men were fighting like fury in front of my office to-day," said Mr. Noodle, at the family dinner-table. "It looked pretty nasty for one of them. The bigger man seized a huge stick and brandished it; I felt that he was going to knock the other's brains out, and I jumped in between them."

The family had listened with rapt attention, and as the head paused in his narration to watch the effect of his story, his son and heir, whose respect for his father's bravery was immeasurable, proudly exclaimed:

"He couldn't knock any brains out of you, could he, father?"—Sent in by A. Ellery, Dinnington, nr. Rotherham.