

BONNY LAD'S RACE!

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



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BONNY LAD'S RACE!

A Magnificent

New, Long, Complete Story of

Tom Merry and Co. at St. Jim's.

By

MARTIN CLIFFORD.

CHAPTER I.

Rogues in Council.

"GOOD MORNIN', young gent," said Mr. Herbert Blinks affably.

He spoke to two members of the Shell Form at St. Jim's—Racke and Crooke.

Mr. Herbert Blinks was a bookmaker, and he looked it. He was also a swindling scoundrel; and to the unprejudiced eye he looked that, too.

But Racke and Crooke had no special objection to scheming scoundrels, being very much of that type themselves; and they were very thick with Mr. Herbert and his half-brother, Mr. William Blinks, at this time.

The Blinks were members of the select society at the Green Man, an establishment which was out of bounds for St. Jim's, but which Racke and Crooke and a few more of the school's gay dogs frequently visited on the sly.

But it was at his own residence, a rather dirty and dilapidated house just past Rycombe, on the Westwood road, that the elder brother was now receiving the black sheep of the Shell.

"Bit of a rough house here yesterday, wasn't there?" asked Crooke, with a grin.

"There was some trouble—some slight trouble, as you might say," admitted Mr. Herbert guardedly. "I ain't made up my mind yet whether I shan't report the feller Darsey an' 'is very 'igh-anded young friends to your 'Ead."

"I shouldn't, if I were you," said Racke.

"Why for not? Do 'e 'appen to be a rat of yours?"

"Not likely!" replied Racke, with emphasis. "I into the swankin' idiot."

"Put it there, sir," said Mr. Herbert Blinks, and held out a hand which seemed to testify to the present high price of soap.

Racke, who prided himself on his white and unblemished hands, nevertheless "put it there." Racke was a trifle bruised about the face, and still more about the body, where it did not show. Crooke also had some bruises.

There two had not only refused help to Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, the swell of the Fourth, when he had been imprisoned by Blinks Brothers, but, moreover, they had triumphed over him with sneers and gibes.

And, naturally, the first thing Arthur Augustus had done on his return to St. Jim's was to seek out Racke and Crooke. From the crowd of chums who accompanied him, Gussy asked nothing but moral support. He had difficulty with Digby, who was particularly anxious to attend to Crooke while his chum thrashed Racke. But Blake had held back Dig.

Within three minutes Racke had owned that he had no use for more, and in about a similar space of time Crooke had professed himself satisfied.

And Arthur Augustus, barely marked, felt much happier.

"What's this varn about a pony of

D'Arcy's that you're keepin', Blinks?" asked Racke, tendering his elegant cigarette-case to the gross-looking bookmaker.

"A pony of 'oo's?"

"D'Arcy's—the fellow you shut up here."

Very deliberately Mr. Herbert Blinks lighted the gold-tipped cigarette, and blew out the match, before he answered.

"I don't know nothink about no pony of young Darsey's," he said, puffing out a cloud of smoke.

"So that's the game, is it? Well, I'm not blamin' you. That tailor's dummy goes about askin' to be taken in, an' it isn't goin' to grieve me if he gets what he asks for."

"I don't know nothink about no game," said Mr. Blinks, in a fat, rumbling voice. "As for a takin' of anybody in—well, now, surely you knows me better nor to think that, Mr. Racke."

"Of course I do, Blinks. I know you wouldn't dream of doin' it—unless you got the chance!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" chuckled Crooke. But Crooke did not feel quite easy, and he gave Racke a sly kick under the table.

If there was to be any hanky panky work in connection with the black pony which Arthur Augustus D'Arcy had been foolish enough to buy, and mad enough to entrust to the Blinks to take care of, Crooke would have preferred not to know of it in advance.

"There's a black pony 'ere—well, not to say exactly 'ere, but round the corner, as you might say," admitted Mr. Herbert Blinks, looking very knowing indeed. "If young Darsey says that pony's 'is—well, let 'im prove it."

"He can do that all right," Crooke said uneasily. "Several chaps were with him when he bought it."

"An' 'e won't 'ave no sort of objection to tellin' your 'Ead all about the deal, I don't," s'pose," sneered the bookmaker.

"You've got 'em down there," said Racke. "You've got D'Arcy in a cleft stick! Hold on to that, an' 'e'll never dare to do a thing—it would mean too big a row. And the other fellows would be dragged in; he wouldn't fancy that."

"Says 'e bought the gee off a man named Simon Gloop," Mr. Blinks rumbled on. "Sounds likely, don't it? Let 'im produce 'is Simon Gloop! I don't believe there never was no such a man. A made-up name, that is, I'll lay a quid."

This was rather reckless on the part of Mr. Blinks, as he not only knew Simon Gloop, but had had dealings with him on more than one occasion.

"He's got a receipt, I suppose?" said Crooke.

"'E hain't!" replied Mr. Blinks emphatically and triumphantly.

"You mustn't expect that the bizney will be chucked at once," Racke said. "These bounders are stickers, y'know! You'll have some of them along here before the day's out, begad!"

Mr. Blinks's florid and dirty face changed colour at that.

"Let 'em all come!" he said, with a

jovial recklessness that sounded rather forced.

"Well, it's no affair of mine," Racke said.

"Of course, it's no affair of ours—not the least in the world!" Crooke hastened to add.

"Oh, don't say that, now! See 'ere, gentlemen, I was a-counthin' on you to give me the straight tip, case anythink was a-goin' to happen, us all bein' up agin this 'ere young Darsey. Come now! Promise as you'll give me warnin' if you fear of 'im doin' okkard things—goin' to a lawyer chap, or any game of that sort."

Again Crooke gave Racke's shins a tap. Racke favoured Crooke with a glare like a basilisk.

"Oh, we'll do that," he said.

"Speak for yourself!" growled Crooke.

But neither Racke nor the bookmaker took any notice of his growl.

"Now I'll let you gents enter a secret that everyone don't know yet!" Mr. Blinks said confidentially.

"It wouldn't be much of a secret if everyone did, I'm dashed if it would," said Racke.

"I don't want to know any more secrets!" growled Crooke.

"But you can't 'elp bein' interested in this one, 'cos it's a sport like you."

Crooke was idiot enough to be pleased by that. A fellow with any sense of decency would have thought it a very left-handed compliment to be called "a sport" by this low swindler. But it tickled Crooke's foolish vanity.

"As long as it's nothin' about that dashed pony," he said.

"It ain't," said 'ere; you ain't 'eard, I 's'pose, as there's to be races at Westwood in a week or two?"

"No. It's rot, an' you must have got hold of some silly lie somewhere, begad!" replied Racke, with his most pronounced man-of-the-world air.

It's the straight griffin. On'y pony an' Galloway races, it's true; but that's better nor nothink."

"More unlikely than the other thing," Racke said.

"Sounds unlikely enough, I desay. 'Appens to be true, all the same. An' I could tell you 'ow it's been wangled—for in course it 'ad to be wangled. But you can take my word for it as it is, right."

"I don't see why it shouldn't be, Racke," Crooke said. "I say, Mr. Blinks, can you put us on to anything good for it?"

"Rather! A dead snip!"

"I'll believe it when I see it in print, Blinks," said Racke. "I'm not doubtin' your word—I think your information's wrong, that's all! But I hope it's right—an' aftern at the races would suit me down to the ground. It's been horrid dull lately, with nothin' in the racin' way goin' on, except in Ireland."

"My information's all right, sir. 'Tllo, young Bill! What's the blessed matter with you?"

Mr. William Blinks, who was young enough to have been the son of his half-

brother, and cunning enough to have been his father, looked in with a face on which beads of perspiration stood out. There was some fear in that face, too.

"They're a comin', Bert!" he said. "A dozen or more of 'em!"

"What! Our fellows?" demanded Crooke, in alarm almost equal to that of the bearer of the news. "We'd better clear out, Racke!"

But it was too late for that. Racke and Crooke had only just time to dodge out of sight of anyone who might chance to look through the window, before there came a knock at the door—a loud blench, and caused the two black sheep to feel very uncomfortable.

"Here, I say, we must get out of this!" said Racke. "We'll cut into the back room, an' wait for a chance to sneak out."

"I'll go, too," said Mr. William Blinks, in haste.

"No, you won't!" snapped his brother. "You'll just stay 'ere! All right, gen'l'men, I won't go to the door for a minnit."

CHAPTER 2.

Arthur Augustus States His Case.

"WILL you come, Talbot?"

"Of course, But I wasn't in the affair yesterday, and there ought to be plenty without me."

"I would not dream of pressin' the mattah if there is any disinclination on your part, dear boy; but you are vewy lefel-headed, an' I am suah—"

"Say no more, Gussy! You do me proud! I'm sorry I missed the little entertainment yesterday, as a matter of fact; and I shall be only too pleased to come along now."

When the Hon. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, of the Fourth Form at St. Jim's, talked—and he talked often, and at length—he liked to be sure of an audience.

It was said of old that no man is a prophet in his own country; and it must be admitted that in Study No. 6, on the Fourth Form passage, which D'Arcy shared with Blake, Herries, and Digby, a patient audience was a rare thing. Gussy's chums even went so far as to say "he bore them!"

Today there was special need for eloquence, and Arthur Augustus was determined to meet that need. But it would have been a pity to waste eloquence on the desert air—or on mere Blinks, which came to very much the same thing. Moreover, it was not safe to visit the house of Blinks alone, as Gussy well knew; and though prudence had never been one of his leading characteristics, he had enough of it to see that it was better to take his chums with him than to put them under the necessity of coming and rescuing him, as they had done the day before.

Today was the day for going again—keen indeed. It was felt that the Blinks were behaving in a way that was neither more nor less than making light of the juniors of St. Jim's. And that sort of thing was emphatically not to be borne with.

So Blake and Herries and Digby were the war-path. So were the Terrible Three—Tom Merry, Monty Lowther, and Manners. So, likewise, were the chums of No. 9—Ernest Levison, Sidney Clive, and the erratic Cardew. And from the New House came Figgins and Kerr and Fatty Wynne—a hefty trio.

And these were to have come. Grundy of the Shell volunteered—his offer including Wilkins and Gunn, as well as himself, of course. And it was very hard indeed to choke Grundy off.

Kangaroo & Co. asked whether further

help was wanted, were told politely that it wasn't, and withdrew. Julian & Co. of the Fourth did not like being left out, but were less persistent than Grundy. Redfern & Co. of the New House might have been added to the crowd.

But it was enough of a crowd already, and Talbot only was invited to join it. Arthur Augustus talked to Talbot on the way. Arthur Augustus was just a trifle tired of talking to his rescuers of yesterday.

"Those fellows appeal to me to take altogether a w'ong view of the mattah, you see, Talbot," he said.

"That's a pity, Gussy," replied Talbot gravely.

"Yaas, so I think. They seem to imagine that I have acted like a sillay ass!"

"Surely not, old chap! You must have mistaken their meaning."

Gussy shook his head.

"I am afraid that it is not so, Talbot," he said sadly. "When a chap calls another chap a sillay ass, an' a putwid idiot, an' a cwass chuckle-head, an' a blithewin' maniac, about a hundred times, he must mean somethin' by it!"

"Well, it does look a little as if he might mean some of it," admitted Talbot, smiling. "But surely no one has been so rude as that to you, Gussy?"

"I w'egwet to say that several have. Blake, for one; an' Hewes. Dig has been slightly more aggressive. Then there is Levison, who expresses himself with a freedom which I cannot help w'egardin' as misbecomin' in a fellow who might, but for me— But we will not go into that, for Levison is quite the right sort now, if only he would learn to keep that unwuly membah, his tongue, in check. Cardew does say vewy much, but he looks at a person as though he considahed a person the vewy last thing in asses, don'tcherknow. An' Lowthah—weally, I think Lowthah's absurd habit of makin' w'otten jokes is gettin' quite unendurable!"

No one but Talbot would have let the swell of the Fourth say all that without interruption. But Talbot heard him through patiently, and when he stopped for breath, inquired:

"What's it all about? I've heard tales of a sort, but I haven't had a really plain yarn yet; and you are the only fellow who can give it me, it seems."

Which, as Blake would have said, was fairly asking for it!

But Gussy proved less long-winded than might have been expected, thus tempted:

"I bought a pony—a vewy nice pony, an' well worth the pwice I paid. But Blake an' the west thought it a vewy foolish thing to do. What do you think, Talbot?"

"All things considered, old chap, I don't see that you can have much use for a pony here."

"Pewraps not. Well, then, I suppose not. But should you see any reason for takin' it for granted that the boundah who sold me the pony had stolen it?"

Talbot whistled—a long, low whistle of surprise.

"Why had some reason, I should think," he said. "Of course, it might be mere suspicion, but—"

"That's just what it was, Talbot, I am quite suah of it. At least—well, I am not quite suah, but I hope so," added the candid Arthur Augustus. "But that is only the beginnin'. I had to find some play for the little gear, you know; an' that's where these Blinks bwutes came in."

"Yes?"

"An' when I went to see him, they had taken him out dwirin'—a high dogcart, much too big for him. I wemon-

twated, of course, an' I had a fight with the youngah Blinks—a most howwible young cad! He knocked me down with a bwoom, an' I lost my senses. Then they locked me up in a dirty woom, an' pwented I had assaulted Blinks, finish with gwoss violence an' quite without provocation. An' then our fellows came along, an' w'essened me, you know. Oh, I almost forgot, the Blinks wanted to blackmail me—they said a fivah would cleah it."

"They must be particularly shady specimens," said Talbot.

"Wathah! But that's not all. They have taken my pony—hidden it somewhere. An' they mean to stick to him! They say he is not mine, an' that I cannot pwove he is. An' of course, if there was a w'ow, an' the Head came to heah of it—"

"Yes, that would be awkward," Talbot said. "I take it our mission to-day is to carry off the pony by force, if he is there, and to talk to these sweeps in a way calculated to make them deliver him up if he isn't?"

"Yaas, that's the ideah, Talbot."

"Well, we've the necessary force. And I think we may be able to work it the other way, in the pony's absence. But I wouldn't be too sure about that. If—or when—you get him back, Gussy, you mean to send him home, of course?"

"Do you weally think—"

"I am sure, old chap. You can't keep a pony here, you know."

Gussy sighed heavily. "It had been largely because he had contested that point so hotly, an' he had had so many stiff-handed compliments hurled at his head."

"If you say so, Talbot; but weally—"

"It's the one thing to do. We're all ready to back you up when you are treated like this, of course. But it's a vewy different thing to back you up in a matter that both the Head and Ralton would be down on if they knew about it."

"Yaas, no doubt. It's a bit wuff on me, in a way, because I weally want the pony heah, an' I don't need him at home. But I defy anyone to say that I am an unw'asonable person when pwopwly treated; an' you weally have a most weasonable way of puttin' things, Talbot!"

Talbot smiled. The only difference between his way of dealing with Gussy and that of Gussy's other friends was that he left out the abusive epithets of which Blake and the rest were so prodigal. But it was a big difference. Arthur Augustus was far easier to lead than to drive.

"Here we are!" said Blake, turning round. "Now who's going to do this chin-wagging?"

"I shan't naturally state my own case," replied Arthur Augustus loftily.

