



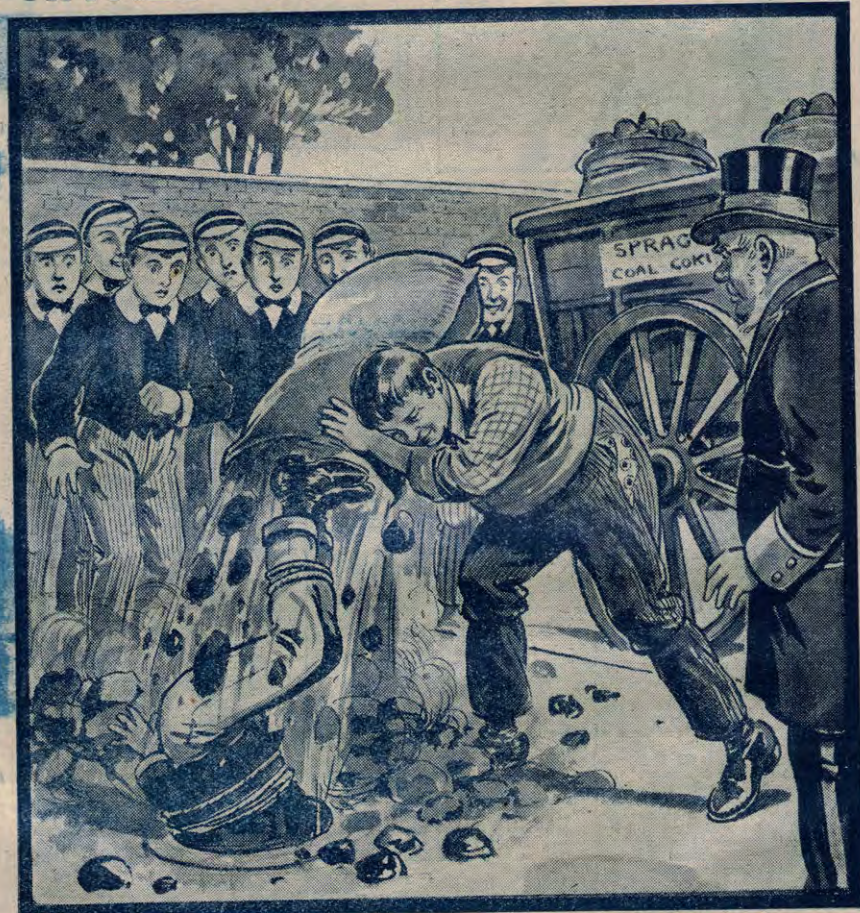
The GEM 1 $\frac{1}{2}$

No. 611, Vol. XIII.

October 25th, 1919.



RIVALS ON THE WARPATH!



SHOOTING THE COAL-CHUTE!

An Amusing Incident in the Splendid, Long, Complete School Tale in this Number. 25-10-19



CHAPTER 1.

Bagged!

"THEY—they've hopped it!" George Figgins, the leader of the New House juniors of St. Jim's, spake those words as he halted in his running, and motioned to his followers—Kerr and Wynn—to halt also.

The three heroes of the New House came to a full-stop, and gazed around them, as if in search of somebody.

Figgins, Kerr, and Wynn were both hairless and breathless, and the warlike glitter in their eyes betokened that their errand at the father end of St. Jim's quadrangle was decidedly not an errand of peace.

Ten minutes ago, whilst they were engaged outside the tuck-shop, at the instigation of Fatty Wynn, contemplating a purchase of some of Dame Taggles' new jam-tarts, three mysterious individuals had crept up behind them and removed their caps from off their heads.

Figgins & Co. had turned, and beheld Tom Merry, Manners, and Monty Lowther, the Terrible Three of the School House, bolting off with their caps, and the New House had set out in chase of their enemies.

The pursuit had led them to the rear of the school, from the quadrangle into the domestic quarters of St. Jim's.

But now Tom Merry & Co. had disappeared, and Figgins & Co., like Little Bo-Peep, did not know where to find them.

"The—the scallywags!" gasped the mighty Figgins. "Wait! till I do get hold of them! I'll give 'em socks!"

"They've already got our caps, though!" grunted Kerr ruefully. "They've scooted round the back of the conservatory, and are hiding round by the tradesmen's entrance, I reckon!" "Come on, then!" snorted Figgins, putting his lanky legs into action once again. "We must get our caps back, or they'll crow over us no end. This way!"

Turning the corner by the conservatory, Figgins, Kerr, and Wynn made another halt.

Their hated rivals, Tom Merry & Co., were not in sight.

Evidently those enterprising youths were out to lead Figgins & Co. a pretty dance.

Figgins & Co. had now come upon the rear of the school, where the domestic quarters were situated.

From the tradesmen's entrance in the school wall a drive led up to the front door of Mrs. Kibble's domain, where, as matron of St. Jim's, she ruled supreme over the servants "below stairs."

As Figgins, Kerr, and Wynn looked, they saw a cart drawn up at the front door. Mrs. Kibble herself, a portly, dignified dame, was standing at the door, evidently directing the operations of a grumpy individual, who was at that moment lugging a sack from the rear of the cart.

"Hallo!" said Fatty Wynn, with more interest than the occasion seemed to demand. "That's Spragg, the greengrocer. I wonder—"

He's taking in some sacks of potatoes," said Kerr. "Nothing doing in your line, Fatty."

He might be taking in some apples, or pears."

"Oh, there he goes!" Thinking of his tumour again," growled Figgins. "I say, Kerr, when Spragg comes out, we'll ask him if he's seen those boulders! They might have passed by here."

Spragg had disappeared inside the house, under the weight of a heavy sack of potatoes, but when he reappeared, Figgins approached him, with a diplomatic smile.

"Hallo, Spragg?" he said. "Have you seen three of our chaps passing here a minute or so ago?"

Spragg grinned.

"Yes, Master Figgins," he replied. "Last-ways, I did see one young feller a-hidin' in the stables over there. 'E ain't come out, cos I dare say I should ha' seen him."

Figgins' eyes sparkled. "Good!" he said. "We've got 'em properly now!"

He returned to Kerr and Wynn, and for the next five minutes there was a

RIVALS ON THE WARPATH.

By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

A Magnificent, Long Complete Story dealing with the Adventures of Tom Merry and Co., at St. Jims.

quiet consultation between them, in which Figgins did most of the talking.

Then, as Spragg emerged from Mrs. Kibble's, after having delivered his last sack of potatoes, Figgins again approached him, this time with a face beaming with smiles and good humour.

"Are you busy for half an hour, Spragg?" asked Figgins softly.

"Well," said Spragg, scratching his head. "I've got to go back to the shop to get a load of coke, and bring it back ere again, to be delivered to the porter at the gate."

"To old Taggles!" exclaimed Figgins. "Why, that will fit in just lovely with my plan. Listen, Spragg! Those three chaps we are after are our deadly enemies. They belong to the School House here. That's a measly old casement, where the chaps get cheeky and try to put it over us—the New House fellows, and top dogs of this school."

Spragg nodded, though it is doubtful whether he understood.

"So, you see," went on Figgins animatedly, "we are after those three chaps, to play a joke on 'em, and teach 'em not to be cheeky in future. And I want you to help—"

"Me?" said Spragg. "Ow?"

"Just like this," said Figgins earnestly.

"Lead us those three sacks in your van for a minute, and my chums and I will go over and bag those three chaps in the stables. We'll bring 'em back in the sacks, and I want you to cart 'em away, and bring 'em back to the school gates with the coke, and—"

Figgins kept forward, and whispered a few words into Spragg's ear, then, with a deft movement of his hand, he deposited two shining silver coins into the brown palm of the Rylcombe greengrocer.

At this last manoeuvre Spragg smiled, and slapped his thigh.

"I'll do it, if you won't be too long, sir!" he announced.

"Spragg, you're a sport!" chuckled Figgins, and he beckoned to Kerr and Wynn to come along and secure the sacks.

Taking each a sack from Spragg's cart, the three New House heroes crept

stealthily across to the stables, where the Head's carriage and horse were kept.

Arriving in the rear, Figgins shinned up the water-pipe, and peeped into the dusky interior of the stable.

The pony's stall was directly before him, but over a partition Figgins could see three St. Jim's school caps.

Then came a voice, which Figgins recognised as Monty Lowther's.

"They seem to have cleared off, and given us tip for lost," said Lowther, with a chuckle. "Ha, ha, ha! What a capture for us!"

Figgins, as he clambered upon the roof of the stable, and beckoned to his chums to follow, chuckled also.

The three, arriving on the roof, let themselves through the wooden trapdoor into the pony's stall.

The pony was pawing and moving about, so that any noise the New House marauders made was effectually screened from the ears of Tom Merry & Co., who were hiding in the next compartment, where the carriage was kept.

"Quiet!" muttered Figgins. "Easy does the trick, you know. Got your sacks ready?"

His followers nodded.

They were now at the door of the stall, standing behind the backs of Tom Merry, Monty Lowther, and Manners.

"Then—go!" jerked Figgins.

Upon the word, he and Kerr and Wynn darted forward, and fell upon Tom Merry & Co in the rear.

The School House juniors, blissfully unconscious of the peril that lurked behind them, were completely bowled over with surprise.

"Yarooogh!" yelled Tom Merry, as the dusty mouth of a sack enveloped his head. "I—Ooooh!"

Figgins chuckled deeply as he jerked Tom Merry over and thrust the sack completely over him.

Meanwhile, Kerr and Wynn were performing their part of the business manfully. Kerr soon had Monty Lowther inside a sack, and then went to the help of Fatty Wynn, who was struggling with Manners.

In five minutes Figgins, Kerr, and Wynn had three sacks before them, and from the interior of each sack came queer, gurgling sounds; starting, to say the least of it.

"Groogh!"

"Lemme out!"

"Yah-hoo! You rotters—"

"Ha, ha, ha!" chorled Figgins.

"We've bagged you beautifully, Tom Merry! Didn't expect that, did you?"

A fierce snort came from the third sack.

"Now we'll gag them carefully," said Figgins.

"Open the ends of the sacks,

and ram their caps into their mouths, and

then tie the openings of the sacks round

with this string. Sharp's the word,

Spragg's waiting."

Quickly the sacks were reopened, their

occupants securely gagged; then the

sacks were tied up again, and Figgins

whistled Spragg over.

The sacks containing the defeated

School House leaders were lifted bodily

into the cart and five minutes later

Spragg was carting them away from St.

Jim's, the cart bumping and jostling as

it went, giving poor Tom Merry & Co.

a far from pleasant sensation as they lay

inside, unable to move or speak.

"My word, what a lark!" gurgled

George Figgins, as he and his chums

watched the cart lumbering down the

lane. "Pity poor old Merry when the

coke arrives!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" chuckled Kerr and

Wynn.

CHAPTER 2.

Plenty of Coke.

HALF an hour later there was quite a crowd of juniors congregated at the gates of St. Jim's.

Needless to say, Figgins had been the means of bringing them there, though what was about to happen nobody but the three cheerful New House juniors knew.

Taggles, the school porter, was annoyed by the crowd of boys outside his lodge.

He was expecting a consignment of coke to arrive from the village very shortly.

Soon there came the rumble of wheels upon the road, and Figgins nudged Kerr and gave rent to a deep chuckle.

"Here comes the cart!" he murmured.

"I hope Spragg has done the trick!"

Spragg's cart drew up at the gates, and Taggles turned out to meet it.

The worthy porter blinked into the

van, and turned with an astonished

countenance to the greengrocer.

"Which I didn't horder six sacks!"

he said. "Three was what I hordered!"

"All right, Mr. Taggles," said Spragg

airily. "I had another order from the

school, to deliver a double quantity.

Shall I tip 'em down the coal-hole?"

Taggles grunted, and taking a little

lever lifted the cover from the coal-

hole at the side of his lodge.

The crowd of juniors looked on wonder-

ingly—with the exception of Figgins,

Kerr, and Wynn.

They were brimming over with mirth-

ful expectation.

Inside the cart were six sacks, at the

open mouths of which protruded forth

many knobs of coke, giving the im-

pression that each sack was beimfull.

Spragg lifted the first sack from the

tailboard, bore it across his shoulder to

the coal-hole, overturned it, and a deluge

of coke rumbled down through the hole

into the cellar.

