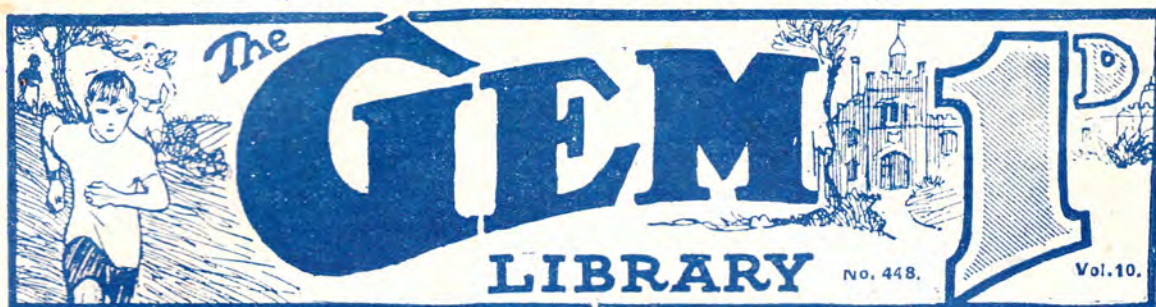


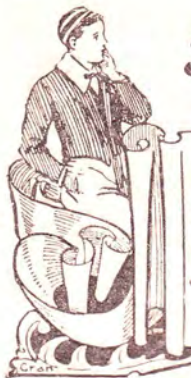
THE "GEM" ON THE BATTLEFIELD!

(See This Week's Chat Overleaf.)



SYLVIA THE SLOGGER!

(An Exciting Incident in the Fine School Story in this number.)



THIS WEEK'S CHAT

Whom to Write to —
EDITOR "THE GEM" LIBRARY.
 THE FLEETWAY HOUSE, FARRINGTON ST. LONDON, E.C.
 OUR · · THREE · · COMPANION · · PAPERS!
 "THE MAGNET" THE "PENNY" CHUCKLES.
 — LIBRARY — — POPULAR — — 1/2"
 EVERY MONDAY EVERY FRIDAY EVERY SATURDAY.



For Next Wednesday :

"FRIENDS OR FOES?"

By Martin Clifford.

Next week's grand, long, complete story should supply what the advertisers call a long-felt want, for it is a Talbot yarn; and some little time has passed since any story in which this favourite character played a leading part last appeared. Again it is a shadow from Talbot's past that falls across the sunshine of his days at St. Jim's, though the man who this time recognises the Toff of former days in the handsome and athletic schoolboy was not a member of the old gang. He is one Lodgey, a sharper with whom Crooke grows friendly. Crooke is Talbot's cousin, of course, and their uncle, Colonel Lyndon, would naturally like to see them chums. Talbot is willing, but Crooke's envious, jealous nature makes real friendship impossible between them. Nevertheless, Crooke pretends to repent of the past, and professes a wish to wipe the slate clean. In this he is acting on the advice of Lodgey, who wants revenge on Talbot and the chance of blackmailing Crooke. A scheme to ruin Talbot is concocted, and it is only foiled by Ernest Levison, who, with all his faults, is loyal to the fellow who has so often befriended him. Levison warns Talbot in vain, but will not be choked off even by Talbot's anger; and in the end he is the means of saving the fellow to whom he is devoted, and settling once for all the question whether the two cousins, so unlike in character, are to be

"FRIENDS OR FOES?"

AN ISSUE YOU SHOULD NOT MISS.

The issue of the "Boys' Friend" now on sale is one which no reader of the "Gem" should miss obtaining. It is quite the best number of our famous companion paper that has ever been published.

With each copy of this week's "Boys' Friend" is given free a magnificent photogravure plate, entitled "The Bulldog Breed!" A facsimile of this grand, free plate—which, by the way, is admirably suitable for framing purposes—appears on page 17 of this issue. I want every one of my readers to make a point of securing one of these splendid presentation-plates.

In this week's issue of the "Boys' Friend" appears the first thrilling, long, opening instalment of "The Red Raiders!" a magnificent new story of adventure in the Wild West, by Duncan Storm.

Also in this issue is the first of a really great new series of detective stories, entitled "The Secret of the Sarcophagus!" Derrick Brent, the schoolmaster detective, and his two school-boy assistants, Tom and Teddy Rawdon, are characters you will all like.

Another fine attraction in this special number of the "Boys' Friend" is a grand new series of articles, entitled "Boys and the Air Service!" If you have ambitions to join the Air Service, these articles will interest and instruct you.

Delicious tuck-hampers are offered as prizes in a simple competition, and every reader of this paper should endeavour to bag one of them. The contents of the tuck-hampers are topping!

Don't forget, my chums, all these attractions appear in the issue of the "Boys' Friend," now on sale, price one penny. As this issue of our companion paper has been extensively advertised, you should pop round to your newsagent at once, and secure your copy before it's too late.

THE "GEM" ON THE BATTLEFIELD.

By the Australian mail just in, I have received cuttings from three papers published down-under, telling of a very strange circumstance in which our paper figures prominently. The cuttings are from the "Melbourne Herald," the "Ballarat Star," and the "Ballarat Courier." I have chosen

for reprinting here that from the last-named paper, as it is the most detailed. Here it is:

"To her intense astonishment, a Ballarat young lady during the week received the following message, above the signature of Worth Mills, of the 181st Brigade, Royal Field Artillery, Hants, England: 'I hope you will excuse me writing to you in this manner, as I have never seen you or written to you before. It came about this way. I was in the 120th Battery at Hill 60, France, and whilst there I picked up a "Gem" one day, and put it in my pocket, to read when I had a little time. About three weeks later I was hit in the chest, and the bullet went through the "Gem" just under your name. So I thought I would write to you.' The history of the message had its beginning some three or four years ago, when a lady elocutionist in England intimated in the columns of the 'Gem,' a periodical journal, that she would like to correspond with a young lady in Australia or America. A Ballarat young lady who was at the time attending the convent replied, and her name and address were published in the 'Gem.' Apparently the paper containing the reply was included in a parcel forwarded to the Front as reading matter for the soldiers, and Worth Mills was apparently anxious to acquaint the Ballarat young lady of the extraordinary circumstance, with which she was remotely connected."

The "Ballarat Star" account adds that the fact of the soldier's carrying the "Gem" in his pocket saved his life. This may at first glance appear rather a tall statement; yet it is quite possibly true, as can be seen when one considers how the paper would probably be folded—in four, very likely—to go inside a man's tunic, and how very little is sometimes required to deflect a partially-spent bullet which may yet have way enough upon it to kill if not deflected.

Anyway, the story is sure to interest all "Gem" readers, and will serve to many as a reminder of the days when the Correspondence Exchange, for the revival of which more than a few have been asking, was in full swing.

NOTICES.

Football.

Brentside F.C. (average age 16) want home and away matches. Hon. Sec., S. R. Martin, 59, Windmill Road, Brentford.

Carlton F.C. (14) want home and away matches. Hon. Sec., G. Innerd, 17, Bolingbroke Street, Heaton, Newcastle-on-Tyne.

Correspondence, Leagues, &c.

The Picturegoers' Club, 4, Thanet Street, King's Cross, London, N., would welcome enthusiastic picturegoers in any part of the world as members. Carried on by correspondence. Monthly journal issued. Please send stamped addressed envelope for particulars.

The "Magnet" and "Gem" Social League, 344, City Road, Park, Sheffield, would be pleased to enrol more members (12-18) from anywhere in the world. Stamped and addressed envelope, please.

Back Numbers, &c., Wanted.

F. Millington, A.B., H.M. Trawler Vesta, c/o G.P.O., London, would be very glad to have some back numbers of the "Boys' Friend" 3d. Library.

W. Wood, The Green, Bandon, co. Cork, wants copies of the "Penny War Weekly," for Nov., 1914.

By G. P. H., 14, Berkhamsted Avenue, Wembley Hill—"D'Arcy, the Ventriloquist."

Your Editor

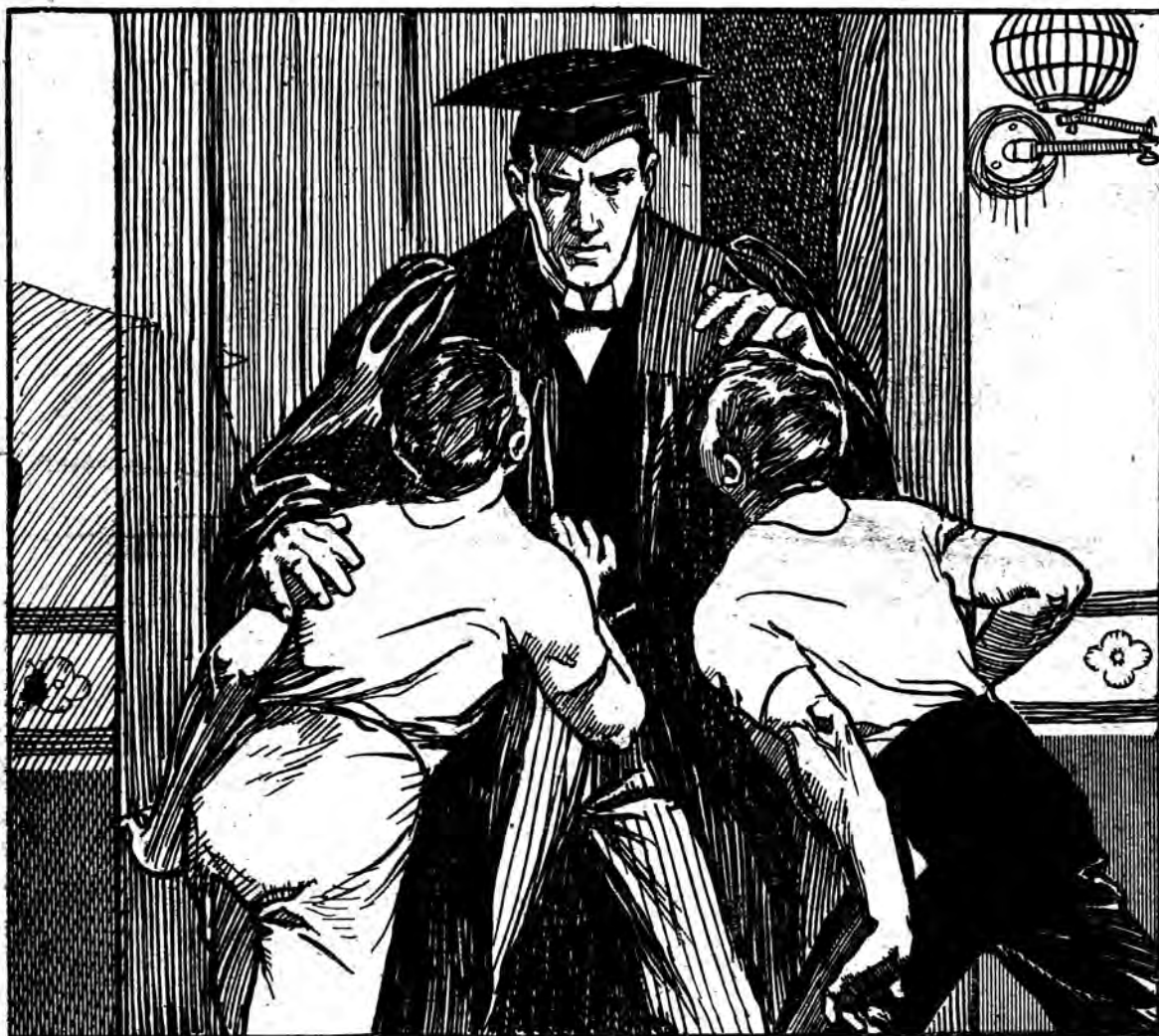
PUBLISHED IN TOWN
AND COUNTRY EVERY
WEDNESDAY MORNING



COMPLETE STORIES
FOR ALL, AND EVERY
STORY A GEM!

HEROES OF THE FOURTH!

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



The two Fourth Formers dashed into the dormitory at a dead-heat, to rush right into the outstretched arms of Mr. Railton! (See Chapter 5.)

CHAPTER 1. D'Arcy Has a Stroke!

"**T**O be or not to be—"
"Rats!"
"That is the question—"
"Dry up!"
"Whethah 'tis noblah in the mind to suffah—"

"Bow-wow!"
Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, the luminous light of the Fourth

Form at St. Jim's, who was declaiming Shakespeare's famous lines with solemn emphasis in No. 6 Study, readjusted his celebrated monocle, and fixed a freezing stare upon Jack Blake, Herries, and Digby, whose constant interruptions clearly showed that they did not regard the swell of St. Jim's in the light of a Martin Harvey or a Henry Ainley.

"Weally, you fellahs, I considah it is downwight wude of you to intewwupt me in this mannah!" said Arthur Augustus severely. "Pway allow me to pwocceed!"

Next Wednesday,

"**FRIENDS OR FOES?" AND "CORNSTALK BOB!"**

No. 448. (New Series.) Vol. 10.

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And he resumed his lines with greater gusto than ever. "Whethah 'tis noblah in the mind to suffah the slings an' awwows of outrageous fortune; or to take arms against a sea of troubles, and, by opposing, end them."

"That's not a bad idea," said Jack Blake thoughtfully. "By opposing, end them. Let's end Gussy!"

And, before the swell of St. Jim's could raise his voice in protest, he was seized in the merciless grip of his chums, and sent hurtling to the floor with a bump which shook every bone in his aristocratic body.

"Yawwoooooh!"

"Once again!" grinned Herries.

Bump!

"Ow-ow-ow! Hands off, you wottahs! I'll give you all a feahful thwashin'!"

Bump!

Arthur Augustus descended for the third time with a terrific concussion.

He was a wreck. His necktie was streaming loose, his hair ruffled and awry, and his monocle dangling from the end of its cord. Just as he was about to scramble to his feet and hurl himself neck-and-crop upon his humorous chums, the study door was thrown open, and a general gasp of dismay followed.

The intruder was the Head.

"D'Arcy!" thundered Dr. Holmes. "How dare you grovel on the floor in that undignified manner, sir?"

Arthur Augustus flushed crimson, and struggled to his feet.

"We—we were just indulgin' in a little gentle welaxation, sir!" he stammered feebly.

"Indeed! The word 'gentle' hardly seems applicable to the case. Follow me at once to my study. I wish to have a word with you."

And Dr. Holmes rustled away along the passage.

"Now we've been and gone and done it!" groaned Digby. "Awfully sorry, Gussy. If it means a licking, we'd better all toddle along and face the music."

"That's all wight," said Arthur Augustus, flicking some of the superfluous dust off his trousers. "Bettah one to suffah than four."

"I shouldn't have thought the Head would get in such a wax over a little thing like this," said Jack Blake. "Keep a stiff upper lip, Gussy, old fellow, and we'll make up for it when you come back by giving you the feed of your life. I'm in funds, for once."

D'Arcy nodded, and limped away to execution, as it were. His palms were already tingling in anticipation of a caning at the hands of Dr. Holmes.

But when he reached the Head's study a surprise awaited him. Books and papers lay in wild disorder on the table, but there was no sign of a cane.

"Sit down, D'Arcy," said the Head kindly, without a trace of his former curtness. "I have just received a letter from your soldier brother, Lord Conway."

"Is ewevythin' all sewene with him, sir?"

"I am happy to say, yes. He will be home on leave for the whole of next week, and has asked me to consent to do him a favour."

Gussy's eyes danced with delight. He had a vague sort of notion what was coming.

"It appears that Lord Conway will be staying at a large house on the Hampshire Downs," said the Head. "He is afraid it will be lonely unless he has young society there."

"That means that I'm to be let off lessons for a week, sir, to go and stay with him?" inquired Arthur Augustus eagerly.

"More than that, D'Arcy. It is your brother's intention to hold a cricket-week, and he wishes me to send eleven juniors away for the purpose."

"Bai Jove!"

"I have consulted Mr. Railton on the subject, and he agrees with me that Lord Conway, who has seen much service abroad and risked life and limb for his country, should be granted what he asks. I have therefore written him that I consent."

"Huwway!"

The swell of St. Jim's leapt from his chair, and executed a sort of cake-walk on the Head's study carpet. He had expected great things when the Head first mentioned Lord Conway's name, but never such a colossal piece of good news as this.

"How wippin' of old Conway!" he exclaimed exuberantly. "It's jollay good of you, Doctah Holmes, to agwee to let us go!"

The Head smiled.

"Provided you atone for the holiday by working doubly hard on your return, I shall be quite satisfied, D'Arcy."

"We'll slave like niggahs, sir!"

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"I leave the selection of the eleven in your hands, my boy. You will give me their names by to-morrow evening."

"Yaas, wathah, sir!"

"Very well; we will look upon the cricket-week as an accomplished fact."

"Thank you vewy much indeed, sir!"

Arthur Augustus quitted the study with his heart throbbing wildly. His head almost seemed to be hitting the sky as he crossed the old quadrangle, and made his way back to No. 6 Study.

"Well!" said Jack Blake, with interest. "You're looking pretty chirpy for a fellow who's just been called over the coals. How many strokes did you get?"

"One, deah boy!"

"One stroke!" said Herries, in amazement. "The Head must be potty! Fancy giving a chap one stroke!"

"Did you bribe him with one of your fivers to let you off the rest?" chuckled Digby.

D'Arcy shook his head.

"It beats me altogether," said Jack Blake, running his fingers perplexedly through his thick, brown hair. "One giddy stroke! What sort of a stroke was it?"

"A stwoke of good fortune."

"What?"

"Explain yourself, ass!" growled Herries.

D'Arcy paused, with the air of one who has something impressive to say, and means to take his time in saying it.

