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HERRIES' SPECIAL TURN!

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



WELL PLAYED, HERRIES!

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

HERRIES' SPECIAL TURN!

By
Martin
Clifford.

CHAPTER 1.

The Noise That Annoyed.

TA-RA-RA-RA-RA!

Weird noises were coming from a study in the Fourth Form passage at St. Jim's.

Jack Blake and Digby and Arthur Augustus D'Arcy pulled up short at the top of the stairs.

"What the dickens—" began Digby.

"My only aunt!" exclaimed Blake.

"What a row! It's enough to wake the giddy dead!"

"Weally, Blake," protested Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, "I strongly object to your talking of the dead in such wopwehensible mannah!"

"Oh, rats!" growled Blake. "This row— Oh, hark at it!"

Ta-ra-ra-ra-pom!

Again there was a burst of discordant noise.

It sounded very much as though it came from a musical instrument, but in spite of the fact that music is supposed to soothe the savage breast, the soothing effect of this particular noise on the chums of Study No. 6 was practically nil.

Far from soothing them, it made them exceedingly angry.

Digby dug his fingers into his ears in order to deaden the sound. Blake growled in a most wrathful manner; whilst Arthur Augustus fixed his monocle firmly in his eye, and surveyed the closed doors of the Fourth Form studies.

Ta-ra-ra-ra-tah!

"Oh, scissors!" growled Blake. "I can't stand this any longer!"

"Neither can I, dear boy!" agreed the swell of St. Jim's. "I suggest we go downstairs again."

"Well, I don't!" growled Blake.

"Weally, Blake—"

"I suggest we rout out the burbling chump who's making that beastly row, and give him a jolly good ducking in the fountain!"

"Weally—"

Ta-ra-ra-ra-ra!

"Oh, come on!" said Jack Blake, moving along the passage. "If we don't buck up and put a stop to this row the drums of my ears will go pop!"

Blake tore along the passage, and hurried open the door of Study No. 4.

The study was empty.

Blake closed the door with a bang, and entered the next study.

Study No. 5 was generally occupied by Julian, Kernish, Reilly, and Hammond, but these worthies were now conspicuous by their absence.

Blake snorted, and once again there was a terrific bang as the indignant Fourth-Former shut the door.

But the noise made by the closing of the door was nothing compared to the frightful noise that was bursting forth from somewhere very near at hand.

Blake had not thought for one moment that the row could have come from Study No. 6—his own study. But now there was very little doubt about it.

Blake treated the door of Study No. 6 in the same unceremonious manner.

As the wrathful junior opened the door

there was a louder burst of noise than ever.

Ta-ra-ra-ra-pom!

"My hat!" exclaimed Blake, as he pulled up short just inside the study.

"My hat!" echoed Digby; and Arthur Augustus D'Arcy concluded with:

"Good gwacious!"

The three juniors were struck spell-bound, for standing in the centre of the study was George Herries.

The fact of Herries standing in the room would not have been sufficient in itself to astound Blake & Co.

But Herries was holding a cornet to his mouth, and at frequent intervals he blew into the mouthpiece.

The result was a really most blatant noise, though anybody with a musical ear might, possibly have recognised the tune Herries was playing.

But Blake & Co. did not possess musical ears, and their indignation towards the musical Herries knew no bounds.

Ta-ra-ra-ra-ra!

Herries played on, quite unconcerned by the angry expressions on the faces of Blake & Co.

"Herries, you ass!" roared Blake.

"Herries, you burbling chump!" yelled Digby.

"Hewwies, you wank duffah!" chimed in Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

But the musical Herries only responded on the cornet with:

Ta-ra-ra-ra-ra!

"Herries, you fat-headed idiot!" shrieked Blake. "Stop it, d'you hear!"

Whether Herries heard or not, he certainly did not heed.

With his cheeks expanded, and his face red from exertion, he continued to blow into the mouthpiece of the cornet.

The result was a very discordant:

Ta-ra-ra-ra-ra-ra!

Jack Blake raved and roared with indignation.

"Stop that unearthly row!" he shouted, shaking his fist at Herries.

Ta-ra-ra-ra-pom!

"Herries, you burbler!" shrieked Digby.

Ta-ra-ra-ra!

"You silly ass, Hewwies!" yelled Arthur Augustus frantically. "Why don't you drop that blessed thing?"

But still Herries had nothing to say but:

Ta-ra-ra-ra-pom-pom!

Jack Blake was almost beside himself with rage.

He cast his eyes round the room for something to hurl at the unperturbed Herries.

The blatant noise was now at its height, but it was not to last much longer.

Blake observed a glass of water on the table.

In an instant he had picked it up, and, without giving thought to the damage he might inflict upon the cornet, he hurled the water into the trumpet.

Ta-ra-ra-roomp—oomp!

A gurgling, rumbling sound came from the cornet.

"Now perhaps you'll shut up, you burbling chump!" exclaimed Jack Blake, replacing the glass on the table.

Herries shook the water out of his in-

strument, and glared at his wrathful chums.

"What—what did you do that for?" he demanded, giving Blake a furious look. "You've spoiled my cornet, you silly ass!"

"A jolly good job, too!" growled Blake. "You shouldn't have kicked up such a blessed row. I've never heard such a din in all my life."

"Din!" gasped Herries. "I—I— Why, I was playing the 'Spring Song.'"

"Eh?"

"I was playing Mendelssohn's 'Spring Song.'"

Blake grunted.

"Well, you can think yourself jolly lucky that Mendelssohn's dead," he said plainly.

"Why? What—?"

"If Mendelssohn were alive and could hear you murdering his music like that, I reckon he'd rag you bald-headed!" growled Blake.

"Heah, heah, Blake, dear boy!" said Arthur Augustus. "I weally think that Mendelssohn would be justified in wagging Hewwies for making that silly row!"

Herries breathed hard through his nose. "You fat-headed chump!" he exclaimed hotly. "There isn't a fellow who understands music."

"Ha, ha, ha!" laughed Blake. "If you call that music what you were playing, I'm jolly glad I don't understand it. What you wanted to play the old thing for I don't know."

"I was practising for the contest," explained Herries.

"Eh?" exclaimed Blake. "What contest?"

"Why," said Herries, "we've had cricket contests and boxing contests and japing contests, so widge didn't we have a musical contest?"

Blake snorted.

"Because we're not going to?" he replied flatly.

"But—"

"That sort of thing's dead off," said Blake. "The fellows aren't keen enough on music for that. Nobody can play an instrument well enough for—"

"I don't know," said Herries. "I reckon I could whack any fellow the School could produce in a cornet contest. You hear me play the 'Bourgeois' from the 'Tales of Hoffman.'"

"You won't—"

Ta-ra-ra-ra—oomp—oomp—oomp! Very little music came from the cornet this time; there was too much water in the pipes for that.

The result of Herries' effort was a deep rumbling sound.

Herries shook his head angrily.

"What did you want to throw that water over my cornet for, Blake?" demanded. "How do you expect me to play it when—"

"I don't expect you to play it," said Blake. "And, what's more, I'm not going to let you."

"I'm going to—"

"You're not going to do a thing of the kind!" snapped Blake. "If you want to play another note you'll have to go into the carpet!"

"I tell you I'm—"

"I tell you you're not going to—"
 "Hallo! What's all this rumpus about?"

Talbot stood there, with Tom Merry and Figgins and Skimpole, the genius of the Shell.

Skimpole was looking very serious, as he usually did, but the faces of the others were wreathed in smiles.

"Come in!" sang out Blake. "Herries has been talking a lot of silly rot, and I'm trying to make him shut up."

"It ain't rot!" declared Herries firmly. "I'm going to play the 'Barcarolle' from—"

"If you dare to—"

"I'm going—"

"One minute, Herries, old scout," said Tom Merry diplomatically. "Skimpole's got a suggestion to make for a contest in the competition. Let's settle that first. We'll have your old carbuncle afterwards."

"'Barcarolle,' fathead!" snorted Herries.

"Oh, 'Barcarolle,' then!" said Tom Merry. "I didn't quite catch the word. Now then, Skimmy, tell Blake this wonderful wheeze of yours."

Tom Merry winked at Blake.

Skimpole was standing with his back to the captain of the Shell, and he did not notice the wink.

But Blake did, and he guessed that Skimmy's leg was about to be pulled.

It seemed very possible that Blake had guessed right.

CHAPTER 2.

Herries' Wheeze.

"WHAT'S the trouble, Skimmy?" asked Blake.

"My dear Blake," said Skimpole simply, "you are under a delusion. There is no trouble whatsoever, I am thankful to say."

"Oh, good!" sighed Blake. "It's a relief to know that."

"I was sitting in my study," continued Skimpole eagerly, "when suddenly something flashed across my mind."

"Go hon! What was it—lightning?"

"Lightning!" repeated Skimpole perplexedly. "I fail to understand why you should have drawn that deduction from my statement."

"Well, you said something flashed across your mind, and I naturally thought you were referring to lightning."

"Nothing of the kind," said Skimpole. "You are entirely under a delusion. I meant to say that an idea had crossed my mind."

"Oh!"

"I feel that it is incumbent on me to lend my services in order to make a profound success of the competition between the Shell and the Fourth," said Skimpole seriously.

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

"Not at all," said Skimpole, with a shake of the head. "I regard it as my bounden duty. But, to proceed. During moments of meditation it occurred to me that the Shell might challenge the Fourth to produce a book on a certain subject."

"A book?" said Blake. "Why, that's easily done! How will this one do?"

Blake picked up a book from the table, and, without a movement of his face, he handed it to the genius of the Shell.

Skimpole gave Blake a questioning look.

"My dear Blake," he said, "you misunderstand me. Perhaps it is an error on my part, however. When I said produce a book, I should have made my meaning clear by saying write a book."

"Oh!"

"It would practically involve itself into a test of brains—the brainiest fellow in the Shell against his equal in the Fourth," continued Skimpole fervently.

"But—but we've got no brainy chaps in the Fourth," objected Blake.

"It would be your duty, my dear Blake, to discover somebody who could uphold the honour of the Fourth in the contest," said Skimpole. "In dealing with such a subject as 'The Evolution of Man—'"

"The what?"

"The Evolution of Man," repeated Skimpole. "After giving the matter very careful consideration, I have come to the conclusion that this would be, without the shadow of doubt, the most suitable subject for the book to deal with."

Blake found it very difficult to keep a straight face.

Tom Merry and Talbot and Figgins were sniggering behind Skimpole's back, and their hilarity was gradually infecting Blake.

"My hat, Skimmy!" muttered Blake. "How the dickens do you think of these things?"

"That, my dear Blake," said Skimpole, "is a question my modesty forbids me to answer. In regard to this contest, —"

"But, I say, Skimmy, this wouldn't be a fair contest," protested Blake. "Being such a brainy chap, you understand all about 'The Evolution of Man.'"

Besides, I understood you had already started a book on this particular subject."

"That is perfectly correct, Blake," said Skimpole. "I am at the present moment engaged upon the two hundredth and seventy-ninth chapter, and—"

"Phew!" gasped Blake. "How the dickens do you expect a fellow in the Fourth to catch up with you?"

"I should be perfectly willing, my dear Blake," said Skimpole, "to cease all work on my book until my opponent had progressed to the same extent as I."

"Do you really mean it, Skimmy?"

"Really, Blake," said Skimpole reproachfully, "I sincerely trust you do not suspect me of speaking untruthfully?"

"Not at all, Skimmy, old son," said Blake cheerily. "But you're sure you won't do another line of your book until your opponent has caught up with you?"

"You have my word for that!"

"Oh, good!" said Blake. "You're a jolly good sort, Skimmy! You leave everything to us. We'll fix things up."

"Very well."

Skimpole turned on his heel and took his departure, little realising that he would never have the pleasure of winning points for the Shell by writing a book on "The Evolution of Man."

As soon as the genius of the Shell had gone Figgins gave Blake a meaning look.

"Where the dickens do you think we're going to find a chap to produce a book on that silly rot?" he demanded.

"Oh, that's easy enough!" said Blake. "You can take on the job yourself!"

"I jolly well won't!" declared Figgins flatly.

"Well, I will!" said Blake.

"You?"

"Why not?"

"But you don't know anything about the evolution of man!"

"That doesn't make any difference."

"How are you going to write a book on the subject, then?"

"I'm not going to."

"But—but you promised Skimmy—"

Blake roared with laughter.

"You mean Skimmy promised me!"

he said.

"Eh?"

"Skimmy promised me he wouldn't do another chapter of his book until his opponent had caught up with him," said Blake.

"Quite so."

"Well, he never will," said Blake, "for the simple reason that his opponent won't

do one chapter, let alone two hundred and seventy-nine. You see, Skimmy's agreed to the arrangement, so—"

"But it'll take years for anyone to catch up with him!"

"All the better, my son," said Blake. "It'll keep Skimmy from pegging away at that rotten book of his."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Skimmy's a decent old ass," said Blake, "but he does talk a lot of rot. But he's not the only one."

"Eh?"

"Herries was babbling a lot of rot just before you came in," said Blake, with a sidelong glance at the musician of the Fourth.

"It wasn't rot!" snapped Herries indignantly. "It—"

"Well, tell these fellows, then," said Blake, with a wave of the hand in the direction of Tom Merry and Figgins and Talbot.

"What is it, Herries?" asked Tom Merry.

"Why," said Herries, glaring wrathfully at Blake, "you remember it was decided that it was not necessary to confine the contests between the Shell and the Fourth to sports?"

"Quite so."

"Well, why shouldn't we hold a musical contest?"

Blake laughed, but Tom Merry and the others looked serious.

"A musical contest," said Tom Merry meditatively. "What do you suggest? That a fellow in each Form gives a cornet solo, and—"

"A cornet solo would, of course, be one of the items—"

"Naturally," said Blake blandly.

Herries gave his chum a savage look.

"Don't be such an ass, Blake!" he snorted. "You couldn't give a musical entertainment without a cornet solo."

"Musical entertainment!" repeated Blake. "So that's the idea, is it?"

"Of course it is!" said Herries. "And a jolly good idea it is, too! We could hold the entertainments in the Hall; the Shell could give their performance one night, and the Fourth another."

"H'm!" said Tom Merry. "The notion doesn't sound at all bad."

Blake sniffed in such a way as to suggest that he did not entirely agree with the captain of the Shell.

"But how's the contest to be judged?" he asked. "You can't expect the umpires to sit and listen to a couple of third-rate musical entertainments."

"Don't talk such rot, Blake!" snapped Herries.

"But—"

"P'wray be quiet, Blake, deah boy!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "I considah you are most vude in your remarks. I am beginning to think that there are immense possibilities in Hewies' scheme."

"You're just the sort of silly ass who would!" said Blake cuttingly.

"Weally, Blake—"

"So you are!"