Then he returned to the cart, and lifted

down another sack.

At the mouth of the coal-hole he in-

verted the sack.

First there came a score or so knobs of

coke, and then wonder of wonders—the

bulky figure of a trussed-up schoolboy

hurled out and fell with a crash head-

first into the hole, where he stuck half-

way.

A roar of amazement rent the air as

the onlookers blinked at this strange

sight.

"Great cats!" ejaculated Jack Blake,

of the School House Fourth, who was

there with Arthur Augustus D'Arcy,

Herries and Digby. "It—it's one of our

fellows!"

"Who is he?"

Spragg stood regarding the apparition

that had emerged from the sack in

elaborate amazement.

Taggles' eyes seemed to be starting

from his head.

"Good 'Evings!" he gasped. "Wot's

this?"

Still assuming a look of complete be-

wilderness, Spragg took another sack

from his cart and emptied it.

Spragg's thoughts must have been wan-

dering at the time, for he absent-

minedly emptied the third sack on top

of the unfortunate youth stuck in the

coal-hole with his legs in the air.

This time it was half a hundredweight

of coke that issued forth from the sack.

The unhappy boy—whichever he was—

who had been "emptied" from the

second sack, was completely buried in

coke.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Figgins, Kerr,

and Wynn.

Jack Blake glared at the hilarious New

House fellows and blinked at the figure struggling in the coal-hole.

As for the other fellows, they looked on in breathless wonder.

"Well, I'm blessed!" gasped the greengrocer, rubbing his eyes. "If that ain't the limit! 'Ow on earth did that—that image get into the other sack? I wonder if there's any more?"

The fourth sack was lifted down and inverted over the heap of coke, from which the bound legs of a human being were elevated in the air.

A roar of amazement went up, as, after the top layer of coke had fallen from the fourth sack, another bound figure of a schoolboy crashed from inside.

"Hi say!" yelled Taggles, striding up to Spragg and pointing at the heap of coke and schoolboys. "Wot's the meanin' of this? Call that coke? I—"

"Shurrup!" retorted Spragg, bestowing a sly wink upon the convulsed Figgins. "'Ow should I know anythin' about it?"

With which he returned to his cart, lugged out the fifth sack, bore it over to the coal-hole, and inverted it.

"Ere!" howled Taggles, dancing up

to Spragg and tugging at his sleeve.

"Don't empty that coke down there, you

idjit! Can't you see the bloomin' coal-

ole is bunged up? I—Wow!

Yow-ooooo! Gerrugh!"

Taggles broke off with a fiendish yell.

Spragg turned as the porter belowed

at him, and—whether by accident or

design—the onlookers could not say—the

sack of coke got tipped off Spragg's back,

and the coke swamped all over Taggles.

Half a hundredweight of real coke

smote Taggles in the solar plexus, and

he went to earth—or, rather, to coke—

with a loud bump and a yell.

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled the spectators.

By that time there was a conglomer-

ation of coke, two schoolboys and Taggles,

sprawling on the ground beside the

porter's lodge.

The sight was too funny for words, and

the St. Jim's juniors yelled with merri-

ment.

Upon the grimy face of Spragg there

was a look of cherubic innocence and

surprise.

Like a man in a dream, he went over

to his cart, drew forth the sixth—and

last—sack, and staggered over to where

he had already emptied three sacks of

real coke, and two sacks of schoolboy.

As the mouth of the sixth sack be-

came inverted over the heap, Taggles

sprang to his feet and dragged at Sprag-

ge. Over went Spragg on top of Taggles,

sack as well.

Before the sack came to rest, however,

a human figure bumbled out of it and

fell amongst the coke.

"My hat!" yelled Cardew. "Another

of 'em!"

"They're bound and gagged!" ex-

claimed Levison. "Who on earth are

they?"

Taggles and Spragg were already

struggling amongst the coke, locked in

each other's embrace.

Figgins, almost choking with laughter,

dashed across the debris and slashed at

the bonds of the last-arrived figure with

a penknife.

The ropes fell away and the figure got

rid of the gag, and then there came a

spluttering remark.

"Gerrugh-gug, gug!"

The figure sat up, and the onlookers

sent up a howl of astonishment as they

recognised the unhappy youth.

"Tom Merry!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Figgins.

"Guess who the others are!"

Blake dashed across to the legs that

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were sticking up from the coal-hole, and lunged at them.

He drew forth the bound figure of the first arrival.

Furtively Blake cut at the bonds, and Monty Lowther stood revealed.

"Ow, ow, ow!" he groaned, glaring round him. "I—I—"

Lowther would have said was drowned by a bellow of fury coming from the other bound figure that had been emptied from the sack.

Herries had released him, and Manners was howling at the top of his voice, for he was sorely hurt.

The schoolers fell back, and regarded the three hapless School House juniors in bewilderment.

Tom Merry, Lowther, and Manners rubbed their several bruises, blinked at the howling spectators and groaned dismally from soreness of heart and body.

Figgins, Kerr, and Wynn were surrounded by a concourse of New House juniors, and were doubled up with laughter.

"Ha, ha, ha!" chorled Figgins, wiping tears of merriment from his eyes.

"What price the Terrible Three now?"

Tom Merry flung his bonds from him and struggled to his feet.

"You—you villains!" he roared furiously, shaking his fist at the mirthful New House trio. "I—I—I'll—"

"Here! Hold on, Tommy!" exclaimed Jack Blake, grasping the captain of the Shell, as he made a dart at Figgins. "What's the merry game?"

What's happened?"

"They—they—bagged us and—and—"

Tom Merry choked. "They bribed Spragg to cart us away, fix us in the sacks and cover us with coke, and then deliver us at the school gates—"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Figgins. "That was a state arrival, Tommy, old scout! My word, you were in a state!"

At that moment Monty Lowther sprang to his feet, and Manners did likewise.

Their faces, where the coke had not smeared them with dirt, were red and furious, and the fire of bitter vengeance gleamed from their eyes.

"At 'em!" yelled Monty Lowther.

"Figgins' and his gang have done this, and—"

"Yah! We've scored over you this time, you School House dummies!" hooted Figgins. "Who's cock house at St. Jim's now—eh?"

"New House!" came in a roar from Figgins' followers, numbering about fifteen, who were gathered round him, chorling over their chief's success.

Tom Merry choked with wrath.

"Never!" he roared. "School House for ever!"

"Boo! Go and eat coke!" retorted Figgins.

And there was a howl of laughter from the New House boys at this allusion.

Taggles and Spragg, after having taken deadly toll of each other, were standing among the heap of coke, arguing.

Jack Blake & Co. gathered round the crestfallen Terrible Three, and all the School House fellows therabouts did likewise.

The two rival factions at St. Jim's faced each other, and there was one breathless moment of suspense.

Then—

"Go for the cheeky cads!" howled Tom Merry, dashing into the ranks of the New House fellows, and dealing heavy blows to left and right. "Give 'em what for! Come on, School House!"

"Hooray!"

"Give 'em jip, New House!" screeched Figgins, leaping at Tom Merry as that

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dishvelled youth advanced. "Don't let the mouldy rotters lick up! Up, boys, and at 'em!"

And in a couple of minutes a wild and whirling fight was in progress between the New House and School House juniors.

The New House, hard pressed at first beneath the School House onslaught, fought desperately for supremacy.

Figgins, with the eye of a leader, had divined that, once the pile of coke could be reached, his enemies could be driven off by means of missiles.

Tom Merry, the champion of his own side, also saw what an advantage the coke would be as an asset in the battle, and urged his men onward towards the objective.

Manfully the rivals fought, first the School House warriors driving back Figgins & Co., and nearing the coke. Then Figgins would rally his forces, bear down in close formation upon Tom Merry and his men, and beat them back again.

Right merrily did the battle proceed, until Figgins & Co. made a great effort, and smote Tom Merry and his warriors hip and thigh.

"Stick it, lads!" cried Tom Merry desperately. "Don't give in!"

"Hooray! We're winning!" roared Figgins, seeing that the advantage was his. "Onward to the coke-heap, my lads, and then they'll cop it!"

In vain did Tom Merry urge his men to combat the advancing foe. Little by little Figgins and his followers gained the supremacy, and, with a yell of triumph, they gained the coke.

Tom Merry groaned, seeing that it was all up now.

"Back, you fellows!" he cried. "They've got the coke, and—"

"Yarooogh!"

Next minute Tom Merry himself had the coke upon his chin, hot from the hand of Kerr.

That was the signal, and the New House host grabbed up the coke and sent it whizzing at the unhappy School House party in an incessant deluge.

That hurricane of coke was beyond human endurance, and before it Tom Merry & Co. ran.

In a scattered mob they fled from the scene of their disaster and made tracks for shelter.

Figgins, standing upon a mound of coke, urged on his men to manful efforts, and, when the School House fellows were out of range, he let out a shout of triumph.

"New House scores!" Figgins yelled. "Ha, ha, ha! See how they run! Who's cock house now?"

"New House! Hooray!" roared the victorious New House juniors.

"Hooray!"

And Tom Merry & Co., crawling ignominiously into their own house, had not the heart to reply.

They knew only too well that they were beaten.

Whilst the New House juniors were yelling out their cries of victory Taggles approached, with an angry glitter in his eyes.

"I'll say, you young rascals!" he roared. "Look at the mess round 'ere! I'll report yer! I—"

"All right, Taggey!" said Figgins, turning breathlessly to the infuriated porter. "We'll square with you!"

"What I saw is this 'ere!" snorted Taggles. "I'll get the lot of you a floggin' for these 'ere carryings on!"

And wot's more that rascal Spragg—

Figgins dived into his pocket and brought forth two half-crowns.

"There, Taggles, old top!" he said persuasively, bestowing the silver coins

upon the porter. "Take that as a slight token of our appreciation, and let the matter rest at that! It won't take long to shovel the coke down the coal-hole, and you need not say anything—"

"Which it's werry kind of you, Master Figgins!" said Taggles solemnly. "But if you puts it like that—well, boys will be boys, that's wot I say, although they are young rips sometimes. Now, jest you leave that 'ere coke alone now, or else I won't—"

"Now, then, chaps, come off it!" cried Figgins. "We've properly kyboshed the School House funks, so the days is over! Let 'em hear us smile once more, and then we'll retire! Now, then, smile, you beggars, and let Tom Merry and his crowd hear you!"

Whereupon the victorious New House fellows proceeded to smile, and the way in which they smiled was so emphatic that it was heard all over the school.

CHAPTER 3.

Glyn to the Rescue.

THE usually sunny brow of Tom Merry wore a frown of gloominess, and the heart of the captain of the Shell was heavy within him.

It was the day after his inglorious defeat at the hands of Figgins & Co., and, like Rachel of old, Tom Merry mourned, and would not be comforted.

He was seered in his study—No. 6 in the Shell passage—and Monty Lowther and Manners, his chums and study-mates, were with him.

They also were considerably down in the dumps for they felt that the honour of the School House depended upon the fruits of this consultation.

That honour was almost a religion with Tom Merry & Co., and, next to the honour of St. Jim's itself, they always had the welfare of the School House uppermost in their minds.

From time immemorial there had been constant warfare between the New House and School House at St. Jim's.

During the months of the Great War the antagonism between Tom Merry & Co. and Figgins & Co. had flagged somewhat, but now it seemed that, like a slumbering volcano, it had broken out again afresh when least expected.

Tom Merry realised, with a heavy heart and lowering brow, that he had sustained a heavy defeat on the preceding day, and for his own honour, and for the honour of the School House, he must retaliate, and that right quickly.

"It's beastly!" he growled, regarding his chums dismally. "The House will be up in high strikes over this, and—"

"And we've got to do something!" said Monty Lowther savagely. "Those New House wasters are crowing no end over what they did to us yesterday, and are swanking something shocking! You must think of something, Tommy!"

The captain of the Shell groaned.