"Bwothah Conway is home from the Fwont next week," he explained, at length. "An' he's goin' to have a cwicket-week."

"My hat!"

"The Head has given me permish to take a team down to Conway's place. I'm to select the eleven myself."

"Oh, good!" ejaculated Jack Blake and Digby and Herries, in the same breath.

"The Head's a brick of the first water!" added Blake. "Of course I'm coming, Gussy?"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"And me?" queried Digby.

"Ahem! It strikes me that theah are othah fellahs with a bettah claim than you, Dig. You're not a membah of the eleven, in the ordinary way."

Digby snorted.

"I'm jolly well coming along, or I'll know the reason why!" he said heatedly.

"Same here!" said Herries. "And I'll take Towser along, too. Towser will enjoy the holiday. I hear that the country's simply swarming with rabbits just now. They come right out into the open."

"That bwute shall nevah entah Conway's place!" said Arthur Augustus, with dignity. "I don't think you will, eithah, Hewwies."

"There'll be a dead Gussy lying about if I don't!" hinted Herries solemnly.

"Sowwy, deah boy, but the numbah is limited to eleven. If I could take some weserves, I'd include you with pleasuah, but I feah it is quite impos."

Jack Blake sat astride the study table, and chuckled.

"I'm all right, anyway," he said. "When have the names got to be handed in by, Gussy?"

"To-morrow."

"Phew! Not much time to make up your mind. I suppose the Terrible Three are coming?"

"You suppose right, my bonny boy!" came Monty Lowther's cheery voice.

The Fourth-Formers swung round in surprise at the interruption. Tom Merry & Co., in their flannels, and with radiant grins on their faces, stood framed in the doorway.

CHAPTER 2.

Bribery and Corruption.

"WHAT'S on?" asked Tom Merry.

"Something very nice, if Gussy's face is anything to go by," said Manners.

"It's a cwicket-week, deah boys!" explained the swell of St. Jim's. "We're goin' to my bwothah Conway's tempowawy wesidence, in Hampshire, to give a demonstration of how cwicket should be played."

Monty Lowther straightway fell upon the speaker's neck, and hugged him as if he were a long-lost brother.

"Gussy, my cherub, you're worth your weight in sixpenny novels!" he murmured.

"Ow! Dwy up, Lowthah!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I say, this is stunning news!" ejaculated Tom Merry, when Monty Lowther had desisted from paying humorous attentions to the dandy of the Fourth. "Shan't we have a topping time?"

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



P.-c. Crump got in the way, and, flashing on his bullseye lantern, demanded to know what "them young rips was a-doin' of." Digby, who was slightly ahead, simply shot out his left with full force, catching Crump in the region of his waistcoat. (See Chapter 5.)

"I twust so, if you follow my lead and behave youah-selves."

"Ahem!"

Arthur Augustus drew a sheet of paper towards him, and Monty Lowther obligingly produced the inkstand, spilling about half its contents over Gussy's immaculate attire as he did so.

"Lowthah, you clumsy wottah! I've a jollay good mind to omit your name from the list!"

Monty Lowther took out his handkerchief and indulged in a passionate burst of sobbing.

"Don't!" he spluttered. "Nothing so dreadful! Oh, Gussy, Gussy! I'll never, never do it again!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Dwy up, you funnay beast!" said D'Arcy.

He dipped the pen into what ink there was, and then the choosing of the eleven began.

"I shall be skippah, of course," said Gussy. "Then there's Jack Blake, Tom Mewwy, Mannahs, Lowthah—"

"Digby," interjected the owner of that name.

"It's quite imposs, as I told you befoah," said Arthur Augustus. "I cannot allow personal favouitism to entah into the mattah."

"Put in Talbot," said Tom Merry. "He's the best cricketer in the Shell, bar none."

"Except Tommy," said Monty Lowther loyally.

So Talbot's name went down. And then, upon due reflection, that of Figgins. Figgy was a mighty man of valour, who bowled well and batted better, and he was likely to prove a valuable acquisition to the side. As it was unheard-of to include Figgins in anything without also including Kerr and Wynn, his bosom chums, their names went down also.

"Redfern's a' good man," said Jack Blake. "We don't want too many New House chaps, but we can't leave Reddy out."

"That's ten," said D'Arcy.

"And I'm the eleventh man," said Digby triumphantly.

"Why, you fathead," roared Herries, "you can't play cricket for toffee! I don't believe you know a leg-bye from a maiden over!"

A terrific argument ensued, in the midst of which the Terrible Three strolled out of the study, to acquaint their chums with the good news.

Arthur Augustus had more visitors during the next half-hour than he was accustomed to receiving in a whole week. The projected cricket-week was soon common knowledge.

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NEXT
WEDNESDAY!

"FRIENDS OR FOES?"

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

and, naturally enough, every fellow considered he had a right to a place in the team.

George Alfred Grundy was one of the first applicants to present himself at No. 6 Study. The great George Alfred seemed to take many things for granted.

"I suppose I'm coming along on Monday to your brother's place, Gussy?" he said.

"Theah's somethin' w'ong with your supposah, then, deah boy," was the rejoinder.

Grundy turned scarlet. He looked for a moment as if he meditated wiping up the floor with the swell of St. Jim's.

"Are you blind?" he growled at length. "Don't you realise that there isn't a fellow here who can hold a candle to me at cricket?"

"Not your style of cricket," said Jack Blake pleasantly.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Get out of it, Grundy!" growled Herries. "I'm having a little argument with Digby, so you'd better keep off the grass."

"I'm jolly well coming!" hooted Grundy.

"An' I say you're not!" said Arthur Augustus, quietly but with unmistakable firmness.

"Are you asking for a thick ear, you—you confounded tailor's dummy?"

"Here, steady on!" remonstrated Jack Blake, jumping off the table. "We can't have our pet Gussy slanged in our presence! Which way will you go out—by the door, or the window?"

Grundy preferred the door. He didn't like the expression on Jack Blake's face at that moment, and although anything but a funk, he had sense enough to see that a scrap would not pay.

Barely had Grundy taken his departure when Levison lounged in, with a peculiarly agreeable smile on his face. Ernest Levison always created suspicion when he tried to look agreeable. For one thing, the look was unnatural; and for another, he usually had an eye to grind.

"Well?" inquired D'Arcy, who was still pondering, with upraised pen, over the sheet of paper upon which the eleventh name had not yet been filled in.

"I should like a word with you in private, Gussy."

"Can't be did," said Jack Blake. "Gussy has no secrets from his chums. Say what you've got to say, and skedaddle!"

Levison shifted uncomfortably from one foot to the other.

"I heard some of the fellows talking about a cricket-week at Lord Conway's," he said.

"Quite wight, deah boy! What is it?"

"Ahem! I—er—that is to say, I'm coming, of course?"

"No," said Jack Blake bluntly. "You're going!"

And he made a stride towards the cad of the Fourth.

Levison backed away in alarm.

"Pax!" he said hastily. "I didn't mean any offence—honour bright! I'm hot stuff at cricket, and it's up to D'Arcy to give me a chance."

"You!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus, with a freezing stare at the applicant.

"Yes!"

"Smokin' an' gamblin' are more in your line than a gwand game like cricket!"

"Look here!" said Levison desperately. He was taken with the idea of securing a week away from lessons, and resolved to sink all his scruples in order to attain his object. "Will you give me a show in the eleven if I make it worth your while?"

"B-b-bai Jove!"

"What do you mean?" demanded Jack Blake, his hands clenched tightly together.

"I'd be pleased to make it a quid!" said Levison, who, because he himself set much store by money, imagined his schoolfellows did likewise. "If I hand you a quid now, Gussy, will you count me in?"

Arthur Augustus sank back, limp and helpless, in the arm-chair. That Levison was a cad of the first water he knew, but that he would go to such lengths seemed incredible.

"Yes, we'll count you in—I don't think!" said Jack Blake, with a dangerous gleam in his eyes. "You're more likely to be counted out, I reckon! Take that!"

Levison took it—on the nose. He staggered back from the four-point-seven punch which Jack Blake gave him, and the claret began to trickle from his injured nasal organ.

"Yaroooooo-ah!"

"Plenty more where that came from!" said the Yorkshire junior. "Would you like another dose, you howling cad?"

Levison declined the invitation. Enough was as good as a feast, and he had found Jack Blake's knuckles hard.

Without another word or look at the chums of No. 6 Study, the cad of the Fourth turned and fled, streaking along the passage like a champion of the cinder-path.

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It was pretty obvious, on the face of it, that the junior eleven would go on its way rejoicing, without the services of Ernest Levison!

CHAPTER 3.

The Eleventh Man.

THE prompt retirement of Levison did not restore harmony to No. 6 Study. Far from it! Digby was slanging Herries, and Herries was slanging Digby, without ceasing, and matters were growing decidedly warm.

"I tell you, I'm the best man!" shrieked Digby.

"And I say you're not!" rejoined Herries warmly.

"Rats! What do you know about cricket, you thundering idiot? Cuddling bulldogs is more in your line!"

"Look here, idiot!"

"Look here, ass!"

"Oh, dry up, for goodness' sake!" growled Jack Blake. "Can't you settle the affair peacefully? Spin a coin, or something of the sort, and let the chap who loses take it smiling!"

But the matter was far too weighty and important, in the opinion of Digby and Herries, to be settled by the mere spin of a coin.

"Digby ought to stand down!" said Herries. "He knows I'm the best man, and won't admit it because he's so beastly obstinate!"

"Obstinate!" snorted Digby. "I like that! Why, you're as obstinate as a trainload of mules!"

"Look here!" said Herries, his manner changing. "I appeal to you to do the decent thing!"

"Same here!" retorted Digby. "Be a brick, Herries, and give way to a better man!"

"Better man be blowed! If you say that again, I—I—"

"Pway, desist, deah boys!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, in great distress. "We don't want a scene in this study! I am weally vewy sowwy I cannot take both of you, but it is quite beyond my powah to do so. Conway has invited eleven, an' the Head has agweed. If I asked his permish to take anotheah, he would be awfully watty!"

"You two will have to fight it out!" said Jack Blake. "No good holding up your hands in horror, Gussy! It's got to be did! As you say, we won't have a scene in this study. They can slog at each other in the gym. Is that a go, you two?"

"I'm willing!" said Digby, glaring at his rival.

"And you, Herries?"

"Why, I'll jolly well make shavings of him!"

"Good! You won't do it here, though, as this isn't a carpenter's shop! Come behind the chapel!"

The four juniors quitted the study together. They would have liked to keep the affair quiet—screened from public gaze—but that proved to be impossible. School fights are not easy things to keep dark. They get known in a lightning-flash.

From the flushed faces of Herries and Digby, it was not difficult to gather what was afoot, and ten minutes later a big crowd of juniors had taken up their station behind the chapel, where so many thrilling and historic encounters had been witnessed in the past.

"Sure, an' pwhat's the row about?" inquired Reilly of the Fourth.

"Who started it?" clamoured a score of voices.

"Herries is going to finish it, anyway," grinned Monty Lowther.

"Looks a perfect war-dog, don't he? Can't you see the light of battle in his eyes?"

"It's about the cricket week," said Tom Merry, coming up with a cricket-bat under his arm. "The eleventh place has got to be filled. Herries thinks he can fill it all serene, and Dig thinks the same about himself. This is the result!"

"Stand back, gentlemen!" said Jack Blake, who, watch in hand, had appointed himself master of the ceremonies.

"This is to be a twelve-round contest, and if it can't be decided by a knock-out on either side, then it falls flat!"

"Pile in!" roared Figgins, who had come over from the New House with his comrades to see the fun.

"Time!" said Jack Blake.

Like hounds let loose from the leashes, Digby and Herries leapt at each other, their one object in life seeming to be to flatten one another into something approaching table-jelly.

"Go it, Dig!"

"On the ball, Herries!"

The first round was a sheer farce. Digby was excited, Herries more so, if that were possible. The result was that the combatants were mixed up in a wild scrimmage.

"Break away, there!" said Jack Blake laconically.

But Herries and Digby showed no signs of obeying. They hugged each other like bears until "Time!" was called at the end of the round, and then, with flushed faces and heaving chests, tottered to their respective corners.

"This won't do at all!" said Jack Blake seriously. "It isn't a strangling match, or anything of that sort! Can't you use your fists?"

"Yaas, deah boys! Fight like Bwitons, an' not like beastly Pwussians!" came Arthur Augustus' voice.

The words took effect. In the second round both Herries and Digby were careful not to clinch too often. They stood apart, hitting out straight from the shoulder, and the crowd, who loved a keen tussle, applauded loudly.

"Stick to him, Dig!"

"Wipe him off the earth, Herries!"

At the same instant, on mention of his master's name, Towser, the celebrated bulldog, uttered a low growl, and leapt into the ring to take an active part in the battle. Tom Merry & Co. contrived to drag the animal back, and the combat continued with unabated fury.

At the conclusion of the second round honours were easy. The same state of affairs prevailed after six rounds had been fought, and the excitement amongst the serried ranks of spectators was at fever-heat.

In the seventh round Herries, who was more strongly-built than his rival for cricketering honours, landed a powerful straight left on the jaw, and Digby went down like a log, to the accompaniment of deafening cheers. It was almost providential that no master or prefect appeared on the scene, for the row resembled another Tower of Babel.

Jack Blake bent over the fallen warrior, and commenced to count. Digby allowed him to get to eight, then he sprang to his feet as if electrified.

"There's life in the old dog yet!" remarked Monty Lowther. "Bravo, Dig! Go for him baldheaded, old scout!"

For the rest of the round Digby fought gallantly, despite the reverse he had sustained. He gave Herries a black eye, and then, with a short, swift jolt of his right, he sent his opponent reeling. The call of "Time!" saved Herries from a large slice of humiliation.

The next three rounds were fast and furious. Herries pummelled Digby, and Digby transformed Herries' face into anything but a thing of beauty and a joy for ever.

"What a swap, bai Jove!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy admiringly. "Neithah of the boundahs seem to have the wemotest intention of givin' in. What's to be done?"

"The last two rounds will settle it, I'm thinking," said Talbot.

But the Shell fellow committed an error of judgment for once. There was a good deal of hurricane hitting in the last two rounds, but nothing in the nature of a knock-out. Honours were dead easy.

"Well played, Dig!"

"Well played, Herries!"

"What are you going to do about it, Blake?"

Jack Blake ran his fingers through his hair in sheer perplexity.

"I don't see what we can do," he said. "Anybody got any suggestions?"

"Yaas, wathah! I have just had a bwain-wave, deah boy!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

"Get it off your chest, old man!"

"It's like this," said Gussy. "We shall be havin' a pwactice match to-morrow, to get in twim for next week. Let Hewwies an' Dig play, an' the one who gets the most wuns can have the vacant place."

"Good egg!"

"That's fair enough," said Herries, dabbing at his nose with a handkerchief.

And thus it was arranged. Ten names were posted up on the notice-board in the Hall, and the eleventh was left vacant. The question as to whether the place would be filled by Digby or Herries was a burning one, and excited much comment throughout St. Jim's.

Herries and Digby were about on a par so far as cricket—and everything else, for that matter—was concerned. Both were good fighting men, both were on the same footing in Form, and both were bent on accompanying the merry cricket-party to Hampshire on the following Monday.

There was but one vacancy in the side, and either Digby or Herries would fill it. The problem was, which? That, as Monty Lowther remarked, was a question which called for the judgment of a whole bench of Solomons.

CHAPTER 4.

The Wheeze that Wouldn't Work.

"P LAY!"

Tom Merry sent down a ball.

The scratch game had begun, and Herries was already batting. He had scored 14, which, considering the quality of the bowling with which he had to contend, was assuredly something to write home about.

Herries sent Tom Merry's next ball soaring to the pavilion for six. The onlookers cheered, and Digby, in the pavilion, looked—and felt—decidedly glum.

"I'm done in the eye now!" he groaned.

"Rot!" said Jack Blake. "You can make twenty in as many minutes if you like to put your beef into it. And look! There goes Herries' wicket!"

Even as Blake spoke, the leather curled round the legs of the batsman and sent the stumps flying.

"Now, Dig, deah boy, go in an' pwospah!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy cheerily.

Digby strode out to the wicket with a hard, set look on his face. Herries darted him a look of triumph as he passed; and then, taking his guard, Digby awaited Tom Merry's first ball, determined that it should not find him wanting.

Click!

The sphere glanced off the edge of the bat's blade, and shot away through the slips. Eluding the frantic clutch of a fieldsmen, it sped on to the boundary.

"Good old Dig!"

"Well done, sir!"

"Keep it up!"

"It'll be more advisable for him to keep it down," said Monty Lowther. "He only wants to spoon the ball somewhere near where old Talbot is standing, and he'll come out with a rush."

But Digby had no intention of presenting the fieldsmen with easy opportunities for disposing of him. He kept the ball well down on the turf, and the runs steadily piled up from his bat.

"Eighteen!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy at length.

"He'll lick you, Hewwies!"

Herries set his teeth, and said nothing.

Digby was facing Fatty Wynn now, and he found him a much harder nut to crack than Tom Merry. The Falstaff of the New House was a bowler of deadly skill and persistence, and he was right on the top of his form.

His first delivery missed Digby's off-stump by the merest fraction of an inch. The second pitched rather short, and Digby, stepping out to it, slogged it out to the long-field for 2.

The third ball beat him all the way, and came in with such amazing velocity that it shattered the middle-stump clean in half.

"Twenty, bai Jove!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

"He's tied with you, Hewwies!"

Digby was given a rousing cheer when he came off. But the situation remained as before. There had been no marked superiority on either side in the boxing; there was no superiority in batting. Neither Herries nor Digby was a bowler, so that it was impossible to test their abilities in that direction.