"Bet you you don't, Gustavus! We're not goin' to let you. There's only one w'orse thing pos'n than that, which would be to let Grundy conduct proceedings. But Grundy has been choked off so that can't happen. I don't mind taking on the job myself."

The jaw of Arthur Augustus was unusually prominent, and the eyes of Arthur Augustus gleamed.

"I decline absolutely to allow you to do anythin' of the sort, Blake!" he said.

"Right-ho! I'm not so keen on it as all that. It had better be Tom Merry, then."

"It will most assum'dly not be Tom Mewwy!"

"Gussy has some discrimination, and he knows that I am the only man for the job!" said Lowther.

"Bai Jove! I would wathah have some giddy clown f'ewm some giddy!"

circus than you, Lowthah! Your wotten jokes—"

"Say no more, Gussy! I am quite capable of taking a friendly and polite hint, like that."

"If you ain't allowed to do the spouting yourself, old scout—and you're not going to be—who is to do it?" asked Tom Merry.

"Talbot!" answered Gussy, with a gulp. "I have stated the case to him, and I may say that we are in full agreement."

"The old Talbot!" remarked Lowther, touching his forehead significantly. "It's come upon him with dreadful suddenness; but we must help him to bear it!"

CHAPTER 3.

The Limit of Cheek!

M^{R.} WILLIAM BLINKO'S hurried flight to warn his brother had not been seen, and the presence of Racke and Crooke in the house of Blinko was not at first even suspected by their schoolfellows.

It was Blake who gave the first loud rap at the door.

No one came in response to it.

"Wouldn't it be a good move to send a detachment round to the back?" asked Cardew. "I don't happen to know who is supposed to be in command of the forces, except that I'm not, by gad! But it strikes me as likely to be useful. The pony might be there, or our friends inside might do a bunk by the back way while we're waitin'."

"Good egg!" said Tom Merry emphatically. "Will you go, Cardew?"

"Oh, if you like. But not alone, of course. If there's to be any giddy scurrying, I shall exercise a general's right to lead from the rear. It's beastly hot to-day, you know."

Levison and Gussie agreed at once to accompany Cardew. So, after a moment's hesitation, old Herries, Digby, Manners, and Fatty Wynn.

"Bai Jove! Seven an' six makes thirteen!" said Arthur Augustus, in dismay.

"I believe that is the case," replied Lowther. "But so do eight and five, and it would really be to the advantage of all concerned if you followed Cardew, Gussy."

"Wats. Are you not awaaah, Lowthah, that thirteen in a vewy unlucky numbah?"

"I've heard other old women say so before now," answered the humorist of the flock. "But if you feel that it constitutes a difficulty, my dear chap, the difficulty is easily overcome. On the opposite side of the road 'there is a bank on which the wild thyme grows,' at least, I dare say it does, and it's all the same if it does not. The principle's the same. Go and sit there, Gussy! Your mission in this world is the ornamental, not the useful, and—"

Lowther was cut short. Blake had rapped again without getting an answer; and then Tom Merry had taken the knocker, and had given a gentle tap that might have been heard on the other side of the village.

Mr. Herbert Blinko appeared at the door. He did not open it widely—only enough to show a section of his red face.

"Wodjer want?" he rumbled.

Tom promptly put his foot inside the door.

"We desire to come in and indulge in chery chat with you," replied Monty Lowther.

"I don't want no chat alonger you, an' what's more, I don't mean to 'ave none!"

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"Your mistake!" snapped Tom; and he pushed him at the door.

Behind him Blake and Figgins, Talbot and Lowther, Kerr and D'Arcy lent their weight. Mr. Herbert was forced back, scowling.

The passage was narrow, and the invaders were impatient.

The door of the room Mr. Herbert had just left proved to be locked. He twisted the handle, and swore loudly at Mr. William, who appeared to be inside.

"You talk to them in the 'all, Bert!" yelled Mr. William. "They ain't a-comin' in 'ere. I don't want to 'ave nothink to say to them!"

Mr. Herbert was being squeezed against the door in a manner that was distinctly painful. He could not get down the passage, for he was cut off in that direction. And he did not want to give away Racke and Crooke, who were in the back room. He regarded them as valuable clients.

"Open this 'ere door, you blinkin' young ijut!" he howled.

"Shan't!" rejoined Mr. William, most improperly.

The door was quivering. Mr. Herbert was a light weight, and the pressure was considerable.

"You'll 'ave me through, you young fiends!" he roared.

"Quite a good notion!" said Monty Lowther cheerily. "Heave-ho, my hearties!"

"Heave-ho it is!" cried Figgins. And heave-ho it was!

It was not the door. It was only the lock. But the happy result was the same.

Mr. Herbert sprawled on his broad back in the room, and Talbot was the only one of the six who avoided sprawling on top of him.

Mr. William made a bolt for the window. But it was shut, and the lower sash did not move easily.

"Yarooogh!" howled Mr. William, as Talbot caught him by one leg and yanked him back. "Lemme alone, can't you? I don't want nothink to do with none of you!"

"It's a bit late for that," replied Talbot.

"What's it gotter do with you, any way? I don't know you from—"

"Simon Gloop, shall we say?" asked Lowther, who was the first of the heap which pinned down Mr. Herbert to arise.

"I don't know no Simon Gloop," replied the etable-boy sullenly.

It seemed plain that the Brothers Blinko intended to stick to their guns. The pony was theirs. That was their story. D'Arcy said it was his. Well, let him prove it!

They knew that proving it would entail publicity, from which the fellow they were trying to windle would naturally shrink. And they were inclined to exaggerate his difficulties. Being radically dishonest themselves, they failed to realize that, if the pony had been stolen, D'Arcy would have given it up to its owner, on proof of ownership, without a murmur. To the Blinks it appeared that it was all one to D'Arcy whether Benny Lad went to one person or another, if possession of the pony was to be lost to him.

There remained the Head and Mr. Ralston; and these constituted the real strength of the rascals' position, though they did not know it.

Exposure must mean a row, and a row into which Gussy's claims would be dragged. And that Gussy felt, was to be avoided at almost any cost.

Mr. Herbert was suffered to arise. "This means callin' in of the lor!" he

rumbled. "Assaultin' of a man in 'is own 'ouse!"

"Better go and fetch Crump, Monty," said Tom quietly.

"'Ere, come off that! When I says the lor I don't mean no silly fool of a bluebottle!"

"If I were you, D'Arcy, I should take a look up the road and see whether that solicitor fellow is on the way," Lowther remarked.

Gussy's mouth was open to ask a question which would have comforted the enemy; but Kerr joggled him in the ribs in time, and the Blinks failed to notice.

"Train may be late," said Tom.

"Look 'ere, what's the blessed use of lawyers in a business like this 'ere?" asked Mr. Herbert, wiping his heated brow.

"I'm under age, Bert. The lor can't touch me!" burred Mr. William.

"That is a delusion which will soon be dissipated," said Lowther.

But now Mr. William remembered something.

"Train's in," he said. "I see it myself. An' nobody didn't get off it. They're a-tryin' to 'ave us, Bert!"

"That cock won't fight, you pups!" snarled Mr. Herbert. "Now let's 'ear what all this means, for bust me if I understand it!"

"Will you speak, Talbot?" said Arthur Augustus.

Talbot stepped forward, looking very cool and capable. Though not older in years than most of the rest, he was older in mind; and there was more of the man than the boy in his manner now.

"You are detaining a pony, which is D'Arcy's property," he said.

"Let 'im prove it!" snarled the elder Blinko.

It does not require proving, as you well know. Several of our fellows were with him when he bought it."

"Yes; but they wasn't with 'im when 'e sold it!"

"Oh, weally! I must speak, Tom Mewwy! This is the vewy limit of cheek! Do you mean to pretend that I sold the pony to you, howwid woffian?" cried Arthur Augustus.

"I don't mean to pretend nothink. We bought 'im and paid for 'im. 'Orse-dealin's a part of our trade. P'raps you wasn't aware of that, Mister Blinko's Talbot?"

"Of course, you can show me a receipt for the money?" said Talbot, still quite cool.

It was more than Gussy was. Three of them were needed to keep him back. He was almost foaming at the mouth.

"Never 'ad one. Afore we could git pen an' ink, your plucky young friend set out my brother Bill, who ain't 'is 'isize, an' blessed near killed 'im. We 'ad to 'ave 'im up, 'e was that despit'."

"You—you— Oh, weally, this is beyond beashin'!"

"Then your lot come along an' committed assault an' battery on both me an' Bill. An' now you've come along again an' done likewise. Are you agoin' to make a 'abit of it, may I ask?"

"Yuss; that's what Bert an' me wants to know—are you agoin' to make a 'abit of comin' 'ere an' knockin' of us about?" demanded Mr. William.

"On the whole, it seems possible that we may have to do so. But if you hand over the pony, we shall be pleased to cut any further acquaintance with you," replied Talbot coolly.

"We won't ask you for apologies, for we really should not value them from persons of your sort."

"Oh, you can 'old your 'ead 'igh now, Mister Bloomin' Burglar Talbot!" roared the elder rascal.

Talbot's eyes blazed, and his hands

clenched. But he kept command of his temper.

These scoundrels were friends of Lodgery, the billiard-sharper at the Green Man, and Lodgery had known Talbot in the old days, when he was the Toff, a cracksmen among cracksmen, and a leader despite his youth.

The past rose up against Talbot like this now and then. But, among his loyal chums, who trusted him utterly, he could bear it. And even now he was not as furious as were Tom Merry and Arthur Augustus D'Arcy at Blinko's taunt.

"That sort of thing will not pay you," Talbot said quietly. "Is the pony here?"

"No; the pony ain't!"

"Where is he, then?"

"Find out!"

"Remember, my man, that the charge against you will be a very serious one!"

"You daren't, none of you, make no charge!"

In that defiant statement there was just such a measure of truth as made it very difficult to answer.

It was not absolutely true, because, if things came to the worst, Gussy and his chums would rather face a really big row than knuckle under to Blinko Brothers.

But they wanted to settle the matter without a row, if possible.

Before Talbot could answer, Levison put his head in at the door.

"Racke and Crooke!" he said. "They're in the back room, an' the chaps are going for them!"

CHAPTER 4.

Tar and Feathers!

CARDEW had led his detachment into the yard—or, rather, had strolled in after them. The gate had had to be opened from inside.

But Herries, bunked up by his side, had done that. Cardew's notions of leadership did not include doing such things himself.

He walked in leisurely fashion to the stable.

"Not here, by gad!" he said, with a frown.

"Did you expect to see the pony?" asked Clive, grinning.

"No, dear boy, I didn't. But I never count on seeing what I expect to see, so the see might have been here. Let's take a survey of what is here."

There was not much. The presence of the two black sheep of the Shell was as yet unknown. But Digby found a barrel of tar, and muttered by it lovingly.

"It's a pity if we can't use this some way," he said. "I like the smell of tar, don't you, Manners?"

"Not particularly keen on it. You can sniff at it all you like, Dig. It's the enemy's tar, of course. And sniffing it won't make it any less."

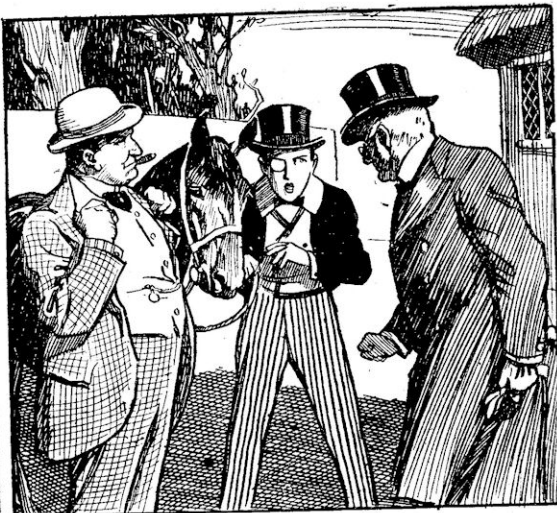
"Oh, yes, it's their tar!" replied Dig. "It's theirs, sure enough. And I want them to have it. Wonder how the pow-wow's getting on?"

Manners had a strong suspicion that Digby hoped the pow-wow—otherwise the settlement of trouble with Blinko Brothers—was not getting on at all nicely. Manners rather hoped that himself, in a way. Of course, Gussy must have his pony back; but not half enough had been done to those rotters the day before—so thought both Dig and Manners.

It was Fatty Wynn who found Racke and Crooke.

The broken windows of yesterday had not yet been mended, and the two cad- of the Shell were feeling very uneasy indeed. They had not reckoned upon this interruption into the yard.

Until Fatty looked in—they were keeping away from the window. It was not



D'Arcy in a Difficulty.

(See Chapter 7.)

an actual crime to be in the house of Blinko Brothers; but neither of them had any desire to be caught there.

Fatty ambled up to the window. Like a full moon appeared his round face thereat. But Racke and Crooke, doors of dark deeds, had no welcome for the moonlight.

"Hallo, racke!" said Fatty. "Didn't know you were here! Hallo, Crooke!"

Fatty took it very coolly indeed. "Shush!" hissed Crooke. "Don't let on to the other chaps, Fatty, there's a good sort!"

"Oh, you dashed donkey!" said Racke savagely. Racke knew that nothing was more certain to make Fatty "let on" than that request.

"Come here, Clive, will you?" said the Palstaff of St. Jim's.

Clive came, and Herries, and behind them strolled Cardew.

Racke snatched up a soda-water syphon. It was a leaf out of the book of Arthur Augustus. But, for all that, it was a bad move on Racke's part.

Right into the faces of Fatty, Clive, and Herries came the hissing stream.

Fatty gave a bellow like that of a wounded bull. Herries snatched up an old bench that stood close by.

"Lend me a hand, you chaps!" he shouted. "We'll soon have them out of that!"

They refused to let D'Arcy out yesterday. We will return good for evil," said Cardew, with his most sardonic grin. And he lent a hand.

The bench was more than Herries could have lifted to the level of the window alone. But Digby and Manners came rushing up, and the six lifted it, and swung it, while Levison, who was nearest the gate, ran round to tell the rest.

Crash!

The window-sash was stove fairly in. Into the room plunged the reckless half-dozen. And Cardew, though he had

talked about leading from behind, was the first whose feet touched the floor.

Racke flung the syphon at his head.

"Grrrrrow!" ejaculated Fatty Wynn, as it hit him in the stomach.

"Ow-yow!" roared Racke, as the fist of Ralph Reckness Cardew took him under the chin, almost lifting him off his feet.

He went down. Crooke made a futile effort to get under the table. There was not the beginning of a fight in Crooke.

But he kicked when they lunged him back.

He would have done better to fight. His lashing feet took Clive on the shin, and Herries on the knee, and Manners in the region of the waistbelt; and three angrier persons than Clive and Herries and Manners it would have been difficult to find within twenty miles of Rylcombe just then.

Then the rest swarmed in, carrying with them on the tide of their rush the Blinko Brothers.

"My hat! Oh, you rotters!" gasped Tom Merry.

"Those two wretched boundahs are in the rotten plot!" howled Arthur Augustus.

"Plot be hanged! We're in no plot!" snarled Racke. "You've no right to touch us!"

"This is a pretty place to be found in, Crooke!" said Talbot.