"Weally—"

"Peace, children!" said Tom Merry pacifically. "Let's settle this matter, and then you can argue as much as you like."

"I thought we'd settled it," said Blake carelessly. "Herries shouldn't want telling more than once that his notion's all rot."

"I don't know that it is," said Tom Merry slowly.

"Eh?" exclaimed Blake. "Do you mean to say that you're going to support the silly duffer?"

"Why not?" said Tom Merry, with a smile. "A musical contest would make quite a change, and—"

"Well, I'm blowed!" interrupted Blake. "What do you think, Figgy?"

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The New House Junior grinned. "I'm inclined to agree with you, Tom Merry," he said.

"What about you, Talbot?"

"Same with me," said Talbot.

Herries beamed. His scheme had met with approval at last.

Blake made a hopeless gesture.

"All right," he said resignedly.

"Have your own way. I give in to the majority. But don't blame me if the contest turns out to be a frost, that's all."

"Shan't do that, Blake. old son!"

said Tom Merry cheerily. "Now, Herries, whose entertainment is to come off first—the Shell or the Fourth?"

"Suppose we toss for it?" suggested Herries.

"Right-ho?" said Tom Merry, feeling in his pocket for a coin. "Call to me, Herries."

Tom Merry spun the coin, and Herries called:

"Heads!"

The coin came down head uppermost.

"Good!" said Herries. "The Shell can give the first show. We'll give ours last."

"Right-ho!" said Tom Merry. "Shall we fix the dates of the shows?"

"Might as well."

"Suppose the Shell give their entertainment on Monday next, and the Fourth on Tuesday?" suggested Tom Merry.

"That'll give each side a fair time to practise in."

"Very well."

And so it was arranged.

CHAPTER 3.

The Solo that was Not Sung.

"CRICKET practice, Herries!"

Jack Blake made the remark as he entered Study No. 6

after dinner that day.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy and Digby were with him, and they were all in cricket flannels.

Herries was sitting at the table with a pen in his hand and lots of writing-paper strewn over the table in front of him.

He looked up slowly as Blake & Co. entered.

"What did you say, Blake?" he asked absently.

"It's time for cricket practice," said Blake in measured tones. "Why the dickens haven't you changed into your flannels?"

"I—I— Oh, I'm not coming to practice this afternoon," explained Herries haltingly.

"Not coming?" ejaculated Blake.

"But—but what are you sticking indoors for on a brilliant afternoon like this? You haven't got lines to do, surely?"

"No."

"Then what are you staying in for?"

"I'm getting out the programme for the entertainment," explained Herries.

"Oh, hang that blessed entertainment!" growled Blake. "Can't you leave that over for a bit?"

"No, I can't!" declared Herries firmly.

"Every minute's valuable if we're going to whack those Shell bouncers. I suppose I can't put you down for anything?"

"I don't mind selling programmes, if that's any good," said Blake.

"Fathead!" grunted Herries. "I mean, put you down to play an instrument."

"No, you can't!" said Blake. "I don't mind backing you up in this scheme for the sake of the Fourth, but as to playing a tinpot cornet or a squeaky concertina, that's dead off!"

"Bai Jove!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "You can put my name down, Hewwies, for—"

"What about you, Dig?" asked Herries, turning a deaf ear to Arthur Augustus' remark.

"Weally, Hewwies—"

"I don't mind giving a humorous recitation," said Digby.

"Hewwies, deah boy—"

"Humorous recitations ain't wanted," said Herries, crossing Digby's name off the list he had made out. "It's to be a musical entertainment. But, of course, if you care to bring a song into the recitation—"

"That might be done."

"Weally, Hewwies, I wish you—"

"All right, Dig," said Herries. "I'll let your name stand. After all, I don't see why we should bar recitations. They make for variety, and—"

"Bai Jove!" exclaimed D'Arcy. "I wish you would listen to me, Hewwies!"

Herries looked up at the swell of St. Jim's.

"I wish you'd shut up!" said Herries meaningly. "I don't know how I'm going to fix this blessed programme up with you yapping like a blessed dog!"

"Weally, Hewwies, I was going to help you out of the difficulty," said D'Arcy.

"I don't want any help!" said Herries.

"I'm quite capable of—"

"You don't understand my meaning, deah boy. I was going to tell you that you could put my name down."

"What!" exclaimed Herries. "What should I put your name down for? I've already told Blake that we don't want any programme-boys."

"Weally, Hewwies, I wouldn't dream of selling pwogwammes! I—"

"Then what should I put your name down for?"

"For a song, deah boy."

"A song?"

"Yaas, deah boy," said the swell of St. Jim's. "I should be perfectly willing to give a tenah solo."

"Oh!"

"I would sing anything you like," continued D'Arcy, "but personally I should pwefer to wendah 'Let Me Like a Soldier Fall,' or another song from one of the opewas."

"Oh!"

"It's a long time since I sang a tenah solo," said Arthur Augustus. "Pewwaps you'd like to heah me wendah a few lines."

"Oh, preserve us, Gussy!" said Blake.

"Weally, Blake, I wish you would not pass such disappawgin' remarks when I'm trying to help Hewwies out of his difficulty!" said D'Arcy frigidly. "I will sing you the first verse, Hewwies."

"Don't trouble."

"It's a pleasuah, deah boy," said Arthur Augustus. "This is how the song goes. 'Yaas, let me like a—'

Ow! Yow!"

The swell of St. Jim's burst into a few notes of song, and then suddenly uttered two very forcible exclamations.

"Don't think much of that!" said Blake, with a sniff.

"Weally, Blake," said Arthur Augustus, "I considah it the height of wadness for you to twead on my foot when I was singing!"

"Was it your foot I tread on, Gussy?" asked Blake innocently.

"You know it was!" said D'Arcy.

"Well, don't worry about it now," said Blake. "Let's get down to cricket. Time's short, and—"

"But I've got to give Hewwies a sample of my singing first," said Arthur Augustus.

"Don't trouble now, Gussy."

"But I insist, deah boy!" said D'Arcy. "Yaas, let me like a soldier—"

"Oh, hang!" growled Blake. "I can't stand this unearthly row!"

D'Arcy stopped singing and surveyed Blake severely through his monocle.

"Weally, Blake, I wish you wouldn't intewwupt me when—"

"Well, come down to the cricket, then!"

"I will, deah boy, when I've sung one verse," said D'Arcy. "Please oblige by not intewwewing with me this time. I will commence at the first line once more. 'Yaas, let me like a—'"

"Shut up, fathead!"

"Soldier fall, upon—"

"Stop that blessed row!"

"Some open— Gwooooh! Yow! Yoooop!"

Such words as "Gwooooh!" and "Yow!" and "Yoooop!" were certainly not to be found in the words of that famous song; but Arthur Augustus had been unable to restrain himself from uttering them.

In uttering the word "open," D'Arcy had incidentally opened his mouth to its largest extent.

This had given Blake his opportunity. He had picked up a tablet of scented soap which was resting on the mantelshelf and promptly slipped it into Arthur Augustus' wide-stretched mouth.

D'Arcy spluttered frantically, and dabbed his mouth with his handkerchief.

"Ow! You wottah! Gwooooh! Yoooop!" he spluttered.

"Ha, ha, ha!" laughed Blake. "Serves you jolly well right! I told you not to kick up that blessed row."

"You uttah wottah!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus severely. "How can I sing with my mouth full of soap? Gwooooh!"

"Better not try," said Blake. "You might get some more if you do. Come down to cricket, and don't be such a silly ass!"

"I wefuse to go with you, you wottah!"

"Don't be such a chump! Come—"

"I wefuse!"

"Oh, all right!" said Blake, with a grunt. "Stay here and torture Herries. I'm not sure that he doesn't deserve it for proposing this blessed musical contest! Come on, Dig! Cricket's preferable to listening to Gussy's wails!"

Digby followed Blake out of the study, and D'Arcy closed the door after them.

"Now, Hewwies, deah boy. I will give you that solo," he said. "I—"

"Don't trouble, D'Arcy, old chap," said Herries, with a wave of the hand.

"But weally, deah boy, if I'm going to take part in the entertainment, I ought to give you some idea of how I can sing."

"I know that all serene," said Herries.

"But you don't know which song suits my voice best, deah boy," said Arthur Augustus. "I used to think it was 'Yaas, Let Me Like a Soldier Fall,' but recently I've had leanings towards 'Il Bacio.' You know how 'Il Bacio' goes, don't you?"

"Oh, rather!"

"I'll sing you the first verse, if you like," offered the swell of St. Jim's.

"Don't trouble, Gussy."

"No trouble at all, deah boy!"

"But you might strain your voice, you know."

"Bai Jove!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus thoughtfully. "I hadn't thought of that, deah boy. But surely one verse wouldn't—"

"Well, you never know, Gussy," said Herries. "Beet be careful. You mustn't crack up before the night."

"No, deah boy. That would be tewwible. But which song shall I sing— 'Yaas, Let Me Like a Soldier Fall,' or—"

"Oh, that's the one!" said Herries.

"You're sure that suits my voice best?"

"Certain."

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Herries particularly wanted to be left alone at that moment, in order to prepare the programme.

"Very well, deah boy," said D'Arcy. "We will wegard that as settled. Now, can I assist you to pprepare the pwo-gramme?"

"No, thanks; I can manage that all right."

"But weally, in a mattah like this, a fellah with my tact and judgment—"

"Quite so, Gussy," agreed Herries. "But I think I can get along all right. All the same, if I find I can do with your assistance, I sha'n't hesitate to ask for it."

"Are you suah, deah boy?"

"Positive."

"Vewy well," said Arthur Augustus. "I will go down to cwicket practice. Wemembah, deah boy, you can wely upon me!"

"I sha'n't forget."

The swell of St. Jim's strode out of the study, and at last Herries was able to carry on his task uninterrupted.

Having a musical ear, he was exceptionally keen on the forthcoming contests.

Herries had so far done very little to win points for the Fourth in the series of contests with the Shell, but a musical competition gave him the chance, for which he had been waiting.

At a time like this cricket was quite an after consideration with the musician of the Fourth.

Herries was determined that the Fourth should win the contest.

Already he had half completed his programme.

The first item on the programme was to be a piano solo, to be followed by a violin solo by Dick Brooke.

Figgins had promised to give a piccolo solo.

When Figgins had made the offer, Herries had politely informed the New House junior that he was not aware that he could play such an instrument.

But Figgins had averred that he knew a great deal about piccolo playing, and his name had promptly gone down.

Kerr had expressed willingness to give an impersonation sketch, and two or three other fellows who professed to be able to play musical instruments had offered their services.

It was the last item on the programme which was of most interest to George Herries.

"Special Turn! By George Herries!" was the way it was described on the programme.

The nature of the "Special Turn" was a secret of Herries, and incidentally Herries intended that it should remain his secret.

In Herries' opinion it was this item that was to carry off the points for the Fourth, and he was resolved to keep it dark right up to the last minute.

Half an hour later, whilst the Fourth and the Shell were most out of doors, Herries left the school, and vended his way in the direction of Wayland.

Herries had a very special mission to perform in the old market town that afternoon.

CHAPTER 4.

Mr. Curll Agrees.

GEORGE HERRIES reached Wayland at last.

He kept on until he arrived before the Wayland Empire, the only music-hall of which that market town could boast.

The front of the building was plastered with huge posters, announcing the astounding attractions for that week.

Herries scanned the posters in turn.

At last his eyes lighted on one that brought a smile to his face.



Gussy is gagged!
(See Chapter 3.)

This particular poster announced that Horatio Curll, the famous tenor, late of the Roser-Moser Company, would render songs from all the well-known operas.

Herries had met Mr. Curll on several occasions before.

Mr. Curll had been, to his own account, one of the greatest tenors of all time. He had taken the tenor parts in practically every famous opera, and had brought down crowded houses. His triumphs were innumerable—so Mr. Curll said.

But bad times had come to Mr. Curll. Although it never occurred to him, it was more than likely that Mr. Curll could have avoided these bad times had he partaken of water as a beverage instead of something a good deal stronger.

The last time Herries had met Mr. Curll, he was acting as pianist at a picture-palace.

Evidently he had tired of this job, for here he was again back on the stage.

A boy in buttons was standing at the door of the Empire. Herries gave one glance at the poster advertising the great Mr. Curll, and then walked up the steps of the theatre.

He was about to walk past the boy in buttons, when the latter grabbed him by the shoulder and dragged him back.

"Wodjer want?" demanded the boy.

"I want to see the manager," said Herries, dragging himself free.

"Well, yer can't!" snapped the boy impolitely. "The manager's hout. You don't expect managers to work in the artemnoon, do yer?"

"I didn't know," said Herries nonplussed. "I—"

"Well, buzz off, then!" exclaimed the boy. "Come again at seven o'clock. You may catch the guv'nor then."

"I—I—" Herries paused. He was in somewhat of a quandary.

"Wodjer I-ing about?" demanded the boy uncivilly.

"I—I— The fact is, I want to see Mr. Curll," explained Herries. "Is he here?"

"Curll? Here?" exclaimed the boy. "This ain't a blessed lodgin'-house! This is a theatre! The actors comes 'ere to act, not to live and sleep!"

Herries stamped his foot impatiently.

"Well, can you tell me where I can find Mr. Curll?" he asked irritably. "I want to see him most urgently."

"Oh, do yer? And what do yer want to see 'im about?"

"That's my business," said Herries bluntly. "Can you tell me where I can find him?"

"I can."

"Where is he, then?"

"That's my business," replied the boy in buttons, sniffing disdainfully. "If you wants any information, you must ask for it properly. Git that?"

Herries stared the boy full in the face. He was half inclined to land out at the insulting youngster, but he realised in time that that would not assist him to learn the information for which he was in quest.

He put his hand into his pocket, and, drawing forth a shilling, slipped it into the boy's hand.

"Look here," he said, "I must see Mr. Curll this artemnoon. Tell—"

"Mr. Curll," said the boy in buttons, with exceptional civility. "Yes, sir. I can put you on to Mr. Curll. He's staying at the Bull's Head, at the end of the street, sir. If yer goes along there now, you'll probably find 'im in, sir!"

"Thanks," said Herries. And he promptly walked down the steps.

Mr. Curll was lodging at the Bull's Head. Herries knew the public-house slightly. It was really a most disreputable place, and Herries knew that if he were caught in the building a severe punishment would probably be his reward.

But Herries was not in the mood to think about punishment at that moment. In order to make a success of the musical entertainment, it was most imperative

that he should see Mr. Curll without delay.

Herries would have risked expulsion from St. Jim's at that moment to consult Mr. Curll.

He reached the inn at last, and he hesitated outside as the smell of beer and spirits assailed his nostrils.

But his hesitancy soon passed.

He opened the front door and entered. The fat, burly landlord looked at him questioningly as he walked in.

"What do you want, young shaver?" he asked curtly.