When the game was over, the cricketers assembled in front of the pavilion to discuss the position.

"Blessed if I can see what we're going to do about it!" said Tom Merry thoughtfully.

"Unless they toss for it," said Manners.

But neither Herries nor Digby would dream of doing that.

"Set 'em an eating contest," suggested Fatty Wynn.

"The chap who guzzles the biggest number of doughnuts to have the eleventh place. That's fair."

Figgins glared at his fat chum freezingly.

"And what sort of cricket d'you think the winner would play next week?" he said. "Fancy a chap trying to run down the pitch with a score of doughnuts chasing each other in his interior! The idea's N.G.! Try again, Fatty!"

But Fatty Wynn's mind dwelt solely upon tuck, and he could suggest no alternative other than an eating contest.

Then the practical Talbot came to the rescue.

"Let all the fellows vote for it," he said.

"Wippin'!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "The vewy thing I was goin' to pwopose myself!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Do you two fellows agree to Talbot's wheeze?" asked Tom Merry.

Herries and Digby nodded.

"Then we'll gather the clans together, and hold the election in the junior common-room at once."

"I'll get old Kildare to come along and see fair play," said Jack Blake.

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ANSWERS

NEXT
WEDNESDAY:

"FRIENDS OR FOES?"

"Good egg!"

The juniors turned up in full muster to register their votes. The New House contingent came over as well, and there were eighty present when the good-natured captain of St. Jim's distributed small sheets of paper.

"Write down the name of your favourite candidate, and I will collect the papers," said Kildare.

A score of fellows promptly complied. Others found the matter of selection no light one. Herries was a decent chap; so was Digby. Herries would be able to render a fairly good account of himself during the cricket-week; so would Digby. Herries was held in fairly high esteem by the juniors in both Houses; but, as Fate would have it, so was Digby.

"Are we bound to register a vote?" asked Redfern.

"No; you may remain neutral, if you wish," said Kildare.

Redfern laid down his pencil, leaving the paper blank. Several fellows followed his example.

Five minutes later, amid a breathless hush, the captain of St. Jim's collected the voting-papers, and commenced to scan them.

He looked up at length with an air of perplexity.

"Who's won?" clamoured a score of voices.

"Shout out the votes, Kildare!"

"Herries has thirty-six votes—" said the captain of St. Jim's.

"Bravo, Herries!"

"And Digby has thirty-six also."

"Oh!"

It was a state of affairs which very few had anticipated. The rival candidates had tied at boxing and cricket; but an election by ballot without a definite result being reached was positively amazing.

There was silence in the common-room for a moment. Then Kildare said:

"Would any of the neutrals care to vote?"

There was no response.

"Give the casting vote yourself, Kildare," said Tom Merry.

"Yes, rather!"

The senior shook his head.

"I should prefer to be neutral," he said.

"Then what's to be done?" asked Figgins helplessly.

Kildare shrugged his broad shoulders.

"That is a matter for you to decide," he remarked.

"Tell you what," said Grundy, starting to his feet with a gleam in his eyes. "There's only one way out, and a jolly good way at that!"

"Get it off your chest!"

"Chuck both confounded candidates out of it, and give the place to me," said Grundy coolly.

"Well, of all the cheek—"

"Talk about nerve!"

"Bump the boulder!"

The juniors surged round George Alfred Grundy in a menacing mob. Before he could realise what was taking place, he found himself lifted bodily from his feet and sent to the floor with a crash.

"Ow-ow-ow!"

"Give him another!" cried Harry Noble.

"That'll do," said Kildare, laughing. "This isn't a bear-garden."

The avengers released their victim as suddenly as if he had been red-hot, with the result that Grundy went crashing to the floor for the second time, yelling like a dervish.

Kildare swung out of the common-room, smiling, and leaving still undecided the question of whether Herries or Digby should accompany the cricketers to Hampshire on the following Monday.

CHAPTER 5.

The Night-Errants!

"BAI JOVE!"

Arthur Augustus broke the stillness of the Fourth Form dormitory by this sudden observation. Kildare had seen lights out half an hour previously, and most of the fellows had sunk into the arms of Morpheus. But others were wide awake, puzzling over the eternal problem of the eleventh man.

"Bai Jove!" repeated the swell of St. Jim's. "I've got it, deah boys!"

Jack Blake grunted.

"What do you want to interrupt my train of thought for?" he demanded.

"Weally, Blake, I've hit upon a wippin' wheeze to settle this peculiiah mattah.

Another grunt from Jack Blake.

"We shall want a cah to take us down to my cousin's on Monday—"

"What's that got to do with it, fathead?"

"Eweverything! It will be impos for me to bowwow my patah's cah, as he has placed it at the disposal of the Wed Cwoss. We shall, therefoah, have to engage a vehicle fwom Wayland."

"Plenty of time for that," said Herries.

"I quite agwee. But supposin' you an' Digby went into Wayland to-night to ordah it?"

"What the merry dickens—"

"You could have a wunnin' wace," continued D'Arcy, warning to his subject. "A wace to the gawage in Wayland—it's open all night—an' the winnah—the chap who gets back to this dorm first—could fill the vacant poeish in the team!"

"That's not at all a bad wheeze," said Jack Blake. "But I shouldn't think Dig or Herries would reliah trotting about seven or eight miles at night."

"Oh, I don't mind!" said Digby promptly. "Anything to get out of our giddy suspense."

"That's how I feel," Herries said. "It's a good distance, but if I can't run Digby off his legs I'm a Dutchman!"

"Rats!" retorted Digby.

The rivals slipped from their beds, lighted candle-ends, and commenced to dress. They garbed themselves in sweaters, running shorts, and gym shoes, and both looked very keen and very determined.

"It won't take two seconds to ordah the cah for Monday," said Arthur Augustus. "The one who gets to the gawage first will do that. The othah will also go as fah as the gawage, of course, befoah weturnin' to St. Jim's."

Herries and Digby nodded.

"You can trust us to play the game squarely," said Herries. "Give us your fin before we start, Dig, to show there's no ill-feeling."

Digby grasped his study-mate's hand warmly, and then, and the excited encouragement of those of their schoolfellows who happened to be awake, they started on their enterprise.

The actual run did not commence until they were over the school wall, out of the danger-zone. Then they set off at a swift pace down the hard, white road.

That it would be a tremendous task they both knew, but neither doubted his ability to cover the distance arranged.

The quick patter of running-shoes sounded almost uncanny in the intense silence of the night.

Not a word passed between the two chums. They realised that they would need all their breath by the time that gruelling affair was near its end.

On and on they flashed, rounding the bends of the road, surmounting hills, and speeding down slopes, until the buildings of Wayland loomed up blackly against the midnight sky.

The runners had kept together in a remarkable manner, and it was touch-and-go who reached the garage first.

Digby had the honour. He forged ahead a few yards, and saw the manager of the motor works in the entrance.

"I say!" he shouted.

The manager spun round, amazed.

"Great pip! Who—what—"

"Send a car—largest you've got—up to St. Jim's—Monday—for D'Arcy!" gasped Digby, in a series of jerks.

And then he turned and sped back in the direction of St. Jim's, leaving the manager gasping.

He gasped still more when Herries appeared, and would have detained him for an explanation; but Herries wasn't having any. He raced up to the garage, paused to take a deep breath, and then went off on the homeward journey in hot pursuit of Digby.

It was an exciting return. When the runners reached the outskirts of Rylcombe, P.-c. Crump got in the way, and, flashing on his bullseye-lantern, demanded to know what "them young rips was a-doing of?"

The young rips didn't stop to explain. Digby, who was slightly ahead, simply shot out his left with full force, catching Crump in the region of his waistcoat. The constable rolled over in the roadway, his yells awaking the echoes of the night.

The runners took no more notice of the worthy Crump. They left him to wallow in the mire, and sped on as fast as their legs could carry them.

TUCK HAMPERS ARE GIVEN AWAY TO READERS OF THE "BOYS' FRIEND," 10.



Talbot bent down and peered into the captive's face, then he gave vent to an exclamation which rang through the kitchen "Figgins!" (See Chapter 8.)

The task called for pluck and perseverance. No weakling could have accomplished that run. But it was the glorious prospect of a week of rollicking revels with the cricketers that caused Herries and Digby to keep on keeping on, never once slacking, but straining heart and nerve and sinew to reach the goal that lay before them.

The last lap of the race would prove to be the most difficult. It included scaling the school wall, and dashing up the stairs to the Fourth-Form dormitory. Considering the enormous distance which the runners had had to traverse, it was surprising that they should both reach St. Jim's at practically the same moment, with barely a yard between them.

Digby, more agile of movement than his companion, was over the wall first; but Herries had longer legs, and these he meant to use to the very best advantage ere the race was over.

With the perspiration pouring off his brow, he chased Digby with all speed across the quad, and came up with him just outside the box-room window.

Both runners were through the window in a twinkling, and then came the last obstacle of all—the stairs.

Digby took them like a well-conditioned horse taking a hurdle. Despite the fact that his legs felt like leaden weights, he bounded up four steps at a time, and could hear the irregular, pained panting of Herries at his side.

A few more yards, and the result would be known. How strangely quiet the dormitory seemed! The runners, weary and jaded as they were, would have appreciated a welcome.

A cough came from the interior of the dormitory—a loud, unnatural sort of cough; but Herries and Digby were too keen on the race to take much heed.

The door was open, and, putting on a desperate spurt at

the finish, the two Fourth-Formers dashed into the dormitory at a dead-heat, to rush right into the outstretched arms of Mr. Railton!

CHAPTER 6.

The Problem Solved.

DIGBY! Herries! How dare you! I demand an explanation at once!

The juniors shook themselves free from the Housemaster's detaining grasp, and drew back, their breath coming and going in great gasps.

"Well?" said Mr. Railton sternly. "I am waiting for your answer!"

Both Digby and Herries were so overcome by this tragic turn of events that their tongues seemed to cleave to the roofs of their mouths. What could they say in excuse?

They were caught redhanded at one o'clock in the morning, entering the dormitory in running shorts and sweaters!

"I am still waiting," said Mr. Railton, after an ominous pause.

"Pway let me explain the circs, Mr. Wailton," came the voice of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

"D'Arcy, I thought you were asleep!"

"No, sir."

"Then why did you not answer me just now when I came into the dormitory?"

"Ahem! I didn't want to put you to any unnecessary trouble, sir, such as givin' me lines, f'winstance," explained the swell of St. Jim's innocently.

Mr. Railton looked grim.

"Well, and what have you to say in connection with these misguided boys, D'Arcy?"

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NEXT
WEDNESDAY:

"FRIENDS OR FOES?"

"They went at my instructions, sir."
Mr. Railton almost fell down.
"At—at your instructions! Are you romancing, D'Arcy?"
"Not a bit, sir. It was I who suggested that Hewwies an' Dig should wun into Wayland!"

"How very absurd! What was the object of such a ridiculous errand?"

"As you know, Mr. Wailton," said Arthur Augustus, "my bwothah Conway is holdin' a 'cwicket-week, commencin' on Monday, an' Doctah Holmes gave me permish to select eleven fellahs to take part in it. Aftah a good deal of thought an' discussion, I got ten; but we couldn't decide who to include as eleventh man out of Dig an' Hewwies."

"Go on."
"We made 'em fight it out, sir, an' they finished up with honahs easy. We made 'em pprove their worth on the cwicket-field, with a similah result. We had an election of all the fellahs, an' they tied, each gettin' the same numbah of votes!"

"How very extraordinary!"
"And then wē—or, wathah, I—hit upon this scheme, sir," said Arthur Augustus. "We wanted a cah to take us away on Monday, an' sent Hewwies an' Digby to the gawage in Wayland. The one who got back first was to win the vacant place in the team. I'm feahfully sowwy if we've offended you, sir!"

Mr. Railton laughed. His laugh was reassuring, and the juniors who were awake and taking in the proceedings brightened up. Was it possible that Mr. Railton, who had more sympathy with boys than the rest of the masters put together, would be prepared to take a lenient view of the case?

Mr. Railton's next words confirmed the happy thought.
"I cannot overlook your offence in breaking bounds, Herries and Digby," said the Housemaster. "You will each take fifty lines!"

Fifty lines! A trivial punishment, indeed, in proportion to the crime! A public flogging or a gating, or perhaps both, had loomed up in the minds of the delinquents, and they could hardly believe their great good fortune.

"Thanks awfully, sir!" stammered Herries.
"Yes, sir; you're a brick!" added Digby, half defiantly.
But the best was yet to come.

"If you will allow me to say so, D'Arcy, I can see a very simple way out of the problem which has been perplexing you," said Mr. Railton.

"I shall be delighted to considah any suggestion you may like to make, sir," said Arthur Augustus politely.

"Then why cannot Herries and Digby both accompany the party on Monday?"

"Eh?"
"Why all this trouble in selecting one, if both may go?"

"Bai Jove! But—but the Head only gave me permish to have eleven, includin' myself, sir!"

"Supposing I explain the position to Dr. Holmes, and secure his leave for both Herries and Digby to accompany the team, making twelve in all?"

"Oh, how wippin'!"
"We'll be grateful to you as long as we live, sir!" chimed in Jack Blake.

Mr. Railton smiled.

"I thought you were asleep, Blake, since you made no response to my questioning when I first entered the room!"

"Ahem!" muttered Blake. "I must have fallen into a— a sort of mild doze, sir!"

"We will leave it at that," said the Housemaster. "I will approach Dr. Holmes in the morning, and notify you of his consent, if it is given. I hardly think he will withhold it!"

"Thank you, sir!"

"And do not forget the imposition I have set you, Herries and Digby!"

"No, sir," said Herries. "We'll do ten thousand lines in return for this favour, sir, if you wanted us to!"

"Rather!" added Digby.

"You had better get into bed at once, both of you," said Mr. Railton, "or you will be catching colds. Good-night, boys!"

"Good-night, sir!"

Mr. Railton left Jack Blake & Co. in a state of the highest jubilation.

They had expected a most terrific shindy to result when Herries and Digby ran into the Housemaster's arms—perhaps even the cancellation of the cricket-week. Instead of which Mr. Railton had turned up trumps, and performed one of those rare acts of kindness which, on Shakespeare's authority, shine like candle-beams in a naughty world.

Mr. Ratcliff, of the New House, would have acted quite differently. But, then, Mr. Ratcliff had long since left his

own schooldays behind him, whereas his colleague of the School House was still very much a boy at heart.

"You are lucky bounders, and no mistake!" said Levison, with drowsy malice. "You wangled it very cleverly, I thought!"

"Wangled what?" demanded Digby.

"Why, working on Railton's sympathy."

"Dry up, you rotter!"

"Rats! I reckon— Yaroooh!"

Levison's remarks were cut short by the sudden and painful arrival of one of Jack Blake's boots. The cad of the Fourth kept his mouth shut after that, but his thoughts, as he lay gritting his teeth between the sheets, were black and bitter.

But Jack Blake & Co. soon put Levison out of their minds. They had something better and brighter to think about—a whole week, crammed full of pleasure, at Lord Conway's, where bat and ball would be very much in evidence.

And, happiest of all, as they curled themselves up in attitudes of sweet repose, were the two recent rivals. Herries and Digby!

CHAPTER 7.

Gussy, the Captive of Love.

"I NEVER felt in finer form for cricket in my life!"

Thus Tom Merry, as he sprang out of bed on the golden September morning, which had been looked forward to with intense longing by the members of the touring-party.

"I feel capable of making a few centuries myself," said Monty Lowther modestly. "Buck up and get dressed, my sons! I can hear the car throbbing down in the quad."

At this juncture Jack Blake & Co., already attired in their spotless flannels, dashed into the dormitory.

"Come on, you lazy slackers!" said Jack Blake. "Feeling fit?"

"Fit as fiddles!" said Tom Merry cheerfully. "I don't know what sort of teams are going to be up against us, but we ought to be able to hold our own with the hottest sides in the county, with the team we've got!"

"Yass, wathah!"

"Who can bat better than old Talbot?" continued Tom Merry.

"You can!" smiled Talbot.

"Rot!"

"Will there be any other guests in the house, Gussy?" asked Manners.

"Bound to be, deah boy! Conway has only got a week, an' you can west assured that he'll make the most of it. I hope we shall wun across some pretty gals, don't you know!"

Monty Lowther raised his hands above his head with a humorous expression of horror and disgust.

"Oh, Gussy, Gussy!" he said reprovingly. "Flirting in your old age! Whatever will Miss Bunn say when I tell her—"

"Lowthah, you fathead!" shrieked the swell of St. Jim's. "You know vewy well that Miss Bunn an' myself have nothin' in common. I considah your conduct is most degwadin'."

"Bow-wow!"

Arthur Augustus pushed back his cuffs with a warlike expression, but Jack Blake caught his arm and dragged him away.

"Come on down to brekker, Gussy!" he said. "We shall have to postpone the cricket-week till next autumn if we don't get a move on!"

Breakfast was a hasty meal, and Fatty Wynn, who had come on the scene with Figgins and Kerr, was the only one to do justice to it. The other fellows were very excited; but all the excitement in the world could not rob Fatty Wynn of his appetite.

When the meal was over, the juniors hurried into the quadrangle, where the car, ordered in such dramatic circumstances by Herries and Digby, was waiting.

The chauffeur was looking a little impatient. His manner was surly and sullen until Arthur Augustus D'Arcy squeezed a currency note for ten shillings into his palm. Then he brightened up perceptibly.

"Thank you kindly, sir!" he said, touching his hat.

"Don't mench, deah boy—I mean, my good fellah! Are we all ready?"

"We is—we are!" answered Monty Lowther, settling himself snugly in the back of the car.