"You've been in worse!" hooted his cousin.

"The rotter kicked my shin!" said Clive hotly.

"And my knee!" yelled Herries.

"He got me in the tummy, the brute!" snapped Manners.

"Racke got me in the tummy, too, with this beastly syphon!" fumed Fatty.

"Serve you all jolly well right!" Crooke yelled. "You should leave us alone!"

"This is where the tar comes in, Manners," remarked Dig.

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"Tar! Where is it, Dig?" asked Blake eagerly.

"Come along and help me fetch it in," returned Digby.

"You leave that there tar alone—that's ours!" rumbled Mr. Herbert.

"That's all serene!" answered Dig.

"You're going to have it!"

Blake and Dig and Levison and Manners rushed out to get the tar-barrel.

"Lemme git outer this!" wailed Mr. William Binko. "I don't want no tar. I ain't done—Ow!"

He subsided on the floor, assisted thither by Tom Merry.

His burly brother fought desperately. Lowther got a punch on the head, that made it sing for an hour afterwards.

Cardew and Figgins said Talbot and Tom all bare marks before the soundly bookmaker was borne down, with Kerr clinging to him behind, and Clive clapping a fat leg as if he loved it.

"Let me sit on him again!" said Fatty Wynn.

And they let Fatty have his way. Clive shared his fate, nursed his shin, which Crooke had barked badly.

The sound of a barrel being trundled on its edge was heard. There came also the noise of puffing and grunting; and the voices of the four who had gone for the tar were heard in exhortation to one another—to be jolly careful lest any of it should be spilled.

Now the barrel bumped along the passage, and now it appeared at the door of the back room, where Messrs. Herbert & William Binko, with Racke and Crooke, lay on the floor, because they could not help it, and anticipated their fate with what philosophy they might. It did not amount to much, at best.

"Got the feather-bed?" asked Dig.

"What feather-bed?" returned Figgins.

"Oh, you duffer! Any feather-bed, of course! These rotters don't keep poultry, and we shouldn't have time to kill and pluck them if they did. So a feather-bed's the only thing."

"You ain't a-goin' to use—"

"Your mistake! We are," said Tom Merry; while Fatty Wynn clapped a plump hand over the mouth of Mr. Herbert Binko, stopping any further protest.

Levison and Lowther rushed upstairs.

"These procedins are becomin' utter laws," said Cardew. "I ain't at all sure that I can countenance them."

But he seemed to be talking through his hat, for his was the first knife out to rip up the feather-bed when it came.

"I can't meddle with the tar," he remarked.

"The sight of it is discomfartin' to me. There have been occasions when I cannot have been far off being all feathered myself, an' who knows what the future may bring forth?"

"Oh, rats!" said Levison, to whom he spoke.

"No, I think not. General frownsiness, that's all," Lowther said.

"I was talking to Cardew, ass!"

"Oh! My remark referred to this bed."

"It certainly does not smell pleasant," Cardew said.

"But it is the fitter, therefore, for the dear Racke an' the gentle Crooke."

Someone had found a couple of old brushes. The feathers from the ripped-up bed made a heap on the floor, and floated in the air, causing coughs.

The Binko Brothers and their St. Jim's allies gazed with eyes of horror at the preparations.

"Here, I say— Oh, you can't, you know, you fellows!" burred Crooke.

"It's beyond the limit—it ain't decent!"

"The fitter for you an' Racke, Crooke," roared Cardew.

"You wottahs have faillie asked for The Gem Library—No. 428.

it, an' you are goin' to get it!" said Arthur Augustus, with immense determination.

"Talbot—I say, Talbot, won't you stop them?"

"I will not, Crooke! I'm going to take a hand!"

"I'll make you all smart for this, you cads!" spoke Racke, from between clenched teeth.

Mr. William Binko howled for mercy. Mr. Herbert swore, and writhed, and tried to bite. On the whole, Racke cut the least pitiful figure of the four; and there was nothing about his attitude to admire.

"Crooke first," said Tom Merry. "I say, Gussy, do you really think you ought to help? In those trousers, you know?"

"Rats, Tom Mewwy!" returned Arthur Augustus. "What is a paiah of bags at a time like this?"

"There's Cardew, too," said Lowther.

"He's as particular about style and spotlessness and nice, and all that sort of thing as Gussy, though he does not spend quite so much time admiring himself in the mirror. Cardew, do you—"

But Cardew had snatched a brush from the hand of Digby—much to Dig's indignation—and was at work upon Crooke.

Everyone bore a hand. Everyone felt that the four victims had asked for what they were getting.

Nobody had any fear of consequences. Racke and Crooke dared not tell. If they reported they must explain; and explanations would not suit them. As Lowther remarked, the geography of the case offered difficulties to them.

Mr. William Binko was being tarred, while Crooke submitted sulkily to the feathering process.

"Kick the rotter into the other room!" said Blake coolly. "There ain't too much room here, and he's horribly in the way."

"Yah! Take some of it yourselves!" howled Crooke, attempting a rush.

But the attempt was a failure. Herries thrust a broom into the pit of Crooke's stomach, and he collapsed. After that he crawled out meekly.

In a few moments he was joined in the other room by the younger Binko, while the older Binko gave lots of trouble to those who were feathering him; and Racke, with white, set face and a murderous look in his eyes, submitted to the tarring.

"Ow—yow! Lemme be!"

The shout came from the front room. Levison and Kerr went to see what was the matter, and came back with their faces adorned with broad grins.

"It's all right—oh!" said Levison.

"Only Crooke and the other young cad pitching into one another."

"What for?" inquired Digby.

"We didn't ask. What's the odds?" replied Kerr.

"That's done it! All complete!" said Tom Merry, standing back to survey the finish of their work.

"Look out!" yelled Herries. And he used the broom with effect.

"Thanks, old chap!" said Tom, who had only just escaped a grizzly-bear hug from Mr. Herbert through the quickness of Herries.

"My hat! We shall have to scot if we're to be back by the time the dinner-bell goes!" said Clive.

"Racke an' Crooke will be reduced to the necessity of dinin' with their friends. I fear," remarked Cardew. "My hat, how that man does talk! What a really artistic flow!"

Binko senior was certainly employing a rich vocabulary, but, as Herries said, they could not wait to listen longer.

CHAPTER 5.

Fourteen in Council!

THERE was a distinct whiff of tar about the dining-hall during dinner, and many remarks were made about it. But no questions were asked by the voice of authority; and though the absence of Racke and Crooke was commented upon, no one was invited to explain it—and, naturally, no one volunteered.

Among the raiders was a general feeling of satisfaction, which, somehow, grew less general and less complete as the meal neared its end.

Digby and Herries and Levison all looked as if the world was going very well with them. Cardew smiled now and then, as if recalling something pleasant.

But the Terrible Three had become very thoughtful, and Talbot and Clive were in no chortling mood by the end of dinner; while the noble brow of Arthur Augustus was puckered with perplexity.

In the New House Kerr remarked to Figgys:

"We forgot something, old chap! D'Arcy's just as near—or, as far off—getting his pony back as he was when we started."

"My hat! I'd forgotten the pony completely," admitted Figgins.

"Oh, they're bound to give it up! They can't hang on to it, you know," said Fatty Wynn. "If they do we must go and jolly well raid them again, that's all!"

And Fatty smiled, as one well satisfied with good work done.

"Figgins—Kerr—Wynn, if you do not cease that idle chattering, I shall punish you!" snapped Mr. Ratcliff.

They dried up.

But that they did not look upon it as idle chattering was shown by the fact that they ran across to the School House directly dinner was over.

They met their comrades of the expedition coming out from the dining-hall.

"I say, you know, we've just been thinking—"

"Did it hurt much, Figgys?" asked Lowther sympathetically. "You look rather pale, and I perceive an almost visible decrease in the girth of Fatty. Kerr is much as usual. But I believe Kerr has been known to think once or twice before."

"Oh, ring off!" snapped Figgys.

"Look here, Merry, we didn't get that giddy pony after all!"

"What extraordinary powers of ratiocination have lain unsuspected in you, Figgys! It's like the 'gem of purest ray serene,' or 'the flower born to blush unseen,' by Jove!"

"You're like nothing but a thumping, burbling, puffing, blithering idiot!" rapped out George Figgins.

"Figgys's quite right, you know, Lowthah," said Arthur Augustus mildly. "I don't see why you should wot Figgys. He has discovered a fact which has also crossed my mind."

"And you imagine we haven't got on to it?" said Lowther wonderingly.

"What do you consider our brains are made of?"

"Putty!" snapped Figgins.

"We don't consider there's enough of them to be worth arguing about," Fatty said calmly.

"No good chipping one another. Best thing to be done is to talk over our next move," Kerr said.

"You're right, old scout," replied Tom. "Kim on!"

Levison & Co. paid heed to a signal from afar, and within a couple of minutes the whole party had gathered in Study No. 10 on the Shell passage, which the Terrible Three shared.

"I said that thirteen was an unlucky number," remarked D'Arcy, looking round.

"Make it twelve by clearin' out, my dear man," drawled Cardew. "It isn't likely you can contribute anything of importance to the discussion, an' your departure would leave us less cramped for room!"

"Bai Jove! You do talk the most uttawh wot I evah heard, Cardew! Whose bizniz is this if not mine?" said Blake. "True enough, Gustavus," said Blake. "But I won't say Cardew's entirely wrong, for all that. Better leave it to your uncles!"

"I am surprised at you, Blake! This is really—"

"It is, Gussy! Nevertheless, you must admit that you did not manage to make terms with the rosters, and Talbot didn't manage it for you," said Tom. "But it was not a question of makin' terms, Tom Mewwy! It would have been uttawh beneath my dig to do anything of the kind! I would have perished before givin' way to them on a single, solitary point!"

"The ancestors of Gustavus would have turned in their graves and said things if he'd done that," Digby said solemnly.

"All of them!" chimed in Lowther. "Especially the high-minded Bob D'Arcy, who beat Julius Cæsar at the Battle of Waterloo, and was rewarded by being allowed to loot the monasteries; and Imjann D'Arcy, who forced Magna Charta under the nose of Henry the Eighth; and Alf D'Arcy, who came over with the Conqueror, and whacked Simon Gloop—I mean De Montfort—my mistake—at Flodden field; and Henry Augustus D'Arcy, who held George the Fourth's coat while he fought fourteen rounds with Perkin Warbeck, and was given the post of Lord Chief Corkscrew; and—"

But here Lowther was howled down.

"Bai Jove! I wogahd you in the light of a most complete an' uttawh ass, Lowther!"

"How could you, being what you are, regard me otherwise, Gussy?" returned the humorist of the Shell blandly.

Figgins got up from his seat on the coal-scuttle.

"If this sort of thing's going on, I'm going off!" he snorted.

"Exit the disgruntled Figgys!" chuckled Lowther.

"Oh, sit on him, somebody!" said Levin.

"Of course, my ancestors were in what-
ever was goin' on in their day!" said Arthur Augustus. "But Lowther—"

"So is their descendant," said Blake, grinning. "He takes no notice of what his uncles tell him, and, therefore and accordingly, he gets it in the neck every time, and a few over, as he would expect if he had the brains of a giddy maggot! Never mind, Augustus! You don't look nice when you get purple in the dial, so chuck it! We'll look after you, old chump, whether you like it or not!"

Arthur Augustus got up, regarded Blake with a look of withering disdain, and went out, slamming the door.

"Now that we are no longer an unlucky number, perhaps we can get on with the washin'," drawled Cardew.

"As a matter of fact, we're now thirteen," said Blake, grinning. "I guess Gustavus forgot himself—but he never could count, anyway!"

But the door opened again, and Gussy slipped in.

"Woe-ho, an' Cwooke have just awicwed," he said, and a grin had replaced the fury on his face. "They gave me most disappointin' looks. I weally fancy Waeke an' Cwooke are not quite pleased with us, dear boys!"

And he resumed his seat.

"Thought you'd gone to get Grundy's advice," said Cardew.

"Gwenday? Why?" asked Gussy innocently.

"He thinks Grundy is the only bigger ass than yourself you could find about," Dig explained kindly.

"I did not say so," said Cardew.

"I object strongly to your thinkin' it!" snapped Arthur Augustus.

"My dear man, I don't! Grundy is a most awful ass, but I am not sayin' that he takes down your number!"

"The question is what we are to do," said Kerr tactfully. For another explosion was threatened.

"Yes, that's it!" Talbot agreed. "All this kind of thing only wastes time."

"What are you worrying about most, old chap?" asked Digby. "Is it losing the pony or dropping the tin?"

"What I am worryin' about most, Dig, is bein' done down by those wascally Blinkos!"

"Hear, hear," said Cardew.

"He meant it, too. And that was the way most of them felt—though, of course, it was easier for them than for D'Arcy, who had to bear the loss, if loss there was."

"We scored," said Digby, who still looked upon the events of the morning with more complacency than the majority.

"Only in that round," Manners said. "That ain't the finish, you see. If the Blinko beasts are allowed to keep Bonny Lad, the real score's theirs in the long run."

"It isn't much of a scrah for them to be thieves an' wottahs!" Arthur Augustus said, with scorn.

"But, being so, they think it is," replied Manners quietly.

"Better get old Kerr to clear up the mystery," Figgins said.

"Will you take it on, Kerr?" asked Arthur Augustus eagerly.

"I don't mind, old scout! But the question is what exactly I am expected to do. I should like to have some notion of that, you know."

"Gussy had better leave all that to you, Kerr," said Fatty Wyn. "Old Kerr's a ripping detective, you know, Gussy, and it ain't any good meddling with a chap who has brains, especially if—"

"Brains, aren't a New House monopoly," interrupted Lowther.

"I'm not so sure of that," said Figgins.

"The thing that you really want Kerr to do is to find out where the pony is, and what the Blinko bouncers mean to do with him. Isn't that it, Gussy?" said Tom.

"That's it, Tom Mewwy, undoubtedly."

"It's clear enough what they mean to do with him, to hang on to him," Digby said.

"Clear as mud," said Blake.

"I'm not so sure," said Kerr, shaking his head. "They may have something up their sleeves. I rather fancy they have. Of course, they'll stick to the gee if Gussy leaves them alone. But they ain't with him, which Arthur Augustus expected the pressure I fancy they may turn him—after they've done with him."

He would not explain his meaning, and to all there it was as much of a mystery as the disappearance of the pony.

And that mystery was not to be cleared up at once. Kerr went to Rycombe after classes, and Figgins and Fatty went with him, which Arthur Augustus considered, on the whole, bragen cheek on the part of Figgins and Fatty.

But they had to report "no progress" on their return, though they maintained an orster-like reserve as to what they had done.

CHAPTER 6.

Bonny Lad Reappears.

"**B**AI JOVE, it's all very well, an', of course, I am no end grateful to old Kerr for takin' on the case," said Arthur Augustus next day. "But I fail to see that I shall be wealth' interfavin' with his conduct if it I twot down to Wylcombe now an' then, an' have a look woad the Blinko's dog-kennel."

"Leave Kerr to it!" growled Jack Blake.

"They'll be capturing you again and making sport of you this time!"

"Wats, Heavies!"

"Gustavus has found someone he can lick—that young Blinko cad—and wants to have another go at him," suggested Digby.