Herries coloured slightly. He was feeling distinctly out of place in this dingy bar.

"I want to see Mr. Curll," he explained slowly. "I understand he's staying here."

"Mr. Curll," repeated the landlord. "He's staying 'ere, but he's asleep. You can go and wake 'im if yer like."

Herries hesitated.

"Well, yer can please yerself, young shaver," said the man. "I ain't goin' to wake 'im. Curll ain't got the best o' tempers when he's waked up. You can do it if yer like, but—"

"Oh, all right," said Herries, determined to carry out his object. "Where can I find him?"

"First room on the left up the stairs," said the landlord.

Herries walked slowly up the stairs, and stopped before the room occupied by Mr. Curll.

That the landlord had been correct in his assertion that Mr. Curll was asleep was soon proved to the St. Jim's junior.

A succession of deep, resonant snores came from inside the room.

Herries paused on the landing, debating whether to wake the sleeper or not.

He soon settled the question, however. He was in a very determined mood that afternoon, and he would have run the risk of waking a dozen Mr. Curlls for the sake of achieving his object.

Tap!

Herries knocked loudly on the door.

There was no reply save a louder snore than ever from the sleeping Mr. Curll.

Tap! Tap!

Suddenly the snores came to an abrupt conclusion, to be followed by a deep-throated grunt from inside the room.

Tap!

Herries knocked once more.

"Ho, you without there! Enter!" sang out Mr. Curll dramatically.

Herries opened the door and walked in. Mr. Curll was leaning on his elbow on a couch that looked decidedly the worse for wear.

Mr. Curll's hair was in a most bedraggled condition, and there was a look about his eyes that suggested he had been imbibing just a little too strongly.

There was a significant smell of whisky in the atmosphere, too, but this did not deter the resolute Herries.

"Sorry to interrupt you, Mr. Curll," he said politely.

"Be not sorry, young sir," said Mr. Curll with a dramatic gesture. "Tell me, have I had the pleasure of making your acquaintance before?"

"Yes, you've met me several times," explained Herries. "I belong to St. Jim's, you know. Surely you remember George Herries?"

"Ah!" Mr. Curll rose unsteadily to his feet, and struck a most dramatic attitude. "I remember you now. You are my long-lost brother. At last you have deigned to honour me with your presence. This is the day I have longed for for years—and years! Come to my arms, that I may—"

"Hold on, Mr. Curll!" begged Herries, backing away as the man swayed un-

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steadily in his direction. "Don't you know me?"

"Alas! You are my long-lost—"

"I'm Herries of St. Jim's, I tell you," roared the junior.

"Ah!" Mr. Curll blinked rather sheepishly. "Of course," he added. "I remember you now. Is there anything I can do for you?"

"Yes," said Herries. "I want your assistance."

Mr. Curll beamed.

"Ah!" he said with a sigh. "Nobody shall ever say they came to me for assistance, and I refused it. Horatio Curll, late of the Roser-Moser Company, never declined to lend a helping hand. I would spurn a rascally knave who refused to help one in his hour of need. You have doubtless heard of my glorious past."

"Oh, rather!" agreed Herries promptly.

"Did you ever hear of the time when I played the part of Don Cesar de Bazan in 'Maritana'?" said Mr. Curll. "Ah! I would give my life to have five minutes of those glorious days again. To think that I have played before all the nobility in the land, to think that all my triumphs are locked up in the far-distant past. Then look at me now. I say—look at me!"

Herries looked, with no great satisfaction. Mr. Curll was not in a condition in which anyone who wished him well could have liked to see him.

But, nevertheless, Herries nodded genially, for it was most necessary that he should not ruffle Mr. Curll.

"But you're doing pretty well now, Mr. Curll," he said slowly. "I saw a big poster outside the Empire, advertising your show."

"Alas!" said Mr. Curll. "What is one paltry poster? When I toured with the Roser-Moser Company you could have seen my name on every wall in the town. My name was on everybody's lips. I was proclaimed as a genius everywhere I went. But do I bemoan my fate? Never let it be said. I take my misfortunes with fortitude, and I face the future with fearless heart and a strong, determined will."

"Good!" said Herries. "I'm jolly glad to hear that. Now, look here, Mr. Curll, will you do me a favour?"

"My dear young friend, you have but to name it!"

"Perhaps you don't know," said Herries, "but I'm jolly keen on music."

"Ah!" said Mr. Curll. "Countless are the magical influences of music. I well remember the days of my bright boyhood, when the longing for music first entered my heart. Ah! That is an epoch of the past!"

"Did you ever play more than one instrument at once, Mr. Curll?" asked Herries.

"H'm!" Mr. Curll knitted his brows in thought. "I don't remember playing anything but a piano, but it's quite possible. My old friend, Joey Stiggers—" Mr. Curll sighed dismally as he recollected some of the jolly times he had had with Mr. Stiggers—"toured the halls for years. His success was tremendous, and can you wonder at it, when he used to play four instruments at once?"

"Four?" ejaculated Herries.

"Four instruments good old Joey used to play," said Mr. Curll. "And what do you think they were?"

"I don't know."

"I will tell you," said Mr. Curll. "My dear old comrade played the piano, the cornet, the big drum, and the cymbals. A marvelous performance. It has never been equalled in all these years!"

Herries brightened up considerably.

"Do—do you think I could do the same as Mr. Stiggers?" he asked.

"Depends," said Mr. Curll, and he closed his mouth with a snap.

"Well, that's why I came to you, Mr. Curll," said Herries. "We're giving a show at St. Jim's next Tuesday, and I thought that if I could play several instruments at once the turn would go down well. Of course, I've never done anything like it before, but I thought that you—"

"You thought I might help you," said Mr. Curll.

"Ye-es."

Mr. Curll slapped the St. Jim's junior on the shoulder.

"Never shall it be said that you came to Horatio Curll, of Roser-Moser fame, and he refused to assist you in your time of trouble," said Mr. Curll airily. "By my halidom, you shall have the benefit of my years of experience! I will train you in the wonderful art. The whole house will ring with applause at your effort."

"You're jolly good, Mr. Curll!"

"Not at all—not at all."

"Of course, there will be some difficulty, I suppose, about instruments," said Herries. "I have a cornet, but—"

"A mere trifle," said Mr. Curll. "The landlord of this delectable establishment is the fortunate possessor of a piano. We will hire it from him. I can also obtain the loan of a drum and cymbals in the town if you will—provide the necessary. I scarcely like to mention it, but—"

"Oh, I'll pay all right," Herries hastened to explain.

"Were I floating down the tide of fortune," said Mr. Curll, "I would not permit you to pay a penny piece. But my time of fortune belongs to the far-distant past, and—"

"Don't trouble about that, Mr. Curll," interrupted Herries. "I will pay all expense if you will only teach me."

"Rely on me!"

"What about securing the instruments?" asked Herries.

"I will make myself responsible for that part of the programme," said Mr. Curll.

"When can I have the first lesson?"

"H'm! How will Friday afternoon suit you?"

"Nicely," said Herries, thoroughly satisfied. "I'll come along about five. I must be going now. It's getting pretty late, and the fellows will wonder where I've got to. Good-bye, Mr. Curll!"

"Good—I say, Master Herries!"

"Yes!"

"You understand that my present impecunious position is due to no fault on my part?"

"Ye-es."

"Well, could you oblige me with a loan of say, ten shillings?"

Herries hesitated, but next instant he drew forth his pocket-book, and handed a note to the old actor.

Mr. Curll grabbed it eagerly, and slipped it into his pocket.

"Tis most gracious of you to assist me in my hour of monetary need," said Mr. Curll. "Never will I forget your extreme kindness. I shall expect you on Friday. Farewell!"

"Good-bye, Mr. Curll!" said Herries.

A moment later the St. Jim's junior was outside the inn, and trudging along the road to St. Jim's at a quick pace.

He realised that in entering the inn he had been disobeying the rules of the school.

But George Herries, straight fellow that he was, felt no twinge of conscience.

He had already felt that the success of his "Special Turn" was an accomplished fact. Herries was prepared to go to great lengths to achieve this.

CHAPTER 5.

No Luck for Baggy.

JACK BLAKE and Arthur Augustus and Digby were at tea when Herries returned to St. Jim's.

Blake looked at Herries questioningly as he entered Study No. 6.

"Just in time!" he said. "If you'd been a few minutes later I should have wolfed the rest of the bread-and-butter!"

"Don't trouble about me," said Herries, with an indifferent air. "I'm not particularly hungry."

"Have a cup of tea, Hewwies, deah boy," said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "You look jolly hot."

"Yes, I've been hurrying."

"Been out?"

"Yes."

"Did you go far?"

"A fair distance."

Blake gazed at Herries in surprise. The latter's non-committal answers rather puzzled him.

"I suppose you've got no objection to telling us where you've been?" he asked.

"Well, er—"

Herries paused. He had a decided objection to acquainting his chums with his actions of that afternoon.

"Oh, all right!" said Blake quickly. "If you'd rather not tell us!"

"I would, if you don't mind," said Herries, and he coloured slightly.

Herries rarely had any secrets from his chums, but he felt that on this occasion secrecy was an absolute necessity.

For one thing, he felt it quite possible that Blake & Co. would not approve of his visiting the Bull's Head for the sake of practising his "Special Turn."

Moreover, he wanted to keep the nature of the "Special Turn" a dead secret, and surprise the whole school on the following Tuesday.

On their part, Jack Blake & Co. had no desire to probe into Herries' secrets, but, nevertheless, they did not exactly approve of Herries keeping them in the dark.

During the rest of the meal very little was said. As soon as the table was cleared, however, Jack Blake approached the subject of the forthcoming entertainment.

"Got the programme ready yet?" he asked.

"Pretty well," said Herries.

"Let's have a look at it."

Herries handed a rough draft of the programme to Blake.

The leader of Study No. 6 eyed each item critically.

"What's this 'Special Turn' you've got at the end?" he asked at length.

"Special turn," replied Herries indefinitely.

"I know that, fathead!" said Blake, with a sniff. "But what's it all about?"

"You'll see on Tuesday," said Herries.

"Why the dickens can't you tell us now?"

"Well—er—you see—"

Blake gasped.

"Well, I'm hanged!" he said. "You're getting jolly mysterious all of a sudden, Herries!"

"Pawwaps Hewwies is going to ask me to sing a special song," suggested Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, "and he wants to keep the nachah of it dark right up to the last minute."

"Perhaps he isn't!" snorted Herries.

"Weally, Hewwies—"

"Oh, rats!" exclaimed Herries. "Don't you worry yourselves about it. You'll be jolly surprised when you learn what this 'Special Turn' is. I'll tell you this; it's going to win points for the Fourth."

"Go on!" said Blake sarcastically. Even now, although he was most anxious that the Fourth should come out on top, Blake could not wax enthusiastic over the forthcoming musical contest.

"I suppose that, considering I'm on the committee, I ought to take a hand in getting up the show," he remarked.

"You can leave that to me," said Herries. "I'll see that everything's all serene."

"You're sure you don't mind?" asked Blake. "I'm jolly keen on the Fourth winning, you know, but—but the point is the idea itself doesn't appeal to me somehow."

"Pewwaps it's because you haven't a musical ear, deah boy," suggested Arthur Augustus.

"More likely because I've got some sense," said Blake bluntly.

"Weally, Blake—"

"Shut up, dummy!" snapped Blake. "I'm going down for a little cricket-practice before it gets dark. You fellows coming?"

"Might as well," said Digby.

"So might I," said Arthur Augustus.

"No, you won't!" exclaimed Herries firmly.

"Weally—"

"I'm going to hold over practice this evening," said Herries. "You'll have to sing your song over. We've got to put in a good bit of practice if we're to whack those Shell bounders."

"Yaas, wathah!" agreed D'Arcy. "I shall be delighted to practise my song."

The door of the study opened at that moment, and Figgins & Co. of the New House looked in.

"You fellows came for a little cricket?" asked Figgins.

"I want you, Figgy!" said Herries.

"Eh?"

"Practice to-night," said Herries tersely. "Must practise if we're to win the contest."

"Oh!"

"You, too, Kerr," said Herries. "You must practise your impersonation-sketch."

"Oh, I don't want any practice," said Kerr promptly.

"Bosh!" snapped Herries. "The more practice you have the better. If you're not going to practise we might as well throw up the whole bizney, and give the points to the Shell."

"No fear!" said Figgins at once. "We're going to bag those points. Better stay, Kerr, old chap."

Kerr remained, and so did Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. But the others went down to cricket-practice.

As soon as they had gone Herries gathered together all the fellows who were to take part in the entertainment.

Then the practice began—and with it the noise!

It was, indeed, a most discordant row that burst forth from Study No. 6, and when Herries tried the effect of a piccolo-violin-cornet trio the din was really frightful.

Something seemed to go wrong with the works, and Herries eventually noticed it.

"Why don't you keep proper time, Figgy?" he asked.

"I was," said Figgins. "It was you, you fathead! You raced ahead like a blessed steam-engine."

"Try again," said Herries.

They tried again, but still the result was the same.

"Well, I'm blowed!" said Herries, in disgust. "Haven't you ever taken part in a trio before, Figgy?"

"Lots of times," replied Figgins.

"But the other chaps could play."

"Rats!" said Herries disdainfully.

"Why, I couldn't hear you that time."

"I'm not surprised at that," said Figgins meaningly. "The row you were making on that blessed cornet of yours was enough to—"

"Look here, Figgy—"

"Look here, Herries—"

"Haden't Gussy better sing his song now?" suggested Kerr sagely. "We sha'n't have time to practise every item if we don't buck up."

"Oh, all right!" said Herries, with resignation. "We'll try that trio again to-morrow night. Perhaps we'll have better luck with it then."

"Let's hope so," said Kerr, with a wink at Figgins. "Now, then, Gussy, what's this little ditty you're going to sing?"

"Weally, Kerr, it's not a dittyay," protested D'Arcy fervently.

"Well, it isn't a comic song, is it?"

"No; it's opewatic, deah boy."

"Go ahead, then," said Kerr. "The sooner we get it over the better—I mean, the sooner you're finished the more time we shall have for the other turns."

D'Arcy gave Kerr an indignant look, but next instant he burst into song.

As Kerr said afterwards, it was wonderful how the fellows stood and listened to the warblings of Arthur Augustus without butting in.

But the fact remains that they did.

Nevertheless, when the swell of St. Jim's proposed singing another song, he was politely but firmly informed that he would be bumped if he persisted in doing so.

D'Arcy had no desire to be bumped, and therefore one song was his limit for that evening.

Herries went right through the programme, and when he got to the end he was fairly well satisfied.

One or two of the juniors required a good deal of practice yet, but Herries had made up his mind that they should have this practice. He did not intend the Fourth Form entertainment to turn out a failure for the want of a little practice.