"All sewene!" said the swell of St. Jim's, endeavouring to shake hands with a horde of juniors at once, all of whom wished him the best of luck.

The car leapt forward, and the tourists were off. They took with them the good wishes of all their schoolfellows, barring

a few rank outsiders of the Levison kidney, but those didn't count.

The country house which Lord Conway had taken during his convalescence was very quaint and charming, and dated back to the time of the Tudors. A few modern improvements, such as electric-light, had been introduced; but the pictures, the panelled and carved walls, and the mullioned windows, had not been interfered with. It was just such a place as Tom Merry & Co. loved, and the spacious grounds gave promise of good sport.

The St. Jim's juniors, after an exciting and enjoyable ride, sprang out of the car with alacrity.

Arthur Augustus tipped the driver, forgetting that he had already been lavishly generous towards the man; and then the party passed up the drive, their faces radiant with the prospect which lay before them.

A handsome young officer, of upright carriage, looking slightly pale, hurried up to greet the arrivals. It was Lord Conway, the son and heir of Lord Eastwood.

"Hallo, Arthur! Awfully glad to see you again, by Jove!" "The pleasuah is ours, deah boy!" said Gussy, giving his brother a cordial handshake.

"Have you brought anything in the shape of appetites with you?" asked Lord Conway.

"What-ho!" responded Fatty Wynn, with great heartiness. "I could eat a donkey's hind leg off! Ow! What are you treading on my pet corn for, Figgy?"

"This is a country house, not a pigsty!" said Figgins freely.

Lord Conway laughed, and led the way into the spacious dining-room. If the exterior of the house looked inviting, the interior appeared trebly so. The furniture was of the best, the food set out on the long table would have cheered the heart of even the most hopeless dyspeptic; and there was an atmosphere of general cheerfulness that set the blood of the juniors a-tingle with pleasure.

From the big bay window, the diners had a view of the large lawn upon which a dozen flannel-clad figures flitted hither and thither, enjoying themselves immensely, to judge from the sounds of jollity which were wafted on the autumn breeze.

"They are my guests!" explained Lord Conway.

"They seem to regard this show as a sort of heaven on earth," remarked Monty Lowther, pausing in his attack upon the cold collation. "I expect we shall do the same when we've been here a few hours—eh, Gussy?"

There was no reply from Arthur Augustus. Monty Lowther poked him in the ribs with his elbow, thinking perhaps he had fallen into a doze.

"Ow! Dwp it, you funnay boundah!" gasped Gussy. Then he relapsed into his former state of abstraction.

A slim, girlish figure was crossing and re-crossing the lawn, and Gussy's eyes were glued intently to that figure. Absently he dropped his knife and fork, and concentrated himself exclusively on the girl who was flitting to and fro, making skilful strokes with a tennis-racket.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Jack Blake. "Gussy's caught it again, bad! He's head over ears in love!"

"Weally, Blake—"

"Who's the unfortunate lady?" asked Tom Merry.

"That," said Lord Conway, with a smile, "is Sylvia Carr."

"Bai Jove!" murmured Arthur Augustus. "What a pwetty name, begad!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Gussy's well away," said Digby. "We sha'n't get much cricket out of him this week. He'll be mooning about the fields, and making eyes at the stars, and goodness knows what. You fellows know what he is when he gets a bad attack of love-fever, like this."

"We do—we does!" said Monty Lowther. "Somebody'll have to keep watch and ward on him while he's here, or else—"

"Or else what, fathead?" demanded the swell of St. Jim's.

"There'll be an elopement!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I will introduce you after lunch, Arthur," said Lord Conway.

"Thank you, deah boy! I twust you will take no notice of the frivolous remarks these fellahs persist in passin'!"

"That's all right!" said the young officer cheerfully. "I sha'n't mind you falling in love. You're bound to fall out again in record time!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

When the meal was over, the party moved out on to the lawn, and were introduced to the assembly, male and female, khaki and civilian.

If Miss Sylvia Carr had looked charming at a distance, she looked simply lovely at close quarters. She was an upright, athletic girl, with hair of the richest auburn, and a com-

plexion rarely seen outside Devon. Small wonder that she at once captured the chivalrous heart of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy!

"Good aftahnoon, Miss Carr!" exclaimed that elegant youth.

Promptly, and without a vestige of shyness or affectation, Miss Carr returned the salute.

"Care to have a go at the nets?" she said briskly, when they had been chatting a few moments.

"The—the tennis-nets, deah gal?"

"Tennis? No; that's the game of a fop! I mean the cricket-nets, of course!"

"But gals can't play ewicket, you know!" said Arthur Augustus, thereby putting his foot in it.

"That's all you know about it," retorted the athletic Miss Carr. "Here's a bat. Let's see what sort of stuff you're made of."

The swell of St. Jim's elevated his eyebrows in surprise; but the girl was evidently very much in earnest, and he felt that he ought to humour her. Besides, the lawn was pretty well crowded by this time, and he would be able to give a demonstration of his batting powers. For Arthur Augustus, good fellow at heart though he was, dearly loved the limelight.

Gussy's cricket was, as a rule, beyond reproach. Of course, he wasn't such a mighty wielder of the willow as Talbot or Tom Merry, but he could usually be relied upon to hold his own against the best of bowling.

He experienced a shock on this occasion, though. Poising himself before the stumps in an elegant attitude, he watched the preparations of Miss Sylvia Carr with an amused smile.

Lord Conway's fair guest looked very grim as she prepared to bowl.

"Play!" she exclaimed, in a ringing voice.

"Wight-ho, deah gal!"

Whiz!

The ball travelled down with considerable velocity, and the next moment the middle-stump was seen to be making revolutions in the air.

"Bai Jove!" gasped Arthur Augustus.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Tom Merry & Co., who had been looking on out of curiosity, shrieked with laughter as they beheld the comical expression of dismay on the face of their schoolfellow.

"I rather think that's out," said Miss Sylvia, with a merry laugh.

"I kind of sort of fancy it is!" chuckled Monty Lowther. "Fancy being beaten by a girl! For shame, Gustavus!"

"I—I say, that was a fearful fluke—I—I mean—"

"You mean that I couldn't do it again?" queried Miss Carr pleasantly.

"Just so, deah gal!"

"Then, look out!"

Arthur Augustus did look out, but he was unable to check the next swift delivery, which not only took his middle-stump out of the ground, but settled the hash of the off-stump as well.

"There!" said Miss Sylvia, triumphantly. "Perhaps you won't despise our sex so much, after that!"

"Weally, Miss Sylvia, I nevah intended to tweek your sex with despicion—I mean—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I think you are a very clever bowler, Miss Carr," said Tom Merry.

"Thank you!"

"We were under the impression that girls knew more about sewing shirts for soldiers than they did about cricket," was Jack Blake's comment.

"Then you were entirely wrong," retorted Miss Carr, with a short shrug of her fair shoulders. "At my school—St. Evelyn's—we have a cricket team as good as any boys' side in the county."

"Bow-wow!"

"Who made use of that ungentlemanly remark?" demanded Miss Carr.

"I did," said Figgins, colouring to the roots of his hair.

"I'm sorry, Miss Carr. I wasn't thinking."

"Weally, Figgy, I considah it was downright wude of you to address the young lady in that wepwehensible mannah!" said Arthur Augustus severely. Then, edging closer to Miss Carr, he added: "I should be vewy delighted, Miss Sylvia, if you would wegard me in the light of a pwotectah!"

"Thanks; I don't need one," was the prompt reply of Sylvia, who certainly seemed to be a young lady well able to look after herself.

"But I should be most pleased—"

"So should I, if you would kindly keep your distance!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Arthur Augustus ran his fingers perplexedly through his hair.

D'Arcy was not really a great student of Shakespeare, but

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he could not help feeling that the immortal bard of Avon had hit the nail right on the head when he observed that the course of true love never did run smooth. Gussy felt very much in love with Sylvia Carr, but that fair damsel did not seem at all in the humour to reciprocate.

"Look heah," said Arthur Augustus, lowering his voice, and getting as near to Miss Carr as he dared, "I have a pwoposal to make, Miss Sylvia."

"A what?" gasped Sylvia.

"I didn't mean a pwoposal of mawwiage!" stammered D'Arcy. "What are you fellahs gwinnin' at? Stop it, Tom Mewwy! Talbot, I shall give you a feanful thwashin'! Lowthah, you funny idiot—"

"Let's hear the proposal," said Miss Carr.

"Vewy well. I suggest that we meet your eleven at cwicket."

"Gussy, you prize maniac—!" began Jack Blake, who caught the words.

"Dwy up, Blake! I am in weal earnest, Miss Sylvia."

"But we should wipe you off the face of the earth," declared Miss Sylvia, with boyish frankness.

"That wemains to be seen. I am willin' to bet on the result."

"I'm not!"

"I'm not wefeywin' to money," said Gussy, hastily. "Come wight away fwom these fellahs, an' I'll explain."

"I don't see the need for secrecy. However, anything to oblige."

When they were out of earshot of the rest, Arthur Augustus bent down and whispered in Miss Sylvia's ear: "If you will agwee to play the match, I'm weady to bet we shall lick you."

"What will you bet?"

"A kiss!"

D'Arcy half regretted the words as soon as they were spoken, for he expected Miss Carr to give him a sounding slap on the cheek. Instead, Sylvia merely smiled.

"Done!" she said. "If you win, I'll permit you the privilege. But I'm only saying it because I know for a fact that you haven't an earthly!"

Gussy's heart leapt with joy; and when, a moment later, Miss Sylvia was called away to another part of the lawn, he bounded about like a frisky kangaroo.

"Match to be played to-morrow!" Miss Sylvia called out, over her shoulder.

"Wight you are, deah gal!"

"Now what have you been and gone and done?" asked Tom Merry.

"I've awwanged a match with St. Evelyn's," said D'Arcy. "An' if we win, I'm goin' to be allowed—"

"Well?"

"To kiss Miss Sylvia!"

Whereupon the cricketers gaped at Arthur Augustus in silence for one brief moment; then, throwing themselves down in various attitudes on the lawn, they laughed and choked in the throes of hysterical merriment.

Never had they suspected D'Arcy of such amazing nerve, though they knew quite a lot about his tuppenny-ha'penny flirtations in the past.

And the burning question of the moment was:

Would the budding Romeo succeed in attaining his heart's desire?

CHAPTER 8.

The Ghost Walks!

THAT same afternoon, after they had strolled round the grounds, the St. Jim's juniors played their opening cricket-match of the series, against a village side. A munition factory had been constructed barely a mile away, and most of the members of the visiting eleven were employed there. They put up a stubborn fight, but their style of cricket was not so classy as that of their opponents, and they retired well beaten by four wickets.

The juniors whiled away the rest of the day in pleasant fashion; but they were tired, most of them, and were glad to get to bed in order to maintain

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that state of physical fitness in which every British boy delights.

The Terrible Three, with Talbot and Dick Redfern, had a spacious bedroom to themselves; and as they turned in they discussed the forthcoming match against the girls' team captained by Miss Sylvia Carr.

"Of course, we shall win hands down," said Tom Merry.

"Oh, of course!" agreed four voices, in unison.

"The only thing is, ought we to encourage Gussy in his giddy flirtations? You know what it means if we win. He's going to kiss Miss Carr."

"Shocking!" exclaimed Monty Lowther, holding his hands aloft with a pious expression of horror.

"Don't rot! Look here, I think we ought to arrange to let the girls lick us, and then we shall be keeping Gussy to the path of virtue."

"He'd kiss her, in any case," said Manners.

"If she gave him the chance!" put in Redfern.

"I think we ought to play to win," said Talbot. "After all, think of the chivvying we should get if the girls licked us. Other people might not think we did it on purpose."

"I agree with Talbot," said Monty Lowther, quite serious for once. "If Gussy wins his bet, don't let's begrudge him his reward. But he's a lucky bouncer, all the same!"

And Monty Lowther heaved a deep sigh, and sank into the realm ruled over by Morpheus. His comrades were not long in following his example.

Several hours must have elapsed before something—he hardly knew what—caused Tom Merry to sit up in bed with a shudder.

It was a moonless night. The window-blind gave out a pale reflection, but apart from that the room was in darkness, and the skipper of the Shell could see nothing.

Then, just as Tom Merry was beginning to chide himself for being a funk and a fool, he distinctly heard a dull chink, proceeding, apparently, from the foot of the bed.

"Hallo!" exclaimed Tom, his heart beating fast. "Who's there?"

Simultaneously, Talbot stirred in his bed, and exclaimed:

"What's the little game?"

There was no reply, but both Tom Merry and Talbot distinctly saw something white flit past the window-blind. Then there was silence, broken only by the deep breathing of Monty Lowther.

"Talbot!" panted Tom Merry.

"Yes, old chap?"

"What the merry dickens was that?"

"I'm no wiser than you are. Hop out of bed and put on the electric light."

Tom Merry obeyed. The action aroused the other occupants of the bed-room.

"Wharrer marrer?" yawned Monty Lowther drowsily.

"That's just what we're trying to find out," said Tom Merry. "I woke up just now with that funny sort of feeling you always get when there's a stranger in the room. I couldn't see anybody at first, but after a bit I heard a clinking noise, and saw something white go past the window."

"Rats!" grunted Dick Redfern. "You had too heavy a supper last night, that's what's the matter with you!"

"I tell you—"

"You should chew your grub more carefully, and avoid too much meat," continued Redfern. "That always gives you nightmare!"

"Tommy hasn't had nightmare," said Talbot. "He woke me up by shouting at the intruder, whoever he was, and then I, too, saw something glide past the window."

"My hat!" exclaimed Manners, with a shiver. "Is this place haunted, by any chance?"

"There's something jolly mysterious about it all, anyway," said Tom Merry. "The door's shut, for one thing, and we didn't hear the fellow—it must have been a fellow; there's no such things as ghosts—open and shut it again!"

"But he must have done," said Monty Lowther. "It's the only possible exit. The window's a jolly sight too high from the ground for anyone to descend with any comfort, and the chimney's too narrow!"

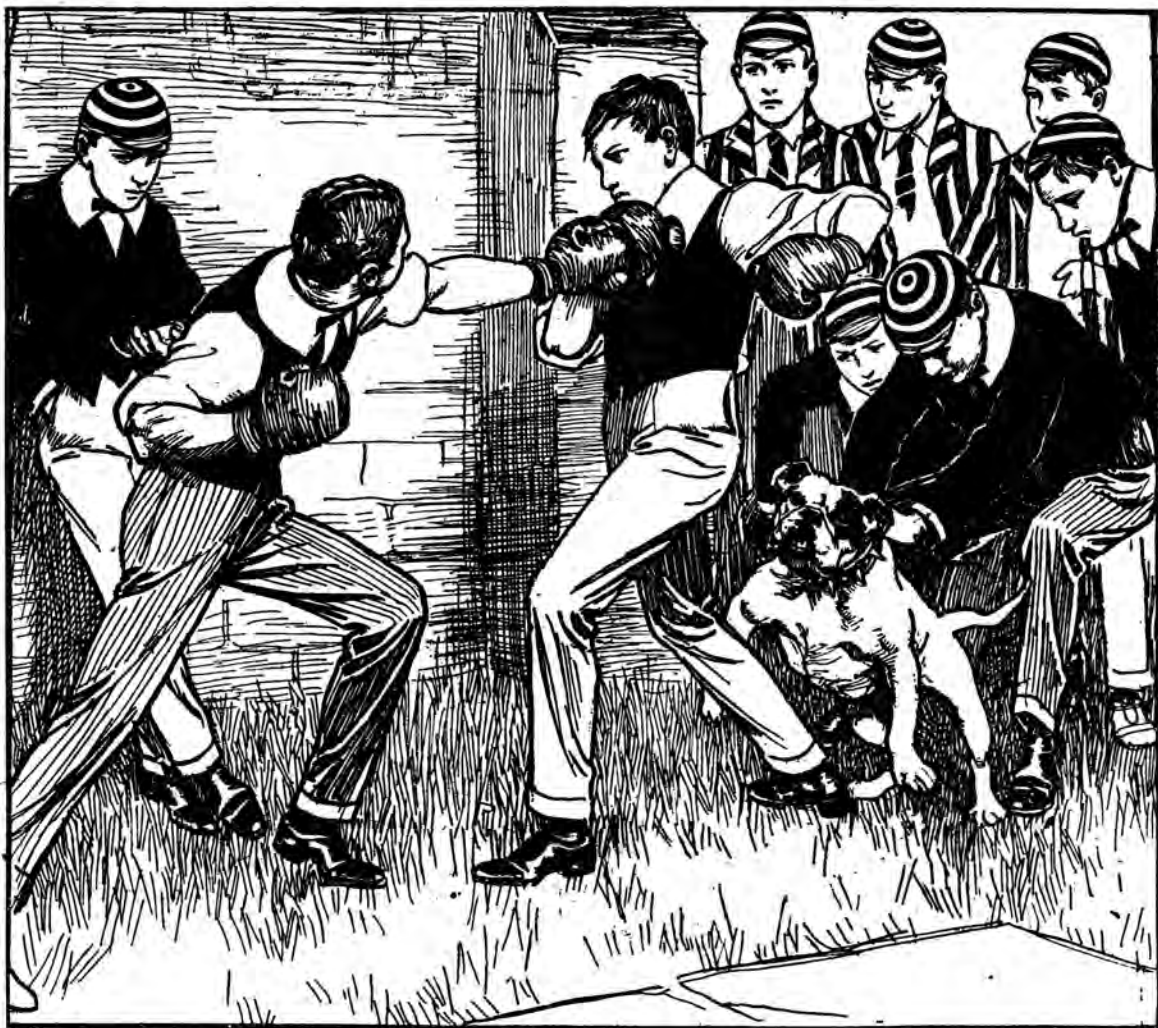
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OUT TO-DAY!