"Uttawh wot, Dig?"

"Well, keep your weather eye open for the broom, old chump!" said Blake.

"Wubbish!"

Herries had his mouth open to speak again, but before he could get out a word Arthur Augustus, with stern resolution written plain upon his classic countenance, said:

"It makes no difference at all what you say! I am goin' down to Wylcombe. The only question to be decided is whether you come along or whether you stay Leah. I weally do not mind in the least!"

"Oh, we'll come!" said Dig.

"Right-ho!" said Herries.

"Can't trust this old fatted-to go alone," added Blake.

"If you are so howbly wude, Blake—"

"Oh, don't mention it, old ass! I can be heaps worse than that if I try."

The four went off alone. The Terrible Three, with Talbot, Levinson, and Clive, were all on Little Side and the New House trio were not looked for.

Blake and Co. mounted their bikes, and in a few minutes had reached Rycombe.

The abode of Blinko Brothers showed no sign of life, save for a thin wispy of smoke from one chimney.

The yard gate was shut and barred. But Blake was quickly over it.

He came back to report that Bonny Lad was not in the stable.

They had not expected he would be. But it was best to make sure.

"What's the next item on the programme, Gustavus?" inquired Blake.

"You read this wild-goose chase."

"Shall we wide towards Wayland a bit?"

"Right-ho! Anything for a quiet life!"

They were not half-a-mile out of the village before they saw something that made D'Arcy jump from his saddle.

"Look there!" he gasped. "Oh, the scoundrelous wuffians! Do you see, dear boys?"

"We've got eyes," replied Digby.

In a big field close to the road a black pony was being exercised by a thin and monkey-faced rider.

The black pony was as certainly Bonny Lad as the monkey-faced rider was Mr. William Bire.

"Come Leah, you scoundrel!" shouted Arthur Augustus.

"Dilly, dilly, dilly, come and Le killed!" grinned Blake. "Jolly likely, ain't it?"

Blake seemed to have read aright the great mind of Blinko junior.

Blinko junior reined Bonny Lad round at once.

"The wuffian!" cried Arthur Augustus.

"Would you cweed such tewwible cheek? He has actually got my widin'-bweeches on! I took them down, you know, an' I must have forgotten all about them."

"You're always making presents to those Blinko bouncers," said Herries. "I don't wonder they're fond of you, Gustavus."

"Wats! He stole them. It was nothin' but stealin'! Oh, I know! What asses we all were to forget!"

One and all, they had forgotten the whistle-call which had been taught by Mr. Simon Gloop to D'Arcy.

But the other three remembered as Gussy sent a whistle on two notes sounding through the hot still air.

It was the call Bonny Lad knew so well. The swell of the Fourth had got it just right.

Blinko junior was in trouble with his mount at once, as they could see. D'Arcy whistled again.

The pony swung round and galloped towards the gate, his rider tugging at him hard, but vainly.

In another moment D'Arcy had seized the bridle, and Blake, Herries, and Digby were dragging Mr. William Blinko out of the saddle.

They tumbled him into a convenient ditch. It was dry, which was a pity. But it was full of nettles, which was not such a pity.

"Ow! Vooop! I'm stung to death!" howled the stable-boy. "I'll make you all suffer for this, you pups!"

"Come along and make one of us suffer to start with—any one you like to choose," retorted Blake liberally.

But Mr. William Blinko had not intended his threat in that way. He stayed among the nettles in preference to having his meaning further misunderstood, as it might be if he arose.

Leading Bonny Lad, the swell of the Fourth walked up to the prostrate Blinko.

"Take those bweeches off at once!" he ordered.

"Ere, don't talk so blessed silly! What am I goin' to do if I take 'em off?"

"That," said Arthur Augustus majestically, "does not concern me in the very least!"

"I can't go 'ome in me shirt-tails can I, you silly fool?"

"It does not mattah to me, wheithah you evah go home at all, you impudent cad!"

"I ain't going!"

"Take off those bweeches at once, Blinko, or I shall admintstah to you a fearful thrashing!"

"An' me all in among these 'ere nettles, bein' stung to death even with 'em on! Likely, ain't it?"

"You wouldn't care about wearing the things after that cad, Gustavus," said Herries.

"That argument hit the mark. You are quite wight, Hewwies, I should not," said the swell of the Fourth.

"All things considered, Blinko, it may be as well if you retain the bweeches."

Mr. William Blinko's muttered answer may have been an expression of thanks. But it scarcely sounded like it.

Arthur Augustus led Bonny Lad out of the gate.

"Where 'shall you take him?" asked Blake. "Anyway, we'd better go straight to the station, and order a horse-box, hadn't we?"

"I'm goin' to have a wide first," said D'Arcy.

He was almost wild with delight at recovering the pony so easily, and when Gussy was that way he was not easy to manage.

But there did not seem much risk in cantering the pony down the road towards Rylcombe.

"Ha, ha, ha! Look at old Gustavus with his trousers up to his knees!" said Blake.

"And his widdin'-bweeches on Blinko's legs!" chuckled Herries.

But for once Arthur Augustus was thinking very little of his appearance. He felt the swing of the pony under him, and the saddle against his knees. And he rejoiced with the joy of the real horseman.

He turned Bonny Lad on to the broad strip of grass by the roadside, and the canter became a gallop.

"Oh, you beauty! Bai Jove, this is a weal treat!" he cried exultingly. "You shan't go back to those wottahs, old boy, I promise you!"

CHAPTER 7.

Beyond the Limit!

"D'ARCY! What does this mean?"

Arthur Augustus reined in Bonny Lad at once.

For the voice that spoke was that of Mr. Latham, his Form-master. And Mr. Latham spoke very sternly indeed.

"Descend at once! You very nearly ran me down!" rapped out the master.

"Oh, no, sir! You are quite mistaken, weally! The pony was undah perfect control, an' I should not do so clumsy a thing as that."

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The pony had certainly been under control, for D'Arcy had pulled him up within three paces. Mr. Latham saw that his first impression—which had been that the junior was being run away with—was a mistaken one.

But he had had a shock to his nerves, and he was not in his best temper in consequence.

"Do not presume to argue with me!" he said sharply. "Descend at once, I say!"

Gussy slipped out of the saddle. "Now, what does this mean, D'Arcy?"

It was not a nice position for Arthur Augustus. His chums were left behind. To tell Mr. Latham lies was impossible to him. To tell him the whole truth would never do.

And they were within twenty yards of the Blinkos' house, which fact did not at all improve the situation.

"I—I was only havin' a wide, sir. There is no harm in havin' a wide, sir, I twust?" said the swell of the Fourth.

"Absurd! What sort of discipline could be maintained if every boy at school were allowed to go galloping along the public roads at his own will and pleasure, like—like Mazeppa?"

"Excuse me, sir, but he didn't, you know. Mazeppa was tied on, an' he wasn't at all pleased about it. I don't need tyin' on, sir. I have widden evah since I was quite a small kid—I mean a little child."

He grinned involuntarily. Mr. Latham really had made a bit of a bloomer about Mazeppa.

"How dare you grin at me in that impertinent manner, D'Arcy?"

"Oh, weally, sir, I was only—I assuah you, 'pon honah, sir, that I intended no impertinence!"

"You are evading my questions!" It was not often Mr. Latham got so put out as this. Arthur Augustus was rather surprised at him.

"I answahed one of them, sir," he said stiffly. "Pardon me, but I weally do not know what the othahs were."

"Do you not know that this sort of thing cannot possibly be allowed?"

"No, sir—I mean, yass, sir! But there isn't any wale against it, I believe!"

Mr. Latham's temper rose higher. He breathed hard and pursed his lips.

Arthur Augustus did take masters that way at times. Quite innocently and without the least disrespect, he wanted to discuss matters as between one man and another. And at times he had been allowed by Mr. Ralston to do so, for the master of the School House had his own ideas about the management of boys, and he liked and understood D'Arcy.

"Do not be idiotic, D'Arcy! Rules cannot be framed to meet in advance every contingency. Such hare-brained folly as you are often guilty of could never occur as possible to those who draw up the code. Whose is that animal?"

Arthur Augustus hesitated—and was lost!

"E's mine, sir," said a voice behind them.

And Mr. Bert Blinko appeared. Gussy was as one struck dumb. This impudent claim was really beyond the limit.

But he could not contest it without telling Mr. Latham the whole story.

And he did not want to do that. He did not want to tell Mr. Latham anything.

Indeed, he felt that he could not tell him. A dozen other fellows would be dragged into trouble—his own best chums.

Racke and Creeke, too; but they did not matter, save in so far as that to sneak of them was impossible.

"Oh, he is yours, is he?" asked Mr. Latham sharply. "Then what do you mean by allowing this boy to ride him?"

Blinko senior was much too crafty to deny allowing it. That would have been to give D'Arcy an opening.

"I weren't awer, sir," he said, touching his hat, "as I was a-doin' of any 'arm. A man must live, sir, an' times is 'ard in my trade."

"That may be!" snapped Mr. Latham, regarding Mr. Herbert Blinko with no favour.

Vaguely Arthur Augustus remembered a story of Lowther's—how some famous sarcastic beast, being told that a man must live, said he didn't see the necessity.

Mr. Latham, he imagined, felt rather that way about Blinko senior. And if Mr. Latham didn't, Gussy did!

"That may be!" repeated the Form-master. "But in order to live, it is scarcely necessary that you should and abet the juniors of St. James' School in flying direct in the face of the school rules."

"Beg pardon, sir! Very sorry, I'm sure, sir! It ain't a-goin' to 'appen agin. The young gent said as he rode at 'ome, an' I see as he knew the gime. An' 'e begged very 'ard, indeed—a most with tears in 'is eyes—"

"Oh, you cwass—"

"Silence, D'Arcy! What do you owe this man?"

Arthur Augustus looked mutinous, and did not answer. What reply could he make?"

"Do you hear me, D'Arcy?"

"I don't you, but the gentleman? What a bad chap all through you must be to go a-deceivin' of me, an' breakin' of the rules like that there, an' then to go sulky!"

"Hold your tongue!" snapped the master, in real anger. Blinko senior's unctuous rectitude annoyed him greatly.

"Do you hear me, D'Arcy?"

"I am not deaf, sir!" Yaas, I hear you!"

It was an answer unworthy of the polished swell of the Fourth.

But there was excuse. His head was in a whirl. He did not know what to do or to say.

"Then why do you not answer?"

"You told me to be silent, sir. I can't vewy well—"

"Take five hundred lines for gross impertinence!"

Mr. Herbert Blinko leered in evil glee. The noble blood of Arthur Augustus fairly boiled in his noble veins.

He felt himself entangled in a net from which there was no escape. His chance to speak out was gone. In spite of his reputation as one who scorned to tell a lie, he could never win the belief of Mr. Latham now.

"I protest, sir!" he gasped. "With all respect, sir, I protest strongly! If I am ordained to do two contradictory things, I can only do one of them, an'—"

"Your imposition is doubled, D'Arcy! What do you owe this man?"

"Never mind that, sir. I'm sure as I don't want to git the young gent into further trouble. I'm a free-anded man. We'll call it square."

"Have the goodness not to interfere!" snapped the master of the Fourth. "D'Arcy, answer me! What do you owe this fellow?"

"I do not owe him a single penny, sir, an' he knows it." Yaas, you scoundrell, you do know it!" cried Arthur Augustus, turning in a fury upon Blinko.

"Are you mad, boy?"

"No, sir! It's true—welly it is! The pony is not his at all!"

It was out now! The whole story must follow—so Gussy deemed.

"Ho, ho, ho! If that ain't a good one! The young gent's a-feelin' of the case, I'm sure, sir. There's a wildness about his eyes as I don't fancy a bit. 'E'll be doin' one or t'other of us a mischief if we don't watch out. My life's worth a bit more'n the five bob or so as 'e owes me, an' by your lief, sir, I'll take the little gee along, an' get outer danger."

"Five shillings, do you say? Here you are. And the sooner you depart with your pony the better pleased I shall be!"

"My pony!"

The words trembled upon the lips of D'Arcy, but he did not speak them.

The situation was too much for him, with all his tact and judgment. With wildly-gleaming eyes, and a face the colour of pickled cabbage, he watched Mr. Latham pay the swindler the sum he had asked.

"It's the 'eat, sir, that's what it is," said Blinko senior oilyly. "I've seed blokes took this way afore. Walk 'im one, sir, an' lay 'im down, an' put ice to the more kid's. Don't be 'ot or 'asty with 'im, sir!"

To that Mr. Latham offered no answer, unless a perceptible stiffening of the back could be regarded as such.

"Welly, sir, I cannot allow—"

"That is not for you to say, D'Arcy! You can, if you choose, regard the small amount as a loan, and repay it when you come to apologise—as I shall certainly expect you to do. But I do not want to hear another word from you now!"

Mr. Latham stalked away. Mr. Herbert Blinko, with a leer which Gussy would fain have killed him on the spot, led Bonny Lad into the yard. The gate closed, and Blake, Herries, and Digby came up—too late!

Blake was wheeling a spare bicycle—Gussy's, of course.

"What on earth has happened, Gustavus?" he asked.

"Come away, Blake! Come away, all of you! Bai Jove, if I stay heah, I shall be guilty of man-slaughtah—or pig-slaughtah, for it's that w'etch Blinko, an' I do not considah him a man! Come away!"

"But he's got your pony!" said Dig.

"And old Latham's let him take it!"

"It is not my pony!" said Arthur Augustus, more than half hysterically. "Blinko says it's his, an' Latham be-

no condition to be badgered for explanations.

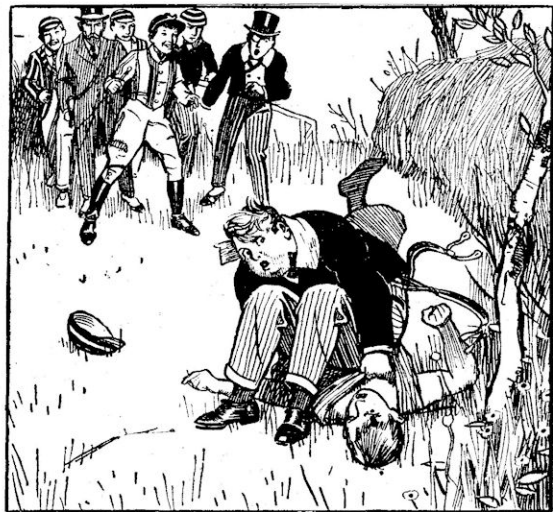
And Blake did not intend he should be badgered!

CHAPTER 8.

Press Cuttings.

BLAKE and Herries and Digby told no one about the recovery and fresh loss of Bonny Lad, and Arthur Augustus told only the Terrible Three and Talbot, who certainly did not noise the story abroad. Lowther, in spite of all the fun he poked at Gussy, had a high regard for him, and would have bitten out his tongue rather than have given the swell of the Fourth away about a matter that he felt keenly as a disgrace to him.

And it was far easier for any of the



Fatty Wynn as Warder.

(See Chapter 12.)

lieved him! An' Latham paid him a dollah for the hiah, an' I am to pay Latham back an' apologise! An' I have a thousand lines for impertinence—not that the beastly lines mattah. But I am afraid I welly was impertinent; an' you know, deah boys, how uttaly among my principles impertinence to a mastah is! I—I— There is somethin' gwavely wrong with my head."