"I say, Herries," remarked Figgins, when Herries stated that the practice was over, "we haven't had this special turn of yours yet."

"We're not going to."

"But you ought to have a go at it, you know."

"There's plenty of time for that."

"Quite so; but—well, tell us what the turn's to be like."

Herries smiled meaningly.

"You'll all know next Tuesday," he said. "You must practise your own turns. Don't worry about any others."

The juniors grunted discontentedly, but Herries refused to say a word. His "Special Turn" was to remain a secret until next Tuesday. On that point he was immovable.

As soon as the juniors had left Study No. 6 Herries settled down to read by the window.

He had not long been thus engaged when the door opened, and the fat form of Baggy Trimble appeared on the threshold.

"What do you want, porpoise?" demanded Herries.

"Nothing much," replied Baggy; "but—"

"Well, buzz off, then."

"Oh, I'm just going!" said Baggy.

"But, I say, aren't those chaps beastly inquisitive?"

"What!"

"Blessed sance on their part to want to know what this 'Special Turn' is of yours," went on Baggy eagerly.

"Eh?" exclaimed Herries, jumping up.

"What do you know about it?"

"Oh, nothing!" said Baggy. "But I happened to be outside, and I heard—I mean, I heard them saying that you wouldn't tell them what this 'Special Turn' is. Of course, I don't blame you for one moment."

"You fat idiot!"

"I wouldn't tell one of those fellows

a secret of mine," continued Baggy. "And I reckon you did right in not telling them. With me, of course, it's different. I wouldn't dream of letting on to those Shell rotters."

"You wouldn't get the chance."

"But, I say, you know, you're going to tell me, aren't you?" persisted Baggy. "I'll keep as mum as anything. If a Shell chap offered me a quid to split, I—

Ow! Leggo my ear, you beast! Yow!"

"Come on, porpoise!" exclaimed Herries, gripping the fat junior by the arm, and leading him towards the door. "Outside's the right place for you, you sneaking fat aweep!"

And Baggy Trimble was promptly deposited outside.

It had occurred to Baggy that if he could have discovered the nature of Herries' "Special Turn" he might have been able to execute a most satisfactory financial deal by imparting the news to somebody in the Shell.

But Baggy's hopes in this direction had been dashed to the ground, likewise Baggy. For when Herries got the fat junior outside the door of Study No. 6 he pulled his legs from under him. Baggy landed on the hard, unsympathetic floor with a resounding bump.

He uttered a series of powerful yells which could be heard near and far.

But nobody had any sympathy to waste on Baggy Trimble, so Baggy had to pick himself up from the floor, and amble off to his own study as best he could.

CHAPTER 6.

The First Lesson.

THE next day the juniors' interest in the forthcoming musical contest between the two Forms was decidedly on the increase.

Tom Merry had entered into the scheme with enthusiasm, and Monty Lowther, who was quite a good pianist, lent him valuable assistance.

They had a little trouble with Racke and Crooke, who argued that the noise of several instruments playing at once prevented them from doing their prep.

But everyone knew that prep for Racke and Crooke was but another name for banker.

Tom Merry & Co., however, had little sympathy to waste on the Shell wasters. They promptly told them that if they didn't like it they could do their prep out of doors.

Lowther went so far as to warn Racke that if he did not "hop it" at once he would make him a present of a thick ear.

Possibly it was this threat that made an impression on Racke and Crooke, for they promptly "hopped it," and the practice proceeded.

Grundy, of course, had to put his spoke in. He averred that he was the right man to look after the musical interests of the Shell. Tom Merry held the opinion that he was the most suitable person to take on the job.

In the end the question was settled by the taking of a vote. A show of hands was called for, and as only one hand was observed supporting Grundy, he was compelled to take a back seat.

With Herries, things seemed to run much more smoothly.

Even Jack Blake remained in on Thursday in order to be at the practice, and Digby remarked that the Fourth Form musicians were not shaping so badly, after all.

Herries was more than delighted. He had tried the cornet-piccolo-violin trio once again, and this time there was a

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decided improvement, although perfection was not yet.

When Friday arrived Herries was more cheerful than ever. As Blake remarked, he was like a hen with two tails.

The fact was, Herries was anxiously looking forward to the afternoon, so that he could pay his promised visit to Mr. Horatio Curll.

He had announced to the Fourth Form musicians that there would be no general practice that day, but mentioned that they could all devote some time to individual practice.

"Weally, Hewwies," remarked Arthur Augustus, "I think we ought to have a pwactice."

"Can't be done, Gussy."

"But those Shell boundahs are holding a pwactice evewy day."



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Each card is divided up into thirty-one spaces. Whenever you have 8d. to spare, you just buy a stamp at the post-office and fix it on one of the spaces. As soon as all the spaces are filled up you can take the card to a post-office and exchange it for a 15s. 6d. War Savings Certificate.

In five years' time that certificate will be worth £1.

This is the best way for a patriotic boy to put money by. Won't you try it?

"Possibly they need it more than we do," said Herries. "At any rate, we can have a longer practice to-morrow, if we need it. I've got to go out this afternoon."

"Got to go out, deah boy?"

"Yes; I'm going for a spin on my bike."

Blake looked up.

"Going out on your bike, Herries?" he asked. "Good! I'll come with you. I can do with a spin."

"I—I—"

Herries faltered, and his face changed colour. Blake must not accompany him to Wayland. If he did he would probably become acquainted with the nature of his "Special Turn" and he would be robbed of the chance of springing the surprise upon the whole school.

Blake observed the expression on his chum's face, and frowned portentously.

"Of course, if you'd rather I didn't come with you—" he said.

"I would, if you don't mind," said Herries, looking rather sheepishly at his chums. "I simply must go alone this afternoon."

"Oh, all right!" said Blake, with resignation.

Herries slipped on his cap and left the study. It was time for him to set out to keep the appointment with Mr. Curll.

Whilst Jack Blake & Co. were discussing the mysterious behaviour of their chum, Herries pedalled quickly along the road leading to Wayland.

Herries' secretive manner was extremely puzzling to Blake and the others, but Herries never gave that a thought. His thoughts, in fact, were entirely devoted to his "Special Turn," which was going to astound the school, and gain points for the Fourth.

He reached the disreputable inn at last, and so excited was he over his scheme that he experienced no qualms of conscience at entering the forbidden place.

Mr. Curll was in his room, and, to Herries' unbounded delight, he observed that the piano was already there, and at the side stood a bass drum and a set of cymbals.

"Welcome, my young friend!" said Mr. Curll dramatically. "'Tis, indeed, a pleasure to gaze upon your cheerful countenance once more. Behold the piano, the bass drum, and the cymbals! All that is wanted now is—Ha! I perceive you have brought your cornet with you."

"Yes," replied Herries, withdrawing the cornet from the case. "You had no difficulty in getting the drum and the cymbals, then?"

"None at all, but"—Mr. Curll coughed—"these music people, my friends, are profiteers—money-grubbers. I anticipated that the charge for borrowing these instruments would be an infinitesimal one. But alas! such are the ways of man. They demanded the exorbitant sum of two pounds from me!"

"My hat!" exclaimed Herries, in surprise. "Did you pay?"

"Pay?" said Mr. Curll, and then he sighed. "My dear friend, in these times of distress, two pounds is a fortune to Horatio Curll. Had I possessed the money, I should not have hesitated—"

"How did you get hold of the instruments then?" broke in Herries.

"I had to promise to present myself at the shop by midday to-morrow, accompanied by the sum of two pounds," said Mr. Curll. "I despise a man for compelling a gentleman to come to such an arrangement, but what else could I do?"

Mr. Curll made a helpless gesture.

"That's all right, Mr. Curll," said Herries. "You needn't worry yourself about that. I will post you on the money to-night, and you can settle the bill."

"Ha! A load is lifted from my mind," said Mr. Curll, with a sigh of relief. "Disappointment shall not be ours, after all. We shall live to carry on the good work. We shall perform the wonderful musical feat before a crowded house. And how they will rise at us when all is o'er! We shall be the recipients of tremendous applause. Again and again shall we be called before the curtain, and—"

"Haden't we better get on with the practice, Mr. Curll?" suggested Herries, who was getting somewhat impatient.

"Ha! I had forgotten," said Mr. Curll, moving towards the piano. "Step thee forward, my young friend, and I will proceed to instruct."

Herries promptly stepped forward.

"First we will take the cornet and piano," said Mr. Curll. "You will hold the cornet in your left hand, and play the piano with the right. We will take

a simple tune first—say, 'The Maid of Athens.'

Mr. Curll produced the music, and the practice commenced.

Herries' ambition was to play four instruments at one time, but he found it rather difficult to negotiate two.

But he stuck to his guns manfully, and, with Mr. Curll carefully instructing him, he made good progress.

For fully an hour the practice continued. Then Mr. Curll suggested that Herries endeavoured to combine the other two instruments.

The cymbals were so arranged that he could play them with his right foot.

Here again Mr. Curll's tuition was invaluable to the inexperienced junior.

It was by no means easy to give one's thoughts to three instruments at the same time, and on several occasions Herries got into difficulties.

But Mr. Curll was there to assist him, and, to Mr. Curll's credit, it must be said that he helped the ambitious St. Jim's junior most effectively.

At length, very much to Herries' regret, the time came for him to return to St. Jim's.

"Tis sad to part!" said Mr. Curll dramatically. "But we will meet again. Present yourself here to-morrow, my young friend. I shall have the unbounded pleasure of instructing you still further in this most wonderful art. And I say—"

"Yes?"

"You won't forget the two pounds, will you?"

"No fear!" said Herries promptly. "I shall have to borrow the money from old Gussy, but I'll post it off to-night without fail. I'll look in about three to-morrow afternoon. Will that suit you?"

"Splendidly!" said Mr. Curll. "Farewell, my young friend!"

"Good-bye!" said Herries, and he went downstairs.

Arrived at the door of the inn, he started back in surprise, for, standing outside were Racke and Crooke of the Shell.

They had been indulging in a game of cards in the back parlour, and were just about to return to St. Jim's.

Racke smiled cynically at the Fourth-Former.

"By gad!" he exclaimed. "You've been making a thundering row upstairs. A 'Special Turn' isn't the word for it."

"What—what do you know about it?" demanded Herries angrily.

"Ha, ha, ha!" laughed Racke. "We ain't blind, you know, and, what's more, we don't walk about with our ears stopped up."

"What's Curll been saying—" began Herries.

"Oh, nothing, dear boy!" said Racke. "A little bird whispered in our ears. In fact, it told us a lot about this 'Special Turn' rot. I guess Tom Merry and his gang would like to know something about—"

"If you dare to say a word!" said Herries, his face red with anger.

"Shouldn't dream of doing so," chortled Racke, "unless, of course, some evil-disposed person decided to inform certain people that we'd been here this afternoon. That's so, isn't it, Crooke?"

"Oh, rather!" agreed Crooke.

"You threaten to—"

"Oh, dear, no!" broke in Racke. "We wouldn't dream of threatening you. We're merely striking a bargain. You say nothing about us, and we say nothing about you."

"You know I shouldn't split on you, you cads!" cried Herries indignantly.

"That's all right, then," said Racke.

"You can rely upon us to keep it dark about your marvellous 'Special Turn.'"



A happy recognition.

(See Chapter 4.)

Herries clenched his fists firmly.

He was simply itching to send the cads flying, but he restrained himself in time.

He realised that although he would derive considerable satisfaction from thrashing Racke and Crooke, they would probably seek their revenge by divulging the nature of his "Special Turn."

He gave the two a savage glance, mounted his bicycle, and started on the return journey to St. Jim's.

Jack Blake & Co. were doing their prep when Herries entered Study No. 6.

There was still an angry look on Herries' face, and Blake observed it immediately.

"What the dickens—" he began.

But Herries took no notice of Blake. He turned at once to Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

"I say, Gussy," he said, "can you lend me some tin?"

"Yaas, deah boy," said D'Arcy at once. "I shall be delighted to make you a loan. How much do you want?"

"A couple of quid."

"Weally—" gasped Arthur Augustus, taken by surprise.

"Haven't you got it?" asked Herries sharply.

"Yaas, deah boy, but—"

"Well, lend it to me, Gussy, there's a good chap," said Herries. "You shall have it back as soon as I can manage it."

"Bai Jove!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus. "I shall be only too pleased to lend you the money, but I trust you have not been getting yourself into financial difficulties."

"Don't be such an ass, Gussy!" exclaimed Herries resentfully. "Do you think I've been gambling and betting, and got into a hole?"

"Weally, deah boy, that hadn't exactly occurred to me, but—"

"Well, hand over the tin, then," said Herries. "I want to send it off by the last post."

"Heah you are, deah boy," said

D'Arcy, handing over two Treasury notes. "I only received them from my patah this morning, but you're welcome to them."

"Thanks!"

Herries took the notes, and, sitting down at the table, commenced to write a letter to Mr. Curll.

Then, without saying a word to his chums, he inserted the notes and the letter in an envelope, and, after addressing and sealing the latter, he left the study.

"My hat!" exclaimed Blake, as soon as he had gone. "I wonder what old Herries wanted that chink for?"

"Weally, Blake," protested Arthur Augustus, "I fail to see why that should concern us."

"Quite so," agreed Blake meditatively.

"But it's jolly funny."

And D'Arcy and Digby were forced to agree that it was funny. Herries' actions of the last day or so had already puzzled them considerably, but his actions in the near future were to puzzle them still more.

CHAPTER 7.

Proof Positive.

"B AI Jove!"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy made the ejaculation as he burst into Study No. 6.

It was the next afternoon, and, having finished another rehearsal, Herries was sitting by the window with Blake and Digby.

"What's bitten you, Gussy?" asked Herries, looking round.

"Weally, Hewwies, nothing has bitten me, but—"

"Well, what are you looking so scared about?"

"Bai Jove!" muttered D'Arcy. "I am all of a fluttah! I— But it can't be true! It's imposs!"

"My hat!" exclaimed Blake. "I really believe Gussy's going off his dot!"

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"Weally, Blake, I wish you wouldn't make use of such opprobrious expwensions!"

"What's up with you, then?"

"Bai Jove! I've just heard a weally tewwible tale about—about—"

"About what?" demanded Herries impatiently.

"Weally, Hewwies, I wish you would welfwin fwom snapping at me in that diagwaceful mannah!"

"What's this silly yarn about, then?"

"It's about—about you, deah boy."

"About me?" gasped Herries, his brows knitting in a serious frown.

"Yaas," said Arthur Augustus. "It was Baggy Twimble who told me. He said that Wacke and Cwooke saw you at the Bull's Head in Wayland yestaday aftahnoon, and—and— Bai Jove, Hewwies, you've gone dweadfully pale!"

"I—I—I—" faltered Herries, somewhat flurried.

"Blessed cads!" exclaimed Blake wrathfully. "If I were Herries I'd give 'em a jolly good hiding!"