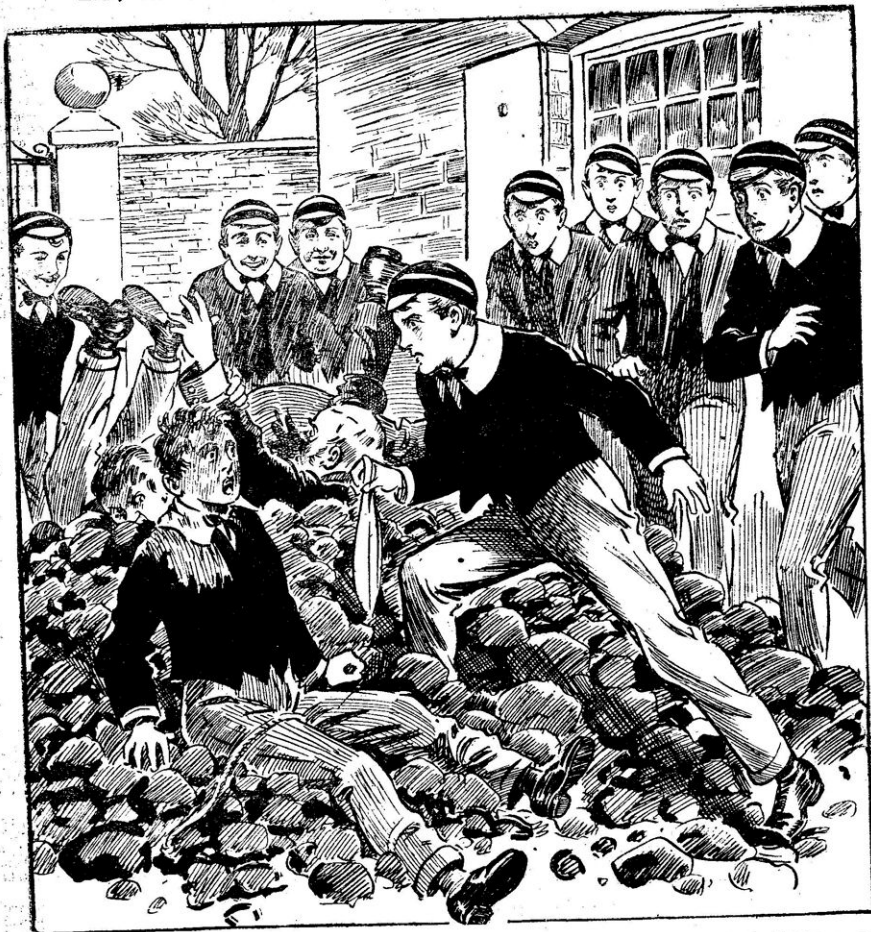
"Yes, it's all very well," he said, "but this sort of thing wants a lot of thinking out! Can't you chaps think of a way to squash that lanky ass, Figgins, and his gang?"

Monty Lowther relapsed into silence, and Manners stared moodily out of the window.

"I know!" said Monty Lowther suddenly. "We'll raid the beggars to-night, take the bottoms out of their beds, and make 'em sleep on the floor all night! Ha, ha, ha!"

"Ass!" said Tom Merry witheringly.

Monty Lowther broke off in the middle of his hearty laugh and glared at his leader.



[The ropes fell away and the figure got rid of the gag, and then there came a spluttering remark, "Gerrugh-gug-gug!" The figure sat up, and the onlookers sent up a howl of astonishment, "Tom Merry!" (See Chapter 2.)]

"What's wrong with that idea?" he demanded.

"How on earth do you suppose we can take the bottoms out of their beds without getting it in the neck?" snipped Tom Merry. "Just explain how it is to be done, Monty, that's all, and we'll adopt the idea. Now, then, fire ahead!" "Ahem!" coughed Monty Lowther. "Perhaps it would be a bit of a job!"

There was silence once again in Tom Merry's study, until suddenly there came an emphatic kick upon the door. Without further ceremony the door was flung open, and four fellows entered.

They were Jack Blake, D'Arcy, Herries, and Digby, the chums of Study No. 6 in the Fourth Form passage.

"Hallo!" growled Tom Merry. "What's the row?"

"Look here, Merry," growled Blake. "We've come—"

"Yaas," put in Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, with a dignified wave of the hand. "It is our painful duty, Tom Mewwy, to have to pwotest, on behalf of the School House—"

"Now, just you shut up, Gussy!" said Blake. "I'm doing the talking, not you."

"Weally, Blake, I considah—" "Shurrup!" howled Blake. "Merry—"

"I wefuse to shut up!" expostulated the swell of St. Jim's. "Look heah, Tom Mewwy, we have come to pwotest, on behalf of the Lowah School, against—"

"We want an explanation of yesterday's rumpus," howled Blake, dragging his aristocratic chum backwards and advancing into the study. "Why on earth didn't you put up a fight when Figgins

set about you in the first place? We want to know—"

"We demand an explanation, Mewwy!"

"We want to know why you caved in, like a set of mummified guinea-pigs. We also want to know what you are going to do about it," said Blake, glaring at Arthur Augustus.

"That's it," said Herries. "Now, Tom Merry," said Digby.

Tom Merry rose to his feet, and there was an angry glitter in his eye.

"Look here, Blake," he said. "You have my word for it that if we could have frustrated Figgins' wheeze we would have done. They took us completely by surprise, and once we were trussed up we were helpless."

"That's all very well," growled Blake, "but the chaps are wild about it, and

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want to know what you, as captain of the Lower School, mean to do. Figgins has got to be kyboshed, and the fellows won't be happy till he is. They look to you to get even with Figgins, and shut his cheeky mouth up!"

"Yaas, wathah!" said Gussy. "The pwestige and honah of the School House is at stake, Tom Mewwy!"

Tom Merry frowned.

"Well, all I can say is, I quite understand the position," he said quietly. "But you chaps bothering round me won't help matters along. Give me time to think of a way, and I promise that Figgins and his gang shall be utterly dashed, and done in. Now, just run away, and leave me in peace."

"Weally, Tom Mewwy, I considah that an apology—"

"Well, you are welcome to consider, old son," said Blake, grasping D'Arcy. "We'll be satisfied with what Tom Merry has said for the present, so don't stand there jawing like a jackass, Gussy. Come along!"

"I wufese to submit to such wuff and pweepintwpy tweatment," cried Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, struggling in the grasp of his chum. "I meahly wish to point out to Tom Mewwy—"

"Well, leave that point out!" grinned Blake. "Are you coming, Gussy?"

"Wathah not, I—"

"Grab him, you chaps, and cart him along!" said Blake.

Herries and Digby readily lent their assistance, and, expostulating and struggling wildly, Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was borne bodily from Tom Merry's compartment, and the captain of the Shell was left once again in comparative peace.

Tom was cogdulling his brains for inspiration, when, ten minutes later, a tap came at the door.

"Oh, come in!" said Monty Lowther irritably.

The door opened, and Bernard Glyn, the inventor of the Shell, came in. The Terrible Three looked inquiringly at their form-fellow.

"Ahem!" said Glyn. "I've just called in to see if Manners has got a test-tube he could lend me for this evening."

"A test-tube?" said Manners, who was an ardent photographer, and had all manner of apparatus amongst his paraphernalia. "What do you want it for, Glyn?"

"Oh, just to carry out one or two ex-

periments with a new invention of mine," replied Glyn. "I won't damage it, Manners."

"H'm! I don't know so much," said Manners suspiciously. "What's the experiment, anyway? Anything that will explode?"

"Nunno!" chuckled Glyn. "As a matter of fact, you fellows, I don't mind letting you into this little secret of mine. I have discovered a new gas, which I am calling Glynolene."

"A new gas?" exclaimed Monty Lowther. "What is it—poison gas, or a material form of Gussy's gas?"

"It's a cross between oxygen and laughing-gas," replied Glyn. "When a chap gets a whiff of this gas he goes light-headed and happy, and doesn't care a blow what happens. He gets merry and cheeky; in fact, the gas sends him completely off his rocker. You know how laughing-gas will affect a chap?"

Tom Merry & Co. nodded.

"Well," said Glyn, "this gas of mine has practically the same effect, but the remarkable thing about it is, that you can carry enough of it about with you—in solidified form—to send a whole city full of people potty. Solidified, it is in the form of a crystal, but upon contact with water, the gas is formed, and anybody around that sniffs it into his noddle is sent completely dotty. It's a wonderful gas!"

Tom Merry & Co. gazed at the school-boy inventor in wonder.

"My word!" said Monty Lowther. "What a merry invention!"

Glyn chuckled.

"It's dangerous stuff to have in the school, you bet," he said. "Can I have a test-tube, Manners?"

Manners nodded, and went over to his box to get the required article.

Meanwhile, Tom Merry had remained silent, but there had arisen a gleam of excitement in his eyes.

Just as Glyn was about to leave the study with the test-tube safe in his possession, Tom Merry sprang to his feet and clutched him by the arm.

"Hold on a minute, Glyn!" he exclaimed. "How—how much of that gas could you make by to-night—in solid form, I mean?"

Glyn stared at Tom in surprise.

"Why, I suppose I could make quite a lot," he replied. "But what—"

"My hat, you fellows!" gasped Tom Merry eagerly. "I've got a ripping

idea. It will put the kybosh on Figgins & Co. Glyn, will you make me some of that Glynolene, in solid form, by to-night? My idea is to get into the New House to-night, and put some of that stuff in the Fourth Form dormitory. We'll pour a drop of water on it, and bang! Figgins & Co. will be gassed, and, if it works as you say, they will be dotty in five minutes."

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Monty Lowther and Manners.

"It will be a regular caper!" chuckled Tom Merry, his eyes dancing with merriment. "Old Figgins and his gang will get up and start gadding about in the dorm, as mad as March hares. And if they should wake old Ratty up, and he comes along to see what the row is all about, he'll be gassed himself, and—"

"Ha, ha, ha!" gurgled Monty Lowther. "Just imagine old Ratcliff prancing round the New House at dead of night, singing and shouting with joy! It would be a sight for gods, and men, and little fishes!"

Glyn chuckled.

"My word, you chaps, I'll do it!" he said. "Of course, there would be a terrific rumpus in the morning, but the effects of the gas would work off in about an hour, and nobody would know what was the matter. Rely on me, you chaps. I'll have the stuff ready by bed-time to-night. I'll take it up in the dorm, and when the time comes we can get out and work the trick. If you hold a handkerchief soaked in methyated spirit over your face while the gas is in the air, you won't be affected yourself."

"Good man!" said Tom Merry heartily. "Glyn, if this trick works, you'll be worth your weight in gold!"

Glyn left Tom Merry & Co. chuckling heartily over their little plot to get even with Figgins of the New House.

For upwards of an hour hence, Glyn was busy preparing enough Glynolene in crystal form to send the whole of St. Jim's off their heads in two minutes.

CHAPTER 4.

Figgins' Great Wheeze!

Figgins chuckled. The leader of the New House juniors was feeling considerably "bucked" since his great score over his enemies the previous day.

His position as leading light of the New House clan was greatly enhanced, and his popularity was rising by leaps and bounds.

"It's a long time since we really gave those School House asses what for," he announced to Kerr and Wynm that same afternoon, as Glyn's interview with Tom Merry. "Of course, it was a big slap in the eye for 'em yesterday, but what they want is more medicine like that, until they are completely cured of their swelled heads."

Figgins looked round upon his followers for their response.

"Hear, hear!" said Kerr.

Fatty Wynm was at that moment negotiating the remains of a pork pie that he had filched from the cupboard.

A great partiality for grub was Fatty Wynm's one weakness. All else dwindled into insignificance before that absorbing question.

Figgins glared at Fatty Wynm.

"When you've finished gormandising, Fatty," he said sarcastically, "I'll get on with what I was about to say."

Fatty Wynm looked up with a contented, shiny countenance.

"Oh, certainly, Figgys!" he remarked. "I shan't be more than twenty minutes."