"Just found that out?" asked Herries, grinning.

"Oh, dry up, Herries!" snapped Blake.

"But surely you told Latham—"

"Dry up, Dig! Don't you see?"

And then the other two saw what Blake had been quicker to see.

Gussy really was unwell. The heat, the excitement of recovering Bonny Lad, and the almost impossible position in which he had found himself when Blinko made his impudent claim—all these combined had proved too much for him.

It was not really serious, Blake thought. He would be all right in a little while. But at present he was in

rest to keep a silent tongue than it was for Monty Lowther!

But the story got about. Trimble had it, and Mellish. Whence they had it Arthur Augustus and his friends knew not, but they could guess when Racke and Crooke giped and jeered in the Common-room.

Trimble and Mellish having the story, it was tolerably certain that practically the whole school would have it within a few hours. And so it was. Gussy's chums were afraid it would come to the ears of the masters; but, as a matter of fact, none of the prefects even got to know of it. These in authority are usually the last to hear of such things.

There was less chaff than might have been expected. Everyone but the black-sheep recognised the fact that the tongue of Arthur Augustus had been tied far more by regard for his chums' safety than by thought of any danger to himself. What he had done, what he had failed to do—it might be foolish, but it was not mean or selfish. And no one

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thought the better of Racke and Crooke for their association with swindlers—not even Mellish and Trimble and Scrope and Clampe. Even these recognised the fact that there were no lions.

Arthur Augustus had been rather in dread of the japes of Cardew and Levison. But both were more than decent. Cardew went out of his lordly way to be pleasant; and Levison devoted quite a lot of his spare time to the writing of lines in a hand that looked like D'Arcy's. In the old days of Messrs Levison had done this sort of thing for hard cash. Now he did it out of honest friendliness—"for love," as he put it, with a grin that was only half-mocking.

Grundy came along with renewed proffers of help and advice. He was so very much in earnest that even Blake forbore to suggest bumping him. But his offers were not accepted—very much to his disgust, of course.

"Well, if you make a mess of the whole bizney—as you're safe to do—don't blame me, that's all!" he said.

"We shan't," replied Blake. "But if we let you in you'd be dead sure to make a mess of it, and then we should jolly well blame ourselves!"

Dick Redfern punched Clampe's head for sneering at D'Arcy's folly, although Clampe had said that he thought what Racke and Crooke had done was pretty rotten. Reilly and Harry Hammond and Kerruish dealt faithfully with Mellish and Trimble for a similar offence.

Julian wanted to fight Crooke; but Crooke did not want to fight Julian, it appeared. Even George Gore gave Racke the rough side of his tongue, and offered further liberality if required.

All of which was very comforting to the wounded soul of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

He handed to Mr. Latham a thousand lines and five shillings. The shillings were Gussy's own; but that could not be said for most of the lines.

The Form-master tore them up without looking at them, accepted Gussy's apologies quite nicely, and dismissed him happily.

For it was plain that Mr. Latham suspected nothing of the true state of affairs. And the thing that Arthur Augustus desired more than anything in the world just then was that he and his chums should be allowed to get even with Blinko Brothers without the meddling of anyone in authority!

It hardly seemed likely, though proofs thereof to the confidence reposed in Kerr's detective powers were justified now came along.

The New House trio did not need to be told about the affair which the School House contingent were trying vainly to keep dark. They knew within three hours of its happening.

"There's nothing much in it," said Kerr modestly. "As I'm not recognised by the Head or Ratty—more especially Ratty—as a 'tec, I simply have to get some of my work done by deputy. Present deputy is a sharp boy I've found at Rylcombe. He's only ten; but there are no flies on him. He has not only told me all about the row—but the talker-talkee, which he wasn't contiguous enough for—but he has also discovered where Bonny Lad is being hidden."

"Oh, where is it, Kerr?" asked Gussy eagerly.

"With a chap named Jordan, who has a place up the Wayland road, and is hand-in-glove with the Green Man set. No, you can't 'lift him out of the stable door betwixt the dawn and the day,' like Kamal, in that fine 'Ballad of East and West,' Gussy. I'd be game to help if I saw any chance; but there isn't any. They've something on, that gang, and I

mean to get at what it is; but I'll say no more till I have more to say."

"Now tell us the rest, Kerr!"

"No fear! But I want to ask you one thing. You are a judge of horseflesh, I know. Should you call Bonny Lad fast?"

"Yaas. He is weally fast. I do not know that I have evah widden a fastish ponny."

"And would any judge of horses take him to be so on the look of him?"

"Bei Jove, yas! He cawries the look of a pig. I should pick him out as a likely winnah from a whole eword."

"Thanks, old chap! That's all I want to know at the moment."

It was also all that Kerr would tell. He did not even tell more to Figgins and Fatty. Most of those who had heard him were quite at a loss. Digby said it told Tom Merry something, and Cardew and Levison looked at one another in what Herries considered a cockily knowing way.

Talbot knew more of the wiles of the wicked, and Levison and Cardew more of the ways of the turf—which comes to very much the same thing—than the rest.

It was on the next day that Digby rushed into Study No. 6, in wild excitement, with a scrap of paper in his hand.

"What's the row?" demanded Blake.

"Look here! If this ain't— Oh, my hat, the cads!"

It was not very consecutive; but all understood when they had glanced at that paper.

The heading was in capital letters and in ordinary ink. It ran:

"DOES D'ARCY OF THE FOURTH KNOW ANYTHING ABOUT THIS?"

Pasted below was a cutting of a few lines only from some local journal. It offered a reward of £10 for the recovery of Bonny Lad.

There was no possible doubt about it. Bonny Lad, and no other pony in the wide world, was indicated. He had been stolen, as Blake and some of the rest suspected from the outset.

"Those rotters Racke and Crooke pinned that beastly thing up on the notice-board!" said Digby, with flashing eyes. "Trimble saw them. He came to me cackling about it. I don't believe a word the fat Ananias says, and as a rule, but this was straight enough. And now I'm going to see Racke and Crooke about it! The thing's an insult to the whole giddy Form; and the howling cad who could make out our old ass Gussy to be a thief wants spifficating!"

Arthur Augustus was not there at the moment. Blake caught Dig by the arm.

"You're not going," he said quietly. "We must attend to those bounders later on. The game at present is to fetch Kerr, and find out what he was driving at with that mysterious talk of his. This may upset his scheme, if he's got one, or it may work in with it—I don't know. But when Racke and Crooke are attended to it's going to be a joint affair. Dig!"

A hurried council was summoned. Kerr came with another press-cutting.

It was a longer one—the programme of a pony and Gallows race meeting, to be held at Westwood two days later!

"The thing's impos," said Lowther. "At least—well, it must have been wangled somehow. When the Government consented to let racing start again it wasn't for this sort of thing."

"There's been some wangling, of course," replied Kerr. "And there's a wangle within a wangle, or I'm much mistaken. Cast your eye over that list, Gussy, and see if anything interesting strikes you."

It was not only Arthur Augustus who cast his eyes over the list. Nearly all of

them crowded to look at it. But Cardew sat where he was.

"I've got it!" cried Tom. "Wayland Plate, for Ponies not exceeding, et cetera, et cetera—you chaps don't want all that piffle—Mr. Darsey's Black Lad, rider B. Williams."

"That's what I thought all along," said Cardew lazily.

"Oh, rate! How could you guess it?" asked Digby incredulously.

"He did, though," said Levison. "I happened to have heard of these races," Cardew added.

"I thought there might be something of the sort," said Talbot. "But I don't think those scoundrels are running Bonny Lad for a win."

Arthur Augustus pressed a slim hand to a fevered brow.

"Weally, deah boys, you go too fast for me!" he gasped. "I am in a positive fluttah to think that those boundahs should have dared to use my name, though it is fortunate they have not spelled it pwopahly; but why—"

Talbot's right, said Kerr. "I'm sure it is."

"Those rotters would never run straight, anyway," Blake said.

"But how will they get their profit out of doing the other thing?" asked Manners.

"They couldn't get it out of winning," remarked Levison. "For the chances wouldn't be paid over to them without inquiry about Mr. Darsey, and that would mean a hornets' nest about their ears."

"Brother Bert makes his book against Bonny Lad," said Cardew. "If the pony's a real good one he's likely enough to start an odds-on favourite, with the asses tumbling over each other to back him."

Brother Bill—who is also B. Williams—rides him, and makes it good an' certain he don't win. It's easy as fallin' off a form; but it took some thinkin' out. An', of course, if anythin' went wrong—"

Cardew stopped short, with a low chuckle of delight at the horror plain to be read on the aristocratic face of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

CHAPTER 9. To the Races.

Gussy was quite genuinely horrified.

It angered him, too. The thought that those swindlers meant to use the pony which he had paid for, and they had stolen as a counter in their low, money-grubbing schemes, was very galling to him.

Far more worrying was the prospective loss of the pony. He was not sure that would not have been very like a relief—if only he had been able to hand over Bonny Lad.

The tangle would be straightened out then, and neither Simon Gloop nor Blinko Brothers would any longer be of the least concern to Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

But there was the rub! He could not hand Bonny Lad over, and he could not feel quiet of his responsibility in the matter till the rightful owner had the pony back.

At Kerr's advice he telegraphed to the gentleman who had advertised the loss, notifying him that a letter would follow.

That letter was one of the hardest jobs that had ever come Gussy's way. He tried it this way and that way; but his regard for the truth kept tripping him up.

"Why don't you tell this Mr. Broughton just exactly what has happened?" asked Blake, at last, quite out of patience. "It's no good going all round

it. He can't be off knowing you're an ass, anyway!"

And it was according to Blake's specifications that the letter at last found construction. At great length, and quite artlessly, Gussy told his tale of woe. He warmed up to his work, and wrote as if to a friend. And the letter was none the worse for that.

"There's a giddy traitor for Bonny Lad's owner!" said Blake, as Arthur Augustus stood there, twopenny halfpenny worth of stamps on the envelope which contained the lengthy missive.

But eighty miles away next morning a bearded and tanned man read every word of that letter, and then handed it to his wife to read, remarking:

"Whatever else that boy may be—and I'm afraid he is not a genius—he is, at least, a gentleman—every inch!"

Mr. Broughton had intended to travel to Rylcombe that day, but important business prevented his doing so, and he forgot to reply to Gussy's letter till it was too late for post. He was not keen on writing letters at any time, and he resolved to go down to the Sussex school with him over a wire.

Meanwhile, Gussy waited, wondering why he heard nothing, and growing more anxious with each hour that passed.

And the day of the races came, and with that there came to Arthur Augustus a desperate resolve.

Something he must do! And there seemed only one thing to be done!

He thought of doing it alone. He did not want to see his chums in trouble for backing him up.

But he knew that there would be trouble with them if he acted on his own. And for the time being he was chaste in spirit—so much so, that he admitted to himself that when he had acted on his own just lately the results had been rather unpleasant. He must really have suffered a temporary loss of tact and judgment. It could only be temporary, of course!

So he called a council, and again the whole crowd assembled.

"I'm going to those beastly waces!"

Thus Arthur Augustus announced his decision.

Nobody said "Rats!"

Gussy had quite expected that eloquent monosyllable from Blake, at least. He would not have been surprised had there been a general chorus of "Rats!"

But nobody said "Rats!" at all. Blake rubbed his chin thoughtfully. Digby said:

"You can have company, Gustavus! I've heard that Racke and Crooke are going!"

Arthur Augustus did not say "Rats!" But that was only because he could not. He said "Wats!"

"I'm going, too!" said Cardew coolly.

"With Racke and Crooke?" asked Lowther.

"Not at all! With D'Arcy, if he's not too naughty!"

"I shall be delighted, dear boy! You know a great deal more about all this blackguardly—ahem!—about all this sort of binyer than I do, an' I assure you that your support will be invaluable!"

"My—ahem!—blackguardly knowledge shall be placed at your disposal," replied Cardew sardonically.

"You comin', Levinson?"

"Trying to bribe me back into the primrose path, Gussy?"

"No, wathen't net, dear boy! Weally, I would not dream—on the whole, Levinson, I am suah you had better not come!"

"Ass! I mean to go! I'm not putting anything on anything, not having anything to put on anything. Be-

sides, other reasons, which might only bore you. But I'm certainly going!"

"You, Clive?"

"I'm thinking about it!" was the surprising answer of Sidney Clive.

"Hanged if it ain't worth thinking about, too!" said Herries, banging the table with a weighty fist.

"Westwood isn't out of bounds on a halfer!" Blake said thoughtfully.

"But the racecourse would be if the Head thought of it!" Talbot remarked.

"I haven't heard that the Head has engaged any of us to do his thinking for him!" replied Lowther.

"We've made up our minds to go!" said Figgins.

Arthur Augustus stared in round-eyed wonder. He had anticipated strong opposition.

But there had been no opposition at all as yet, for Talbot had smiled as he spoke, and Cardew, Levison, Figgins, and Kerr, and Paddy Wynn were all coming, and Clive and Lowther and Herries seemed on, and Blake and Digby were evidently wavering.

There remained Tom Merry, Talbot, and Manners. What Tom did, Manners would do; and what Tom decided to do depended a good deal upon Talbot.

"I don't half like it!" said the junior skipper of St. Jim's. "Of course, it isn't a matter of going to the races as races; but that's the sort of distinction Ralton and the Head would have precious little use for. If we had—I mean, if Gussy had heard from this chap Broughton—"

"But I haven't! An' it's too late now."

"I know you haven't! And I hate the notion of letting those Binko brutes have it all their own way, though I'm blessed if I can see yet how we are going to stop them if we go. But I'm game to go, unless anyone can show me anything against it but the fact that we're risking a thundering big row. Now, then, Talbot!"

"I fancy I could, Tom; but I'm not going to try! I'm on!"

"Manners?"

"You can count me in!" said Manners.

He did not look quite happy about it. But they all knew how anxious Manners major was to avoid anything in the way of example that might prove a stumbling-block to the feet of Manners minor; and they all knew why. They said nothing, because it was one of those things that are best not talked of.

So, after dinner, the whole fourteen wheeled out their bikes, and mounted at the gates, and pedalled hard through Rylcombe, and on to Westwood.

The race in which Bonny Lad figured was well down the card, and few, if any, of them felt any keen interest in the other races. But Racke and Crooke had been absent from dinner, and this time it was not due to tar and feathers, as Cardew remarked, so that it was tolerably certain that they had engineered the business somehow—probably at the expense of a good deal of lying. But neither of them ever grudged that.

Arrived on the course, their machines left in the town, which had a very decided appearance, the St. Jim's juniors found there a throng of all the most raffish elements of the countryside, with worse from farther away.

"I don't think much of this!" said Tom Merry. "If this is a fair sample of a race-meeting, anybody may have 'em for me! I don't want any!"

"It isn't much like Ascot!" remarked Cardew, smiling as his eyes roamed over the crowd. "There are our sweet sportsmen—do! the thing in style, I must say!"