ONE PENNY.



"Wipe him off the earth, Herries!" At the same instant, on mention of his master's name, Towser uttered a low growl and leapt into the ring to take an active part in the battle. Tom Merry & Co., contrived to drag the animal back. (See Chapter 3.)

"Not for a ghost!" said Manners.

"Oh, give the ghosts a rest!" said Redfern. "Only old maids and idiots believe in those things. Tom Merry's had nightmare, that's the long and short of it."

"Funny that I should have nightmare at the same time," said Talbot. "I'll swear to it that there was somebody in this room—somebody besides ourselves, I mean—not five minutes ago!"

"Then let's trot round and explore," said Monty Lowther.

"Count me out!" said Redfern promptly. "I'm not going to spoil my beauty-sleep by hunting for ghosts that don't exist. If you fellows want to make prize asses of yourselves, you can go ahead. There's no law against it."

The Terrible Three and Talbot tumbled out of bed in their pyjamas. Talbot and Merry were convinced that they had seen something, and they were not the sort of fellows to invent wild romances.

The corridor was in darkness, save where a faint light flickered from a gas-jet at the head of the stairs.

Noiselessly, and moving on tiptoe, the four juniors crept along.

Suddenly Tom Merry, who was leading, stopped short, and held up his hand in caution to his comrades.

Footsteps could be heard descending the flight of stairs above. Then, while the juniors stood irresolute, straining their eyes in front of them. They distinctly saw a figure in white pass under the gas-jet and proceed downstairs.

Tom Merry's eyes lit up with triumphant anticipation.

"Spotted him, by Jove!" he said. "Come on, kids! Keep close together, and we'll give the bouncer the surprise of his life!"

With their hearts thumping wildly against their ribs, the ghost-hunters groped their way cautiously along the dark passage. Then they crept down the stairs which the mysterious figure in white had been seen to descend, and found themselves in the domestic regions.

There was no light in the spacious kitchen, but Tom Merry groped for the switch, and turned it on.

Immediately an exclamation of triumph arose. Over in the farthest corner, the midnight prowler, unaware of the fact that he had been run to earth, was on bended knees, as if searching for something.

"Collar him!" muttered Tom Merry.

There was a short, sharp scuffle, during which the "ghost" proved that he was possessed, not only of flesh and blood, but of muscle and sinew, for he struggled gamely, yet unavailingly, against heavy odds.

"Keep him under!" panted Monty Lowther. "We'll jolly soon cure him of his ghost-walking! My hat! The bouncer's got the strength of a whole menagerie of lions!"

A moment later, however, the struggle was over, and the Terrible Three sat upon their prostrate victim, who spluttered and choked beneath their united weight.

Talbot bent down and peered into the captive's face. Then

he gave vent to an exclamation which rang through the kitchen:

"Figgins!"

The Terrible Three surveyed one another with sickly glances.

"M-m-my only aunt!" gasped Monty Lowther.

"Figgy, you ass!" said Tom Merry. "Why on earth didn't you explain who you were?"

The New House junior snorted with fury.

"You didn't give me a chance!" he growled. "Have you all gone potty, or what? Get off my chest, Lowther, for goodness' sake! I'm half suffocated!"

"Look here, Figgy!" said Tom Merry sternly. "What d'you mean by prowling round the house at dead of night like this? You gave us quite a turn when you came in our bed-room. And how in thunder did you manage to get out so quickly when you were spotted?"

Figgins sat up and clasped his nasal organ, which was beginning to swell as a result of the recent combat.

"It wasn't me!" he said.

"Then who on earth was it?"

"How should I know? Somebody came into our bed-room, too, about ten minutes ago—somebody in white, and Gussy swore it was the ghost paying his annual visit! We were all pretty well startled, but the other fellows didn't fancy searching for what they thought was a blessed spirit. So I came alone, and this is the result!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Monty Lowther. "We've mistaken you for the ghost, Figgy, old man! That's the worst of being so thin in the calves. It makes you look suspiciously like the family spectre!"

"Dry up, you funny idiot!" growled Figgins. "I've had enough ghost-hunting for to-night! Groo!"

And the indignant leader of the New House tramped away to his bed-room, which he regretted ever having vacated.

"Shall we carry on with the search?" asked Manners.

Tom Merry yawned, and shook his head.

"It's hardly worth while," he said. "I expect it was only some practical joker. Besides, we don't want to go blundering all over the house. We might wake some of the guests up, if we haven't roused 'em already."

"Any luck?" asked Dick Redfern sarcastically, as the four juniors re-entered the bed-room. "You haven't brought the ghost back in little pieces, by any chance?"

"Oh, rats!" growled Tom Merry. "I'm still convinced that somebody came into this room!"

"Same here!" said Talbot.

"I should advise you to study the war-poster, and eat less meat," chuckled the New House junior. "Buck up and turn in, or you won't be fit for anything in the morning. Good-night!"

But at least an hour elapsed before sleep visited the eyes of

Talbot and the Terrible Three that night. They were wondering who their nocturnal visitant could have been, and whether they would see anything of him again.

The same thoughts were passing through the minds of the occupants of Figgy's bed-room, where two juniors, at least, were intent on tracking the spectre to its lair should it appear again.

And their names were Herries and Digby!

CHAPTER 9.

Some Person Unknown.

"MY gold tickah!" Arthur Augustus D'Arcy uttered the words in tones of horror.

"What's the matter with it?" asked Jack Blake. "Slept with it under your pillow and smashed it?"

"No, deah boy. It's gone!"

"What!"

"It was heal last night when we went to bed. I distinctly wemembah hangin' it ovah the bed-wail! Some thief—some burgleh—"

The eyes of the other occupants of the room met instinctively. Their thoughts at once reverted to the white-clad figure which had entered the bed-room in the silent watches of the night, and vanished swiftly and mysteriously, without a hint as to the why and wherefore of its coming.

His face pale with apprehension, Arthur Augustus ran through his clothes, and brought to light the leather case in which he kept his celebrated fivers. Then a cry of consternation burst from his lips. The case was empty!

"Bai Jove!" gasped the swell of St. Jim's. "I've been wobbled, deah boys, unless—unless some boundah's done this for a tick!"

But that wasn't likely. Not a single member of the junior eleven was in the habit of playing doubtful tricks of that sort. Obviously the midnight prowler, whoever he was, had entered the bed-room with deliberate intent to steal.

"How much was in the case, Gussy?" asked Figgins grimly.

"A couple of fivahs an' some Tweasuwuy notes, amountin' to two pounds ten."

"That's twelve pounds ten missing, then. A small fortune, by Jove!"

But, black though the situation was, there was worse to follow. The rest of the juniors ran through their pockets, and each of them found that some article of value was missing. Jack Blake's silver penknife, which had been fitted with numerous useful implements, had been appropriated;

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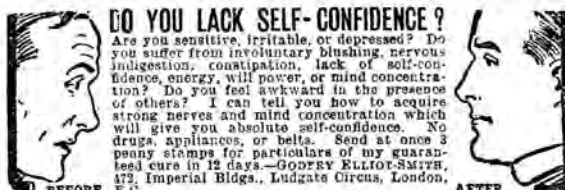
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Kerr had lost a fountain-pen which was the fondly-cherished gift of Ferrers Locke, the famous detective; and Fatty Wynn, Digby, and Herries had been relieved of whatever sums of money they had possessed.

"We've been robbed wholesale!" said Herries, aghast. "But Gussy's loss is the biggest. What shall we do about it?"

"Bettah not let it get to my bwothah's eahs," said Arthur Augustus, in great distress. "It would wowwy him no end to know theah was a thief in the place."

"We shall have to thrash the matter out on our own," said Digby. "Herries is going to give me a hand to-night in catching that ghost fellow."

"Rather!" said Herries.

"He won't pay us any more visits, I'm thinking," said Jack Blake. "He's cleaned us out, and—"

"My hat!" said Figgins suddenly. "Now I come to think of it, he went to Tom Merry's room as well! I wonder—"

The speaker rushed off to the bed-room occupied by the five Shell fellows. He found them conversing in tones of great excitement.

"What's up?" he asked breathlessly.

"Everything!" said Tom Merry. "That ghost we saw last night must have been Raffles in disguise. He's walked off with all our tin!"

"The Crown Prince is dead in this act," remarked Monty Lowther. "We've never been looted so completely in our lives! Every penny's gone!"

"It's the same with us," said Figgins. "Gussy's been robbed of his gold watch and a matter of about twelve quid, and the rest of us have all had our pockets rifled!"

"And what are you going to do about it?" asked Talbot.

"What can we do? Herries and Digby are forming some scheme or other for collaring the thief, but I dare say it'll end in smoke. A man who can get in and out of rooms without leaving a single clue, won't be such an easy customer to track down."

"Anyway, we'd better keep it from Lord Conway," said Tom Merry.

"That's just what Gussy says. Conway's had worries enough in France, without having 'em piled on over here. Let's go about with grinning chivvies as if nothing has happened, and p'raps during the week we shall be able to lay our hands on the thief."

Meanwhile, Herries and Digby had taken upon themselves the role of amateur detectives, and they discussed the affair with great excitement in their bed-room while their comrades went off to see what had become of Figgys.

"It's pretty obvious," said Herries, "that the thief isn't one of us."

"No jolly fear!" said Digby.

"And it's equally unlikely that it's one of the guests. We've seen 'em all, and they're not the sort of people who commit midnight burglaries."

"Then where would you look for the thief?"

"Among the servants," said Herries promptly. "I might be wrong, of course. A fellow can't become a Sherlock Holmes in a day. But there's one particular person who strikes me as having a thoroughly dishonest look about him."

Digby laughed.

"Who d'you mean?" he asked.

"Why, that butler who waited on us in the dining-room last night—Soames, I believe his name is."

Digby started.

"To tell you the truth," he said, "I didn't like the look of the fellow myself. He's got a sly, stealthy way of creeping about that doesn't smack of honesty. But what are we going to do about it? We can't go up to him and demand the return of the stolen property. He might be as innocent as a new-born babe."

Herries nodded.

"Tell you what," he said. "There's one thing the thief didn't take, for the simple reason that he couldn't get at it."

"What was that?"

"My gold tiepin. It's a real beauty, and my pater gave quite a lot for it. Suppose I flourish it in front of Soames' eyes, and see if it has any effect on him?"

"Good egg!"

"I'll do it at brekker," said Herries. "That's not till nine, so we might as well have another snooze. The other fellows are jawing in Tom Merry's bed-room, I s'pose."

"Let 'em jaw!" chuckled Digby. "I'll bet they won't make head or tail of the bizney. This giddy mystery's going to be fathomed by you and me—what?"

And Herries, as he turned into bed again in his pyjamas, exclaimed grimly:

"You bet!"

CHAPTER 10.

The Hear! Bowed Down.

ARTHUR AUGUSTUS D'ARCY, although his losses were heavier than those of his chums, was the first to banish the affair of the theft from his mind.

Tom Merry & Co. followed the example of Herries and Digby, and got back into bed again, but Gussy dressed in his flannels and went down.

His expression matched the morning. It was sunny and serene, and the light of pleasure danced in the eye that gleamed behind the celebrated monocle. For Gussy at all times fell a ready victim to the fascinations of the other sex, and, for the time being, at any rate, he felt that he would be willing to lay, not only his whole heart, but his soul, body, and brain, at the feet of Sylvia Carr, whose winning smile and azure eyes were for ever leaping into his gaze.

Arthur Augustus hoped, in the course of an early morning stroll, to come face to face with his divinity; but Miss Sylvia Carr, as a matter of fact, was slumbering placidly at that hour. She never rose with the lark, but tumbled out with that somewhat lazier bird, the sparrow. Gussy saw nothing of her until breakfast-time, when, unfortunately, they sat far apart, Sylvia's immediate neighbours being Figgins and Kerr, of the New House.

When Soames brought in the porridge, he darted a searching look at St. Jim's juniors; and Digby and Herries did not fail to observe the sudden gleam in his eyes as they sighted the latter's gold tiepin.

Lord Conway drew Tom Merry aside as the breakfast party dispersed.

"I can tell by your angelic smile, Tommy," he said, "that you regard this match with the girls in the light of a walk-over. In that case, let me hasten to assure you that you will have all your work cut out to win."

"But—but they're only girls!" stammered the hero of the Shell.

Lord Conway smiled.

"They may be mere girls," he remarked, "but not of the flabby, take-me-to-the-pictures-Charlie variety. They are athletes to the finger-tips, and although their style of cricket is—ahem!—a trifle peculiar, it is very effective. You will have to play up all you know."

"Thanks for the tip," said Tom Merry. "It's to be a single-innings affair. I take it?"

Lord Conway nodded.

No sooner had Tom Merry left his host's side than a brake came rattling up the drive, crowded with happy, high-spirited girls, of Sylvia Carr's age and stature. They were dressed plainly, but with scrupulous neatness, and certainly gave the impression that they would render a good account of themselves on the cricket-field.

"Let's get to business," said Miss Carr briskly, when the rival teams had been gathered together for the fray. "Call to this, Tom Merry!"

"Pardon me, but I'm the skippah——"

"Oh, dry up, Gussy!"

Miss Sylvia spun a sixpence in the air.

"Heads!" said Tom Merry.

"Offside!" said Sylvia. "It's tails. You should always call tails, you know—it's luckiest. Well, having won the toss, I think we'll bat. Come along, Phyllis!"

The girl addressed was a bright-eyed, vivacious creature of fifteen or thereabouts, and she promptly complied with her chief's command.

Figgins and Fatty Wynn took over the bowling. They were inclined to be easy-going at first, until Sylvia slogged Figgins over the boundary railings, almost causing a catastrophe among the people who were watching the game with amused smiles. Then, after this incident, the bowlers served up their very best, marvelling why the creatures in petticoats remained at the wickets so long.

Sylvia Carr played delightful cricket. As Monty Lowther observed, she ought to have been a fellow. Her wrist-work was a treat to watch, and she wasn't afraid of the fastest bowling. There was power behind her strokes, too, and when she slammed Fatty Wynn, the best junior bowler at St. Jim's, to the boundary for the third time, Tom Merry began to look very red and shamefaced. He remembered Lord Conway's words, and saw now that they were true.

"Buck up, for goodness' sake!" he growled, admonishing his fellow-fieldsmen. "It would be too rotten if they licked us!"

"And that's precisely what we are going to do!" said Miss Carr, looking almost majestic as she stood at the wickets.

No fewer than 30 runs were registered on the scoring-board before the two girls were separated, Phyllis spooning a catch into Talbot's safe hands. She had played remarkably well.

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

being responsible for a solid dozen, and deserved all the applause she got as she wended her way back to the marquee which served as a pavilion.

An auburn-haired girl, coming in next, helped Miss Sylvia to take the score to 45, when one of Fatty Wynn's hottest uprooted her middle stump. Shortly afterwards a rot set in, but, as Tom Merry remarked, it was high time, for at one period the girls had looked like remaining at the wickets all day.

The total was 80. Sylvia, who had carried her bat for a meritorious 33, was loudly cheered, the St. Jim's juniors joining in.

"Of course, we shall top that all right," said Figgins.

"Of course!" said Tom Merry, but with a note of uneasiness in his tone.

If the girls were as capable in the bowling and fielding departments as they were in the batting, the juniors would have all their work cut out to win. Eighty was not a formidable score exactly; still, it took some getting.

Tom Merry opened the innings with Talbot. It was understood that they were to take no risks, but play up just as keenly as if it were an ordinary match under ordinary conditions.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, in the marquee, watched the opening of the St. Jim's innings with tremendous anxiety. A few hours ago he had felt confident that neither things present, nor things to come, nor things temporal, nor things eternal, could prevent St. Jim's from winning. Now his confidence was somewhere in the region of his boots.

Tom Merry and Talbot were at the wickets a long time, but runs came at very protracted intervals, like figs in a fig-pudding. With the score at 15, the captain of the Shell got in the way of one of Miss Carr's under-arms, and Lord Conway, who was umpiring, promptly voted him leg-before on being appealed to.

Jack Blake took up the running, but not for long. He was nervous—for no fellow likes to be dismissed by a girls' side for a duck's-egg—and in his nervousness he spooned the ball into the slips, where the fair Phyllis brought off quite a clever catch.

"Fifteen for two!" groaned Arthur Augustus. "This is awful! I shall have to go in an' buck things things up."

"Rats!" said Tom Merry. "Better go in last, Gussy, and then you can pull the game out of the fire. That's the sort of position which appeals to you, I know. Besides, think of the impression it will make. You might get an extra career for it!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

D'Arcy frowned portentously, and Figgins, the long-limbed leader of the New House, went out to assist Talbot.

Figgy was suffering just a little from stage-fright, and the downfall of Jack Blake and Tom Merry was not calculated to give him much in the way of encouragement. He scraped together an inglorious 3, and then Phyllis—she of the dark tresses—promptly put paid to his account.

The situation went from bad to worse. Kerr and Wynn amassed between them the anything but grand aggregate of 2; and Digby had the mortification of knocking his own wicket down.

Talbot seemed to be the only fellow who could make anything of the bowling, and even he was by no means set. Never had the St. Jim's juniors seen such a sterling demonstration of cricket by the other sex as that given by the girls of St. Evelyn's. Tom Merry & Co. had imagined that the girls would be hopeless duffers—that they would miss catches galore, and get the ball entangled in their dress when fielding, and so on.

Instead of which, Miss Carr and her fair warriors were very keen and very wide-awake, and the batsmen had to fight hard for their runs.

"A damsel is a-bowling,
And down the wickets go!"

sang Monty Lowther softly, as he watched Manners' middle stump do a sort of back-somersault before lying prostrate on the turf.