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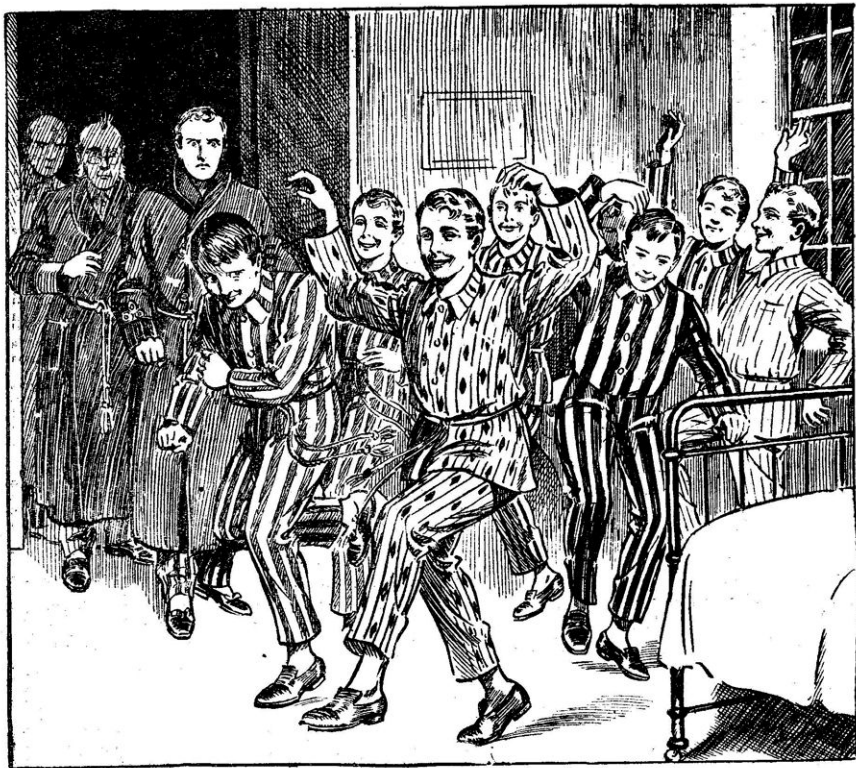
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The door swung open and the Housemaster, followed by the shivering Messrs. Linton and Lathom, strode in. Tom Merry & Co., with six New House juniors in their midst, were swaying round the dormitory singing at the top of their voices. (See chapter 6.)

Figgins gasped, whilst Kerr gave a deep chuckle.

"This is prime!" said Wynn, with evident relish. "I—I think it will last me till tea-time."

"Why, you—you greedy boa-constrictor!" howled the incensed Figgins, jumping up and grabbing the pie-dish away from Fatty with a suddenness that made Fatty's cheeks go quite pale.

"Hi! Leggo! Gimme the pie!" screeched Fatty Wynn, making a dive after the confiscated pork pie. "Figgys, you rotter—"

"You can have the pie when we've finished business," said Figgins flatly. "Here am I, just about to tell you of the most gorgeous wheeze on record, and here are you, gorging away as if that was your only ambition in life!"

Fatty Wynn grunted.

"Well, buck up over the bizney," he said peevishly. "I'm hungry, you know, Figgys."

Figgins gave Fatty a severe look, and planted the pie in front of him, safe from Fatty's reach.

"Now to get to business," he said. "What I was about to tell you fellows is this. Koumi Rao, you know, comes from India, and knows any amount about

Oriental herbs and things. Well, he came to me to-day with some stuff he called by a tongue-twisting name, and asked me to try a bit on my hand. I did, and—Great Scott, you fellows, it itched so much that I was nearly driven silly!"

"Why, it must be that stuff they call 'Itching Powder,'" said Kerr.

"Yes, something like it," said Figgins, nodding. "Now, don't you see how we can put that stuff to good use?"

We scored one over the School House yesterday, but that's not enough for my liking. I want to squash those blighters utterly and completely, and now we have gained the advantage, we must follow it up and not give 'em time to get their second wind."

"I see," said Kerr. "Your idea is, I suppose, to dose Tom Merry & Co. with Koumi Rao's itching powder?"

Figgins nodded.

"That's it!" he replied. "I suggest we steal into their dormitory to-night, take this stuff with us, and distribute it all over the floor and round by their beds, so that when they step out of bed in the morning they will get 'Itching Powder' on their feet, and, my word! won't it give 'em socks!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Kerr. "That's

not bad, Figgys. I reckon they'll be tickled to death!"

Fatty Wynn, despite his surliness at the confiscation of his pie, grinned delightedly.

"Bravo, Figgys!" he said. "And now gimme my pie!"

"Are you game to sneak out of the dorm. to-night, and enter the School House with me and Kerr?" asked Figgins severely.

"Yes, yes! Anything you like, only do hand over that pie!" said Fatty Wynn pathetically. "You know, Figgys, if you starve me I sha'n't be able to leave my bed to-night, and you will be left in a hole."

"A bit of starving would do you good, I'm thinking," snorted Figgins, disparagingly. "Here, take your blessed pie, you old hog, and mind—not a word to anybody! I'll tell Redfern and his set myself."

"Right-ho!" murmured Fatty Wynn, his face already buried in the pie-dish.

With that, Figgins and Kerr left the study and went to see Redfern & Co. a little higher up.

Dick Redfern, Lawrence, and Owen entered into the idea with a ready spirit.

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and Figgins returned to his headquarters a leader of men well satisfied.

The leader of the New House valiantly awaited that night with eager anticipation, little dreaming what a night it would be.

CHAPTER 5.

High Jinks by Night.

"G" OT the stuff, Glyn?" Tom Merry whispered the question to Bernard Glyn as the Shell trooped upstairs to bed that night.

"Yes," replied the schoolboy inventor. "I think I'd better keep it, though, in case anything goes wrong. What time does business start?"

"Eleven o'clock," muttered Tom Merry. "Don't go to sleep!"

Glyn placed a tiny wooden box containing some crystallized gas underneath his bed as he took his boots off in readiness for the projected expedition into the New House.

Barrell saw lights out, and in half an hour all was still and silent in the Shell dormitory.

Tom Merry, Lowther, and Manners had elected to keep awake.

The captain of the Shell lay wakefully between the sheets, waiting for the clock tower to boom forth eleven.

Monty Lowther and Manners, however, had been down in the vaults earlier that evening, developing some plates, and were more than usually tired.

Lowther made one or two manful efforts to keep awake, but by ten o'clock the arms of Morpheus gathered him up, and he slept soundly.

Manners, too, dozed off until he was quite oblivious of all around him.

The clock had just struck half-past ten, when a sound came at the door, and Tom Merry sat up in his bed with a jerk.

"My hat!" he murmured. "There's somebody coming!"

Peering through the gloom he saw the door open and a figure enter.

"Figgins!" gasped Tom. "I'd know his lanky legs anywhere!"

George Figgins turned to his followers, and hissed to them to be silent.

They had just arrived from the New House—six of them—and had entered the Shell House by the lower box-room window.

In his hand Figgins carried a package containing some of Ktomi Rao's weird mixture, and each of the others, Kerr, Wynn, Redfern, Lawrence, and Owen, were similarly equipped.

"Shish-sh!" whispered Figgins, creeping into the Shell dormitory. "They're not all asleep, bless their little hearts! Quiet, now, and—Great pip! What's that?"

From the darkness came a shout. "Wake up, chaps! New House rotters!"

It was the ringing voice of Tom Merry, and the captain of the Shell leaped from his bed as he gave his warning cry.

In an instant the dormitory was awake, fellows starting up in their beds in amazement.

"Oh, crumbs! That's done it!" groaned Figgins, gazing wildly round him. "Hop it, you chaps!"

The New House marauders turned to flee, but Levison was before them.

He leapt from his bed, and ere Redfern's hand closed upon the handle of the door Levison's hand was upon the key. In a trice the door was locked, and the key in Levison's possession.

"You fool!" gasped Redfern. "Gimme that key!"

He dashed at Levison. They closed

and fell crashing to the floor, locked in each other's arms, fighting furiously.

That was the signal for a general attack upon the marauders.

Candles were lit, and the Shell fellows poured from their beds and dashed upon the midnight raiders of their dormitory.

Next instant the room was the scene of a skirmishing fight between six New House fellows and the whole of the Shell dormitory, with the exception of a few funks like Crooke and Racks.

George Alfred Grundy was in the thick of it, and was waging a strenuous struggle with Fatty Wynn.

Tom Merry was dealing with Figgins, and Manners and Kerr were "going it" hammer and tongs.

Monty Lowther had hold of Redfern, and the two were executing a species of jazz between them up and down the dormitory. Owen and Lawrence were invisible beneath a pile of pyjama-clad Shell fellows.

The fight was at its zenith in about two minutes, when suddenly there came a lull.

The Shell fellows released their assailants as if they had suddenly become red-hot.

Figgins & Co. had not hurled their "Itching Powder" from them. They still hung on to it; but as that powder became distributed all over the dormitory and all over the Shell fellows in the heat of the conflict, it soon began to make its presence felt.

"Ow-ow-wough!" yelled Grundy, leaping away from Fatty Wynn and clapping his head. "What the thump have I got on my head—ow-ow!"

Fatty Wynn groaned. He also had had a dose of that powder. It had been scattered all up his arm.

Grundy commenced dancing round the room, scratching desperately at his head, howling the while that he was attacked by red ants.

Amongst the others all was confusion. Raiders and raided had received a share of the itching powder, and well they knew it.

As the powder attacked the soles of their bare feet, they collapsed upon the floor and writhed in agony.

Those that had the powder upon other parts of their anatomy also writhed.

Many of them flopped upon the beds and rubbed their itching limbs in anguish with their hands and feet, and those who writhed upon the floor picked up more and more powder, which Figgins & Co. had been compelled to drop.

They were all helpless.

Figgins & Co. were suffering with the rest.

"Ooooh! Ow, ow!"

"Yaroooh!" moaned Figgins, clutching at his neck. "C-c-confound this p-p-powder!"

"Gerruh!" gurgled Monty Lowther. "W-w-what is it? Ow! I'm tickling all over!"

Everybody was suffering the same. Tom Merry was rubbing the soles of his feet and hopping about first on one foot, then on the other, and each time he trod the floor he picked up more powder.

At last Glyn, whose legs had been sorely smitten with itching-powder, suggested that water would prove the best remedy, and a hurried dash was made at every available water-basin in the dormitory.

Soon everybody was slapping water over his legs and arms and feet. Grundy got a basin full of water on top of him, and all over his bed, but it alleviated the itching sensation, and that was all he cared about at the moment.

Water was slopped everywhere, and as much water found itself upon the beds as upon the boys themselves.

Everybody was gasping and groaning and moaning, when, as if by magic, the

groans and the moans and the gasps ceased.

In the struggle somebody's boot had hooked Glyn's box, containing the Glynolene crystals, into the middle of the dormitory.

Then somebody's foot had crashed upon it and smashed the lid, so that the crystals became deposited upon the floor.

And then some of the water that had been used to alleviate the tickling sensations of the itching-powder had reached the gas crystals, with the result that Glyn's gas was being evolved at the rate of several cubic feet per second.

As the gas arose and filled the atmosphere of the dormitory, the boys within sufficed it up their nostrils, and the effect was magical.

Looks of anger and of agony disappeared, and frowns went from faces as though erased by indiarubber.

The boys ceased groaning; instead, a great lightness of heart seized them, and one and all they burst forth into many manifestations of light-heartedness.

George Figgins, whose nose happened to be quite near the broken box at the time, jumped to his feet and raised his voice in a loud anthem of joy and merriment.

"We won't go home till morning!" he trilled musically.

Grundy, who had been wringing water from his pyjama-jacket, gave a leap off his bed and flinging his arms and legs out in all directions at the imminent danger of flinging them away altogether, commenced to execute a species of Irish jig between the beds, shouting blithely as he did so.

"Tra-la-la-la!" churred Monty Lowther, clutching Kerr and hugging him as if he were a long-lost brother. "Oh, come, let us be joyful! Tra-la-la-la!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"He, he, he!"

"Ho, ho, ho!"

The gas quickly got thoroughly to work, and soon every boy in the Shell dormitory was laughing and chuckling and dancing in the buoyancy of spirits.

Even the weedy Skimpole had sprung from his bed, and, clasping Gore round the neck, led that burly youth in a dance down the middle of the dormitory, caring nothing for the water and overturned water-basins that bestrewed their path.

Skimpole, for once, was at peace with his bullying study-mate!

The whole dormitory seemed suddenly to have gone mad. Glyn's gas was working like a charm.

Glyn himself, the inventor of the marvellous gas, was stricken with extreme jollity.

He was endeavouring, though without much success, to execute somersaults in the air from the end of his bed.