There were few carriages on the course; but in one of them lolled Racke

and Crooke. Tom Merry & Co. were in blazers. But Racke and Crooke had appeared in regular racing get-up, field-glasses and all. Both looked older than their years, thus accoutred. But while Racke seemed quite at ease, Crooke's face showed that he would have been enjoying himself more if he had felt absolutely safe from detection.

The risk was not great. It was a thousand to one against any St. Jim's master being on the course, and a hundred to one against anyone who knew them and might tell tales being present. To Racke and Crooke it was of no consequence that they should be seen by D'Arcy and his small army of chums. In a sense, these were all in the same boat with them.

This consideration apparently failed to occur to the great mind of Arthur Augustus.

"The wotahs!" he said, contemptuously. "An' if they haven't the blazin' check to be wavin' to us!"

"Don't be angry with them, old man," said Cardew. "I rather think they're signallin' to me. It's my terrible reputation for bein' among the goats, I suppose. I'll go an' speak to the sweet creatures; but I'm not deservin' the ship, D'Arcy!"

And he went.

"I wish Cardew was just a twifle more—"

Gussy paused, and Levison chipped in. "More full of horror of the slough you've lifted him out of—like me, eh?"

he said, in his old jeering way.

Arthur Augustus tossed his noble head. "If I did not know that you an' Cardew are not weally wotahs I should often feel disposed to think you so by your conversation, Levison," he said.

"How do you know we're not?" asked Levison mockingly.

CHAPTER 10.

Doing the Impossible.

CARDEW came back, with a smile on his face more sardonic than ever.

"Those sweet youths are in the know," he said. "They've been so very kind as to advise me to back Hop Pole for the Wayland Plate, although everyone seems to fancy that the race is a dead cert for Black Lad—B. Williams up! They think it's no end of a score over you, D'Arcy, an' they're quite pleased to know that you're here to see yourself scored over."

"You need not wub it in, Cardew!"

"I'm not! I'm tryin' to think of some dodge to do down the whole slimy gang!"

"There's a way, if we can only manage it," said Kerr.

Cardew turned on him sharply. "If you've a way—"

"I don't say it's possible, mind you."

"Oh, hang it, why should we worry about that? It's got to be done!"

Gussy himself could not have been more eager than the usually indifferent Cardew, though Gussy was eager enough.

"If we could collar that young sweep Binko, strip the jockey clobber off his back, and—"

"By gad! You're a genius, Kerr! That's the game, an' that's what we're goin' to do!"

Not all had heard. Lowther had not. He was crowding—as usual.

"This would—don't look nice, and it don't smell really nice," he said, turning up his nose. "Do you think it would be any sweeter where the bookies book, Tommy, my son? I should like to trot along and see whether the dear Binko is industriously bookin'."

Lowther and Tom and Talbot and Manners moved off, unaware of the plan that was being discussed by some of the rest. Clive, Levison, Herries, and Digby had moved off in another direction.

"There he is!" said Manners.

And there, mounted on a stool, his red face redder than ever, in a starting chess-board tweed suit, stood Mr. Bert Blinks.

"Roll up!" he rumbled.

"Deal with the old firm! Deal with Blinks & Co., what never failed to pay out, an' never won't! Make your bets for the next race, gen'l'men! I'll lay you five to one against the field, bar one!"

None of the St. Jim's juniors quite understood the sporting jargon, but, from the conversation around them, they gathered that Black Lad was a hot favourite for his race, which was the next but one on the card, and that already bets were being made in plenty on him at a very short price. Now, Mr. Bert Blinks, feeling quite sure that the stolen pony would be given no chance of getting home first, naturally felt safe in accepting every bet offered on him.

"I suppose he reckons the money as good as his already," said Tom.

"Which I should not mind in the least if it was at all likely that he would find himself mistaken when the numbers go up," replied Monty Lowther.

"Oh, come away!" said Manners.

"That beast makes me feel ill!"

Meanwhile the other contingent of roaners had sighted Black junior.

"There's P. Williams!" said Levison, pointing, with a grin, to a figure in jockey costume.

The colours were a hideous combination of blue, red, and yellow, calculated to make the teeth of an artist on edge.

"Looks nervous, doesn't he?" said Digby.

"So might you, if your job was to see that the best horse didn't win, but to take jolly good care others didn't see it," returned Levison.

"It wouldn't be; because I shouldn't take on such a job," Dig replied.

"He's seen us," Clive said. "Twig him sheer off!"

But as Mr. Bill Blinks tried to sheer off he spotted in the crowd Tom Merry and the three who had gone with him to have a glance at the betting ring.

So Mr. Bill tried another direction. But this proved no luckier for him. It brought him within sight of the D'Arcy and Cardew contingent.

These were quite on the edge of the crowd, well away from the shelter afforded by the hundreds of sweltering racegoers, and tried to plunge back amongst them.

But he was headed off. And now there was no accident in it. Blake had joined Tom Merry & Co., and had told them Kerr's plan. They only wanted a chance to collar Mr. Bill. It could not be done in the crowd, of course, but his colours made him quite easily discerned wherever he went.

In his new direction he saw Levison & Co. ahead. Figgins had joined them.

Mr. William tried another way. But it was no go. They could keep him in sight, while he could not pick them out; and gradually they were forcing him towards those who waited, much as a deer is forced towards the guns by the beater, or as a sheep is singled out from the flock and rounded up by a collie dog.

They had split up further now. He turned in one direction, and had to dodge to avoid Tom Merry and Manners; in another, and sighted Clive and Levison; in yet another, and Talbot and Lowther were almost upon him. And there were Digby and Herries, and over there Blake and Fatty Wynn!

And he was getting much too near the

outsiders of the crowd. He knew it. But he did not know that there beyond waited Cardew and Kerr and D'Arcy and Figgins!

At last the chance came!

He was outside the crowd—only just outside, but all the faces were turned the other way, for a race had just been started. A blazer was flung over his head. His yell of dismay was muffled. Kicking and writhing, he was caught up in strong arms, and carried through a convenient gap in the hedge into the field beyond.

Then he was bumped down hard on the grass, and the blazer was whipped off his head.

He found himself in a sitting position, with the fourteen adventurers grouped around him, contemplating him as if he were a very rare and extremely noxious reptile.

"You can sing out for help if you like," said Tom Merry. "But nobody's going to hear."

"Wodjer mean? Wodjer want? Lemme go! I got to ride a 'oss in the next race!"

"But that's where you slip up," said Blake. "You're not going to!"

"Ho, ain't I? Who is, then?"

"I am, Blinks!" replied Arthur Augustus with immense impressiveness.

"You ride 'im, you pup? Fat chance 'e'll 'ave of winnin', I don't think!"

"But he's not out to win, is he?" inquired Cardew blandly.

Mr. William's eyes almost started out of his head, and his jaw dropped. He looked like a trapped wasel.

How had they come to know that? How could he? Had Racke and Crooke betrayed the secret?

That seemed impossible! And yet they knew! And most certainly they meant what they said. Some of them were grinning; but even the faces of those held no comfort for Blinks. And some looked as stern and resolved as ever he had seen men look.

"You—you—oh, you pack of bloomin' 'ooligans! Think you're 'avin' me on a bit of string, don't you?"

"Due process of time, Blinks, someone is sure to have you on a thick piece of string—a rope, in fact. Sure to!" said Lowther.

"Get that clobber off!" commanded Kerr.

The face of Arthur Augustus fell.

"Bai Jove, Kerr, I wathah bah that, don't oberknow!" That low cad doesn't think of me, I'm suah. I cannot bwing myself—"

"Ring off, Gussy!" snapped Blake.

"How is it to be done without the clobber?"

"'E ain't goin' to 'ave my togs—not on 'is 'life, the pup ain't!" burred Mr. William Blinks.

"You are right, Blake, an' you are quite w'ong, Blinks," said Arthur Augustus. "A faiah wobbahwy is no exchange—oh, you know what I mean, deah boys! Off with the clobber, Blinks!"

"Wharrer think I'm a-going to do? I ain't a-going about in your togs!"

"You most assuahed!" are not, Blinks!" he replied Gussy emphatically.

"I should not fancy them at all atfah that! You will stay here till the race is over, that's all!"

"What, in me naked—"

"In your—ahem—in puwis natuwabialis, as the classics say, Blinks!"

"I won't, I tell you! You can't make me. Ow!"

Blinks let out with both feet, and Arthur Augustus received a savage kick on the right elbow.

"Yaroooh!" he howled.

The rospaid small heed for the moment to his howling. They were disabbling Blinks junior.

"You can keep your vest!" said Tom Merry.

"But don't wander around looking for fig-trees," added Lowther.

But Digby came running up with a sack.

"I found this in the barn over there," he said. "Just the thing!"

"I ain't goin' to get into no sack!" roared the stable-boy.

"Your mistake—you are!" said Blake. "The first act in the impossible is accomplished," announced Kerr. "You fellows rounded him up jolly well, I must say. Now for—Hallo, what's the matter, Gussy?"

CHAPTER 11. Bonny Lad's Rider.

FOR the face of Arthur Augustus was white and drawn with pain, and he was nursing his right arm with his left hand.

"Gwooh!" he said. "The bwute has kicked me! I have lost all powah in my wight arm! I am weally afwaid that it's all off! Don't blame me, deah boys, but—Gwooh!"

"You can't ride the race!" asked Cardew, with unusual briskness.

"Gwooh! I don't know! I weally feah—"

"Then I will! You'd be no use like that."

"But the wisk, Cardew! I can't allow anoth—"

"Hang the risk! If I can stand wearin' those awful colours I can stand any risk there is, I should think!"

"Can you ride, Cardew?" inquired Fatty Wynn.

"Can you eat, Wynn?" returned Cardew, with a grin.

"Weally, Cardew—"

"You can or you can't, D'Arcy! There's nothin' else for it. Can you?"

"I'm afwaid—"

"That's enough! We all know that you wouldn't shy at it for anything less than bein' completely clobbered. I shall ride—unless anyone else offers—Herries, perhaps?"

"Rats!" retorted Herries, flushing. Others grinned. Herries was certainly not a jockey.

Cardew hurried on the light and airy costume which Blinks junior had given up.

He was quite cool. The situation did not seem to him to present any difficulties which could not be overcome by his native audacity.

He knew the ropes, as he told them. And he walked off, switching his leggings with his whip, for all the world like a seasoned jockey.

"I'll stay here and mind Cardew's togs and this rotter, if you like," volunteered Fatty Wynn. "I don't much fancy that crowd. A chap does get dug in the waist-coat so!"

"So much of it," remarked Lowther.

"Keep an eye on Blinks, Fatty!" said Kerr.

"Right-ho! If necessary, I'll sit on the bounder!"

"After which he will probably cease for ever from bounding!" said Lowther.

They hurried off to the course. They were just in time to see Cardew ride to the starting-post on Bonny Lad—Black Lad, on the cards.

"That's the winner! That's Black Lad!" somebody near the St. Jim's juniors said eagerly. "A red-hot fav'r, an' the best sample o' hoss-flesh I've seed to-day!"

"Got your bit on 'im, Bob?"

"What d'ye think, Sammy?"

"I put mine on 'Op Pole. Wish I 'adn't now. 'E's a nice little hoss, but I can't touch Black Lad."

CHAPTER 12.

After the Race!

"Rajah's as good as 'im. But, bar accidents, Black Lad's a sure winner."

Arthur Augustus picked out Hop Pole and Rajah from the ponies ranging up for the start, and expressed to his chums his agreement with what they had heard.

"They're good second-watahs," he said. "But they don't come near my pony, an' the west."

"Mr. Broughton's pony, Gussy!" said Blake.

"Oh, well, yaas! But you need not be so blessed precise at such a critical moment! Gwooh! My arm hurts!"

"My hat! What a cool beggar old Cardew is!" said Digby.

"Just found that out, Dig?" asked Levison.

"They're off!"

"And they were off."

Racke and Crooke saw that race through, no doubt. They were in a position to see it, but hardly to enjoy it.

The rest of the St. Jim's spectators really saw very little more than Fatty Wynn—and that, of course, was nothing at all. They were too late on the course to have any chance of getting near the front.

But they did get a glimpse of those dreadful colours flashing past in the van, and above the glaring shirt the cool, confident face of Ralph Reckness Cardew, and there was small doubt in their minds as to the result!

"That nipper can ride—some!"

"He's gone to the front too soon, T."

"Easy enough to ride a pony like that. It's on'y sittin' on 'is back. 'E does the rest."

"He don't want to play no wainin' game! It's Black Lad first all the bloomin' time! Bray-yo, young Williams!"

"There's Rajah comin' up on the left like a good 'un!"

"Comin' up be 'anged! Not up to Black Lad!"

"An' there's 'Op Pole! 'E'll make a race of it yet! Go it, Barnes! Ride, son, ride!"

No doubt Barnes rode his best. No doubt but that Hop Pole and Rajah went all out. Or, if any doubt, only that which always exists on the turf, where roguery is rampant!

"Black Lad!" came a mighty shout.

"Rajah! Stick it, Belhamy!"

"Black Lad wins!"

Bonny Lad had won—by a couple of lengths.

Cardew came from weighing-out, leading his mount, no longer cool for the perspiration was pouring down his face, but still quite calm.

"Might have won by twenty lengths," he said. "Gad, he's a beauty! But I didn't want to bucket him. Never touched him with whip or spur. Goin' to claim your dubs, D'Arcy?"

"Oh, weally! I never thought of that. What am I to do? I should think some chawty for the wah, you know—"

"There's no hurry. They haven't got the cash in a bag for you to carry off—Hullo, sir, I really don't think I have the extreme pleasure of your acquaintance!"

It was to a bearded, tanned man that the last few words were spoken. His hand had dropped upon Cardew's shoulder, and the dandy of the Fourth, quick to resent familiarity from a stranger, shook it off at once.

"I have not the pleasure of yours," said the bearded man. "But my name is Broughton, and the pony you are leading is mine; and you, I think, must be D'Arcy."

"Wrong, sir!" said Cardew coolly. "Here is my friend D'Arcy. This, D'Arcy, is Mr. Broughton, the owner of—er—your pony!"

AS Mr. Broughton stood among the St. Jim's juniors, before any explanations could be asked or given, there sounded yells and curses that might have come from denizens of the bottomless pit.

Then past them rushed Mr. Herbert Blinko, with sheer funk written large all over him; and behind Mr. Herbert, like hounds on the trail of a fox, came a howling mob.

"A welshe!" said Mr. Broughton, with a grim smile.

"An' a thief!" replied Cardew. "That's the rascal D'Arcy wrote you about, sir. His brother was to have ridden the race, an' lost it, you know. But I rode it instead, an' I happened to win."

"They copped a welshe 'ere last year," spoke an excited voice behind the group. "An' 'pon my word, they didn't ar' put 'im through it! Duckin' 'im in a pond, rolled 'im in the mud, tore the clothes off 'is back, and bashed 'im on the crumple!"

"So may it be with the present specimen!" grinned Lowther.

And, as they heard afterwards, so it was. The crowd of swindled backers caught Mr. Herbert and dealt with him in Hunsish fashion. They could not well have done more than they did, to leave him alive at the end of it; but they might have tried had they known the whole truth. For Mr. Herbert had relied on his swindle, and had omitted to provide himself with capital in case it failed; he had thought himself on a heap to nothing, and when the crash came he could do nothing but bolt.