"Yaas, wathah!" agreed D'Arcy. "I weally think Hewwies would be justified in giving them feahful thwashings all wound."

"Good egg!" said Blake promptly. "Come along, Herries, and give 'em socks! You ought to be able to manage those two cads."

"I—I—I—" Herries drew back.

Blake gave him a chum a critical look.

"Great Scott!" he exclaimed. "To look at you anybody would think the yarn was true! I suppose you're feeling all right?"

"Ye-es."

"Well, come along and paste those rollers!"

"I—I—I—" Some other time," said Herries in a halting voice.

"Bai Jove!" gasped Arthur Augustus. "I hope, Hewwies, deah boy, you did not by any chance visit that disweputable public-house?"

Herries did not reply. He shifted uneasily in his chair.

Blake and Digby fixed their eyes on their chum. Herries' hesitancy was extremely puzzling to them, and although their faith in him was unshaken, they could not help thinking that there was something in Racke's yarn.

For a few moments there was complete silence in the study, and then, without saying another word, Herries rose to his feet and left the room.

His chums watched him go with set faces and frowning brows.

Herries went downstairs, and, procuring his bicycle, was soon pedalling down the road to Wayland.

He was feeling very downcast at the accusation which had been levelled against him.

Of course it was true, but on no account could he admit it.

Once his chums knew about his visits to the Bull's Head, they would have a chance of discovering the nature of his "Special Turn."

Herries' great ambition was to spring this on the whole school as a huge surprise, and, in spite of the machinations of Racke and Crooke, he was determined to achieve this object.

He reached the Bull's Head at last, and went straight up to Mr. Curll's room.

Mr. Curll rose to greet the junior, and Herries could not help noticing that the man was somewhat unsteady on his feet.

His eyes, too, were looking extremely wild, and Herries' opinion was that Mr. Curll had been drinking rather heavily—an opinion that was very near the truth.

"Welcome, my young friend!" said Mr. Curll genially. "It is, indeed, a

great pleasure to behold you in this room once again!"

"Did you get the notes?" asked Herries.

"Ha!" said Mr. Curll. "The dutiful postman delivered it to me personally this morning."

Mr. Curll did not add that he had been waiting on the doorstep for the postman. Mr. Curll had rather wanted that money, but Herries little suspected that a certain portion of it had been expended for the purpose of trying to quench Mr. Curll's unquenchable thirst. But such was the case.

"I suppose you've paid the bill?" said Herries, eyeing Mr. Curll with some doubt.

"I have done so," replied Mr. Curll solemnly.

Herries breathed a sigh of relief.

"That's all right, then," he said. "It's jolly good of you, Mr. Curll, to have taken so much trouble over this business!"

"There is still one other item I fain would mention," said Mr. Curll.

"Oh!"

"I had quite forgotten that the sum of ten shillings was due to the landlord of this hotel—ahem!—for the loan of his piano."

"Will Monday do for that?" asked Herries at once.

"No doubt I can persuade the venerable gentleman to wait until then," said Mr. Curll.

"Oh, good!" said Herries thankfully.

"You're awfully good, Mr. Curll."

"Don't mench!" said Mr. Curll. "It is indeed a great pleasure to oblige you, my young friend. Now let us proceed!"

"I've been thinking—"

"Eh?"

"I've been thinking that if I could manage to play 'Life on the Ocean Wave' it would go down well with the fellows," said Herries. "You know the piece, don't you? It's got all the national airs in it."

"The very thing!" said Mr. Curll, slapping Herries on the shoulder. As he did so he swayed rather unsteadily. The strong liquor inside Mr. Curll was inclined to upset that worthy's equilibrium.

Herries noticed Mr. Curll's action, but he said nothing. If he did so, he might possibly upset Mr. Curll, and that would never do.

"I suppose I can tackle the four instruments to-day?" remarked Herries.

"Most decidedly!" agreed Mr. Curll, and he proceeded to instruct the St. Jim's junior.

There was no doubt that Mr. Curll had been indulging in firewater, but all the same, it did not seem to have affected him to such an extent that he was unable to train Herries in his wonderful feat.

At last the St. Jim's junior got well on the move.

The cornet blazed forth in a powerful manner, the piano tinkled in concert with the cornet, the big drum came in at the right moment, and the cymbals clashed well in harmony with the other instruments.

Right through the piece Herries played, finishing up with "Rule Britannia."

His performance was a most commendable one, and Mr. Curll patted him on the shoulder when he had finished.

"Splendid, my young friend!" he said congratulatingly. "Already I can hear the house applauding you to the echo. I can see you appearing before the curtain again and— Excuse me one moment, my young friend! I must

pop downstairs to consult a particular friend of mine. Go on practising."

Herries went through the piece once again, and noticed a distinct improvement.

"Life on the Ocean Wave" is by no means a short piece, but Herries had played it twice more ere Mr. Curll put in a reappearance.

Herries did not need to glance twice at Mr. Curll to learn the nature of the friend he had been to see, for that same friend accompanied Mr. Curll back to the room—a glass of whisky that he held in a none too steady hand.

If Mr. Curll had not made strong liquor his chosen friend, it was quite possible he would have remained on the stage to achieve greater triumphs.

But, of course, this had never occurred to Mr. Curll.

Herries gave him a reproachful look, which was entirely wasted.

"I hope you do not mind my partaking of some light refreshment, my young friend?" remarked Mr. Curll, his head nodding under the influence of that same "light refreshment."

"Not at all," said Herries at once. "Would you like to hear me play the piece once again?"

"Delighted!" said Mr. Curll, leaning against the piano for support. "I never tire of hearing those grand old tunes."

Herries started off once again.

Mr. Curll stood at his side, with the glass of whisky in his hand.

His eyes were fixed on the St. Jim's junior, but he was paying little attention to the music.

Ta-ra-ra-pom—pom!

Herries stuck to his task manfully. Now and then he would bang the big drum a little too soon, and would come in with the cymbals a little late, but on the whole he did extremely well.

He let himself go when he came to "Rule Britannia," and Mr. Curll reached over to slap him on the back.

Unfortunately for Herries the hand that Mr. Curll reached forward contained the glass of whisky.

There was a sudden tinkle of glass as the latter fell to the floor, but the whisky did not descend so far. It spread itself over Herries' Eton jacket.

The St. Jim's junior ceased playing immediately, and looked round at Mr. Curll.

That worthy was very shamefaced and repentant.

"Pray accept my humblest apologies, my young friend," he said meekly. "I would not have interrupted your delightful performance for worlds; but, alas—"

"That's all right, Mr. Curll," said Herries diplomatically. "I don't think I'll do any more just now."

"Oh, do!" said Mr. Curll at once.

"I must be getting back to St. Jim's," said Herries. "If you don't mind I'll give you another look-in on Monday."

"Do, by all means," said Mr. Curll. "But—but, I say, you won't forget that small item of—"

"No; I'll send you the ten bob to-night," said Herries, and, bidding the old actor good-bye, he was soon pedalling along the road to St. Jim's.

He was, in spite of his enthusiasm, rather glad to get away from the Bull's Head. Mr. Curll in liquor was not a pleasant object.

Herries little realised, however, as he cycled along the dusty road that there was a very damp appearance about his Eton jacket, and that that dampness was caused by Mr. Curll's whisky.

He was soon reminded of the fact, however.

As he entered the hall at St. Jim's he came face to face with Racke, Crooke, and Clampe of the New House.

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Racke sniffed the air as he caught sight of Herries.

"By gad!" he exclaimed. "What a sniff! D'you smell anythin', Crooke, old man?"

Crooke sniffed.

"Smells rather strong, doesn't it?" he remarked. "If I didn't know that Herries wasn't a pub-haunter I might suggest he'd been drinking whisky, but—"

"You cad!" exclaimed Herries hotly, advancing towards the three juniors.

Racke promptly backed away.

"By gad! If you come near me—"

"You rotter!" roared Herries. "I'll—"

"Get away!" snapped Crooke. "You fairly reek of whisky! Looks as though you've been soaking yourself with it!"

"I haven't! I—"

Herries paused, for suddenly the remembrance of Mr. Curll's little accident had flashed across his mind.

Surely the spirit had not gone over his clothes?

He sniffed the air, and he was forced to admit that there was a suspicious smell of whisky hanging around.

"By gad!" exclaimed Racke, holding his fingers to his nose. "This is a bit too thick! I don't mind a chap havin' a little whisky once in a way, but when he chucks it all over him, it's a bit too thick!"

"Hear, hear!" concurred Crooke. "And Herries is supposed to be such a good little Georgie, too!"

Herries glared at his tormentors.

He was half inclined to hurl himself at the cads, but he thought better of it.

He gave them an icy look, and then, turning on his heels, he raced upstairs, and did not stop until he reached the Fourth Form dormitory.

Quickly he pulled off his Eton jacket, and put on another. Then he slipped the whisky-stained coat into his locker.

Had he remained long in that jacket he might have been subjected to some very keen questioning.

Herries was most anxious to avoid anything of this sort; it might have had a disastrous effect on his great scheme for surprising the school.

CHAPTER 8.

A Rift in the Lute.

"GOT any whisky in here?" Racke asked the question as he poked his head round the door of Study No. 6.

Blake looked up at the cad in amazement.

"What the dickens—" he began.

"Oh, you needn't think I need it for myself!" added Racke quickly. "I thought perhaps Herries might want it."

"Herries?" ejaculated Blake. "What—"

"Haven't you heard?" asked Racke, with an innocent air. "Herries has taken to drink, and—"

"Look here, Racke!" said Blake, jumping up from his chair. "It's you who's been spinning the yarn about Herries going to the Bull's Head! What do you know about—"

"Oh, lots!" said Racke. "If you don't believe it, you smell Herries' jacket when he comes in. I just met him in the hall, and he fairly reeked with whisky."

"Whisky!" gasped Blake. "But—"

"I should think he'd been chucking it all over his clothes as well as down his throat," said Crooke, with a grin.

"You cad!" exclaimed Blake hotly. Blake might be puzzled and hurt by Herries' mysterious behaviour, but Blake was loyal.

"Well, you needn't believe me unless you like!" said Racke carelessly. "The truth will come out soon enough. I— Ow! Yow! Grooogh!"

Blake had planted his left fist in Racke's face, and Racke had shot backwards into the passage.

"You rotten cad!" exclaimed Blake hotly. "If you dare to say another word about Herries, I'll give you the biggest hiding of your life!"

"Yow! Ow-ow-ow-ow! Yarooogh!" was all Racke said.

The cad of the Shell rose to his feet, and holding his hand to his face, went off down the passage.

As Blake moved towards his chair at the table there was a very serious expression on his face.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy and Digby were looking rather concerned, too.

They had immense faith in their chum, but these persistent rumours as to Herries' visiting disreputable public-houses and drinking strong liquor, provided them with considerable food for thought.

The three chums were thinking very deeply about the matter when the door of the study opened once again, this time to admit George Herries.

There was a very anxious frown on Herries' face as he strode in.

With a mere glance at his chums, he sat down at the table and commenced his prep.

Blake gave him a meaning look, and sniffed.

Arthur Augustus did the same, and so

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did Digby, until there was a regular succession of sniffs.

Herries heard them, and the colour rushed to his face.

He guessed at once that Racke and Crooke had already spread the yarn as to his having returned to St. Jim's smelling of whisky.

"What the dickens is the matter with you chaps?" demanded Herries almost angrily.

"N-n-nothing!" stuttered Blake.

"Well, what are you sniffing for?" asked Herries. "I suppose you haven't all got colds?"

"N-n-no."

"Then for goodness' sake shut up!" exclaimed Herries. "How do you think I can get on with my prep when you're making that row?"

Blake & Co. did not reply.

There was certainly no suspicious smell hanging around Herries, and yet the three chums were extremely puzzled by their chum's mysterious behaviour.

Why was Herries so mysterious? Why had he refused to let them accompany him on his various excursions from the school during the last few days?

If there was no truth in Racke's yarn, surely Herries could have explained the reason for his behaviour.

Their prep finished at last, the chums of Study No. 6 trooped off to the Common-room.

On the way they met Baggy Trimble. Baggy buttonholed Blake, and drew him aside.

"I say, Blake," remarked the fat junior, "it isn't true, is it?"

"What do you mean?"

"About Herries," said Baggy.

"Racke says he's taken to pub-haunting, and that— Ow! Yow! Grooogh!"

Blake was not in the mood to deal lightly with Baggy Trimble. He planted

his fist in the fat junior's face, and sent him to the floor.

Leaving Baggy to pick himself up, Blake moved on to the Common-room.

A crowd of the Fourth Form and Shell fellows were there.

In a warlike mood, Blake strode over to Racke and Crooke, who were standing together, talking in whispers.

"Look here, you cads!" he exclaimed indignantly. "I want to know what you mean by telling lies about Herries!"

"Lies!" said Racke cynically. "I like that! A chap can't tell the truth now without—"

"It's not the truth!" snapped Blake.

"Well, you ask Herries, then!" said Racke calmly. "If Herries hasn't been visiting pubs, he's only got to say so, and I'll apologise."

Herries entered the Common-room at that moment, and immediately all eyes were turned in his direction.

"Speak up, Herries!" said Levison.

"Yaas, wathah!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "Speak up, Hewwies, deah boy, and make Wacke apologise!"

"He's afraid to," said Baggy Trimble. "He knows Racke's telling the truth, and— Yow! Ow-ow-ow!"

Blake's fist had the effect of bringing Baggy's remarks to an untimely conclusion once again.

But it certainly looked as though the fat junior had hit the nail on the head, so to speak, for Herries said not a word.

"There you are!" said Racke triumphantly. "He can't deny it. I suppose you don't want any more proof, Blake?"

"By Jove!" gasped Blake.

"Weally, Hewwies," said D'Arcy, surveying his chum through his monocle, "I considah you are acting in a most wepwehensible mannah. If you would only say that Wacke's been telling lies, I should make it my duty to give him a fearful twashin'!"

"I've got nothing to say," responded Herries quietly.

"Yes, you have, deah boy!" said Arthur Augustus. "Say you haven't been visitin' pubs, an'—"

"Ha, ha, ha!" laughed Crooke. "He'd be telling lies if he did!"

"He wouldn't!" exclaimed D'Arcy staunchly.

"Well, ask him to his face, then!" said Crooke sardonically. "Ask him whether he's been inside a pub during yesterday and to-day."

"Have you, Hewwies, deah boy?" Herries did not reply.

"Bai Jove!" gasped Arthur Augustus. "I am wathah inclined to think that there's some trwth in what Wacke says, aifah all!"

"Of course there is!" said Racke gloatingly. "Shouldn't have said it otherwise!"

"Weally, Hewwies," protested D'Arcy impatiently, "I am supwised at you!"

"Oh, rats!" growled Herries.

"Why don't you say something one way or the other?"