More often than not, he landed head-first on the floor, or on top of some other fellow who had fallen down in overabundance of joyousness; but, wherever he landed, he was soon up again, caring nothing for his hurts, and laughing as if it were a fine joke—at, indeed, it was, if anybody could have seen them.

Everybody was shaking hands with somebody else.

Dick Redfern and Levison had ceased their struggle for the key, and were slapping each other on the back with great heartiness, and beaming at each other as if the milk of human kindness had ever flowed unchecked between them, and far from being enemies, they were comrades as inseparable as the celebrated Siamese twins.

Everybody was laughing.

Kangaroo was trying to imitate the animal from whom he derived his nickname. The Australian stood upon Tom Merry's washstand and dived off with a shout of seraphic bliss.

There was a fearful thud as he landed on top of Patty Wynn, but both were up again in an instant, and shaking hands as if congratulating each other.

"I'm Henery the Eighth, I am!" yelled Buck Finn, the American school-boy. "What-ho for the woolly Wild West!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Then, as if by a sudden inspiration, they all joined hands and went waltzing down the dormitory, kicking up their legs and each shouting different tunes.

CHAPTER 6.

Caught!

SOON absolute pandemonium reigned.

The celebrated Tower of Babel would have seemed a murmuring brook beside the humdrum that proceeded from the Shell dormitory in the School House that evening.

Needless to say, other parts of the school were aroused by the brawl.

Jack Blake & Co., at the head of a deputation of the Fourth, banged at the door, and, getting no response, stood outside there emitting gasps of wonderment.

"They've all gone potty!" gasped Blake. "Clean off their rockers to be making a row like that in the middle of the night!"

Then a candle appeared at the head of the stairs, and Mr. Linton appeared, a scared look upon his features.

"Good heavens, Blake, what is the matter in there?"

"Blessed if I know, sir," replied Blake, with a blank look at the Shell master.

"Bless my soul!" exclaimed another voice; and Mr. Railton, the Housemaster, came striding upon the scene.

"Whatever does this commotion mean?" "It is incomprehensible—unbelievable," stuttered Mr. Linton, shivering, for it was cold.

"Open this door, Merry!" roared the Housemaster.

Mr. Railton tapped at the door, and then simply banged at it; but his efforts were fruitless.

With a very grim look upon his face, Mr. Railton strode away to fetch a key.

By this time Mr. Lathom, the Fourth Form master, had arrived, carrying a poker, evidently in the belief that the school was being burgled by a drunken mob.

Kildare and a crowd of the Fifth and Sixth were there, and the horror they felt was depicted upon their countenances.

Mr. Railton returned with a key, which he fitted in the lock of the dormitory.

The door swung open, and the Housemaster, followed by the shivering Messrs. Linton and Lathom, strode in.

A scene that made them all gasp in amazement met their eyes.

Tom Merry & Co., with six new House juniors in their midst, swaying round the dormitory, executing all manner of weird and wonderful antics with arms and legs and bodies, singing at the top of their voices.

It was a sight to see and wonder at!

"Boys!" thundered Mr. Railton.

This had the effect of causing the grotesque dance to cease. The light-headed juniors stood there, grinning sheepishly at the startled crowd in the doorway.

"Merry! Lowther! Figgins!" rapped out the astounded Housemaster. "What is the meaning of this? Have you all taken leave of your senses?"

Figgins, with a seraphic smile upon his countenance, laid a hand upon his heart and bowed low to the ground.

Thereupon, the rest of the gassed

juniors set up a loud cheer, and then laughed hysterically.

"G-g-good gracious!" gasped Mr. Railton, taking a step back, in spite of himself. "The boys are mad!"

Tom Merry clasped Figgins round the neck and hugged him.

"My old pal!" he chirruped. "My dear old pal! Don't give me the giddy go-by, Georgie, my dear old pal!"

Figgins clasped the hand of Tom Merry, and gazed long and steadfastly into his eyes.

"Thomas," he said with emotion. "I never shall leave thee. So long as I have breath left in my body, naught shall sever us!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" chorused Monty Lowther. "Boiled beef and carrots—that's the stuff to give 'em! Ha, ha, ha!"

"Ho, ho, ho!" carolled the gay St. Jim's juniors.

The crowd at the door exchanged startled glances.

"Bai Jove!" gasped Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "The poor fellahs must be quite off their rockers!"

"They've gone clean potty!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared the merry-making crowd in the dormitory.

The opening of the door seemed to have sent a draught of fresh air, for it served to clear the atmosphere of the magical gas that Glyn had invented.

Gradually the bubbling spirits of the affected ones simmered down, and they became more sober.

Their guffaws died down to grunts, and instead of dancing, they stood still, grinning sheepishly, as if they did not know quite what had happened.

Mr. Railton, a puzzled look on his face, advanced into the room, and grasping Tom Merry by the arm, shook him.

"Merry!" he exclaimed. "What has happened to you, boy. What does this disgraceful conduct mean?"

"I—I—" stuttered Mr. Tom, gazing vacantly at the master. "I dunno, sir!"

Mr. Railton looked long and fixedly at Tom, and saw that the captain of the Shell was not acting, as he had at first supposed.

The masters looked around the dormitory, and everywhere they saw water that had been tipped out of the jugs. The beds were upset, and the dormitory was in a shocking state of untidiness.

The "gassed" juniors were one by one recovering their senses as the effects of the gas worked off.

Figgins & Co. were gazing stupidly around them, wondering how on earth they came to be in that situation, and what they had been up to.

Glyn, having recovered sufficiently to realise that he was in for trouble, unless he did something quickly, surreptitiously kicked the tell-tale wooden box under a bed.

Mr. Railton fixed a stern eye upon the assembly of confused juniors.

"Boys," he said, "do I understand that it was—er—involuntarily that you came to cause this disgraceful disturbance?"

"Er—er—"

"Ahem!" coughed Mr. Lathom, who, on seeing that the burglars were not the cause of the disturbance, had discreetly hidden the poker beneath the folds of his dressing-gown. "Ahem! Mr. Railton, it seems to me that the boys have been the victims of some—hm!—abnormal agency. Perhaps there was something in the atmosphere—"

Mr. Railton sniffed, but fortunately one of the beauties of Glyn's gas was that it was odourless.

"It is incomprehensible," said the Housemaster. "Surely there cannot be an escape of—er—oxygen, or a gas of that description?"

The subjects of this discussion blinked dismally at each other, and at the masters.

Figgins & Co., in particular, were shivering in their shoes.

"Kildare," said Mr. Railton, "will you assist me in a search?"

Between them, the three masters and the captain of St. Jim's made a tour of the Shell dormitory, but nothing was discovered, with the exception of some of Figgins' Itching Powder.

Mr. Lathom first discovered it, for he plunged his hand in a heap of it, and it took him quite ten minutes before he recovered sufficient composure to make himself articulate.

Then Figgins made a confession of his part in the business.

Mr. Railton listened with a grim look on his brow.

"So, Figgins," he said, "you came over for the express purpose of doping the juniors in this dormitory with this—er—powder. It is possible that the action of water upon it created a gas that affected the minds of these unfortunate youths?"

"Ow!" gasped the suffering Mr. Lathom. "Quite likely!"

The three masters held a consultation on the spot, and it was decided that Mr. Railton's suggestion could be the only possible explanation to the mystery.

"Figgins," said Mr. Railton sternly, "I shall report you to your Housemaster for your participation in this affair."

"Y-y-yes, sir!" gasped Figgins. "But shall we be blamed for the—the gas, sir?"

"No," replied Mr. Railton. "I assume that you knew nothing of the powder's propensity to form a gas—which is the only theory I can see. You will be punished for leaving your own dormitory and entering this House after lights out, and for an absurd prank you appear to have perpetrated upon these unfortunate youths. You may go, Figgins, and your companions."

And the New House marauders went with downcast faces.

Whilst Mr. Railton was superintending arrangements in the Shell dormitory, Messrs. Linton and Lathom herded off the other boys to bed.

Tom Merry & Co. had to make the best of a bad job, and spend the night in swamped and confused beds.

It was some little time before slumber came to the stricken Shell. Tom Merry remained awake on purpose.

When the clock-tower was booming forth the matutinal hour of one, Tom raised himself in bed and called:

"Glyn!"

A sleepy voice answered him.

"Glyn!" hissed Tom between his teeth. "Let me find you with any more of that confounded gas, and I'll make you eat the blessed lot!"

"Thanks!" said Glyn sleepily, and turned over.

"Glyn!" called Tom Merry.

"Oh, what's the trouble?"

"You are a blithering ass!"

"Eh?"

"And a fatheaded dummy!"

"Grooogh!"

"And a burbling jackass!"

Snore!

"Br-r-r!" snorted Tom Merry, and he also turned over and went to sleep at last.

CHAPTER 7.

The Rivals' Arrangements.

MY hat!"

"Look here!" A crowd collected round the notice-board next morning.

In the Head's handwriting, a notice was pinned up for all to read:

"The school will assemble in Big Hall after prayers this morning.

"(Signed) J. HOLMES,
"Headmaster."

Tom Merry, Monty Lowther, and Manners, who were in the front of the crowd, were the first to read the notice. They blinked at it, and then at each other.

The same thought was uppermost in the mind of each.

"Gug-good lor!" gasped Monty Lowther. "Railton's given the game away to the Head, and we are to be called over the coals in public!"

Glyn's face wore a forlorn look as he read the notice.

He felt that there was much that was wanting in the notice.

After prayers St. Jim's as a whole assembled in Big Hall.

Tom Merry & Co., Glyn, and Figgins & Co. were particularly uncomfortable. They fidgeted uneasily as they stood in their separate ranks.

There was a breathless hush as the Head, an imposing figure in mortar-board and gown, rapped the table, and rose to address the assembled school.

"Boys," he said, and it seemed to the trembling delinquents that his steady eye was fixed accusingly upon them, and them alone—"boys, I have called you here for a very serious purpose. Last night—"

Monty Lowther groaned, and Tom Merry was seen to exchange a hunted look with Figgins.

"Last night," continued the Head, "news of grave import reached my ears, and it is necessary that you should all become acquainted with the facts of the case. A dangerous lunatic has escaped from Wayland District Asylum—"

There was an excited buzz in the serried ranks of the school.

A look of great relief passed across the worried faces of those who had waited in fearful apprehension for denunciation, and Tom Merry & Co., Glyn, and Figgins & Co. breathed again.

"The fugitive," went on Doctor Holmes gravely, "is a particularly dangerous character, and the authorities have issued a warning to the countryside to beware of him. So far as is at present known, the man is rambling over Wayland Moor. I have been furnished with a description of him by the police authorities. He is of medium height, rather slimly built, with black hair, a flowing, black moustache, and a sunburnt complexion. He was attired in the uniform of a sailor, for he was a seaman when his mind became unbalanced. He answers to the name of Kidd, and is a menacing and desperate character!" The Head paused, that his words might sink into the minds of his hearers. St. Jim's hung on to Doctor Holmes' next words.

"My lads," resumed the venerable Head, "I hesitate to cancel this afternoon's holiday, but certain precautions must be taken. I have, therefore, decided that the town of Wayland and the neighbourhood of Rylcombe village, as far as the outskirts of the moors, shall be out of bounds; and I further decree that boys shall not leave the school, nor walk outside the school walls, alone.

"Boys wishing to leave the school gates must do so in parties of not less than three, and they shall continue to keep together until they return to the school. I need hardly add that you should all be on your guard against at-

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tack by the fugitive ruffian, especially this afternoon. You may now go to your class-rooms, boys."

Talking animatedly over the news, the boys left Big Hall and made their way to lessons.

"Well, here's a merry go!" said Jack Blake. "Fancy us having a giddy lunatic roaming round the countryside! I thought we'd had enough of lunatics last night in the Shell dorm!"

"Yaas, wathah!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "But I considah it wippin' of the Head not to stop our half holiday this afternoon!"

"Yes, the Head's an old sport!" said Digby.

After lessons, fellows congregated in the quadrangle to discuss the momentous news.

Tom Merry, Lowther, Manners, Cardew, Levison, and Clifton Dane were in a group, and Tom Merry was speaking.