The juniors conducted Mr. Broughton to where Fatty Wynn had Blinko the younger in safe ward.

But as they drew near they began to doubt whether the ward had been so safe, after all!

"Lie still, you rotter, or I'll smack your ugly head again!" came the voice of Fatty.

"Trouble with Blinko junior," said Talbot. "That's the jockey end of the plot, sir. We left him with one of ours."

As they passed into the field beyond the course a queer sight met their eyes.

Blinko junior was no longer in the ditch into which they had dropped the sack enclosing him. He was only partly in the sack. Fatty, who was sitting on him, was in a state of extreme disablement, his waistcoat buttons were undone, his braces hung down, and his trousers looked as if they had just been pulled half on—or off!

"My hat, what an earth have you been up to, Fatty?" asked Higgins.

"I haven't been up to anything!" growled Fatty. "It was this sweep. I suppose I must have snoozed off. And this rotter crawled out of the ditch—with nothing but his vest and socks on, the scandalous bounder!—and he was trying to pinch my clothes off my back!"

"Not to mention your legs," said Lowther blandly. "Let me introduce you to Bonny Lad's owner!"

"Rats! Oh, you ass! How can I be

introduced to anyone till I'm buttoned up? Stand in front of me, some of you chaps!"

Mr. Broughton made things easier for Fatty by turning the other way.

"I say, you know, Wynn—it's a mere detail, of course—but where are my clothes?" growled Cardew. "I should create some excitement if I went back in this Joseph's coat to St. Jim's."

"They're all right. I've hidden them—before I snoozed off. I thought perhaps I might snooze off," said Fatty. "I do now and then."

"You do!" said Figgys.

"But this chap must have seen you. Why didn't he go for Cardew's clobber?" asked Tom Merry.

"I put it up a tree. Blinko wouldn't fancy climbing a tree—not like that, you know," said Fatty placidly.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

It was an evidence to the juniors—and to Mr. Broughton—that Mr. William had been in no case for climbing trees.

"Come out of that sack!" ordered Blake.

"Not blessed well likely! For you to grin at me—hay? Not me!"

But he had to come out, and he donned the jockey garb, while Cardew—leisurely as ever—dressed himself. Cardew was not to be rushed, and no one felt disposed to grumble at him.

"What shall we do with him, sir?" asked Arthur Augustus.

"On the whole, I think I should do nothing," replied Mr. Broughton. "He deserves horsewhipping; but I fancy that in the long run it would not pay you to use any such drastic measures with him. I take it that your visit here this afternoon is in the nature of an escapade?"

"Well, yaas, sir, that's so," confessed Arthur Augustus. "I didn't hear from you, you see, an' we were wild to think of those vascals usin' Bonny Lad to wook people. Not but that most of the people we have seen to-day might be wooked for all I should care. They are weally a most unpleasant lot, an' their smell is howwid!"

"It is obviously my fault, in a great measure, should have written," said Bonny Lad's owner. "Or, at least, have wired. But time was short, and I made up my mind to come along here. I did not guess that you would have intervened with such effect."

"You don't mind, sir?" said Tom.

"On the contrary, I am grateful to you all. Bonny Lad is my daughter's. He given to her by the man she was to have married. He died at Ypres. You understand?"

"Oh, sir!" breathed Gussy. No one else spoke. But over them all a shadow fell for the moment as they thought of that young life and that severed pair of lovers; and Talbot stroked Bonny Lad's nostrils, and Fatty Wynn blinked away moisture, and even the careless, cynical Cardew felt a lump in his throat.

Gloop, it appeared, had been employed for a time as groom at Mr. Broughton's place. He had disappeared, taking the pony with him. No sentimental consideration was likely to weigh with Mr. Gloop.

Blinko junior had slunk away. Now the adventure dropped, with Mr. Broughton and Bonny Lad. It was best they should get back as soon as possible, and they had no further interest in the races.

But first they had tea with Mr. Broughton at an hotel. He was the best of good fellows, they found; and to a man who had travelled all over the world, as he had, their breaking of bounds seemed a far slighter thing than it would have done to a schoolmaster.

TO THE BOYS AT THE FRONT.

If you are unable to obtain this publication regularly, please tell any newsdealer to get it from

Messagers HACHETTE & Co.,
111, Rue Reaumur, PARIS.

He did suggest that they might do wisely to confess, and offered to come over to St. Jim's and help them out; but he did not press the point when they made it evident that they preferred to take their chance.

He had the greatest difficulty in persuading Arthur Augustus to take back his twenty pounds, and none of the others would hear of taking the reward.

"It's all right, sir," said Blake cheerily. "What's D'Arcy's is ours, you know. That's why we objected to his wasting money on Gloop."

"Well, Blake, that is most untrue!" flashed Gussy. "These fellows are not spongers, Mr. Broughton, though you might fancy so to hear Blake talk!"

It cut Gussy to the heart to part with Bonny Lad; but he would have borne heavier pain in the circumstances. He thought of Miss Broughton and that soldier lad who had died at Ypres, and

he could not regret that the girl who had lost so much should get back her cherished pony.

Cardew was called out while they were at tea. He came back grinning.

"Racke and Crooke," he said. "Robbed on the course—stony-broke—didn't know how to get home!"

"What did you do?" asked Levison.

"Lent the rotters a quid—without prejudice to any measure we thought it needful to take in their case later. They were in the giddy wangle, you know, sir. In fact, if it hadn't been for them, we might not have had any real evidence of it. But they gave it away when they tipped me Hop Pole, an' chortled about Bonny Lad's being licked."

"Bai Jove! I nevaht thought of that! On the whole, Cardew, we have some reason to be grateful to Wacke an' Cwooke."

"I don't think!" said Cardew.

And the rest agreed with him.

The Blinks cleared out. Doubtless Mr. William found Mr. Herbert and told him that Bonny Lad's real owner was at hand. That would be enough for the swindlers. Anyway, their habitation was empty when Blake & Co. went past two days later.

Mr. Broughton saw the clerk of the course, and the stakes won by Bonny Lad went to a war charity. And though the adventurers were uneasy for some days afterwards—as it chanced, the story of Bonny Lad's race never came to the ears of the authorities at St. Jim's!

THE END.

(Don't miss next Wednesday's Great Story of Tom Merry & Co. at St. Jim's.—"WALKER!" by Martin Clifford.)

The Editor's Chat.

For Next Wednesday:

"WALKER!"
By Martin Clifford.

Most of you simply love stories of the feud between New House and School House, I know. Next week's story tells of a new development in that feud, how Figgins & Co. were done down by Tom Merry & Co., how the New House juniors expressed their contempt for Figgins as a leader, how Korr took the matter in hand, and how—

But that's too much in advance! Incidentally, the story deals with a new boy named Walker—Albert Adolphus Walker—who comes to the School House, and is met by the old-time Breez and Gussy. This is a singular new boy, this—not only in his manners, but in his methods. New boys do not usually vanish into thin air, when once— But again I must stop, for fear lest I tell too much!

AN OLD FRIEND.

Yots of letters with regard to Mr. R. J. Macdonald, the former clever illustrator of the St. Jim's stories, reach me. He seems to be much missed, though most of my readers have enough artistic perception to realize that in Mr. Warwick Reynolds, our present artist, we have a first-class black-and-white man, who has few equals in one particular branch of work, the picture of animals—and is of rare all-round ability, too.

Well, the other-day Lieutenant R. J. Macdonald, R.N.V.R., looked in to see me on a flying visit to town. His present rank and style may give you a clue as to why his work is not appearing in these pages at present. He has business more important on hand!

That he carries with him the good wishes of the GEM readers, I am sure.

It is impossible, of course, for our readers to picture the differences the war has made in the great publishing house whence the GEM hails. At the very outset many have wilted. They have been going ever since. One by one they pass from us, to take up their share of the big burden, and then, when the shadow is cast upon us as we get tidings that one of them has "gone west," and will never more show his face in the familiar corridors.

We who are left—men too old for service, or physically unfit—carry on, and hope the best for those still out there in the fog of war. And now, and then one of them strides before us almost beyond recognition, with more vigour in his step than of old, fresh—in a sense, if weary enough in another—from doing a man's work where men are proven; very glad, too, to be back, if only for an hour or two, in the old place.

Don't imagine that the war has passed the Fleetway House by! It has taken heavy toll of us. I could say more; but it is not necessary now.

OUR NEW SERIAL.

For some months we have had extracts from "Tom Merry's Weekly" and "The

Greyfriars Herald" in the GEM. When I started them I told you that the time might come when they would be transferred to the "Magnet," and another serial start its course in these pages. But it was not easy to get the right sort of serial. It would appeal to a present only minority of my readers care much for an adventure serial. The majority prefer school matter—and that about their old friends of St. Jim's or Greyfriars or Rylcombe or Highcliffe.

Now I have something in hand that I feel sure will appeal to all of you. Taking a general line through the opinions expressed by my correspondents, I have come to the conclusion that good school stuff is far more popular than anything else that can be offered. So the serial that I start in a week or two will be a school story. Not of St. Jim's, for that would be confusing, with the complete stories appearing week by week in the same paper. The new yarn will deal principally with Highcliffe and Cliff House, and its title will be:

"THE TWINS FROM TASMANIA."

One of the twins is a boy, the other a girl. They are the best of chums, and stand by one another to the uttermost. But you will hear more about them next week, when the story starts!

NOTICES.

Wanted.

A pair of dumb-bells, more be cheap.—H. Glover, 1, Cavalry Street, Norwich.

Football—Matches Wanted by

ST. JOHN'S JUNIORS—14-16—5 mile radius.—T. W. J. Silverthorn, 73, Wellington Road, St. James, Bristol.

LIGHTS JUNIORS—15-16—5 mile radius or less.—L. Taylor, 45, Lightbourne Road, Moston, Manchester.

SPRINGFIELD UNITED.—S. G. Henley, 50, Lealand Road, Stamford Hill, N. 15.

Back Numbers Wanted.

By W. Markall, 189, Edmund Road, Sheffield.—Tom Merry & Co. "Though Thick and Thin" (Boys' Friend" 6d. Library), 6d. each; "Ford," "Magnet," No. 439, 2d. and postage; also "Schoolboys Never Shall be Slaves," 6d.

By B. Jeane, 39, Jones Street, West Knudsford, Transvaal, South Africa.—Back numbers GEM and "Magnet" and "Boys' Friend" 3d. Library.

By H. N. Jenkins, 87, Earl Street, Edgware, Middlesex.—Double Numbers of GEM before Christmas, 1918.

By Norman C. Woods, Swift Street, Albury, N.S.W., Australia.—"Surprising the School," "The Great Postal Order Conspiracy," "Fishy" "Fag Agency," "Figgins' Fig-Pudding," and number of GEM containing "The Race to the Tuckshop."

Your Editor

HUN-SATISFIED!

By MONTY LOWTHER.

The Hun is never satisfied. And lately says we've sought To starve him out—although we've tried To give him food—for thought!

He also says he's never seen Politeness in our ranks; Though lately his attacks have been Returned—with "many tanks."

He says that peace to him is dear, And now his myriad elves Are angry 'cause we volunteer To get him it ourselves!

THE BIRD!

By GEORGE FIGGINS.

She sat alone—pette, entrancing; What luck to find she was not dancing!

Our hero smoothed his ruffled hair, And humbly he approached her there.

He said: "I'm trusting that you'll let Us dance the dainty minuet."

She smiled, and shook her curly head. "I'd rather not," was all she said.

"Then let us do a Turkey trot," She frowned, and said: "It's far too hot!"

He paused, and looked a bit perplexed, And hinted that quadrilles were next.

"I'm sorry," said the maid. "You see, They're far too strenuous for me!"

A Doris, surely, would not fail? He tried that, too—without avail!

And at the lancers, king of whirls, She merely shook her golden curls.

Her face still smiled—still was entrancing; His face was red—but not with dancing!

Her further words he scarcely heard: He knew that he had got "the bird!"

COALS OF FIRE.

By ERIC KERRUSH.

(From "Tom Merry's Weekly.")

"I AM withah shocked!" Arthur Augustus D'Arcy spoke in a tone more of sorrow than of anger. Blake and Herries and Digby had just come into Study No. 6, and Arthur Augustus' remark was addressed to the trio generally.

"Shocked—eh?" yawned Blake. "Naas, wathah!"

"Been handling an electric battery?"

"Of the sort, Blake. I mean I have received a moral shock."

"Thank goodness it's no worse!" said Blake, with a wise shake of the head. "A moral shock is easier to stand than the other sort. If you've got over it, we'll have tea."

"I have not got over it, Blake!"

"Then we'll have tea while you get over it."

"You do not appear to attach much importance to the matter, Blake!" said Arthur Augustus severely.

"Well, as a matter of fact, I don't," confessed Blake. "Is there anything for tea?"

"There are only three lumps left, Blake."

"Well, my hat!" said Herries, in surprise. "I never thought you'd woff all the sugar."

"You utter ass, Herries!"

"It's too bad!" said Digby. "I'm shocked, too. Quite a moral shock."

"I have not woffed the sugar, you ass!" said Arthur Augustus.

"Then where is it?"

"Toby has scooffed it."

"The same rascal!"

"That was the shock I was speakin' of," said Arthur Augustus. "Toby was in the study when I came in, and he was bolting our sugar. It was a very wewephensable act in itself."

"He couldn't!" I suppose, said Digby, thoughtfully. "He would be bound to turn up in the kitchen some time before Christ does. And you wouldn't have finished by then if you'd once started."

"I regard that remark as asinine, Blake!" Toby has scooffed three lumps of sugar, and left only three."

"Well, it can't be helped," said Digby. "Perhaps Toby has a sweet tooth. You're not thinking of reporting him, I suppose, rathard?"

"Wats!"

"Arcy of the Fourth turned his eyeglass wathfully upon Dig at the bare suggestion. Toby, the page in the School House at St. Jim's, certainly had no right to scooff the sugar in Study No. 6, but the wath of the Fourth was more likely to make a complaint of the subject."

"Well, never mind, then," said Blake. "We'll go short on the merry sugar—in fact, you can do without any, Gussy, as you've had your shock. You can have the shock instea' of the sugar."

"I am not goin' to wewport Toby, Blake, but I shall not allow the mattah to dwop head."

"Oh, don't jaw the poor kid!" said Blake. "I am not goin' to jaw him, Blake. I am goin' to appeal to his conscience by heapin' coals of fiash on his head."

"Coals of fire, my hat! I—t that likely to singe his topknot?"

"I do not mean wveal coals of fiash, you ass!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Pway be sewious, deav boy. I am goin' to heap coals of fiash on his head by givin' him the wath of the sugar."

"Oh, crumbs!"

"I am stah that will touch his conscience, and make him realise that he has been guilty of a mean action, Blake."

"Oh, crumbs!"

"You howling ass!" roared Herries. "You can touch his giddy conscience without givin' him no lumps, anyway!"

"Wust, Hewies, that you are not goin' to be mean about a lump or two of sugar, when it is a question of impartin' moral instruction to a thoughtless youngster!"

"Great pip!" said Herries, almost overcome. "Have you seen Toby, deav boys?"

"He went to Tom Merry's study with a parcel a minute ago," said Blake. "You can catch him as he comes back. But, look here, we want that sugar for tea."