"I'm not going to say anything at all," said Herries, moving towards the door of the room. "If you care to believe Racke's yarn, you can jolly well do so. Do you think I'm the sort of chap to take up drinking and gambling?"

"Wathah not!"

"Then shut up!" growled Herries disgruntledly.

With that Herries went out into the passage, and the argument practically ceased.

But many juniors thought a good deal about the matter.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy and Blake and Digby naturally thought about it harder than anybody else.

They wanted to believe Herries was innocent of the charge levelled against

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him, but how could they when Herries had refused even to deny the accusation?

By the time Blake & Co. fell asleep that night their faith in George Herries had received a severe shaking.

Loyal as they were, they could not help suspecting that their chum had taken the downward path.

CHAPTER 9.

The Shell's Effort.

THE next day was a very anxious one for the members of Study No. 6.

Herries was in a quiet mood all the day, and spoke very little.

The affair of the previous night was not mentioned in Study No. 6, but the juniors had plenty to say outside.

Baggy Trimble was particularly active, and more than once Blake was compelled to adopt drastic measures to stem the activity of the fat junior's tongue.

And when Blake heard later in the day that Herries had sold his watch, his suspicions were naturally increased.

"It's rotten!" he remarked to his chums. "Hanged if I don't think that Racke and Crooke were speaking the truth, after all!"

"Weally, deah boy," said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, "I don't like to think so, but—"

"Well, what has the silly fathhead wanted so much money for?" asked Blake. "He had quids from you on Friday, and now he's sold his watch!"

"It's very swange!" said D'Arcy, with a shake of the head.

"Too strange for my liking!" said Blake. "There's this blessed musical contest coming off to-morrow. How the dickens can we expect to whack the Shell when that burling chump's going on the randan?"

"Weally, Blake, we're not quite sure—"

"Well, I am!" growled Blake discontentedly. "But I'll tell you this. I won't forgive Herries if he lets the Form down. He's put himself down for some blessed 'Special Turn'. He won't tell us what it's all about, and—"

"Pewwaps he doesn't want us to know until the vewy day," suggested Arthur Augustus.

"Oh, rats!" muttered Blake. "You haven't heard him practising anything out of the ordinary."

"Quite so, but—"

"Well, my opinion is that he's in such a mess over this pub bizney that he hasn't got time for the other," said Blake flatly.

"Bai Jove, I hope not!"

"So do I!" said Blake glumly. "But what else can we think?"

"Oh, let's go out for a stroll!" proposed Digby. "You won't get any satisfaction out of chewing the rag over the bizney. Better let things take their course. Something's bound to happen soon."

"Yes," said Blake dismally; "and this study will come in for a good whack of disgrace."

"Well, you won't help matters by jawing over them," said Digby. "Come on out!"

And Blake and his chums went out, but it did not bring the discussion of Herries' peculiar behaviour to an end.

The chums of Study No. 6 talked it over again and again during that day, and even when they did manage to forget it for a while it was brought back to their mind by the gossip of other Fourth-Formers.

Altogether it was almost an unbearable day for Blake & Co.

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The trouble, however, did not seem to weigh very heavily on Herries' mind.

More than once Blake noticed a cheerful expression on his chum's face, and it puzzled him more than ever.

How a fellow who was practically proved to have taken the downward path could feel so satisfied with himself Blake could not understand.

But already Herries saw in prophetic vision, as it were, the Fourth Form emerging victors in the musical contest, and this helped him to bear the insulting remarks that were directed at him by some of his schoolfellows.

Herries was still in the same cheerful state of mind when he went up to the Fourth Form dormitory.

The next morning he held another practice, and although the Fourth Form musicians, in consequence of Herries' strange behaviour, had lost some of their enthusiasm, they played up well.

Herries seemed as keen as ever on the contest, and the improvement made by the Fourth-Formers cheered him still more.

None of the schoolboy musicians could be described as first-class in the art, but Herries felt that they all played well enough to hold their own against the Shell.

There would possibly be very little to choose between the Forms, but Herries was relying upon his "Special Turn" to gain the points for the Fourth.

Directly lessons were over that afternoon Herries marched off to keep his appointment with Mr. Curll. He was extremely anxious to receive more tuition from the old actor.

Meanwhile, all arrangements were being made for the Shell's entertainment.

It was decided that admission should be free, and a very big audience was expected in consequence.

The entertainment was timed to commence at seven o'clock.

By a quarter to seven the hall was three-parts full.

Blake & Co. had secured seats in the front row, but the expressions on the faces of the three juniors were of the gloomiest kind.

Herries had not returned for tea, and was still absent.

Crooke had suggested that if Blake wanted Herries he should look for him in one of the local public-houses.

Blake had punched Crooke's head for making the suggestion; but, nevertheless, he could not help thinking that there must be some truth in it.

It was not until the performance was about to commence that Herries put in an appearance.

He came rushing into the Hall, a cheery look on his face. He walked quickly up to the front row, and sat down next to Blake.

"Has the show started?" he asked.

"No," replied Blake curtly.

"Oh, good!" said Herries, breathing heavily, for he had left Mr. Curll rather late, and had cycled back at a pretty good speed.

The fact that Blake showed no inclination to talk to him did not trouble Herries in the least.

His eyes were fixed on the stage, and he was waiting anxiously for the show to commence.

At last Monty Lowther made his appearance, and proceeded to open the entertainment with a piano solo.

Lowther was without doubt one of the finest junior pianists in the school, and his performance was greeted with applause.

Tom Merry followed next with that good old classic, "The Village Blacksmith." The captain of the Shell pos-

sessed a very mellow voice, and he rendered the song in a magnificent manner.

The Shell fellows among the audience cheered him to the echo, and they would not allow him to leave the stage until he had given an encore.

Tom Merry sang "Two Eyes of Grey," and this time there was a louder burst of cheering than ever.

There was no doubt that the Shell had started well.

Clifton Dane followed next with a violin solo, and, apart from one or two shaky notes, there was very little wrong with his effort.

Other items followed, all of which deserved the thunderous applause with which they were received.

Even the Fourth-Formers were forced to confess that the Shell were doing extremely well.

There was not a single hitch in the entertainment, and when at length Tom Merry appeared on the stage and announced that the last item on the programme would be a "Special Turn" by Monty Lowther, there was a vociferous burst of cheering.

The curtain was lowered for preparations to be made, and when it was drawn aside Monty Lowther was sitting at the piano, and, to the amazement of the audience, it was seen that his eyes were blindfolded.

"Bai Jove!" remarked Arthur Augustus D'Arcy in surprise. "Surely Lowthah is not going to play like that?"

"Looks like it," said Blake tersely.

"Hurrah!" yelled the Shell supporters.

"Silence!"

In an instant the hubbub ceased, as Monty Lowther's fingers commenced to trickle over the keys.

The tune that Lowther had chosen to play was "Alice," by no means an easy piece to play with open eyes, but a really difficult task to achieve blindfolded.

But Monty Lowther never faltered. He played on and on, hitting a false note here and there, but playing splendidly on the whole.

The Shell junior put a tremendous amount of feeling into the piece, and hardly a sound could be heard in the body of the hall.

The audience were struck spellbound by Lowther's performance. They were too amazed to speak, but when at length the Shell junior played the final chord there was such an outburst of applause that brought the colour to Lowther's cheeks, as, dragging the handkerchief away from his eyes, he took his bow before the audience.

"Bravo!" roared the Shell supporters.

"Hurrah!"

"Well done, Lowther!"

"Three cheers for the Shell!"

And they were given with a will.

"Bai Jove!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "I wathah fancy we shall have a job to beat them, deah boys!"

"We'll do that all right," said Herries confidently. "It was a jolly good show, but we'll do better."

"Better drop the whole bizney, I think," said Blake crossly.

"What? We jolly well won't drop it!" exclaimed Herries. "We'll knock their show, good as it is, into a cocked hat!"

"How the dickens can we?"

"You wait and see," replied Herries. And that was exactly what Blake had to do.

CHAPTER 10.

A Great Triumph.

THE next day there was considerable excitement in the two Forms.

Perhaps the Shell were a little more enthusiastic than the Fourth. Their achievement of the pre-

vious evening had bucked them up considerably, and they were confident of carrying off the points in the contest.

The Fourth were, of course, hoping for victory, but Herries' strange behaviour of the last few days weighed on their minds; and although they intended to do their best for the honour of the Form, they had very little hope of coming out on top.

Herries, however, was as cheerful as ever.

He left the school directly after afternoon lessons, and did not return until half an hour before the entertainment was due to commence.

He came back in a covered van, and when he took a big drum from the back of the van and carried it into the House, critical glances were turned in his direction.

Several juniors asked him what he wanted a drum for, but Herries refused to explain.

The secret would be known soon enough now.

Right up to the time that the entertainment was due to commence Herries was very busy behind the scenes.

He was liberal with advice to his fellow-musicians, and pointed out the necessity of everyone doing his best.

At length Herries strode on to the stage to announce the first item on the programme, and to his satisfaction he observed that the hall was even more crowded than for the previous show.

Mr. Raiton and Mr. Lathom were sitting at the back, and several Sixth-Formers were present.

There was an outburst of applause at Herries' short speech, for although most of the Fourth had little hope of victory, they were determined to support their own side.

Dick Brooke was the Fourth Form pianist, and he opened the entertainment with a piano solo.

Brooke was not quite up to the standard of Monty Lowther, but he certainly gave a creditable performance.

The Fourth-Formers applauded him enthusiastically.

Kerr, of the New House, came next, and gave an impersonation sketch.

Kerr was a born actor, and the way he impersonated some of Dickens' most famous characters was really marvellous.

And when at length he "did" Taggles, the St. Jim's porter, and gave an exhibition of Taggles addressing a refractory junior, there was a tremendous burst of laughing, intermingled with cheers.

The cheering had barely died down when Dick Brooke appeared once again, and this time gave a violin solo.

Brooke played with a good deal of feeling, and there was very little wrong with his performance.

The next item was the cornet-piccobello-trio. Herries, Figgins, and Brooke did their best, but the effort did not meet with the approval that Herries had anticipated.

Perhaps that was due to the fact that, in the excitement, Herries played a little too loudly on his cornet.

The fact remains, however, that the violin and piccolo were very seldom heard. But that did not refrain the Fourth-Formers in the audience from cheering at the tops of their voices when the turn concluded.

Be the turn good or bad, the Fourth-Formers were determined that there should be no lack of applause.

"The next item on the programme will be a song by Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, entitled, 'Yes, Let me Like a Soldier Fall,'" announced Herries, stepping to the front of the stage.

There immediately arose a shriek of laughter from the Shell faction.

Monty Lowther, who was sitting in the

front row, laughed louder than anybody, and when the swell of St. Jim's marched on to the stage he gave the humorist of the Shell a meaning glance.

"Go it, Gussy!" exclaimed Monty Lowther. "On the bawl!"

"Don't bawl too loudly, though, Gussy!" urged Tom Merry. "We don't want the drums of our ears busted, you know!"

"Be quiet, you wottahs!" muttered Arthur Augustus.

"All serene!"

D'Arcy held a copy of the song in his hands, and waited for Dick Brooke to play the opening bars.

The Fourth Form pianist played a few notes, and then seemed to hesitate.

Arthur Augustus observed this hesitancy on Dick Brooke's part, and, what was more, he noticed something about the tune. It was not familiar to him. Anybody who knew the song could tell that the notes Dick Brooke played did not belong to it.

Arthur Augustus shifted from one foot to the other.

"Go it Gussy!" yelled the Shell juniors in the audience.

"Stick it, Brooke!"

Brooke started over again, but the notes he played were the same as before.

"Brooke, you fathead!" muttered D'Arcy in a whisper. "Play the right tune!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" shouted Monty Lowther from the front row. "Get on with it, Gussy!"

"I—I—" Arthur Augustus gazed first at Dick Brooke and then at the audience.

Next moment he rushed across to the piano, and picked up the piece of music from which Brooke was playing.

He turned it over quickly, whilst the whole hall roared with laughter. Then he uttered an exclamation.

"Bai Jove! Somebody's messed up the music!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled Monty Lowther exuberantly. "Why don't you start, Gussy?"

"Bai Jove!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, shaking his fist at Monty Lowther. "You wottah, Lowthah! You've changed my music!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Give me your copy, Gussy," said Dick Brooke. "You know the words all right, don't you?"

"Yaas, deah boy!"

"Well, let me have your copy, and we'll start over again."

"All wight!"

Dick Brooke sat down at the piano again, and the swell of St. Jim's advanced towards the front of the stage.

D'Arcy was red and indignant, but he was determined that Monty Lowther's little joke in changing his music should not affect the success of his effort.

Arthur Augustus did his best, and well deserved the applause he received.

Monty Lowther expressed the opinion that D'Arcy had certainly made a worse row, from which it was impossible to judge whether the humorist of the Shell considered Arthur Augustus' effort good or bad.

But Lowther was a sportsman, and he clapped with the rest as D'Arcy bowed before the audience.

The next few items were more or less successful, and although they were greeted with a roar of applause, it could hardly be said that the Fourth Form entertainment was superior to the Shell's.

Then Herries stepped in front of the stage, and announced that he would have much pleasure in concluding the entertainment with a "Special Turn" of his own.

Speculation was immediately rife as to the nature of the turn.

The curtain was dropped to hide the preparations, and there was a buzz of voices until the curtain was drawn aside. Then the audience gasped with amazement at the sight that met their gaze.

For, standing in the centre of the stage was George Herries, and to the audience he appeared to be surrounded with instruments.

His right hand rested on the keys of the piano, his left hand held his cornet to his mouth, whilst, fastened to his left foot was a heavy drum-stick, which was held in close proximity to the big drum. On the floor a cymbal was fixed, and another was fastened to the under part of Herries' right foot.

"Well, I'm blowed!" gasped Blake, in perplexity. "Surely that silly duffer is not going to try and play those four things at once?"

"It jolly well looks like it!" said Digby.

"Bai Jove!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus. "He can't do it! It's imposs!"

Similar remarks were being voiced in all parts of the hall. It seemed almost incredible that Herries should attempt such a task.

That he intended to do so was soon made plain to the astounded juniors.

Suddenly the cornet blared forth in great volume, the piano tinkled in harmony, then came the boom of the big drum, followed by the clash of cymbals.

And to the surprise of the audience, each instrument came in at the right moment.

The piece that Herries played was, of course, "Life on the Ocean Wave." The airs were familiar to most of the juniors, and as Herries played them off one after the other, there was soon a roar of hand-clapping in the crowded hall.

Even the masters and the members of the lordly Sixth could not refrain from applauding Herries' performance.

Blake and Digby clapped as loudly as anybody, for, in spite of their chum's suspicious behaviour of recent days, they admired him for his great achievement.