"I propose we make a search-party this afternoon, you chaps," said the captain of the Shell. "It will be a feather in our caps if we can catch that giddy lunatic, and the New House wasters will have to hide their diminished heads after that. What do you say?"

"Good idea, Tommy!" said Monty Lowther. "We'll rope in the merry madman, and proclaim it from the house-tops, eh, what?"

Manners and the others stated their willingness to devote this Wednesday afternoon to capturing the lunatic at large.

"And we'll ask Blake to join forces

with us," said Tom Merry. "I say, Blake!" he yelled. "Come over here a minute!"

Blake, D'Arcy, Herries, and Digby strolled over to the Shell fellows.

"I've suggested we make a search-party for that escaped lunatic this afternoon," announced Tom Merry. "I—"

"Just my idea!" said Blake warmly. "Like your cheek to bone my wheeze, Tom Merry!"

"It wasn't your wheeze!" retorted Tom Merry. "Look here, Blake, don't make a fuss! Will you join us?"

Blake snorted.

"No jolly fear!" he said. "We're out to capture that lunatic off our own bat, Merry. You Shell-fish would only make a bungle of the job. But you can rest assured if that lunatic is to be captured at all, the Fourth Form are the chaps to do the trick!"

"Yas, wathah!" chimed in D'Arcy.

"Hear, hear!" said Herries and Digby.

Tom Merry glowered at the independent Blake.

"All serene!" he said. "You kids can work on your own, and—"

"Here, who are you calling kids?" growled Blake.

"You can't reply Tom Merry cheerfully. You're Fourth Form kids think you can rope in a dangerous lunatic, you're making a bloomer!"

"Oh, are we?" growled Blake. "What price your own selves last night, eh?"

"Yaas, wathah!" chuckled Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "Ha, ha, ha!"

"Why, you—you cheeky asses!" spluttered the captain of the Shell. "Bump 'em, you claps!"

And the Shell fellows grasped Blake & Co. and proceeded, despite their struggles and protests, to bump them heartily.

Bump! Bump!
"Baroooh!" roared the heroes of the Fourth.

"Hallo!" said Figgins, who was standing beneath the elms with Kerr and Wynn. "Looks as though there were a rift in the lute 'way yonder. Those School House kids are always quarrelling!"

Kerr and Wynn chuckled.

"I fancy they are arguing over the lunatic hunt this afternoon," remarked Kerr. "I hear Blake is organising a search-party, and I shouldn't be surprised if Tom Merry isn't up to the same dodge. I hope they are successful."

Into the eyes of Figgins there came a sudden gleam of inspiration. "My hat!" he exclaimed. "Why shouldn't they be successful? Poor little chaps! After all the trouble they are taking, it seems a shame that they should meet with no success. I really think they ought to make a catch!"

Figgins' faithful followers stared at their leader in surprise.

"Going dotty, Figgys?" inquired Kerr. "Perhaps you haven't got over the effects of last night yet!"

Figgins frowned.

"Last night's affair was a hopeless muck-up!" he said. "Both of us copped out pretty rough, I'm thinking. Old Ratty laid it on like a Trojan. But here's a chance to have a real, gilt-edged lark with those School House bouncers! Kerr, you are a dab at make-up, aren't you?"

Kerr stared.

"What if I am?" he asked. "What are you driving at, Figgys?"

"Simply this," chuckled Figgins.

"Those chumps are setting out on a looney-hunt this afternoon, and therein we can have much sport, if you'll do

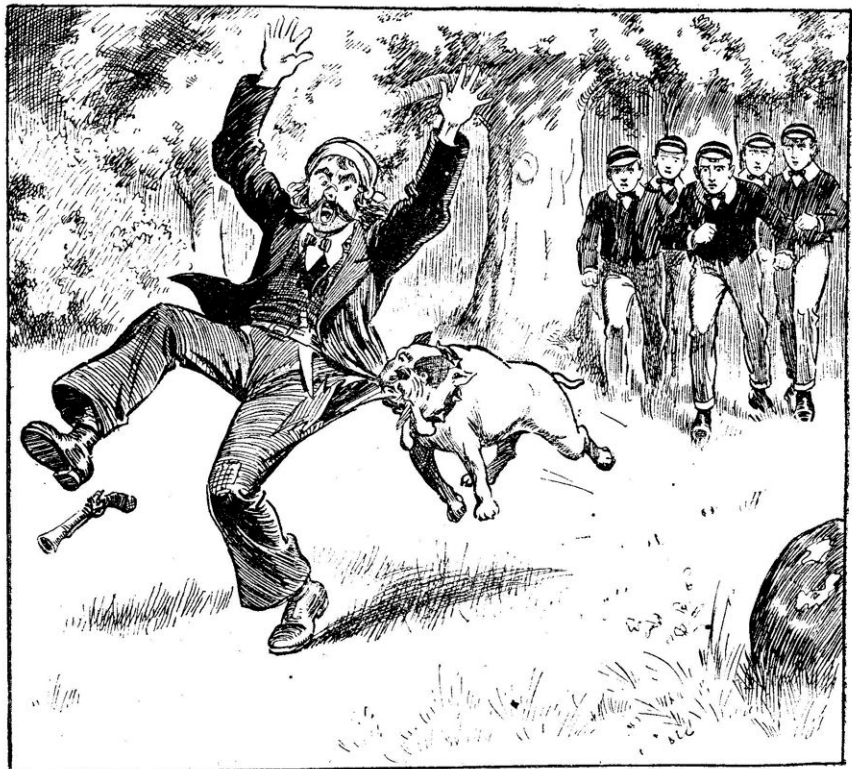
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...the wanted merchant. The Shell juniors gasped, "Ow!" groaned Kerr, giving a leap away from the dog. (See chapter 11.)

the needful, Kerr. All you have to do is to dress up according to the description of the wanted merchant. It will be quite easy for you.

"Then, of course, we'll be able to lead them on a wild-goose chase all the afternoon, and get them into all sorts of trouble. Just let 'em spot you, and then the fat will be in the fire! We'll spy out the land, so that you won't stand the risk of being caught."

Kerr thought for a minute, and then he slapped his leader on the back.

"I'm game, Figgy," he announced. "I'll lead them a pretty dance this afternoon, you bet!"

"You're a brick!" said Figgins heartily.

And the heroes of the New House watched Tom Merry & Co. as they chased their Fourth Form rivals into the gymnasium.

CHAPTER 8.

After the madman.

GR-R-RR! Arthur Augustus D'Arcy gave a jump, as the deep-throated growl of a dog sounded behind him.

"Bai Jove! Whatevah— Oh, weally, Hewwies—"

The chums of the Fourth were standing on the School House steps, waiting to depart on the search for the missing madman.

Herries patted his pet bull-dog on the back, to sooth him.

"Towser won't hurt you," he said. "It's the pattern of those trousers of yours that worries him!"

The swell of St. Jim's jammed his eye-glasses into his eye, and surveyed Herries and Towser witheringly.

"Bai Jove, Hewwies, if you are goin' to buyin' that howwid dog this afternoon—"

"And why not, hey?" demanded the amateur dog-fancier of the Fourth. "We're out to capture a lunatic, and I reckon if he's anywhere nearabouts, Towser will track him. Lay down, Towser!"

Towser was engaged in a violent struggle with his muzzle.

It was not often that Herries took his dog out, so that Towser was yet comparatively unused to his muzzle.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy glared down at Towser.

"Weally, Hewwies, I considah that dog as dangewous. I protest against his comin' this afternoon. He has

absolutely no respect for a fellah's twousahs!"

"Ass!" snorted Herries. "Can't you see the poor blighter's got his muzzle on?"

"Yaas, but—"

"I don't know, though," said Herries thoughtfully. "Perhaps, under the circumstances, I could waive the rules, and take Towser out without his muzzle. The poor boulder can't stand that wire trap over his snout, and it might prevent him picking up the scent. I think I'll take his muzzle off, and chance it."

"Gweat Scott!" ejaculated Gussy. "You will do no such thing. Hewwies!"

"No, fear!" chimed in Blake. "It was only because your old tripehound had got his muzzle on that I consented to his coming, Herries. I—"

Herries sniffed.

"All right!" he said. "But if Towser fails to pick up the scent don't blame him or me!"

Blake chuckled.

"Not much fear of him picking up anything, except a stray bone or a bloater!" he observed. "But don't waste time, you chaps! Here's Reilly and the others, and Tom Merry & Co. have

already gone out. Are you ready, Gussy?"

"Yass," replied the swell of St. Jim's, getting as far as possible away from Towser. "Are you suah that muzzle is on secuvely, Hewwies?"

"Find out!" snapped Herries.
And the Fourth-Form search-party trooped across the quadrangle, and through the gates, Herries in the rear having some difficulty in getting Towser along, for the obstinate animal would persist in stopping to paw at his muzzle.

"Bai Jove!" exclaimed D'Arcy, peering through his eyeglass down the lane. "There go Tom Mewwy & Co. in fwont. They are entewing the wood!"

Jack Blake frowned.
"Why, that's just what I intended doing!" he said. "Ten to one the escaped merchant has reached Friardale Wood by this time, and he may be skulking in there. Never mind, we'll strike the trail now, and get in front of those Shell bounders."

"Yass, wathah!"
Blake lead the way, and the rest of the party followed him over the fence, and into the thickets of Friardale Wood. "Perhaps this is the better way," observed Digby. "The missing man would be sure to lurk away from the beaten track."

"Quite so!" responded Blake. "Are you coming over, Gussy, or do you intend stopping on that fence all day?"

"Weally, Blake!" gasped D'Arcy.

Herries snorted, and bent down to sooth Towser.

The bulldog was getting angry with the muzzle, and growled with temper.

"Now, get a move on, do!" snapped Blake. "We don't want to be here all the afternoon, while Tom Merry and his gang are looking for the prize. Drag that rotten bulldog along, Herries, or leave him!"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy eyed the struggling Towser nervously.

The swell of the Fourth seemed to think that Towser stood a good chance of getting his muzzle off.

"Hewwies, are you suah that muzzle is quite secuvah?" he asked. "If it comes off, I— Oh, bai Jove! My toppah!"

D'Arcy broke off, and made a frantic dive after his beautiful top-hat.

A gust of wind had suddenly lifted it from Gussy's head, and borne it away upon the breeze.

"My toppah!" wailed D'Arcy, dashing away in pursuit of his polished headgear. "Help me, you fellahs!"

Jack Blake & Co. stood their ground. Blake was growling in disgust.

"The howling ass!" he muttered. "You may depend upon Gussy to muck up anything! Come on, you chaps! Leave the blessed dummy to find his own blessed toppah!"

Gussy, by this time, had disappeared amongst the trees, and his chums, annoyed at the delay, moved on.

"Here's a lark!" murmured Monty Lowther. "We'll make old Gus climb after his toppah. Up she goes!"

Lowther raised the toppah, and threw it into the branches of a high tree above.

The toppah sailed into the foliage and came to rest between two branches, where it remained, in full view of the St. Jim's juniors below.

When D'Arcy saw this exploit on the part of Monty Lowther, he stopped short, and gasped with dismay.

"Bai Jove, Lowthah, you feahful wothah!" he ejaculated. "What did you do that for?"

"Foah fun!" chuckled the humorous Montague. "A bit of a climb will do you good, Gustavus. Let's see you get it!"

For several minutes D'Arcy stood regarding Lowther in speechless wrath.

Then he strode up to the humourist of the Shell, and pushed back his cuffs.

Monty Lowther promptly dodged behind his chums.

"Assistance!" he cried, in mock nervousness. "Gussy is after my gore!"

"I weghad you as a feahful wothah and a wuffian, Lowthah!" said D'Arcy.

"I weghad it as my painful duty to give you a feahful whoopin'!"

"Oh, mercy!" bleated Monty Lowther. "Consider my youth, Gussy!"

"I wefuse to considah youah youth—I mean—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"
"Better look after your toppah,

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landing carefully on the turf, after a cautious jump. "You forget my growls. I don't want to wuffle them moah than I can help, bai Jove!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"
"Well, come on, and don't waste time!" growled the leader of the Fourth.

"We want to get ahead of Tom Merry & Co. if we can."

Picking their way carefully, and with as little noise as possible, the Fourth-Form search-party tramped through the wood, looking furtively from side to side and ahead of them for any sign of the roaming madman.