"I wuequah it, Blake, for the purpose of heapin' coals of fiash on Toby's head," said Arthur Augustus firmly.

"Suppose you heap them on my head instea'?" suggested Blake. "After all, you mustn't waste coals of fire in war-time. Coal's going to be very scarce this winter."

"Pway don't be a funny ass, Blake! Ah, heah is Toby!"

A plump youth in many buttons was passing the door, studying doorway from the direction of the Shell passage.

Toby cast a guilty look at Study No. 6 as he scuttled past towards the stairs.

But Arthur Augustus D'Arcy's eyeglass was upon him. The wath of St. Jim's ran into the passage.

"Toby! Stop!"

The youth in buttons halted unwillingly.

"I say, Master Gussy—lo stomered."

"Toby, it was wotten of you to scooff the sugar in the study!" said Arthur Augustus severely.

"I—"

"It was an action only worthy of Twimble of the Fourth," said Arthur Augustus. "I am surprised at you, Toby!"

"I—please—"

"I have wewceived a shock, Toby, from your conduct."

"Oh, sir," said poor Toby. "And I am goin' to heap coals of fiash on your head, Toby—"

Toby jumped.

"Master D'Arcy?"

"Come heah, Toby!"

"Please—"

"Come heah, you young ass! Step into the study, and I shall heap coals of fiash on your head, you young—"

"But Jove! Where are you goin', Toby?"

Toby did not answer.

He was bolting for the stairs like a scared rabbit.

Arthur Augustus rushed in pursuit.

"Toby! Stop! Do you heah?"

Toby dashed down the stairs three at a time. He ran into Grundy of the Shell, and there was a roar.

Grundy caught the banisters with one hand, and Toby with the other—by the ear.

"You young ass!" he roared. "Where are you runnin' to?"

"Lemme go, sir!" shrieked Toby. "He's arter me!"

"Eh? Who's after you?"

"Lemme go!"

Toby wrenched himself away, and tore on, and Arthur Augustus, in full pursuit, crashed into Grundy of the Shell.

Grundy set on the stairs with a bump, and Arthur Augustus found a resting-place a few steps lower down.

"Gwooh!" gasped D'Arcy.

"Toweh!" roared Grundy. "You clumsy ass! Why, I'll skin you—I'll spifficate you!"

D'Arcy did not wait to be skinned or spifficated. He jumped up, breathless and rushed downstairs after the fleeing page.

"Stop, you young duffah!" he roared.

But Toby was fleeing as if for his life.

"Toby! Stop!"

Crash!

In the lower passage Toby ran full tilt into Kildare of the Sixth. The big Sixth-Former staggered, and grasped the youth in buttons with a grasp of iron.

"Hallo! What's this game?" panted Kildare.

"Yoop! Leggo! He's arter me!" shrieked Toby.

"Bai Jove! Toby—"

"So you're arter him, are you, D'Arcy?" said the prefect sternly. "Are you ragging Toby, or you ragging me?"

"Certainly not!" exclaimed Arthur

Augustus indignantly. "Weally, Kildare, I wewel the insinuation with feashful scorn!"

"Name and ye'll yell Toby."

Kildare tightened his grip.

"What are you running for?" he demanded.

"It was only a few lumps of sugar!" gasped Toby. "And to burn a feller's air off for that—"

"What?"

"I can't stand it, sir! I can't ave the 'air burned off me!" howled Toby. "It's crool! That's crool! That's what it is—crool!"

"Gweat Scott!"

The captain of St. Jim's gave D'Arcy a stern look.

"Have you been scaring this kid, D'Arcy?" he asked ominously. "What silly trick have you been playing?"

"None at all," said Arthur Augustus, in amazement. "I certainly did not intend to burn off his hair! I wuegard the ideah as utterly howid, and only worthy of a Fousen Hun."

"He was a-goin' to do it!" moaned Toby. "He said he was! 'Eapin' burnin' coals on a feller's head! It's crool!"

"D'Arcy!"

"Bai Jove! Ha, ha, ha!" roared Arthur Augustus.

"This is not a laughing matter, D'Arcy. If you have been making any such ridiculous threats—"

"Ha, ha! I haven't—"

"He says you said—"

Arthur Augustus cursed.

"I said I was goin' to heap coals of fiash on his head, Kildare."

"Oh!"

"That's it—coals of fire on a feller's head!" gasped Toby. "Crool, I call it, 'cause of a few lumps of sugar. Burnin' orf a feller's 'air—"

Kildare grinned.

"You young ass. Coals of fire doesn't mean coals of fire—"

"Eh? Wot does it mean, then?"

"Ha, ha! It's a figure of speech!" gasped Kildare. "It means punishing a fellow by being extra kind to him, you howling young ass!"

"Roh!" said Toby blankly.

"You feashful young—"

Arthur Augustus. "I was goin' to punish you by givin' you the wath of the surah. That is heapin' coals of fiash on your head, you feashful duffah!"

"Hoh!" gasped Toby.

Kildare walked away, laughing.

"Come back to the study, Toby," said Arthur Augustus.

Toby eyed him very doubtfully. He followed Arthur Augustus up the stairs, however. But he kept at a safe distance, in case it should be necessary to bolt again. Evidently he was not quite satisfied about those coals of fire.

"Come in, Toby," said Arthur Augustus, as he entered Study No. 6. "The young ass was wuegardin' a misapprehension, deav boys. He thought I meant wveal coals of fiash—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Naas, it is wathah funny. Give me the sugar, Blake!"

"Eh?" Blake stirred his tea. "What sugar?"

"The three lumps that were left, deav boy. Where are they?"

"I rather fancy three chaps have put them in their tea," said Blake blandly; and Herries and Digby chuckled.

"Bai Jove!" roared that as wotten!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus. "Now I shall not be able to heap coals of fiash on Toby's head!"

"Punch! His nose instea'," suggested Herries.

"Wats! Pewwaps, as the sugar is gone, and I cannot heah coals of fiash on his head, I had better lick him with a cricket-stump. Toby!"

"Bai Jove! He's gone!"

There was a sound of rapidly receding foot-steps in the passage. For some reason, best known to himself, Toby had not stayed for the substitute for the coals of fire.

THE END.

THE MYSTERY OF TREWITHEEN.

By R. A. DIGBY.

[EDITORIAL NOTE.—I don't think Dig puts this forward as an adventure of his own. Anyway, Tom is not his name. But it's quite a good yarn, I consider.—T. M.]

LAST hole I was staying with a pal of mine down at Trewithen, in Cornwall.

This estate lay hidden in a green hollow that looked as though it had been scooped out of the hills. One could walk through the country for miles round it without seeing a soul.

My word, Trewithen House was some place. It had picture-galleries, a fountain in the courtyard, and—but this is not a catalogue of its attractions.

The place is simply full of all kinds of odd rooms and corridors that seem to lead nowhere in particular, and twist and turn every other yard; dark passages opening out in every imaginable direction.

Ainslie's patter told me that altogether there was nearly a mile of passages. Although I was there a fortnight, I never got to know the place thoroughly.

There was just time to take a venture of mine which put me out exploring alone.

We were sitting at dinner one day when Mr. Ainslie suddenly said:

"I say, Maurice, he told you about our family ghost?"

I picked up my ears at this, you bet, and when my chum replied in the negative I pressed his father for the story. It ran something like this:

Three hundred years ago the owner of the house was Sir Geoffrey Huering. He had been a pretty bad lot in his time, but as he grew old he gave up his wild ways, and—well, you know the proverb. That he married, but his wife died soon after the birth of a son.

Sir Geoffrey worried rather over his past, and he got hold of the notion that if he made his son a peer he could atone for his sins. But the son, also named Geoffrey, bucked. He didn't catch on to the notion at all, and there were pretty frequent rows between him and his governor.

When young Huering was about seventeen years old he got into some sort of wild scrape. Sir Geoffrey summoned him to his private chamber one night, and a furious scene took place. Curses and threats were heard from the room by one of the servants.

From that night Geoffrey the younger was never seen again. Nobody knew what had become of him. Some said that he was hiding from his father, some said that he must have run away. Some even whispered that Sir Geoffrey had killed him in a fit of rage, and burned the body. Only one thing was certain. Sir Geoffrey Huering was never the same man after this. They said he spent his nights wandering round the great house calling upon his son, and in a couple of years or so he perished out.

Ever since then there had been strange tales of uncanny sights and sounds in the house in connection with the ghost.

When Ainslie and I went up to bed after that yarn we couldn't help feeling a bit creepy. Ghosts might be things to laugh at in the daytime, but in the dark, down in the great house everything seemed possible.

I made up my mind to explore the west wing—being by daylight, you bet. I said nothing to Mr. Ainslie. I was a bit—well, he might forbid me to go. I said nothing to Maurice, either.

Next day I slipped out after lunch and made for the west wing. The windows on the ground floor were boarded up, but a great thorn-tree stood against the walls. At the cost of a few scratches I climbed in at one of the upper casements.

The room I got into was hideously depressing isn't the word for it. The walls were damp and mildewed. The ceiling was blackened and discoloured. The beams that ran across the hall were awed up, but I went very cautiously for the stairs were broken in places. But the dark hall looked so uninviting that I paused halfway down and turned over my banisters. It was a silly trick. Something gave with a crack, and I fell headlong.

With a jar that seemed to break every bone in my body, I landed on the planks below. But they, too, were rotten; they

gave way under the sudden strain, and clutching at them, I tumbled into a passage below the floor.

I was quite stunned by the fall, but when I recovered consciousness I found that I had got out of my hole, my broken bones, though I was bruised all over, and a bit dizzy.

But how was I to get back? The hole in the flooring was quite ten feet above my head. No chance that way.

The passage was lined here and there with great stones, but in places they had fallen away, leaving the earth that had been behind them showing.

Then an awful thought struck me. Supposing there were no outlets? The wing was so far from the rest of the house that my shouts would not be heard.

It was no good sitting down to worry. I hurried along the passage, which seemed to be leading straight into the hillside.

I must have proceeded for several minutes when a soft sound of rustling came from my ears and a cool breeze blew in my face. And then from far above came a glimmer of sunlight.

The flickering light showed only a portion of the huge place in which I found myself. But what it did show was wonderful. I could see no roof—at least, not the top of it. It seemed to be dome-shaped.

Through the centre of the hall a stream flowed, disappearing in one of the far corners. A path ran up a steep slope, though which I could see a patch of blue sky. And soon yet I was glad to see daylight.

But now that I felt pretty sure I could get out I was in no great hurry to go. I tried to think what could have been the object of the great underground cave. Then it came into my mind. I remembered reading of just such a place as this. It was an old tin mine, the work of Phoenicians, who were the first to discover and work this mineral.

Then I heard a most curious sound, a sort of low grinding which deepened into a roar. I put my hand against the wall, and felt it shiver like the ground in an earthquake.

The path led to the roof fell with a terrific crash at my feet. This roused me from my stupor. I made a mad dash for the path and the open air above. I plunged through the stream.

I reached the path more of the roof fell, and the whole cave was choked with dust and dying earth. The movement of the ground had become more violent, and the narrow way was crumbling beneath my feet.

I never quite knew how I got out. It remains a hideous blank in my mind. My cheeks were torn and bleeding from the scumming of the ground when I found myself lying on top of the hill, far above the entrance to the cave.

Then, as I lay there, the side of the hill rose up all about me. I gathered speed, and I could see that the surface of the hillside was in motion, and that a great landslide was in progress.

The mighty mass roared down on Trewithen House!

I shut my eyes. I could not bear to look on what seemed inevitable tragedy.

The great rush of earth ceased, and a terrible stillness reigned. It was just as if the whole earth was holding its breath.

At last I raised my eyes and looked.

The side of the hillside had been laid bare to the depth of many feet. It gleamed like a great scar. Over what had been once smooth paddocks and lawns of Trewithen House stood as men have seen on the Western Front the ruins of a village.

With what a roar the ruinous wing of Trewithen had ceased to be, but the rest of the house stood absolutely untouched.

What about Sir Geoffrey and the ghost? Well, scientific men may say that the old tin mine explains all that. It was falling to pieces, so to speak, and the weird sounds travelled along the underground passages, making echoes that no man has ever been uncanny to hear. As for spooky sights they were just imagination, no doubt—like most ghosts.

THE END.

THE MEETING.

By BAGLEY TRIMBLE.

[EDITORIAL NOTE.—Baggy says he will take £10 for this wangle. I—do—not—think!—T. M.]

IT was a wild winter night. Men in sun-drawn apartments shivered when they heard the rattle howl and shriek and the wild patter incessantly against the window-panes.

Our scene, however, lies in a forest of dense, lustrous foliage, where, save for the continuous roar from the thunder and lightning, there was deep silence in this sequestered wood, miles away from any habitation of man.

There was no moon, therefore the forest was intensely dark; a darkness which served to show up more vividly the deep silence surrounding everything.

Leaning against a tree in the wood was a big, coarse-looking man, fanning himself with his handkerchief, so as not to become overpowered by the terrific heat of the July evening. It was evident he was waiting for someone, and he was not disappointed, because presently he heard some person speak.

"Are you there?" came the words, as a big ruff voice loomed up in the darkness.

To protect himself from the bitterly cold wind the new-comer wore a heavy overcoat, open at the collar, and showing his fair arms and shoulders.

He spoke again, and said: "Now that I've found you I want my share of the swag. Do you think I work for nothing?"

The man first on the scene, realising that silence was best, spoke no words, but let fly a volley of oaths.

"Well," he said, after a time of quietness, "I will give you my money in English gold."

"Thank you," drily remarked his companion, as he pocketed the notes.

For some length of time neither of the men spoke. Perhaps it was the moon's white, solitary light, or the terrible heat of the evening all round which waded them, but at all events they crouched together under the tree's well-coming shelter from the cold, pitiless snow and the shivering wind.

To the careful observer the man who had been first on the scene would have seemed boyling over with rage, and, what with the heat of the night and his own convulsive movements, he seemed about to burst into a thousand tiny pees at any moment.

His companion, by his outward appearance, was as calm as ever; but had anywhe been able to have a peep deep down into his breast, it would have been seen that he, too, was nashing his teeth.

After a time a deep, doleful silence was broken by the calmer of the two men, who said:

"What are you worrying about, man? You've got your share of the joels and I've got mine. What more do you want?"

The other man then spoke for the first time, and his voice was full of anger.

"You fool!" he said. "The coins are spurs imitations, absolutely useless!"

The other thief lost his sang froid, and cursed most horribly.

"Then all our trouble has been for nothing. What an idiot you are, bean!" were his words.

A fierce altercation ensued. Both men were terribly angry, and used their fists freely and to great advantage.

Suddenly in the full moon's bright beams a rifle flash; it was held by the man who all along had been in a violent temper, and was now almost mad with rage and chafin.

Rushing forward with a loud cry, which was heard by the other man was distinctly audible, he raised the rifle and struck.

The words were scarcely uttered, a sound, and his murderer, doubtless unnerved by the cry which had escaped the dying man's lips as he fell to the ground, fell panic-stricken from the spot, never to return!

A little while later, midway between the points of the crescent moon, two brilly down upon the bodies of the two men who had died struggling in each other's arms.

THE END.