"This is sickening!" groaned Tom Merry. "I can see Lord Conway grinning all over his chivvy! We shall be reminded of this match till we're tottering old men with the gout! Go in and do something, Monty, for goodness' sake!"

"I'll do my best," said Monty Lowther heroically. "No man can do more. Hard cheese, Manners! Lend me your bat, old man!"

And the humorist of the Shell strolled solemnly out to the wickets, whistling "The Death of Nelson."

"Play!" said Miss Phyllis.

Lowther leapt out of his crease like a tiger, and smote the first ball hard and true to the boundary.

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"Well hit, sir!"

"That's the style!" said Tom Merry, his face lighting up. "If only old Monty can keep it up—"

But, alas! old Monty came an undignified cropper the next moment. He attempted to repeat his brilliant achievement, and was well caught by a fair-haired damsel in the long-field.

Redfern, who didn't suffer from nerves in the least degree, hit out vigorously after Monty Lowther's retirement, and he and Talbot enlivened the game for the next twenty minutes or so.

But when Reddy was clean bowled, and there was only one more wicket to fall, the situation looked as black as ever. St. Jim's were still 20 runs short of the opposing total, and the girls were giving cheerful chuckles of anticipation.

"You've got to be the saviour of the side, Gussy," said Tom Merry.

"Yes, rather! Play up like the very dickens, old scout!" urged Jack Blake.

Very fit and very determined looked Arthur Augustus as he lounged out on to the field of play, with his bat tucked under his arm.

Miss Sylvia had the ball, and she smiled serenely at the swell of St. Jim's.

"Going to pull the game out of the fire?" she asked, with mild sarcasm.

"I mean to have a jolly good twy, anyway!" was the reply.

"Bravo, Gussy!" exclaimed Talbot, from the other end.

"Leave the slogging to me, if you like."

"I'd much prefer to do it myself, deah boy!"

"All serene!"

If Sylvia Carr hoped to repeat her performance of the previous day, by bowling her elegant admirer at the first attempt, she was destined to disappointment. Gussy played very carefully indeed; and although he did not actually resort to stonewalling, his wicket was certainly well guarded.

Then, when he had scored a few singles, he opened his shoulders to the bowling, and a dozen runs had been added almost before the crowd became aware of it.

"That's ripping!" said Fatty Wynn, juggling with a bag of doughnuts. "Who ever would have thought it?"

"Gussy means to go all out for his reward, and chance it," grinned Jack Blake.

Still the score crept up, Arthur Augustus smiting like a Trojan. Talbot, who had been batting from the commencement, backed the swell of St. Jim's up right royally.

The fielding became keener than ever as the margin between the scores decreased.

Five—four—three to win!

All eyes were on the game now. From the big marquee Gussy's comrades looked on breathlessly, scarce daring to speak.

Sylvia Carr sent down the best ball she knew how, and Arthur Augustus smote it hard. Away and away it soared; but the fielding was brilliant, and the batsmen were only allowed to cross twice.

"Level!" gasped Tom Merry, in great relief. "We're not licked, anyway!"

Arthur Augustus smiled as he took guard, and Sylvia smiled back at him. Both were thinking about the wager, and D'Arcy was cooing he would win.

His cooingness brought about his undoing. Sylvia's next delivery, a perfect masterpiece of the bowler's art, curled round his bat in some mysterious and inexplicable manner, and the next instant Gussy's off-stump lay at an angle of ninety degrees. He was clean bowled!

"Well, I'm jiggered!" exclaimed Jack Blake. "A tie!"

Looking very pleased with themselves, the fair "fieldsmen" streamed off the field. Following them, flushed and panting, came Talbot and D'Arcy. Both were loudly cheered, for but for their brilliant partnership the girls would undoubtedly have claimed the issue. Talbot had made a meritorious 45, and was not-out in the bargain.

Arthur Augustus wandered off from the crowd which was waiting to congratulate him, and presently he sought out Miss Sylvia, who was fanning herself beneath the elm-trees which skirted the ground.

"Well?" she said pleasantly.

"I—I've come for my reward, deah gal."

"What do you mean?"

"You wemembah our little compact?"

"Yes; but you haven't won. You said you'd lick us, and you haven't."

"But—but—"

"Excuse me!" said Sylvia briskly. "I must be off! Phyllis is calling me!"

And she flitted away like a fairy, leaving Arthur Augustus rooted to the ground, and murmuring something to the effect that "gals were deceivalls evah!"

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

CHAPTER 11. A Triumph for Two.

TOM MERRY & CO. had kept up an air of cheerfulness that day, and at certain exciting periods, such as during the match with St. Evelyn's, their losses, serious though they were, had failed to worry them.

But late in the evening, when they retired to their bed-rooms, the tragedy of the situation was strongly felt. Gussy groped in his waistcoat-pocket for his gold watch to see the time, and his hand came empty away; Jack Blake wished to point a pencil, and realised that his penknife had passed into other hands; and Monty Lowther, after deciding to reckon up the extent of his resources, found that his pockets were empty.

But most of the juniors were dog-tired after the day's exertions, and had no thoughts beyond getting to sleep as speedily as possible. All of them, except Herries and Digby, felt that the mysterious prowler, having made his haul, wouldn't trouble to come again.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, although he had greater losses to moan than his comrades, soon fell asleep; and Fatty Wynn, a big supper having made him drowsy, quickly followed suit. After a time Herries and Digby were the only two awake in that bed-room.

"Dig!" whispered Herries excitedly.

"Hallo!"

"I've made a discovery!"

"Get it off your chest!"

"There's a sliding-panel in the wall—almost behind my bed!"

"Gammon!"

"Come and see for yourself, then!" said Herries, lighting a candle. "I thought it was part of the carving at first, till I felt it move. It's quite on the cards that there's a secret passage behind it. They're not uncommon in houses of this sort."

"My hat!" muttered Digby.

He jumped out of bed with alacrity, and was no longer a Doubting Thomas. Herries was right. A panel in the wall did back, revealing a cavity about two feet square.

"This is interesting!" said Digby, with an excitement he couldn't for the life of him keep in check. "Shall we squeeze through and see exactly what it is?"

"Half a jiffy!" said Herries, gripping his chum by the arm. "Something's just occurred to me. I've been wondering all along how the fellow who looted us last night managed to get clear so quickly, without leaving a clue. This is the explanation. He came and went by means of this panel."

"By Jove!" said Digby admiringly. "I believe you're right, old man! Going to shin through?"

"Yes. Hold the candle low, so that I can see where I'm going."

Herries clambered through the recess, making as little noise as possible. He was back again within a couple of minutes, his face flushed with excitement.

"I'm right," he said. "It's a secret passage, leading, I take it, behind all the bed-rooms on this floor."

"And Soames sleeps in the end room!" said Digby. "My hat! I begin to see daylight now!"

For a moment the two juniors stood gazing at each other in silence.

"Well," said Herries at length, "what's to be done?"

Digby reflected.

"I vote we close the panel, blow out the candle, and await developments," he said. "That boulder will be after your tiepin to-night, or I'm a Dutchman! When he comes, he'll find he's walked into a hornet's nest!"

"Shall we wake the others?"

"No—not yet, at any rate. Soames mightn't come. He mightn't be the thief at all, for that matter, and we don't want to make ourselves the laughing-stock of the place. Wait till the beast shows his chivvy in this room, and then, if we need help, we can raise a shout."

"Right you are!"

Herries blew out the candle, and seated himself on his bed, with Digby beside him. They spoke in whispers to beguile their rather weary vigil.

After what seemed an age, twelve o'clock was heard to boom from the grandfather's clock down in the hall.

"We'll stick it out another hour," whispered Herries. "If he doesn't come by one, we'll turn in."

"Hark!"

Digby nudged his chum warningly, and they strained their ears to listen.

Very faintly, in the darkness, came the sound of a muffled footstep.

Moved by the same impulse, Herries and Digby took up

crouching attitudes close to the panel. The intruder was coming!

Not another word passed between the watching couple.

Creak!

The panel was moving. A hand on the other side was sliding it along.

The room was in darkness, but the juniors had no difficulty in seeing a man's head and shoulders appear through the opening.

Herries, in particular, experienced a deep thrill of delight at having been on the right track, for the head and shoulders, beyond all question, belonged to the butler.

"Ah!"

The man uttered a sudden fierce exclamation. He became aware that his movements were being watched, and immediately tried to worm his way back into the secret passage.

But Herries and Digby were too quick for him. With one accord they bounded forward, and dragged the rascal into the bed-room by sheer force.

"Got you, you beauty!" exclaimed Digby.

But Soames was so weakling, and he had no desire to be taken captive by a couple of schoolboys. He struggled desperately, and more than once it seemed that Herries and Digby would be overpowered.

So engrossed were they in their grim struggle that both forgot to raise the alarm, which would have brought them prompt assistance.

But the tide soon turned in their favour, and the wretched Soames was sat upon by the burly Herries, while Digby hastily produced a length of window-cord wherewith to bind the rascal's arms and legs.

"Lemme go!" wailed Soames.

"Not this evening!" said Herries pleasantly. "Some other evening! So you were after my tiepin—what? I should have thought the haul you made last night would have been enough to go on with."

"Don't tell the master!" whined the butler. "Anything but that! If Lord Conway gets to know I shall be sacked on the spot! I'll tell you where the things are!"

"Where?" asked Digby sternly, as he bound the victim's limbs.

"In my bed-room, which is connected with this room by the secret passage."

"I thought as much. We'll run along and recover 'em by-and-by. Meanwhile—"

"What's all this?" exclaimed a wondering voice.

Herries and Digby looked up, to see Lord Conway standing in the doorway of the bed-room in his dressing-rown, and with a lighted candle in his hand.

"My hat!" muttered Herries. "It's no use trying to hide the matter now, even if we wanted to. Better own up, Soames, and tell Lord Conway what you got up to last night."

In pitiful tones the butler made his confession. Lord Conway did not seem half so surprised as Herries and Digby had expected.

"I can quite understand it," he said at length. "I had my suspicions before. The man is a kleptomaniac. Thieving's part and parcel of his nature. I will have him removed in the morning. He is a menace to my guests by remaining in this house."

"Did you know there was a secret passage on this floor, sir?" asked Digby.

"Indeed I didn't. I have been here only a little longer than yourselves, and have been too busily occupied to look over the place. A secret passage? You surprise me!"

Digby pointed out the panel in the wall, and Lord Conway peered through into the narrow vault behind. He now fully understood how the theft had been effected.

"This man," he said, glancing at Soames, "will spend the rest of the night in one of the store-rooms. Meanwhile, will one of you recover the stolen property from his bed-room?"

Herries promptly obeyed. He wanted the experience of passing through the secret passage.

When he returned, a few moments later, laden with the juniors' belongings, he found that not only were the other occupants of the room awake, but that Tom Merry & Co. had been roused also, and were listening in breathless amazement to the story of the thief's capture, as told by the delighted Digby.

"Bai Jove!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus admiringly.

"Sherlock Holmes will have to take a back seat afresh this! Why didn't you wake us, dear boys?"

"Because we weren't sure we were on the right track," said Herries. "However, we were, and this is the conclusion of the entertainment."

"One thing's pretty certain," said Tom Merry, by way of a summing-up. "It would have been a pretty poor sort of

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a cricket-week if we hadn't brought both Herries and Dig along with us."

To which Arthur Augustus responded, as he gripped each of his two chums heartily by the hand:

"Yaas, wathah!"

CHAPTER 12.

With Honour to All!

THAT glorious week at Lord Conway's was likely to live long in the memories of those who enjoyed the fun and frolic and healthy sport that was crowded into it.

It was an ideal spot for sportsmen like Tom Merry & Co. They rose early, and went for a dip in the rippling stream that glided through the grounds; when they were tired of more energetic forms of sport they went fishing.

There was boating to be had, too, and tennis; and the girls of St. Evelyn's invariably came round to tea after the juniors had finished cricket for the afternoon.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was looking very down in the mouth for a time. As Monty Lowther put it, he was jolly well jilted, and it served him right. But such a summing-up offended rather than consoled the swell of St. Jim's. Like Rachel of old, he mourned, and would not be comforted. He held aloof even from Sylvia. Perhaps Gussy imagined that young lady to be incorrigible, and had given it up as a bad job. When they met, he was politeness itself, as befitted a devout disciple of the noble Vere de Vere; but he never pursued his quest of her hand and heart.

The last day of the tour was made memorable by a most important cricket-match, between Tom Merry & Co. and Lord Conway's eleven. The latter was a very useful side indeed, and seemed, on paper, to be much too strong for the St. Jim's juniors, who, however, would not have admitted as much for worlds.

A company of Shakespearean actors had come down from London, and half a dozen of them—fine, strapping fellows who were cricketers of considerable ability—were included in Lord Conway's side.

Tom Merry & Co. had won all their previous fixtures, barring the match with the girls, which didn't count, as it was not included in the original programme.

Both Herries and Digby, when called upon to play, had proven foemen worthy of their steel. It was Digby's turn to play when the last match came round.

"Now, my merry lads," said Lord Conway, as he stood behind the nets and watched the members of his eleven at practice, "we're going to send you home with your tails between your legs—see?"

"I don't think!" chuckled Tom Merry. "We're not going to spoil our beautiful record. I say! Who's that fellow batting now? He's a sort of miniature edition of Johnny Hobbs."

Lord Conway smiled.

"That's Aynsley, who plays Hamlet," he said. "The fellow who succeeds in wrecking his wicket will have something to swank about. And you see that stout Johnny with the ball?"

"Yes."

"That's Clyde. He plays Falstaff, and bowls the deadliest leg-breaks that ever were."

"You forget that we've got a Falstaff," said Figgins. "Fatty Wynn's going great guns this afternoon—aren't you, Fatty?"

"What-ho!" responded the plump junior, who was already going great guns with a huge chunk of coconut-ice.

"Well, I think we'll get to business," said Lord Conway. "It's a two-innings match, and we want to dodge the darkness. Who's skipper? You and Arthur have been arguing about it all the week, Merry, and I'm still none the wiser."

"Oh, I'll hand over the reins to Gussy!" said Tom Merry, smiling. "He's dying for the job, and, like the kid with the soap, he won't be happy till he gets it."

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—"

"Call to this," said Lord Conway, spinning a coin.

"Tails!"

"Tails it is. What's it to be?"

"We'll take the field, deah doy. Tom Mewwy, you will open the bowlin' with Wynn."

"Very good, my lord," said the captain of the Shell, touching his forelock politely.

"Don't wot! Hwuwuy up an' get to the wickets, an' mind you play up like—a demon!"

The first innings of Lord Conway's eleven was not a lengthy affair, though the men scored freely. They were all down for 95. Fatty Wynn having captured the lion's share of the wickets, including that of the redoubtable Aynsley.

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"It's a licking for you this time," said Sylvia Carr, as the St. Jim's fellows came off the field. Sylvia was seated in the centre of a bevy of girls, and had been devoting herself to the twofold occupation of criticising the fielding and sampling strawberry ices.

"If we can't put together 95," said Tom Merry, "I'm a Dutchman! Talbot will get 'em off his own bat."

But Talbot soon found himself in misfortune's book. He hit Clyde to the boundary, and then fell an easy prey to short-skip.

Tom Merry, however, batted freely, and was well supported by his comrades. Singularly enough, the St. Jim's innings closed for precisely the same total as that amassed by Lord Conway's team—95.

Then followed the luncheon interval, to the huge delight of Fatty Wynn, who, however, was held in check by Figgins and Kerr, and prevented from overdoing the thing.

"Our first whack was merely a preliminary," said Lord Conway, after a copious draught of lemonade. "You're going to see some cricket now!"

And Tom Merry & Co. did. His lordship batted first with Aynsley, and the pair established themselves at the wickets and simply refused to be separated. They made themselves masters of the bowling, and the fieldsmen were perspiring profusely after an hour's continual leather-chasing.

In that hour, Lord Conway and his actor friend had scored eighty runs—almost a sufficient total in itself. Then Redfern, who had been tried as a change bowler, held a hot return from Aynsley and sent that gentleman back to the marquee, around which was clustered an enthusiastic crowd.

"Eighty for one!" groined Jack Blake. "Carry me home to die, somebody!"

"I think I'll take a turn with the ball," said Arthur Augustus. "None of you fellahs seem to be able to do anythin'."

But, if that were the case, Gussy was in the same boat, for he bowled for half an hour, and failed to dislodge a single ball.

So Fatty Wynn, who was refreshed by his rest, took up his work again.

Fatty seemed to have come into possession of a sort of second wind, for he got three wickets in almost as many minutes.

But Lord Conway still remained, driving the ball with terrific gusto. So far, he had not given a single chance, and it looked as if he was well in the running for the coveted century.

The hundred had gone up long before, and when the fifth wicket fell the hundred and fifty had been passed. Clyde, who came in at this juncture to partner Lord Conway, suggested that the side should declare the innings closed.

Lord Conway shook his head.

"We'll leave nothing to chance," he said. "Besides, my dear fellow, don't you realise that I want to reach my century?"

As if in mockery of Lord Conway's words, he was clean bowled by Tom Merry during the next over.

"Ob, confound it!" he exclaimed ruefully. "Never mind! All's fair in love and cricket. The score's putting on flesh, and that's all that matters. You fellows will have all your work cut out to avoid a heavy licking."

"Don't wub it in, deah boy," implored Arthur Augustus. "It's a wotten shame, considewin' it's our last match, but if we're to go undah, we'll go undah smilin'—eh, you fellahs?"

The "fellahs" nodded assent. Like the sportsmen they were, they meant to see the thing through to the bitter end.