In a small clearing Blake called a halt. "I can hear those Shell fish coming this way," he said. "We don't want to run into them, or they may cause trouble. You know what bungling old jossers they are!"

"Heah, heah!"

"I say," said Herries, dragging at Towser's lead to keep him still, "I'm going to take Towser's muzzle off, and give him a chance of picking up the scent!"

"Good gwacious!" gasped D'Arcy, giving a jump back. "Don't you dare do any such thing, Hewwies, or I shall be undah the painful necessity of administering a feahful thwashing!"

"Rats!" snorted Herries. "How can you expect the poor blighter to—"

"You leave his muzzle on!" growled Blake. "If you don't like it, Herries, take the animal home. I wish you would!"

CHAPTER 9.

Gussy Up a Tree.

"HALLO!" said Monty Lowther. Tom Merry & Co. were strolling through Friardale Wood, bent upon searching out the missing lunatic.

They had just stopped to debate which was the best course to take, when Monty Lowther happened to look up, and, to his great surprise, he saw a beautiful top-hat sailing over the trees towards them.

The Shell party stared at the soaring toppah in astonishment.

"Well, I'm jiggered!" exclaimed Tom Merry. "Where on earth did that come from?"

At that moment there came a crashing of undergrowth and the sound of a human voice raised in accents of dismay.

"My toppah! Stop it, you fellahs!"

Monty Lowther burst into a roar of laughter.

"Ha, ha, ha! It's old Gussy after his toppah!"

The humourist of the Shell made a dart at the descending toppah, and grabbed it neatly.

"Well caught!" chuckled Tom Merry. "Here comes Gussy!"

Caring nothing now for the ruffling of his beautifully creased trousers, Arthur Augustus D'Arcy came scrambling through the bushes, his eyeglass dangling at the end of its string, his hair dishevelled, and his arms waving wildly.

The Shell juniors looked at him and chuckled.

Gussy!" observed Tom Merry, with a chuckle. "There's a ditch the other side of that tree, and the wind might blow your headgear down any minute!"

"Oh, bai Jove!" gasped D'Arcy, blinking up in dismay.

"Chuck stones up after it, Gussy, old top!" grinned Manners.

"No feah!" ejaculated Gussy. "Lowthah, I call upon you to climb up that tree, and secuah my hat!"

"No fear!" chuckled Monty Lowther. "I've got a bone in my leg, old scout, so you'll have to excuse me!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

There was a warlike gleam in D'Arcy's eye as he regarded Lowther through his monocle.

"Lowthah, do you wefuse to weturn me my toppah?" he asked, in measured accents.

"I do!" replied Lowther solemnly.

"Look out, Gustavus!" cried Clifton Dane suddenly. "The toppah's wobbling!"

"Oh, bai Jove!" gasped Gussy.

"Ha, ha, ha!" chorused the St. Jim's search-party.

D'Arcy turned to Lowther.

"Lowthah, you boundah," he said, "I shall not administrah that feahful thwashin' now, but when I get back to St. Jim's I shall take summay vengence!"

"Oh dear!" gasped Lowther, clutching Manners for support.

"I cease to weghad you as a friend, Lowthah," said Gussy severely. "Henceforth we are stwaghahs!"

"Help?" murmured Lowther faintly.

Tom Merry chuckled.

"Well, we shall have to leave Gussy to climb up after his hat, you chaps," said the captain of the Shell. "We can't afford to waste time, for we've got to capture that giddy lunatic, you know."

"What-ho! Ta-ta, Gussy!"

"I waghed you all as a set of feafuhl outsiders!"

"Hurrah! Mind how you go up, Gussy!"

"I—"

"Good-bye-eeec!"

And, waiting blithe kisses to the enraged Gussy, the Shell search-party moved away through the trees.

Left alone, Arthur Augustus D'Arey looked up, and surveyed his topper in dismay.

"Bai Jove!" he murmured. "It waghed seems I shall have to climb up, afah it!"

There seemed no help for it. The wind was now blowing steadily, and the hat might fall at any minute, and there was, as Tom Merry had pointed out, a ditch down below.

"Oh deah!" gasped the unfortunate swell of St. Jim's. "I—I suppose I shall have to do it. Bai Jove! I shall pulverise that beast Lowthah, when I see him at the school!"

And, with many a rueful look at his trousers, Arthur Augustus D'Arey approached the tree and proceeded to climb up.

Gussy, although an extremely aristocratic youth, was a good athlete, and it did not take him long to climb up into the tree.

He had reached the top, and was crawling along the branch that held his cherished topper, when a sound below made him start in horror and look down.

"Oh, good heavens!" gasped D'Arey. "Towsah—and without his muzzle, bai Jove!"

Herries' bulldog had bounded through the trees, and was now standing beneath the tree, glaring up at Gussy, and growling ominously.

Towser had managed to free himself of his muzzle, chain and all.

What Herries was following Blake through the trees, Towser had slipped away, and now stood, growling bad-temperedly, beneath Gussy, helpless in the tree.

"Oh deah!" gasped D'Arey, blinking down at the bulldog. "Towsah—good dog! Wun away, deah boy!"

"Gr-r-r!" growled Towser.

Gussy reached for his topper, secured it, and jammed it on his head.

Then he leant over the branch, and waved his hand at Towser.

"Shoo, you beast!" he cried. "Good doggie, Towsah! Wheah's youah mastah?"

Towser made a leap at the tree, and barked furiously.

Gussy creaked back amongst the foliage, and almost lost his hold upon the branch.

Towser growled, and glared up at the stranded Gussy.

Gussy blinked down in distress, fearful to descend, in case Towser went for him, as, indeed, seemed quite likely from the state of Towser's temper just then.

"Oh, bai Jove, what a pwediment!" gasped the luckless swell of St. Jim's. "That dog has absolutely no respect for a fellah's twosahs. I shall have to smash that careless ass, Hewries, when I get hold of him. Shoo, Towsah! Wun away!"

But Towser had no intention of running away.

The more D'Arey waved and

threatened the more aggressive Towser became.

So Gussy raised his voice in anguish, and woke the echoes of the wood with the cry:

"Help! Wescue, St. Jim's!"

CHAPTER 10.

Frights for Many.

"WELL, I'm jiggered, Kerr! You don't half look a rough!"

It was the mighty Figgins who spoke these words, and he spoke them in an admiring and satisfied tone of voice.

He was standing in a quiet spot in Friardale Wood, and his chums, Kerr and Wynn, were with him.

Fatty Wynn was sucking toffee with great contentment.

But Kerr was a truly marvellous sight to behold.

In fact, nobody but Figgins and Wynn would have associated him with Kerr of the New House at St. Jim's.

He was attired in a disreputable blue jersey, with a tattered and torn jacket that might, in years gone by, have belonged to a seedy sailorman.

His legs were encased in a pair of old bell-bottomed trousers, patched at the seat and at the knees, and growing whiskers at the bottoms.

His skin was swarthy and furrowed. Kerr had managed this by judicious application of grease-paint and walnut-stain.

He wore a wig of flowing black hair, and had bushy eyebrows and moustache to match.

An old handkerchief, to which red ink had been previously applied for effect, was tied around his head, and across the bridge of his nose there was a patch of sticking-plaster.

Round his waist a belt was girdled, and protruding from this belt was a ferocious-looking knife, an old blunderbuss, and an old trowel.

Dangling from his waist was a string, to which was attached a couple of bones, crossed in the true pirate manner.

In fact, Kerr looked a thorough cut-throat villain.

His face was enough, as Figgins remarked, to make a cat call the doctor, and his whole demeanour was one of villainy that came from the high seas.

Kerr had dressed up for the part of an escaped sailor lunatic, and he looked his part to perfection.

Indeed, it was quite possible that the amateur actor of the New House had overdone it.

The effect, however, was striking, and could not fail to inspire terror and fear into the heart of anybody who saw him.

"Top-hole!" chuckled Figgins. "You look an out-and-out villain, Kerr. My word, won't those School House kids be startled when they spot you?"

Kerr screwed his face up into a truly horrible contortion, and gave a high-pitched chuckle.

"Ho, ho! Blood and bones! I am the famous scorcher of the high seas! Thunder and guns! Captain Kidd am I!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled Figgins and Wynn.

Kerr rattled the bones that dangled at his waist, and grinned.

"Think I'll do" he inquired.

"Ha, ha, ha! I should jolly well say so!" grinned Figgins. "Come along, Captain Kidd. You've got to kid those School House kids now."

And the New House trio moved away into the thickets of Friardale Wood, in search of the two School House parties.

They had proceeded about a hundred

yards, when they heard sounds as of somebody scrambling through the bushes.

"It's one of Tom Merry's gang, I reckon!" whispered Figgins. "Come on, Fatty! We'll make ourselves scarce, while Kerr gives him a fright!"

Figgins and Wynn took cover behind a bush, whilst Kerr, in the guise of the lunatic sailor, posed for business.

Next moment a head poked out from between two trees, and Herries, in search of the runaway Towser, appeared.

Kerr gave a howl, rattled his bones, and drew forth the rusty knife from his waistband.

"Ha, ha! Thundering blunderbusses! I spy a saucy scallywag on the larboard quarter! Hi, you!"

Herries' eyes simply goggled out of his head as he caught sight of the swarthy villain on the woodland path.

"G-good lor!" he ejaculated.

"Ho, ho!" grated the murderous-looking rascal. "Port your helm there, you lubber! D'you hear me? Port your helm!"

Herries did not port his helm. He stood there, transfixed with terror, gasping.

"What!" shouted the villain with the knife. "Darest thou disobey the command of Captain Kidd? This is mutiny, sir—mutiny! Ha, ha, ha! I'll hang you by the yardarm! I'll pickle your carcass in burning oil! Blood and bones! Ho, ho!"

Kerr dashed forward and brandished his knife.

That seemed to wake Herries from his stupor.

With one long yell he turned and fled.

Fear lent Herries wings, and he dashed along, through thickets and brambles, caring nothing for scratches and tumbles, so long as he got out of reach of the lunatic desperado.

Kerr did not give chase to Herries, but turned and addressed his convulsed chums, who dragged themselves from cover, holding their sides.

"Ha, ha, ha!" chuckled Figgins. "That was rich! Ha, ha, ha! You frightened old Herries out of his skin!"

Kerr chuckled.

"He'll run along and give the alarm now!" he said. "I reckon he'll pitch a fine yarn about blood and bones, and knives and boiling oil—eh?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Chuckling deeply over their little plot, the heroes of the New House struck out to the right, and pushed their way through the trees.

Suddenly they stopped and listened. From behind the trees, not far away, there proceeded a voice.

"Help! Wescue St. Jim's!"

"My hat!" exclaimed Figgins. "That sounds like old Gussy's bleat!"

"It is Gussy!" chuckled Kerr. "Creep through the trees, Figgys, and see what's the matter with him."

Figgins did so, and two minutes later he came back grinning all over his face.

"Ha, ha, ha!" he chuckled softly.

"Old Gussy's up a tree, and Towser is keeping guard over him below. The merry bulldog's got rid of his muzzle, and Gussy dare not come down for fear of Towser's teeth! Poor old Gussy! I wonder how he got up that tree?"

Kerr's eyes sparkled with delight.

"My word, here's a game!" he exclaimed. "I'll give old Gussy a fright, and blow the bulldog! Stay here, you chaps, and watch the fun!"

And, putting a most villainous expression upon his features, and brandishing his knife, Kerr strode through the trees. Arthur Augustus D'Arey was still

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hanging on to the branch, high aloft, his face red, the very picture of dismay and unhappiness.

Towser was squatting below, glaring up at him, and growling at intervals. Kerr moved into the open, and screwed his face up horribly.

"Ho, ho!" he shrieked shrilly. "You up there, come down! Reef the main-stays and slice a chip off the mainmast! Odds life, I'll shiver your timbers! I'll knock your head off with a belaying-pin! Ho, ho! I'm the scourge of the watery seas, am I! Yo, ho, ho, and a bottle of rum!"

D'Arcy gave a start and gazed at that apparition below as if he was seeing a ghost.

Kerr gave a leap into the air and yelled like a madman.

"Come down and abate there, you runcumscullion!" he howled. "Ho, ho! I'm Captain Kidd, the scourger of the seas!"