Herries went on from one air to another, and when at length he came to "Rule, Britannia," and played each instrument regularly and harmoniously, the rafters of the hall fairly shook with the vociferous cheering.

The Shell clapped and cheered, too, for although Monty Lowther's special turn had been a creditable one, this knocked it into a cocked hat.

It was marvellous to think that a St. Jim's junior could perform such a task.

Herries was quite unaware of the reception of his effort. He played right through "Rule, Britannia," to a wild outburst of cheering, and then, with a final clash of the cymbals, he dropped his cornet to his side, and bowed before the audience.

"Bravo!" shrieked the Fourth-Formers.

"Good old Herries!"

"Well done! Hurrah!"

Never had Herries expected such a reception. It had passed all his expectations. The Fourth and the Shell were yelling at the tops of their voices, the Fifth were clapping excitedly, whilst the Sixth muttered words of admiration amongst themselves.

It was Herries' hour of triumph.

"Well, what's the verdict, Lefevre?"

A dozen or more juniors asked the question of the Fifth-Former as they gathered behind the scenes.

Lefevre smiled good-naturedly.

"I must say that the Shell did very well," said the Fifth-Former, "but—"

"But the Fourth did better—eh?" concluded Blake.

Lefevre glanced at Tom Merry.

"It's all right, Lefevre, old man," said

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Tom Merry genially. "If you gave the verdict to us we shouldn't approve. Herries has whacked us hollow; that's my opinion."

"And mine," said Lefevre.
"Hurrah!" exclaimed Jack Blake, slapping Herries on the back. "Well done, old son! Here, where are you going?"

Herries had suddenly moved away from the juniors.

"I want to find Racke and Crooke!" he said. And an instant later had disappeared upstairs.

A crowd of juniors followed him upstairs. Right up to the Fourth Form passage Herries went, and burst into Racke's study.

Racke and Crooke were sitting at the table, but they did not sit there for long. Herries rushed at them like a bull at a gate. With his right fist he sent Racke to the floor, and with his left he bowled Crooke over into the fender.

"Get up, you cads!" he exclaimed angrily. "Get up, and I'll give you the hiding you deserve!"

"What the dickens—" began Blake, in surprise.

"I'll tell you," said Herries, and he forthwith related to the crowd of juniors in the doorway how he had gone to Mr. Curll to assist him in his "Special Turn," how Racke and Crooke had seen him there, and of the amazing consequences which had followed.

The juniors listened intently, and when Herries concluded Blake held out his hand in rather a shamefaced manner.

"I say, old son," he said slowly, "I'm awfully sorry. I—I— You know what I mean, don't you?"

"Bai Jove!" said Arthur Augustus. "I—I—"

"Oh, don't worry over that," said Herries promptly. "I don't blame you chaps for thinking as you did. It was

all through these cads, but they're going to suffer for it!"

"Bai Jove!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "I vote we duck the wottahs in the fountain!"

"Good egg!"

And Racke and Crooke were promptly carried off to the fountain, and hurled into the cold, unsympathetic water. They were left to scramble out as best they could, whilst the juniors crowded round Herries to congratulate him still further on his achievement. It was a long while ere St. Jim's ceased to discuss Herries' Special Turn.

THE END.

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



CADET NOTES.



THE project of affiliating all the Cadet Corps of the county to the Volunteer and Territorial Regiments was discussed at a meeting of Volunteer and Cadet Corps officers recently held in Southampton. Colonel the Hon. Sir H. G. L. Crichton, chairman of the Southampton T.F.A., presided, and explained the object of the movement and the necessity for forming county battalions which should represent the whole of the effort to increase the welfare of the youths, physically, mentally, and morally. General Sir Robert Scallan also addressed the meeting, and explained the scheme for co-ordinating the various organisations dealing with the welfare of boys, and it is hoped, as a result, that a strong and widely extended organisation will shortly be created throughout the whole of the county of Hampshire.

During the last quarter 130 new recruits were enrolled, and this number could have been considerably increased except for the difficulty of obtaining uniforms. "Judging by the number of applications for enrolment," Colonel Clarke added, "the strength of the battalion could undoubtedly be increased to one thousand were sufficient funds and uniforms forthcoming." The officers and corps were congratulated by Lord Chylesmore and Colonel Simpson on the progress of the battalion and the appearance and drill of the lads, and the prizes were subsequently distributed by Lady Chylesmore. An excellent concert, under the direction of Lieutenant E. F. Strickland, followed, concluding the proceedings.

A movement for the training and development of the youth of North Staffordshire, between the ages of 14 and 17, has been started as the 1st Cadet Battalion of the North Staffordshire Volunteer Regiment. The first enrolment and drill, which took place quite recently, was very successful, more than 150 lads joining up, and looking very smart on parade. At present the movement is confined to Stoke-on-Trent and district, but it is intended to extend it to include Burslem, Tunstall, and other districts in the vicinity. Our readers residing in that area should note this, and join the new battalion.

Lord Scarbrough, Director-General of the Territorial and Volunteer Forces, recently inspected the London Scottish Cadet Corps at their headquarters in Westminster. After the inspection, addressing the lads, he said it was very encouraging to see a battalion like theirs, formed less than a year ago, which had increased so much in strength and efficiency. The Government were doing all they could to support the Cadet Movement as it deserved. Subsequently Lord Scarbrough presented cups to various winners, and the Company Cup for

all-round efficiency was awarded to "A" Company.

In another direction also we understand that considerable activity may be looked for almost immediately. The Cadet Department of the War Office, under the guidance of General Sir Robert Scallan, is taking steps to organise reviews of Cadet Corps in various districts on a very large scale. Arrangements have already been made, we believe, for such a review and inspection in Yorkshire, and a similar review on a very large scale indeed is in contemplation for the Cadet Corps of London and its vicinity. These attractions ought to prove an additional inducement to those of our readers who are not yet members of Cadet Corps to take steps to join up at once. They can obtain full particulars of the nearest unit, etc., on application to the Central Association of Volunteer Regiments, Judges' Quadrangle, Royal Courts of Justice, Strand, London, W.C. 2.

Members of Cadet Units which have been successful in the competition for the Lucas Tooth Medals will be interested to know that the Army Council has issued an instruction with reference to the wearing of such medals by Cadets. These medals are awarded annually to the most efficient Cadet Unit in each county by the Lucas Tooth Boys' Training Fund, a fund derived from the estates of a wealthy man who desired to do something to assist in the training of boys. It appears that in some instances these medals have been worn by the winners on the chest as an ordinary medal, and the War Office has now laid down that this is not to be continued, but that the medals are to be worn on the left arm, two inches below the seam of the shoulder-strap, and pieces of ribbon half an inch in length may take the place of the medal when the latter is not worn. Our readers who are qualified to wear this distinction should note the instructions given as to its display.

Some of our readers have a greater interest in cavalry regiments than in the ordinary infantry Cadet Corps, and for this the Imperial Cadet Yeomanry provides a suitable and attractive Force to join. There are not many detachments of this corps, and in some cases they are already over-full, but the Imperial Cadet Yeomanry of Yorkshire, which is affiliated to the Yorkshire Hussars, is still open to receive recruits. The corps is a very good one, which has been in existence for the past six years, and has attained a status almost equal to that of an O.T.C., and since the outbreak of the war has passed through to the senior Service 1,600 efficiently trained Cadets. The regiment includes squadrons at Leeds, Bradford, and Harrogate, with a detachment of the Leeds Squadron also at Wakefield. Recruits should be lads of good

social standing between the ages of 14 and 18 years, and not less than 5ft. 3in. in height. Further particulars can be obtained only on application, as usual, to the C.A.V.R.

The annual inspection and display of the 1st Wessex Battalion of the Cadet Boys' Brigade was recently held in the Town Hall, Yeovil. The mayor presided over a very crowded audience, and the display reflected the greatest credit upon the officers of the corps and the lads themselves, drills being carried out with great precision and smartness. Captain Dully, the inspecting officer, complimented the officers of the company on their efficiency, and urged that Cadet organisations should be supported by everybody because they laid the foundation of good citizenship. The strength of the company is not so great as it ought to be in a town of the size of Yeovil, and any of our readers residing there ought to join and support the movement.

A presentation concert was recently given at the Perseverance Hall, Plumstead, by the 2nd Woolwich Cadet Corps, affiliated to the 20th County of London Regiment (T.F.). A well-filled smoker's cabinet was presented to Captain C. T. Hand, O.C., by the officers and Cadets of the corps, as a token of appreciation for his services; while a writing-case marked the thanks of the artists who usually take part in the corps concerts. Among those present were Colonel M. H. Egan, A.O.C., and Mrs. Egan, Mrs. Hand, Major Ginnall, M.C., R.E., Captain Palmer, A.O.C., and two officers and thirty other ranks of the W.A.A.C. A most enjoyable programme was carried out by members of the corps and their friends. Among the former were Lieutenant Price, conjuring; 2nd Lieutenant Hinton, piano; Sergeant Dimmore, Lance-Corporal Levey, and Cadet Bartlett, songs; while of the latter Misses McHale, Christie, Prentice, and Russell sang, and Miss Holl recited. The programme closed with a duet by Miss Tate and Staff-Sergeant McAvoy. In expressing his pleasure at the privilege given him, Colonel Egan, who made the presentation, warmly praised Captain Hand for his work during the past seven years, and said that he was proud to be president of a corps whose numbers were so steadily growing. He wished them the success which they deserved for their work. Captain Hand heartily thanked the officers and Cadets for their kindness, and expressed to Colonel Egan his thanks for his help in years past. Captain Palmer, on being called upon, complimented the corps on their hospitality in inviting members of the W.A.A.C. to join them on such a pleasant evening.

Boys of 14 years and over can join the 2nd Woolwich Cadet Corps at the Perseverance Hall, Villas Road, Plumstead, on Friday evenings, 7.30 p.m., or at Vicarage Road Schools on Wednesday evenings, at 7.30 p.m.

THE TWINS FROM TASMANIA.

FOR NEW READERS.

The twins are Philip Derwent, of Highcliffe, and his sister Philippa, of Cliff House. They have a cockatoo, named Cocky, which has been until recently with Flip (Philip) at Highcliffe, but is now at Cliff House. Flip has made an enemy of Gadsby, who is plotting against him with Vavasour. His best chums, Merton and Tunstall, are away from the school for a time, owing to a serious accident to one of Merton's eyes in a fight with Ponsonby. In their absence Flip gets too friendly with Pon and the rest of the nuts and, without any real taste for it at the outset, takes to gambling. He goes with the nuts to a gambling den at Courtfield, quarrels with Pon, and is knocked senseless just as the warning "Police!" is heard. Flip comes to himself in a cellar, bound hand and foot. He is let out, however. He makes up his mind that the only thing for him to do is to run away, as returning to Highcliffe means certain expulsion. Then he meets Peter Hazeldene, who has run away from Greyfriars. Goggs, of Franklingham, comes to Highcliffe. Flip and Hazel go to London, and are robbed by roughs. They meet an officer friend of Flip's. Hazel runs off and Flip follows. Johnny Goggs meets the pretty post-girl, and a general argument ensues between Chiker, Goggs, the nuts, the Caterpillar, and Miss Gittins.

The Nuts Hear the Truth.

"NATURALLY Gadsby doesn't exactly love the chashtisers, of course," said De Courcy; "an' I happen to know of one or two occasions on which he has plotted dirty tricks against them. But never another so dirty as this!"

He paused. No one broke the brief silence which ensued.

They were all thinking hard—even Vavasour. But thinking did not mean repentance in the case of any of the nuts. Their remorse was of the kind that goes just as deep as sorrow at being found out.

"I don't pretend to know why Gadsby favoured Derwent with so much more rancour than he devotes to the rest of the fellows he counts as his enemies—most of them don't think about him except when they see him, but, of course, they're his enemies all the same," went on the Caterpillar. "Unless it was that Pon had favoured Derwent with the fulgent light of his special favour. Must have been that, I fancy. It's makin' Gadsby trifle more like a human bein' to credit him with jealousy, anyway."

"But!" Gadsby snapped. "I wasn't jealous of the boulder. What did it matter to me? Pon only took him up because of his pretty sister, by gad!"

"You will be good enough, Gadsby, to keep Miss Derwent out of this!" said Johnny Goggs, with some heat.

"I trust you won't mind my referring to her, Goggs, dear boy. I assure you that it shall be with all the distinguished respect that she unquestionably merits," the Caterpillar said, in his most courtly manner.

"That is a very different matter, De Courcy," replied Goggs gravely.

"I thank you! It is hardly possible to keep out of this entirely, for she comes into the last part. Our admirable Pon was bitten by her charms, an' cherished for her romantic an' hopeless affection that might have made a better man of him if—"

"But! Utter rot, by gad!" snapped Pon. "I think not. I am convinced that Gadsby is right when he said that Pon made a fool of Derwent because of his pretty sister, but Miss Derwent was singularly blind to the greatest charms of the admirable Pon. As far as I can gather, her feelin' for him was a genuine dislike."

"But!" snapped Pon again. "She—"

"I fear, Pon, that your testimony has the defect of bein' biased. Miss Derwent, then, gave Pon the cold shoulder. That is not the kind of gift that can be given to our Pon with impunity. He is safe to resent it—to seek revenge. So we come to Pon's part in the affair. What a revenge it would be to make the brother such another as himself! That was Pon's game. For a time it fitted in very well with Gadsby's, not bein' essentially different in general scope, for Gadsby would also have liked to see Derwent treadin' the primrose path. But Pon was not an actual sharer in Gadsby's plot. He did not scheme with Chiker. He only—the Caterpillar's voice rang with scorn—"deserted his chum in a den of thieves because they had quarrelled! He only slunk back to Highcliffe an' safety, leavin' Derwent to bear the brunt, an' countin' on Derwent not to give him away—he knew that Derwent could be counted upon for that! Which of his other chums could! Gadsby? Well, hardly. Vav? Absolutely not! But Derwent—that was different! Derwent was not the sort to save his own skin by draggin' others into his trouble—not though they might be really up to the neck in it already! But here we are at Highcliffe, gentlemen, an' my discourse is at an end. Let me thank you all for a dashed interestin' evenin'!"

Vavasour Chucks It.

DE COURCY and Goggs stood back while the three nuts mounted the wall, and dropped on the other side.

Then the Caterpillar took Goggs by the arm.

"Don't let's go in for a few minutes yet, dear boy," he said. "I feel sick, utterly an' completely fed up! An' don't mind if I kind of cling to you, y'know. It's good to feel somethin' honest again, after walkin' all that way arm-in-arm with daddy!"

"I am in no hurry to go in," replied Goggs; and the two turned and paced together along the road.

Several minutes passed in complete silence. But Goggs' lean arm pressed the Caterpillar's closely all the time.

"Aren't they a putrid crowd, Goggs?" said the Caterpillar wearily, at length.