After what seemed an eternity the innings closed, for the magnificent and seemingly unapproachable total of 225.

The afternoon was still at a comparatively early stage, and there would be plenty of time before the hour fixed for the drawing of stumps. But it looked as though St. Jim's would have shot their bolt long before that.

"We'll go in and slog like fury!" said Tom Merry. "It's the only game to play now. No good hanging it out for a draw. What say you, Gussy?"

"I quite agwee with you, deah boy! Let me go in first with you. Talbot seems a twife fagged."

"Right you are!"

And Tom Merry accompanied the swell of St. Jim's to the wickets.

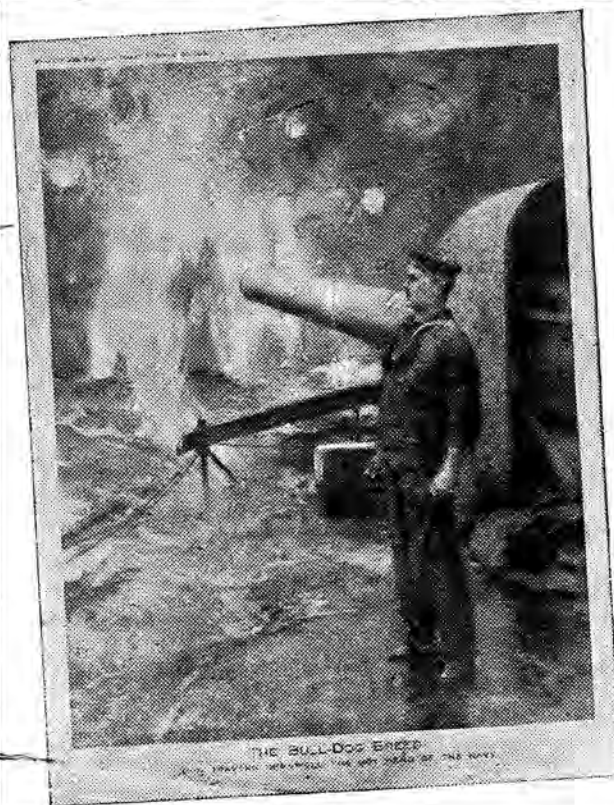
"Going to make a fight of it?" asked Aynsley.

Tom Merry nodded grimly.

"It seems a pretty forlorn hope," he said; "but a game's not lost till it's won, and we mean to put our beef into it."

"Well, you're a plucked 'un, anyway!"

Tom Merry got off the mark in characteristic style. He scored with a freedom and rapidity that was delightful to watch. And, Arthur Augustus putting the same tactics into



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effect, the scoring-board registered 20 in a remarkably short space of time.

The 20 grew to 30, the 30 to 40, and Tom Merry and Gussy remained undivided. The 50, when it was raised, was greeted by a loud and prolonged cheer. An uphill fight is always a stupendous attraction to spectators.

With the score at 55, Tom Merry ran himself out. He had scored a valuable 30, however, and his chums forgave his error of judgment.

Jack Blake helped to take the score to 70 before being dismissed; and Figgins, Kerr, and Wynn, the popular New House trio, made merry to such an extent that 120 were on the board when the fifth wicket fell.

Talbot had not batted yet, and he was a host in himself. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was playing the game of his life. He was hot and parched and fagged, and the perspiration streamed down his set face; but he was resolved to keep on keeping on, no matter what the cost. He told himself that if St. Jim's failed to snatch an eleventh-hour victory the fault would not be his.

Monty Lowther dropped his frivolity for once, and entered into the spirit of the thing, and when a deadly leg-break from Clyde put "Finis" to his innings, he had the satisfaction of having scored a useful 15.

Lord Conway's men began to wake up. Some of them had been inclined to slack a trifle in the field; but they saw now that they could not afford to do so if they wished to emerge victorious.

Meanwhile, Gussy continued to hit in exhilarating fashion. Manners and Digby gave him, in turn, magnificent assistance, and Digby astonished the natives by flogging the ball all over the field and putting together 25 runs before being disposed of.

But St. Jim's was still behind when Talbot—who went in in the unusual position of last man—sauntered out to the wickets. To make matters worse, Talbot confessed to a feeling of indisposition. Despite his iron constitution, the crowded exertions of the week had begun to tell upon him, and he was feeling dizzy and off-colour.

"I must stick it out, though," he told himself. "Gussy can do the hitting."

And Gussy did. He batted heroically, and the crowd, worked up to a pitch of the highest excitement, cheered him to the echo.

"He's great!" said Tom Merry.

"Simply divine!" echoed Jack Blake. "And Miss Carr's clapping him, too! He'll like that!"

As a matter of absolute, grim fact, both the batsmen were crocks. D'Arcy was exhausted and Talbot unwell. But they stuck to their guns gallantly, knowing that they were treading the path which led to victory.

"Give me the ball!" ordered Lord Conway briskly. "I'll see if I can't shift 'em, by jiminy!"

D'Arcy smiled wearily as he faced his brother. His score was 94. Six more runs, and not only would he have completed his century, but St. Jim's would have won! Could he last out?

Click!

It was the familiar sound of bat meeting ball, and then the latter was seen to soar away—farther and farther, beyond the reach of the fieldsmen—till it alighted, with a crash and a clatter, at the entrance to the marquee.

"Six!" chirruped Tom Merry. "Hurrah! We've won, won, won!"

The air rang again and again with wild cheering, and Arthur Augustus bore his blushing honours thick upon him.

But he was almost intoxicated with joy and delight when, a few minutes later, a figure in white flitted across to him and put out a slim hand impulsively.

"You were great!" said Sylvia Carr. "Simply splendid! And if you like—no, I don't care if all the county's looking!—if you like, you can claim your reward—the reward you just missed winning the other day."

And what followed always lingered as a delicious dream in the mind of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

A first-class performance of "Hamlet" was given at Lord Conway's residence that evening, and next day the cricketers returned to St. Jim's, where they were given a right rousing reception. They had fought the good fight, and had deserved well of their country; and for weeks afterwards the main topic of conversation in class-room and corridor, in dormitory and quadrangle, centred around the many exciting events which had occurred during Gussy's Cricket-Week!

THE END.

(Don't miss next Wednesday's Great Story of Tom Merry & Co.—"FRIENDS OR FOES?" by MARTIN CLIFFORD.)

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

NEXT
WEDNESDAY:

"FRIENDS OR FOES?"

OUR GREAT NEW AUSTRALIAN SERIAL!

CORNSHANK BOBBY
BEVERLEY KENT**The Previous Instalments Told How**

Old TOM HILDER, a cattle-farmer of Katfarit, Australia, is faced with ruin for the want of £1,000. He goes to a friend in Sydney, HENRY NORMAN, from whom he obtains the money, but is afterwards robbed, and, in recovering the notes, becomes mixed up, in the eyes of the police, with a gang of scoundrels.

His son BOB receives the money from his father, and takes it to SUMMERS, the bank manager, who is in league with BOARDMAN, a scoundrel who has plotted to ruin old Hilder.

Bob is afterwards arrested, and charged with passing false notes at the bank, but is liberated from his prison-cell by CAPTAIN DASHWOOD, a notorious outlaw.

Bob learns from him that his father was robbed by a man named SUTHERLAND, the leader of another gang of outlaws, and he sets out in pursuit of him. He traces the villain to an hotel, where he also sees his father. A fight ensues, and the place is burnt down. Bob narrowly escapes with his life, believing his father to be dead. He hears later that the old man is still alive.

Bob obtains work on an outlying station, and is left in charge of the owner's house, when Sutherland, with three of his gang, breaks in one night to rob the place. Bob is bound hand and foot by the ruffians, and driven away in a buggy with the cases of silver which they had stolen. After a furious drive for safety they are overtaken by Dashwood, who scatters Sutherland and his companions, and takes Bob to his hiding place, together with the plunder.

(Now read on.)

Dashwood's Premonition.

"It's rum that we should meet again," Dashwood remarked. "Do you remember how I got you out of the police-station the morning after you were arrested on the charge of forging those banknotes, and how, later on, you dropped across me when I was wounded and helped me to dodge the constables?"

"I do," Bob replied.

"It seems as if we're fated to do one another a good turn from time to time," the highwayman remarked. "Now I've rescued you from that chap Sutherland. How did you get into his clutches?"

"I was in charge of the house he robbed."

"What! Old Coulter's place!" Dashwood cried.

"Yes; and I don't know that you have done me such a good turn!" the lad went on, with a touch of bitterness. "My life is ruined, anyhow! Now everyone will think that I aided and abetted in this theft. I was in a bad way before, but there's no hope whatever for me now!"

Dashwood tugged at his moustache.

"There's a thousand pounds' worth of silver in those boxes," he remarked. "Old Coulter went in for the best in every way. And he's a good sort, too—fair in his dealings, and generous to all folk. I wouldn't have robbed him myself, but when I heard that Sutherland was on that lay

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I made up my mind to get the swag as soon as he had grabbed it. I took it from Sutherland, mind you, not from Coulter. There's a deal of difference in that!"

"Not as far as Coulter is concerned," Bob said, with a wry smile. "Nor as far as I'm concerned, either."

Dashwood puffed in silence.

"Luck's been against me for a good bit now!" he grunted presently. "A month ago I lost a big chance on account of a decent sort who would have got into trouble, and now there's you. And I want the money bad, for I know this game can't go on. My only chance is to clear out of Australia altogether."

Bob stared at him. The outlaw's face was sullen, but his words belied his sulky look. He jumped up.

"We'll have a talk when Bogong comes," he said. "I wish I'd never met you, and that's a fact! Once trouble starts, there's no knowing where it will end."

He walked away and sat down on the trunk of a fallen tree on the far side of the clearing. There he remained for half an hour smoking, his arms crossed, his sombrero on the side of his shapely head. It was impossible to divine the thoughts passing through his mind.

Bob watched him with curiosity, not untouched by sympathy. To the world he was a lawless scoundrel, his name struck terror into most hearts; his daring exploits, his thrilling escapes, his contempt for the law, had made him hated. Nothing too bad was said of him; there was no crime possible of which he would not have been deemed capable.

And yet Bob, thrown into his company by chance, knew that much said of him was untrue. He had told the lad on a previous occasion that he would gladly have gone back to an honest life if he could; he had urged him always to run straight. He had done him a good turn, too.

But whatever was on the outlaw's mind at this time he kept it to himself. He did not come back to the hut. Grim-looking, he sat aloof. And tired out, the lad presently dropped into a heavy sleep.

He was awakened by a sharp tap on the shoulder. After all he had gone through, apprehension was ever at his heart-strings, and he sat up with a cry of alarm. He had slept almost all the day, and darkness was falling again. A basilisk pair of eyes were gleaming a foot away from his face.

"Massa told me wake you," a voice said.

"It's Bogong!" Bob gasped, much relieved.

"Yah! Me back after much fun, and your horse much tired!"

"The police pressed you hard, then, but you shook them off?" Bob suggested.

"Police fools with blackfellow!" Bogong grinned. "But massa very queer. Come along!"

"Is he ill?" the lad asked, in surprise.

"Massa's head getting weak, the way he talks," the black tracker said impatiently. "Massa turning old woman!"

"Where is he?"

"Cooking the supper. Me hungry, too!"

Bob followed him to the back of the hut, where a saucy

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

was boiling on the fire. A tempting aroma was coming from it, and as Bob had had no food for twenty-four hours the odour was very welcome to him. Dashwood was standing before the fire, his hands on his hips.

The light thrown upon his broad chest, powerful, square shoulders and finely-chiselled face made him look like a magnificent statue cast in bronze. His eyes were sombre, almost sad.

"Let us have a meal," he said. "Then we'll clear out. Bogong, your work in this place has all been wasted, for some premonition warns me that I'll never come here again. I've had my day. Now the wolves can have theirs."

A Terrible Situation.

There was something so strange in Dashwood's words and manner that Bob stared at him in silence. The outlaw took the saucepan from the fire, and sat down. All helped themselves, and none spoke. When the meal was over Dashwood jumped up.

"Now we'll make a start," he said.

"Where are we going?" Bob asked.

"Back to Coulter's house," Dashwood said. "Yoke the horse in the buggy, Bogong."

"But—but—" Bob began.

"It's this way, sonny," the outlaw said slowly, when the muttering Bogong had been swallowed up in the darkness. "I've taken a liking to you. I know what you've gone through, and you ain't to blame for the trouble that's come upon you. What's more, I never injured any decent chap, as I remember. I'm going to cart that silver back!"

Bob's heart jumped with joy.

"You really mean that?" he gasped.

Dashwood smiled.

"I don't know as I ever say what I don't mean," he replied.

"And I'll be glad when it's beyond my reach, for it would come in very handy just now. That's my affair, though, and I won't talk about it. Your horse is tired out, and will have to stay here. Some day I'll send it back."

"And I'm to go with you?"

"Yes; and there's no reason why you shouldn't stay on at Coulter's. I'll explain all!"

"How will you manage that?"

"Leave the job to me. I've done a deal of hard thinking since this morning. Now here's Bogong with the buggy. He's coming along on my horse. Hi, Bogong, just a word!"

He led the black tracker a few paces away, and they conversed together for a minute. Bogong disappeared again, and presently rode up on Dashwood's horse. The outlaw nodded to him, and, wheeling round, the black boy rode away. Five minutes later Dashwood led the buggy out of the clearing and into the maze of the forest.

He got out on to the track after a time, and they drove away. As they came on to the road Bogong rode up to them, turned, and galloped ahead. Every mile or so he did the same. He was scouting in advance. Dashwood's eyes were anxious. He took a revolver from his pocket, and stuck it in the breast of his coat.

"If we're attacked, I'm going to show fight," he remarked. "In that case, you had better jump out and clear into the bush. I don't want you mixed up in any scrap on my account. That would put the lid on your luck for ever. But we're safe with Bogong, I expect. These black chaps have eyes like a cat in the dark!"

They drove on. The stillness of the semi-tropical night lay far and wide. The parrots and cockatoos were at rest; the hundreds of sounds that keep the bush pulsating with life during daylight had died off. Only occasionally a possum on the branches of a hollow tree giggled with almost human utterance as they passed, or a legion of bullfrogs croaked around the banks of a distant creek.

Back the way they had raced for their lives less than twenty-four hours before they went, up hill and down, travelling swiftly and evenly, but never unduly urging on the horse. They came to the spot where Dashwood had attacked Sutherland and his gang, and the outlaw chuckled.

"I caught up with them by crossing yonder ridge," he remarked, pointing to what now looked like a blur in the sky.

"That saved me four miles. I knew the way, and they didn't. Bless my life, I think that by this time I know this blessed country as Sutherland knows the streets and dens in Sydney and Melbourne! I'm bound to get the best of him whenever he starts up-country!"

"You didn't get to Coulter's house in time to tackle him there?" Bob suggested.

"I wasn't such a juggins!" Dashwood explained. "I let him go in and take the risk. If he got the silver, well and good; I'd have it for certain. If he got nabbed, so much the better. I wouldn't be sorry to see him in chokie. He's

up to every mean trick, and I've sometimes thought of laying hands on him, and dropping him, gagged and bound, outside a police-station, for the troopers to pick up in the morning. But that would only be spiting myself, when all's said, for often when he plans out a coup, and it comes off, I rip in and bag the swag. Here's Bogong again. Well, how goes everything?"

The black tracker reined up.

"Three horses gone this way," the black said.

"When?" Dashwood asked.

"One go first; the others later on. All since morning."

"Then keep your eyes skinned, and we'll drive slower."

Dashwood said. "We're only another three miles along the road before we can turn into a track."

Bogong nodded, and trotted off again. Dashwood lapsed into silence. He shifted the reins altogether into his left hand, and Bob guessed he did this so that his right could grasp his revolver without an instant's hesitation, if necessary. Nothing happened of a suspicious nature, however. They turned on to the track, and jogged along it.

Bob soon began to recognise old surroundings. There was the hill he could see from the hut when he was boundary riding. Below was the vast paddock where Coulter had installed irrigating plant. Beyond that was the house, about two miles away.

They got to the outskirts of the station, and the lad jumped out and pulled out some bars, and through the opening Dashwood drove the buggy. Crossing the paddock, they entered another. For a long time they had not seen Bogong, but now he rode to meet them from out of a clump of pine-trees. It was almost uncanny, the way in which he always managed to be exactly where he was wanted. Dashwood reined up.

"All safe ahead?" he asked.

Bogong shook his head.

"Me don't know," he replied. "Great plain yonder. Me did not ride across it."

"Humph! Then I guess we have gone as far on this line as wheels will safely take us," Dashwood replied. "Still, we can't lug all that silver on our backs up to the house. We must work round and through the trees. You know the way here, Hilder—eh?"

"We can keep under the trees until we come close to the woolshed," Bob explained.

"And how far is that from the house?"

"About a quarter of a mile."

"Good! That's our lay, then. You point out the way!"

Bogong began to mutter, but the outlaw told him to hold his tongue. They drove round slowly, and arrived without any trouble at the woolshed. Dashwood jumped out and looked around.

"There are places where we'll have to go across the open, but for the most part we can keep in shelter," he remarked. "So let's get to work. We've a full hour's job before us!"

He hauled on a box, and Bob helped him to lift it out. Together they carried it towards the house, Bogong being left in charge of the buggy. As Bob knew every step of the way now, Dashwood followed his advice, and congratulated him on his success in taking all possible cover when at last they had laid down the box about a hundred yards from the house. They returned swiftly for another.

Bogong had become restless. He was walking up and down. He had not seen anything to arouse suspicion, and yet he evidently felt uneasy in his mind. He begged Dashwood to dump the rest of the silver there, and clear off at once. But the outlaw only laughed.

"He gets that way at times," he remarked, as he and Bob were carrying the second box, "and I do own that those black chaps have a sort of instinct that no white man can understand. It's the same about the weather, or a landslide, or death, or a bush-fire. They remind me of the instinct of animals. Because they're black and primitive, Nature has given 'em a helping hand, like the dumb creatures, I suppose. But in this case I reckon—Hullo! What's that?"

Across the silence a weird, plaintive cry had rung out. "It's only one of those small tree bears moaning," Bob said.

"Sounds like it, doesn't it?" Dashwood agreed. "And yet—yet— Lay down the box. That's Bogong warning us!"

As he spoke he dropped to the ground, and the lad followed his example. For a couple of minutes they lay flat. Dashwood only occasionally raising his head a couple of inches to look around. The cry had died away. It was not repeated.

"I'm going to forage round," the outlaw said. "Do you stay here, and if Bogong gets more alarmed he is certain to come along to this spot!"

"But you may go into danger," Bob protested.

"If there is danger, it will get us here just as soon as anywhere else," Dashwood grunted. "There's no knowing

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where it is exactly; that's what I'm going to make sure about!"

He glided along the ground like a snake, the rough grass half hiding him, and in a few seconds Bob could not say where he was, or what direction he had taken. As the outlaw had prophesied, Bogong soon arrived. He uttered a sharp note of fear when he saw that Dashwood had moved away, and, dropping down, he began to trail after him. Bob followed. He felt that if the outlaw was in danger, it was only right, after all he had done, that he should be helped, if possible, to escape. Had he not come to the house for the very best of reasons?

Bogong showed more and more excitement every yard they proceeded. He muttered and groaned and burrowed along faster and faster, turning to one side and another as he followed Dashwood with absolute certainty, almost as if he was scenting him out.

They crossed an open strip of land; they passed through a small clump, and came into the open again, and were half-way to another clump a good deal larger, when a hoarse yell arose—a yell that almost froze Bob's veins.

Out of the clump a man dashed; but the man was not Dashwood, as Bob had expected. He stumbled along, and soon another was in hot pursuit. At the same moment a revolver barked, and Dashwood staggered into the open, swaying as he ran. He was wounded!

The first man was almost overtaken. He turned, and gave a cry of fear. Bob sprang to his feet, reckless of his own danger, for he had recognised his father's voice!

His father! He was alive, then, still, thank goodness! He had come there to see him! Now he was in danger!

And Dashwood! Three men had burst out of the clump, and were firing as they rushed after him. If Dashwood was caught, his end was certain. With assistance he could yet escape.

Bob put his hand to his head. The situation was terrible, and he must decide at once. Should he save his father from gnoll, or Dashwood from death? He could not do both, but he could do one.

And just then Dashwood's powerful voice rang out, now weak and desperate.

"Keep 'em at bay! Keep 'em at bay!"

Father and Son Meet Again.

One moment's pause, one swift glance around, and then Bob saw what he had not noticed before. His father, running in one direction, was being pursued by one bushman; Dashwood, weak and wounded, was being chased by a constable and two other bushmen. The lad did not hesitate any longer. He rushed to Dashwood's assistance. If the constable could be thrown off the scent for a few minutes, much might be explained to save the outlaw.

Bogong was already ahead. As Dashwood, who was staggering along, was thrown to the ground, the black tracker sprang into the crowd and disappeared. The struggle became terrific. Dashwood was still making a desperate resistance. When Bob arrived, he saw a medley of arms and legs; he heard hoarse gasps and maledictions. He recognised the trooper by his uniform. Gripping him by the shoulders, he wrenched him back from where he knelt, holding the outlaw by the throat, and threw him on his side. Thus freed, Dashwood fought hard to rise, and, with Bogong tackling one of the bushmen, he was able to get to his feet. He ran for a clump. Bob shouted:

"Bogong, come here! Quick!"

The black turned. He seemed to grasp the full significance of Bob's strategy. The trooper, of course, was the most deadly enemy to him and his master. He ran back to the lad's assistance.

The trooper and Bob were rolling over one another, the man struggling to shake the lad off, the latter trying to hold him down. Bogong's arrival turned the scales, and between them they managed to overcome the trooper. Bob unclasped his belt.

"Get his arms behind his back!" he gasped. "We must manage to tie him somehow! Get hold of his neck; kneel on his back! Don't mind how he kicks! Just a couple of moments more! There, that's done!"

The lad jumped up. The trooper's arms were bound! He lay face-downwards, but presently rolled over on his back, glaring with fury whilst the lad, drawing his breath in gasps, strove to get back his strength.

"You'll pay for this!" the trooper thundered. "I see you, and it's not likely I'll forget you, not if years pass before we meet again! You've defied the law! You've aided the greatest criminal in Australia! Your day of reckoning will come!"

"Haul him up, and drag him along," was all Bob said. "We must get him out of this before we can save Dashwood!"

They dragged him to his feet, and, though he struggled every step, they managed to push him along. Three hundred yards off, they tripped him up, and with his shoulder-belt they strapped him to a tree. Then Bob started to run back.

His father was a prisoner. He could see him being marched to the house by the sturdy bushman who had captured him. Dashwood was a prisoner, too, and the two bushmen were returning with him. The outlaw was quite exhausted, and they were supporting him. Bob went towards them, and recognised one.

"Good-night, Brooks!" he cried.

The bushman stared.

"It's Tracey!" he gasped. "And you've had the sauce to come back here! Well, of all the cheek—"

"Listen to me, Brooks!" the lad began, with some agitation, for he knew that Dashwood's life hung on the success of the appeal he was about to make. "Before you judge me, hear what I have to say. You know that since I came into Coulter's employment I've always played fair!"

"So we thought!" Brooks grunted. "But after this business last night— However, go ahead!"

"I hadn't a hand in stealing the silver plate," the lad began. "On the contrary, I put up the best show I could; but there were four against me, and I couldn't save it."

"That's a likely yarn!"

"He's speaking the truth," Dashwood asserted, in an exhausted voice.

"And you ought to know, I guess, for it was you and your gang that took it," Brooks commented. "Well, go on, Tracey, but you'll be hard set to convince me."

"It wasn't this man who took it," Bob explained. "It was stolen by Sutherland and his push. And they nabbed me and took me away, too, so that the blame would fall on me and they could hide their tracks."

"And you escaped from them, and all that sort of fairy tale!" Brooks sneered.

"This man rescued me. Will you answer me this? Why should I come back here if I had a hand in the business?"

"To bluff and get taken on again."

"And why should I want a job at a pound a week if I had turned thief and got a share of the booty? And if this man—"

"You needn't try to hide his identity. We know who he is. Dashwood, the outlaw!"

"Then why should Dashwood come here to-night? The silver had been bagged; he knew there was a stir going on. Whatever you think of him, he never showed himself a fool yet, did he?" Bob continued. "You never knew him to walk blindly into danger, and without reason, did you?"

"That's all very fine. But how are we to know what his game was, or yours either?" Brooks retorted. "You're very clever at asking questions. Now I'll ask one. If you didn't come on some evil job, then why are you here?"

"To get your thanks and Mr. Coulter's too, I hope, when you hear all," Bob replied. "I say again that it was Sutherland who stole the plate, it was Dashwood who took it from him, and Dashwood came to-night, and I alone with him, to give it back."

"Is that true?" Brooks asked, his face full of astonishment.

"No fooling now. I'll need more than words."

"It is true."

"Then where is the silver?"

"Not far away; but you won't get it until you promise to let Dashwood go free and the old man yonder, too, who hasn't had hand or part in all this, and who doesn't know anything about it," the lad explained in a firm voice, whilst the outlaw chuckled softly. "After all, if Dashwood has played the game and has returned silver worth thousands of pounds to Mr. Coulter, then it's not for Mr. Coulter nor for you, as his employee, to hand the man who did such a good turn over to the police."

Brooks and the other bushman looked at one another. The confidence with which the lad had spoken had begun to carry weight. They were coming to believe that all he had said must be true. Yet they were still dubious.

"It's a rum tale, but it's easily put to the proof," Brooks said. "Where's Trooper Condon, though? He must have a say in this."

"Not likely! He'd nab Dashwood at any cost, and not care much, either, whether Mr. Coulter got the silver back or not, so long as he had that credit and the reward," Bob replied. "This must be settled, and Dashwood must get a

(Continued on page iv of cover.)

HOW 'TOMMY' DOES HIS 'HAIR-DRILL'

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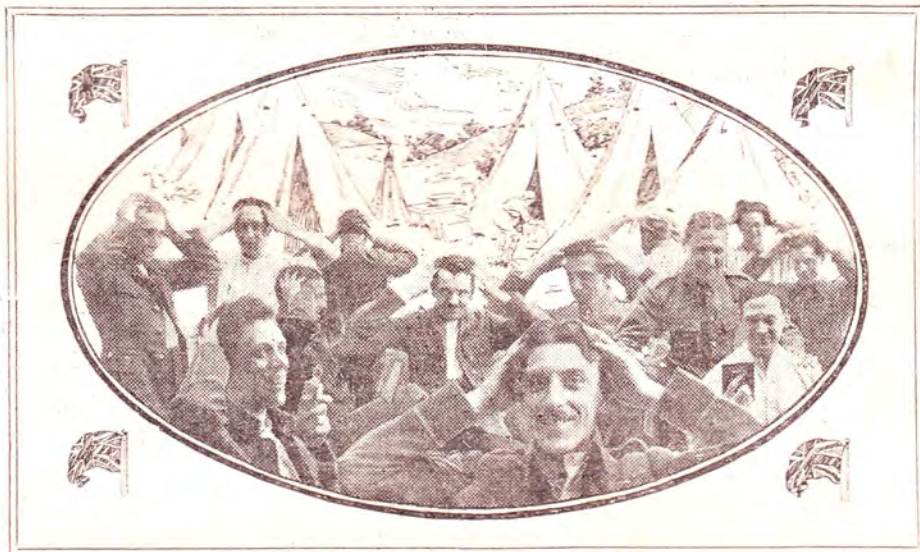
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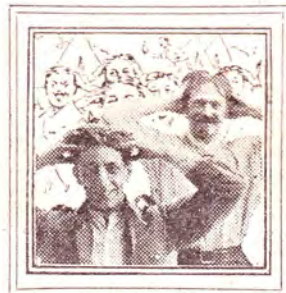


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GEM, September 9th, 1916.

CORNSTALK BOB!

(Continued from page 20.)

good start before the trooper is told. So the sooner you decide the better."

"There's sense in that," Brooks agreed. "Then what do you suggest?"

"I only want your promise that if I hand over the silver you will let us all clear out."

Brooks rubbed his chin thoughtfully. Suddenly he laughed. "Agreed!" he said. "My business is to consider Mr. Coulter's interests. It's for the police to catch an outlaw, and they're only getting another run. They'll nab you yet, though," he continued, turning to Dashwood, "and mebbe sooner than you reckon on."

Bob crossed quickly towards the other prisoner. His heart was thumping like a sledge-hammer, a lump was in his throat. The old man was much shaken; the anxiety, the long and weary travelling, the ill-usage to which he had been subjected, all had left heavy lines upon his drawn face. Yet a certain doggedness was still there. He would fight to the bitter end.

"Father!" Bob said.

Old Hilder, who had been gazing moodily on the ground, quickly raised his head. A quiver went through his frame, his sunken eyes shone with joy and amazement.

"Bob!" he gasped.

"Yes, at last we meet again, father. You came here to meet me?"

"I did. I happened to hear you were here. I met Kerr, and he told me. You remember Kerr?"

"Our bullock driver! He was here at the shearing," Bob explained. "And you happened to come at a very unlucky time, for there has been bad business."

"So this man has told me," old Hilder said. "And he said something for which I would have knocked him down if I had had the strength," he continued, his eyes flashing.

"I know what he told you—that I had turned thief," Bob replied. "But don't bother about that. Brooks, his mate, knows already that the charge is false."

The bushman laughed.

"That's a likely story!" he scoffed.

"So Brooks thought at first, but he's changed his mind," Bob retorted. "Come along and see him. We're all going to clear out in five minutes, with his consent."

They followed the lad, and presently, accompanied by the other bushmen and Brooks, they went to the spot where he and Dashwood had laid down the first box of silver. At the sight of it the bushmen were at last quite convinced. Handing over the second box on the way to the buggy, they quickly unloaded the others.

"There's the lot, Brooks," Bob said. "And now, father, jump in!"

"Where are we going?" the old man asked.

The lad sighed.

"I don't know," he replied. "The future looks blacker than ever, but the first thing is to get away."

Old Hilder took his seat, and Dashwood, in much pain, sank down behind. Bogong mounted his horse. Bob turned to Brooks.

"Do you now believe that I am innocent?" he asked.

"I do," Brooks replied.

"Then shake hands."

"I will, with pleasure; and when Mr. Coulter comes home—and he's on the way already in no end of a state—I'll tell him all," Brooks affirmed. "He's a stern man, as you know, but he's just."

"Unfortunately he can't help me," Bob said.

"Why do you think that?"

"I'm going miles away. I've a big task before me of which I never told you. My name is not Tracey, and I don't care who knows that now. This is my poor old father; we have both been treated shamefully by a scoundrel named Boardman in the first instance, and now he's got our property. My father was robbed by Sutherland and his gang in Sydney, and he has been hunted by the police ever since, and so have I. We have to clear ourselves, and we can't do that until my father's friend, a Mr. Norman, returns to Australia, and we don't know when that may be. Now the police will be hunting for us harder than ever. We will be identified with Dashwood, and every man's hand will be against us. The odds are that we will be flung into gaol, but by hook or by crook we mean to keep on fighting."

"I won't be against you, but I'll stand to you any way I can; and I feel sure that Mr. Coulter will do the same," Brooks replied, as he wrung the lad's hand warmly. "And who knows? We may be able to help you yet."

Reunited,

With these parting words ringing in his ears, Bob picked up the reins and drove off. His resource and pluck had averted a terrible tragedy. At one time it had seemed as if they must all be captured and sentenced, at the least, to years of imprisonment. Now that immediate danger was over, and Bob felt greatly relieved. Bogong's honest grin, given occasionally as he rode by the side of the buggy, showed that he, too, fully appreciated the fact.

And out of danger good had come. Once more the lad and his father were re-united; the months of anxious suspense were over; from this on they could stick together, and fight together. That was a great deal gained. And Bob was eager to hear all that his father had to tell; but, for the moment, he was intent solely on leaving as great a distance as possible between the buggy and Mr. Coulter's house. After driving six miles, he spoke to Bogong.

"Are we safe, do you think?" he asked.

The black tracker nodded.

"We verro safe," he replied. "I fall behind now, and gallop up if men follow. You drive swift."

Bogong drew in the rein, and Bob kept the horse in the shafts at a swift, steady pace. He looked at his father. The old man was sitting tense, his hands gripping a stout stick; he seemed just as full of fight as ever.

"You're not feeling the worse for this scrap, father?" he asked.

"No!" replied old Tom. "I've been used to hard knocks all my life, and I've given my share, too; and what's more, I'm going to give a few more before my number goes up. But I haven't yet got over the impudence of those chaps in thinking that my son could play a low-down game."

"Don't worry about that; suspicion was dead against me," Bob laughed. "And Brooks, as you can see, is as straight as a die; he's on my side now, and whatever else happens I'm cleared of that charge."

"That's so," Tom agreed. "And there's more than enough as it is, against us, in the eyes of most people. I get fair wild, my boy, when I think over it all. And that our Boardman is the cause of our misfortune. But perhaps it won't be long before I'll be able to show him up."

"You've heard that he's got our farm?"

"Yes, Kerr told me so, and it didn't come as a surprise. How confiding I've been; I've trusted that villain Boardman for the last twenty years; I've never harboured an ill-natured thought against him; I did more than any other man around Katfarit to give him a start in life; and this is the way he serves me in return. If it wasn't for him I wouldn't have had to go to Sydney to get the loan of a thousand pounds from Henry Norman, and I would never have got into the clutches of Sutherland. There's a heavy reckoning to come for all this, mark my words, Bob."

"And may the day not be distant; though at present there doesn't seem to be any loophole for us," Bob replied.

"You know I saw you at Mossfred, in the hotel, the night it was burnt down?" he continued. "You were in the room with Sutherland and his gang, fighting desperately for your life."

Tom Hilder turned his head quickly.

"Then it was you!" he cried. "I thought I heard your voice; but I felt sure my hour had arrived, and I fancied it was just one of those tricks of mind, of which I've heard, that come to dying men. That was a close shave, lad."

"I gave you up for lost until Kerr told me, a few weeks back, that he had seen you since that night," Bob explained.

"How did you escape?"

"In the scuffle the lamp went over."

"Yes, I saw that."

"I was on the ground, and the room caught fire at once. The villains knew how quickly a wooden house gets aflame; they got scared at the very start, and dashed for the door. But I caught one of them by the ankle, and brought him down. I got up at the same time as he did, and clung on to him, and wouldn't let go; I had strength enough left for that. He partly dragged me, and I partly followed him out of the house."

"And then?"

"Sutherland saw me, and was afraid to leave me there for fear I'd turn on him. He passed the word, and they hustled me along. Their horses were tethered fifty yards from the hotel. They threw me on one, and galloped away; and it wasn't till we had gone ten miles that I got a chance to make a bolt on my own. I shot away, not caring where I went, and they followed, but I shook them off."

"Boardman was at Mossfred that night," Bob said.

"Are you certain?"

"Kerr told me so," Bob replied; "and I, too, was nearly knocked out altogether that night, and by a scoundrel named Gell, who used to work around Katfarit."

"Gell!" old Tom almost shouted. "Then he did see me in the hotel!"

(Another grand instalment next week.)