"I certainly do not approve of them. But I think there is no need for you to trouble too greatly about their misdoing. What we have to think of is clearing Derwent. Is that not so?"

"It is, dear boy. But don't you see how they are tangled up in it all? As far as Flip can be cleared—it's not quite all the way, y'know—the Head won't look upon his visit to that show as exactly a joke, by gad!—we can clear him. But to do it we've got to show up Pon an' Vav an' daddy. Oh, I know they deserve it! The sack is what they ought to get; an' nothin' could be better for Highcliffe than that they should have the sack. But, Goggs, dear boy, I've a silly, weak hatred of the notion of helpin' to get it for them; an' I'm willin' to lay odds of anythin' up to a thousand to one that Flip feels the same way about it."

"Then what must be done is to set him right without involving them," replied Goggs thoughtfully.

"I don't see the way—I can't see any way. They've got to be blackened no end—not more than they deserve, but no end all the same—for Flip to show up white, by gad!"

"Yes, I see that."

"An' you can't understand why I should have any tenderness about gettin' the boulders what they ought to have?"

"I understand perfectly well," Goggs said gravely. And somehow the Caterpillar was sure that Goggs did understand. He suspected that possibly this new chum of his understood better than he did himself. For Rupert de Courcy was surprised at what he thought his own weakness.

They took three or four more turns up and down the road before re-entering Highcliffe. Neither thought at all about prep, or of any pains and penalties consequent upon their being caught out at that hour. Perhaps both forgot that in the eyes of the Highcliffe authorities they were mere juniors. And that was natural enough, for neither felt quite like a mere schoolboy just then—if either ever felt so.

"I shall have to tell Franky," said the Caterpillar, as they paused under the wall before mounting it. "Franky's my father confessor, y'know, dear boy. I do keep things from him now an' then; but I never feel comfy about doin' it."

"I should certainly tell Courtenay," Goggs answered. "I gather that he is friendly disposed towards Derwent?"

"Yas, rather! Flip's just the sort of chap Franky could have fairly loved—keen as mustard, an' straight as a string, an' all that. They were simply made to be chummy. If Courtenay can help us he will; but I don't see how he can."

"That is no reason why he should not be told," said Goggs.

"Not at all, dear boy! I mean to tell him, or to let you. That would really suit me better. I'm a dashed long-winded talker, as

you may have noticed; but I've pretty nearly done all the talkin' I've any use for to-night."

They slipped over the wall, and started for the school building. But on a sudden Goggs caught the Caterpillar by the arm, and dragged him back into the gloom.

A voice spoke—the harsh and unpleasant voice of Mr. Mobbs.

"Who is that?" it inquired.

Another voice answered—and that seemed to the Caterpillar to be the voice of Mr. Voysey, the Head of Highcliffe.

"Is that you, Mr. Mobbs?"

"It is I, sir. I did not recognise your step."

"Nor I yours. You have no business of moment with me, I trust? I have a desire at the present for my own society."

"Oh, not at all, sir! When I heard your step I took it to be that of one of the boys. They, of course, have no right abroad at this hour."

"Quite so—quite so, Mr. Mobbs!"

The master of the Fourth went back whence he had come. The two juniors stood still until he was safely away.

"By gad! Was that really you, Goggs?" asked the Caterpillar.

"Oh, yes! It was quite easy."

"But you can't have heard our Head speak more than once or twice."

"Once only. It was enough."

"Can you get anyone's voice like that?"

"Most people's, I think. Are you there, Caterpillar?"

It was Goggs who spoke; but the voice was as the voice of Smithson, and De Courcy answered:

"Yas, ass, I'm here; but there's no need to go shoutin' about it!"

"That wasn't Smithson, Rupert," said what seemed another voice.

"It certainly wasn't you who spoke before, Franky!" replied the Caterpillar sharply. And he peered into the gloom for some sign of either Smithson or Courtenay.

Then Goggs laughed.

"You every time? Oh, dash it, that beats the hand!" said the Caterpillar. "There ought to be somethin' in that gift of yours. It's ventriloquism, I know; those voices didn't seem to come from anywhere near us."

"Yes, it is ventriloquism," Goggs said. "And I have found at times that there is something in it, as you say. But I do not see much practical use for it here at present."

"It's helped us out of bein' nabbed by Mobby—not that I care a lot whether Mobby nabs me or not, by gad! It may help in other ways, too—one never knows one's luck. Come along in an' spout to Franky!"

But before they reached Courtenay they ran against Vavasour.

Vav was in a distinctly shaky state. He had been thinking hard, and that always had a rather unnerving effect upon him.

"I—I want to see you fellows," he said. "Let's cut in here."

They passed together into No. 6.

"Look here, I want to be out of this mess—absolutely!" said Vavasour.

The Caterpillar shook his head.

"Can't be done, dear boy," he said. "I should feel the same in your place, I admit. Pon and Gadsby feel the same, I dare say. But there's no such luck for any of you."

"But—but—I didn't trap Derwent, y'know—I wasn't in that, really! An' it was Gadsby who wanted the letter. I never felt that it was quite the square thing."

"Remarkable instance of the sproutin' of the moral instinct in unlikely places, you observe, Goggs," drawled the Caterpillar. "Vav actually had a notion that stealin' another chap's letters was just a trifle off the rails! I am surprised!"

"Oh, don't rot, Caterpillar!" said Vavasour plaintively. "It's true, y'know. Gadsby

wanted me to burn the letter; but I didn't—I kept it, so here it is!"

And he flung on the table the letter for which Flip had longed so greatly—the letter which would have told him that Merton and Tunstall were still his chums, in spite of all that had passed!

Tunstall Returns.

"**H**ALLO!" said a voice. Goggs had never heard before, as the door of No. 6 opened.

Goggs rose politely to his feet. Goggs was always polite.

"You are surprised to find me here, I take it?" he said.

"I am, by Jupiter!" answered Tunstall, for it was he who had arrived upon the scene.

He looked at Goggs doubtfully. Johnny was not impressive at first sight, and Tunstall was at a loss how to size him up.

"Then Mr. Mobbs did not tell you—"

"Haven't seen the dashed little end. Shouldn't mind if I never did see him again."

"Let me introduce myself. My name is Goggs."

Tunstall started.

"Seem to have heard that name before somewhere," he said thoughtfully.

"It is possible that Derwent may have mentioned me. I chanced to meet him at Victoria Station at the 'gunning of term, when I was on my way to Frankingham and he was coming here."

"Oh, I know now, by Jupiter! You're the merchant who put that rotter Gaddy on his back when he was foolin' round with old Cocky. Shake hands! You may be a run 'un to look at, but I fancy you're a good 'un to go."

"My unfortunate personal appearance—"

sighed Goggs, as he gripped Tunstall's hand.

"Oh, it's not so bad as all that, old top!" replied Tun.

"I shouldn't think anyone would mind it a bit when once they got used to it. Sure I sha'n't."

"Of course, it is a shock at first—"

"I wouldn't go so far as that. Not a shock exactly. Oh, dash it! What does it matter, anyhow? I say, what's this?"

Tunstall's eyes had fallen upon his own letter to Flip stuck up in a conspicuous position on the mantelpiece. His face changed on the instant.

"I wrote that," he continued, but in very different tones from those in which he had last spoken. "What's it doin' there, by Jupiter? Didn't Flip ever get it?"

"No," replied Goggs.

"But how was that? Look here, that letter was dashed important! Flip was worryin' himself because he thought Merton an' I had given him the sack—silly ass! We were a bit nettled; but that was all rot. An' he never got it? Oh, dash it all!"

"You know what has happened to Derwent, Tunstall?" said Goggs quietly.

"Yes. Heard from Cliff House, you know. There's a lot behind that, an' I mean to look into it, you bet. But this letter—it must have got here days before Flippy bolted. I can't make it out. Do you know anything about it?"

The question was put almost fiercely.

"Yes. I may say I know all about it."

"Was it an accident?"

"Hardly that. In fact—"

Goggs hesitated. He did not want to bring about an immediate row between Tunstall and the plotters. But Tun was in no mood to be put off.

"Oh, let's hear it! I know you couldn't have had anything to do with it. You weren't here, an' you're not that sort, by Jupiter! Let's hear it. If it's the work of some of our rotters, you can't wait to screen them. They wouldn't be your sort."

"You have guessed correctly," Goggs said.

"It was the work of—"

"Pon, confound him!"

"No. He had no hand in it."

"Gaddy and Vay, then?"

"Yes. Where are you going, Tunstall?"

"To look for Gaddy an' Vay!" answered Tunstall grimly.

"But, my dear fellow, you have only just come from a journey. Besides—Oh, really, I think you had better postpone your—"

"Can't be done! I sha'n't rest for a moment till I've given those rotters what they deserve, by Jupiter!"

"You won't have a cup of tea—well, I should have pleasure in—"

"Oh, don't be a silly ass!"

Tun said that as he might have said it to Flip or Merton. Goggs might be queer-looking, but he had a way with him beyond all dispute, and he had walked straight into Fred Tunstall's confidence.

"May I come with you?" inquired Goggs meekly.

"Oh, if you like! But you don't want to go mixin' yourself up in a dashed row. You don't look that sort."

"I am indeed, of an eminently pacific nature," admitted Goggs. "But—"

"Well, you're not likely to be any dashed use; but you won't be wanted, so that's no odds. Vay's an utter funk, an' I can thrash Gaddy."

Still the picture of meekness, Goggs followed Tunstall. It did not dawn upon Tun that, on the whole, either Gaddy or Vay's our would be likely to dread Goggs far more than they dreaded him—now that they knew Goggs.

"Hallo, Tunstall, dear boy! Glad to see you back!"

It was the Caterpillar who hailed Tun.

"Hallo, Caterpillar! I'm glad to see back, in a way; but—Oh, never mind that!"

"Merton comin' along soon?"

"Yes; in a week or two. He's pretty nearly all serene again now. I should have waited for him, but this lizenz about Flip got on my nerves. You wouldn't understand that. I dare say, the chap not bein' a chum of yours, but—"

"Wrong, dear boy!" yawned the Caterpillar. "Derwent is quite a chum of mine. Things have happened since you an' Merton moved out for a while, an' in the course of things happenin' Flip an' I have become chummy."

"Then I wonder you couldn't have done something to stop this, by Jupiter!"

A shadow passed over the Caterpillar's face. He looked unusually earnest in that moment.

"I wish I could have done, Tunstall," he said. "But when things get happenin' they're sometimes a bit too rapid for me, an' they were this time. You see—"

"Talk to you later on. I've something to do now."

"What's the hurry, dear boy?"

"I'm goin' to slaughter Gaddy an' Vay!"

"Good! I am in complete favour of that. They need it badly, by gad! Vay behaved like a bigger worm than ever last night when he delivered up your letter; an' as a point of principle, I agree with anyone's slaughterin' Gaddy. Well, as you have enlisted Goggs, you won't need my poor help. It would, as a matter of course, be most entirely at your service."

"Goggs? He isn't in this," Tunstall spoke rather disparagingly, though probably he did not intend to do so. "I don't suppose he—"

"Don't suppose at all, dear boy!" chirped in the Caterpillar. "Wait till you've seen Goggs in action, that's all."

Tunstall looked at Goggs curiously. Then he said:

"Well, come along, if you're comin'. Are you goin' to show up, De Courcy? Where are the sweeps, by the way? (Can you tell me?)"

"In Pon's den, I fancy. No; on the whole, I think I will refrain from witnessin' the execution. It would gratify me too much. I shall stay away as a mortification of the spirit, y'know. Sort of *renoncain* the pomps an' vanities. If Vay needs holdin' while you deal with Gaddy, Goggs will hold him, I am sure."

Tunstall grinned. It may have been at the idea of Goggs' holding anyone; but it was just as likely to have been at that of Vay's needing holding.

Johnny Goggs followed him in silence to the door of Ponsonby's study, whereon Tunstall rapped sharply.

The key turned in the lock, and Pon's face appeared as the door opened.

(To be continued.)

The Editor's Chat.

For Next Wednesday:

"THE HIDDEN HOARD!"

By Martin Clifford.

There is nothing about the sports competition in next week's story; but there is plenty of fun and incident in it, and the great George Alfred Grundy and the noble Arthur Augustus D'Arcy figure largely. So does Mr. Erasmus Zechariah Pepper, the Rylcombe miser, of whom we have rather lost sight just lately. Both Gussy and Grundy are hard up against Mr. Pepper, who is a wily old bird, and quite capable of bealing with them either singly or together. Grundy scored heavily over him once, but it can hardly be said that Grundy scores this time. For further particulars see next week's number.

MAKING SURE OF THE "GEM."

The only way to do this in future will be to give a regular order to your newsagent. Once before I told you this; but on that occasion the authorities, who had decided to do away with the practice of returns, relented at the last moment. Now they have decided again; and there is no hope of relenting this time—the paper situation is much too critical.

It is "returns" that enable the newsagent to have piles of papers on his counter, and to fill his racks with specimens. There they are all ready for anyone who wants them.

But they are not going to be there in future, for the newsagent will not take the risk of making wastepaper, even at the present price of wastepaper. And he will not be able to do what he has always done before—send back to the publishers any unsold copies, and get back the price of them. Which means that he will only order what he knows he can sell, and he can only be sure of what his customers order. See? Below you will find an order form, which I hope you will fill in—if you have not already a standing order. I think many of you have. Don't send the form to me; give it to your newsagent.

ORDER FORM FOR THE "GEM."

To Mr. Newsagent
(Fill in name)

Will you be good enough to order and keep for me each week until further notice a copy of THE GEM LIBRARY, at 14d., which I undertake to accept?

Signed
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Date.....

LIST OF TOM MERRY STORIES IN THE "GEM"—(continued).

- 251.—"Grimes of the Fourth."
- 252.—"One of the Bert."
- 253.—"The Captain's Rival."
- 254.—"Jack Blake on the Warpath."
- 255.—"The Rival Housemasters."
- 256.—"The New Boy's Secret."
- 257.—"Winter Sports at St. Jim's."
- 258.—"Tom Merry's Promise."
- 259.—"The Third Form Mystery."
- 260.—"The Head Prize."
- 261.—"Figgins & Co.'s Fend."
- 262.—"The Masked Entertainers."
- 263.—"At Grips with the Grammarians."
- 264.—"Fatty Wynn—Professional."
- 265.—"Ashamed of His Name."
- 266.—"The Last Hope."
- 267.—"Shoulder to Shoulder."
- 268.—"Hidden Treasure at St. Jim's."
- 269.—"D'Arcy's Dodge."
- 270.—"The Schoolboy Firefighters."
- 271.—"Honours Divided."
- 272.—"Under a Cloud."
- 273.—"The Schoolboy Informer."
- 274.—"D'Arcy—Suffragist."
- 275.—"Tom Merry's Discovery."

Your Editor