"Oh, great Scott!" gasped the bewildered Gussy. "The— the escaped lunatic, bai Jove!"

Gussy's blood froze in horror at the sight of the villain beneath him. He forgot Towser for the minute.

Towser had ceased to growl, and was glaring at the new arrival with bloodshot eyes.

Then suddenly Towser pricked up his ears and jumped to his feet.

For the sagacious bulldog had spotted the bones that dangled at Kerr's waist, and Towser took a more lively interest in things.

With a bellow of covetousness, he made a leap at the dancing image in bell-bottoms and flowing whiskers.

Kerr saw Towser coming, and, abandoning his dance, he turned on his heel and fled.

Towser was feeling peckish, and, once having sighted those bones, he meant to get them, come what may.

So away went Kerr, his bell-bottom trousers flapping round his legs, and after him came Towser, growling furiously, hot on the scent of Captain Kidd's bones!

"Great cats!" exclaimed Figgins, who beheld the startling apparition of Kerr bounding through the thickets with Towser at his heels. "What the thump—"

"Yaroooooh!" howled Kerr, in his natural voice. "Callimoff! Gerraway, you beast! Yowp!"

And Kerr disappeared from view behind a clump of brambles, Towser hanging on to his track for dear life.

Figgins passed a hand across his brow and gasped.

At that moment Arthur Augustus D'Arcy very much flustered and scared, tramped into view.

Gussy had wasted no time in getting down from the tree!

He stopped short when he saw Figgins and Wynn.

"Bai Jove! You boundahs!" he exclaimed. "Did you meet that fearful wuffian just now—the lunatic?"

Figgins snorted.

"We've met one lunatic just now, and he goes by the name of D'Arcy!" he growled. "Bump the duffer, Fatty!"

Two pairs of hands were laid upon Gussy, and he was swept off his feet, struggling.

Bump, bump, bump!

"Yawoooooh! Ow! Gwoooooh!"

"There!" said Figgins breathlessly. "That's for getting up that tree, and spoiling the fun, Gussy! Come on, Fatty!"

And, leaving the swell of St. Jim's reclining in an ungraceful attitude on the greensward, gasping, the hero of the

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New House and his plump companion, stromed away, in search of their disguised chum and the bulldog.

CHAPTER 11.

Unmasked.

"MY hat!" ejaculated Blake. "What's the matter with Herries?"

A wild, dishevelled figure had dashed through the trees, and was approaching at top speed.

They recognised their colleague Herries, and they wondered what had happened to cause this precipitate return of the wanderer.

"I say, you chaps!" gasped Herries, halting, wild-eyed and breathless before his astonished chums. "I've seen him—"

"Seen whom?" demanded Blake. "Towser?"

"Nunno! The lunatic!"

"Wha-a-at?"

"He dashed out at me, and threatened me with a knife!" gurgled the excited Herries, waving his arms wildly. "He was a fearful-looking ruffian, dressed just as the Head described him. He was armed to the teeth—"

"Great guns!" exclaimed Blake. "You don't mean to say he's in the wood?"

"Yes, yes!" gasped Herries. "Over there—not far away! He chased me with a knife, and uttered all manner of bloodthirsty threats. He—"

Blake set his teeth grimly, and there was a glitter of triumph in his eyes.

"We'll get him!" he said. "What are you shivering for, Herries?"

"N-n-nothing!" stammered Herries. "But that awful villain—why, good heavens, you fellows, here he comes!"

They all turned, and faces blanched as they saw the figure that was dashing at them full speed.

Down a narrow path a hairy ruffian was approaching them, yelling at the top of his voice.

There was a wild scramble as the Fourth Form juniors made for cover.

Next minute the runaway in sailor's garb burst into full view.

He was running, but not at Blake & Co.

They gasped as they saw Herries' bulldog come pounding after him in the rear.

Herries let out a great shout. "Good old Towser! Towser's got him! What did I say, you chaps?"

The others gaped in amazement as the strangely garbed villain and his canine pursuer disappeared through the trees.

"Well, I'm jiggered!" breathed Blake. "It's the lunatic right enough!"

Herries eyes were dancing. "Come on, you chaps! Let's follow it! Old Towser's got him now, leave it to Towser—he won't let him go!"

"Come on!" cried Blake. "Follow the noise!"

There was plenty of noise, so they had no difficulty in following.

They charged through the trees, shouting wildly, and cheering.

Meanwhile, a little distance farther on, Tom Merry and Co. had heard the commotion, and halted in amazement and wonder.

"Sounds like a dog-fight," said Monty Lowther. "What the dickens is the matter, I wonder?"

They were standing in a large open space between the trees.

They had searched high and low for the missing madman, but met with no success so far.

They turned in the direction from which the noise was proceeding, and very soon were treated to the spectacle of a sailor-garbed ruffian, come leaping

out of the thicket with Herries' bull dog at his heels.

"Look out, you chaps!" yelled Tom Merry. "It's the lunatic!"

"Help!" roared the "lunatic," waving his arms wildly, and dodging the dog.

"Merry—Lowther—call the beast off!" Tom Merry and Co. fell back in wonder at those words proceeding from the lips of the supposed lunatic.

"Yaroooooh!" yelled the newcomer, as Towser made a dive at the bones.

"Rescue, St. Jim's!"

"Gug-good lor!" gasped Monty Lowther. "If that isn't Kerr's voice, call me a Dutchman!"

"Kerr!"

"Woough!" screamed Kerr. "Help!"

But it was too late!

Towser meant to have those bones, and he got them.

He gave a huge leap, and his jaws closed over the dangling bones.

Then he gave a wrench, and the bones came away—so did the belt, the blunderbuss, the knife, and half of the jersey, displaying an Eton jacket and vest underneath.

The Shell juniors gasped.

"Ow!" groaned Kerr, giving a leap away from the dog.

"Call him off!"

But there was no need to call Towser off now.

All that persistent animal had wanted, were the bones, and now they were secured, Towser cared not a rap for Kerr.

Towser, happy in the possession of the bones, was now worrying them to his heart's content, taking no notice of the boys.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Monty Lowther. "Towser was after the bones—not this merchant!"

"B-b-but who is he?" gasped Tom Merry, regarding the panting individual in bell-bottoms and whiskers. "Is it that you, Kerr?"

What Kerr would have replied must remain unknown, for at that moment there came another interruption, in the shape of Figgins and Fatty Wynn dashing upon the scene with Jack Blake and Co. howling at their heels.

Even as Figgins and his chum arrived in view of Tom Merry and Co., Blake and Digby and Herries fell upon the New House juniors, and bore them to the ground.

"Got 'em!" gasped Blake, blinking up. "Why—there he is!"

He pointed to the "lunatic."

Then light suddenly dawned upon Tom Merry and Co.

"We've been spoofed by those New House bounders!" yelled Tom Merry. "Hang on to those two, Blake, while we—"

But Kerr, seeing his danger, had made a break for freedom.

He leapt into the thickness of the wood, and disappeared from sight.

After him cried Tom Merry. "Come on, Monty! Come on, Manners!"

And the Terrible Three, leaving Blake and Co. to deal with Figgins and Wynn, set out in pursuit of the wily Kerr.

CHAPTER 12.

A School House Victory.

"He—he's given us the slip!" gasped Tom Merry.

The Terrible Three, in chase of Kerr, had tracked him through the wood, and out into Rylstone Lane.

Then they had to call a halt. Kerr was nowhere to be seen.

Suddenly, Monty Lowther gave a shout, and pointed towards a clump of bushes at the side of the road.

"There he is! After him!"

The bell-bottom trousers and ink-

stained handkerchief bobbed out into view, and next minute, even as Tom Merry and Co. started off once again, the well-remembered figure leaped out of cover and dashed down the lane, making towards the school.

"Now we've got him!" panted Tom Merry. "Strike it!"

Never before did the Terrible Three run so fast—nor Kerr either, for that matter.

It was his aim to reach the school, and get into the New House, where he would be safe from his pursuers.

It was now getting late in the afternoon, and the sun was sinking.

Kerr reckoned that dusk would be setting in by the time he reached St. Jim's, and under cover of the gloom, he would be able to elude the School House trio.

So onward he dashed, and, like a pack of wolves, Tom Merry and Co. dashed after him.

It was a stern chase, but Kerr, taking advantage of the start he had had, put on the speed manfully, and, with a whoop of joy, gained the school gates whilst Tom Merry, Manners and Lowther were yet a hundred yards up the lane.

Taggles stared in amazement at the strange apparition that pelted in at the gates, but it had disappeared in an instant, and the next moment, Tom Merry and Co. came hurtling through determined to strike it out to the last. "This way!" cried Tom Merry. "Put a spurt on!"

Kerr, finding his pursuers nearer than he expected, made a detour in the direction of the cloisters.

From thence, he could climb over a low wall, and gain the neighbourhood of the New House.

So into the cloisters went Kerr, and after him went Tom Merry and Co.

All was dark and gloomy there, and Kerr, fearing lest his footsteps should be heard, stopped, and crouched beneath an archway.

He chuckled as he saw the figures of his pursuers dash past him, and when they were fairly out of sight, Kerr arose and scuttled back the way he had come.

As he let himself in at the rear of the New House, he smiled the smile of victory.

"They'll never find me now," he muttered.

But Tom Merry and Co., in the cloisters, were still searching for the fugitive.

Once they halted in perplexity, for they had lost the trail.

"He must be here somewhere," said Tom Merry. "Let's try down in the vaults. He may be skulking there."

The three made their way into the vaults, where all was dark and eerie as the grave.

Suddenly, as they advanced through the gloom, a figure leapt out upon them, and Manners fell back, with a cry of agony.

Tom Merry and Lowther wheeled round, and almost on the instant stumbled into a human being.

Tom's hands went up to the other's face, and his fingers closed on a flowing nose-tache.

"Got him!" he roared. "Buck up, Monty!"

A coarse oath answered Tom, and the captain of the Shell was nonplussed for the moment.

It was not Kerr!

But Tom Merry's brain was quick to act, and he divined the truth—the fugitive madman was hiding in the vaults of St. Jim's.

With a high leap Tom Merry was upon the scowling rascal

Monty Lowther followed him up, and the two crashed together upon their assailant.

Manners had been struck over the head with some heavy implement, and lay on the stone flags, stunned for a moment.

Then, as his reeling senses returned, he realised that it was not Kerr they had found.

Then there came the clatter of feet as Tom Merry and Lowther struggled with the madman.

They realised that it was, perhaps, a struggle for life or death, for they had a madman to deal with.

And down there, in the pitch-black vaults, the fight had an additional grimness.

The madman's hot, fetid breath mingled with the gasps of the schoolboys as they struggled bravely for supremacy.

He was a man of prodigious strength, as all madmen are, and by slow degrees his arms freed themselves from Tom Merry's clutch, and any minute he might strangle the brave lads.

But Manners, on the floor, realised the urgency of the situation, and, although he was not able to join in the fight yet, he could do something.

He waited until he could tell the difference between the tramping feet near him.

Then, as the heaviest one came near him, he made a clutch at it.

His hands closed on a roughly-garbed leg, and Manners pulled.

With an incoherent roar, the madman went crashing to the stone floor, Tom Merry and Lowther on top of him.

Then Manners arose, and lent his strength to the struggle.

The three St. Jim's juniors had the advantage now, and they did not allow their assailant to rise.

Tom Merry's hand closed over the man's throat, and his grip tightened on the air passage.

The man gurgled and gasped and struggled frantically; but, whilst Manners and Lowther clung to his limbs and body, Tom Merry did not relax for an instant the grip upon the madman's larynx.

Soon the man's struggles became more feeble, and his chest heaved under the strain of the combat for breath.

Then, with a long-drawn howl that reached through the arches of the gloomy vaults, the man subsided.

Monty Lowther tore his jacket from him, and with that he bound the man's feet and legs.

Manners had some string in his pocket, and with this the improvised bonds on the man's legs were strengthened.

Tom Merry groped for his cap, found it, and rammed it into their captive's mouth. Then he made it secure with his own handkerchief.

That done, they clung to the man, who renewed his struggles, and dragged him into the cloisters.

Then they jostled him to the ground, and sat on him whilst they yelled for help.

Their shouts carried across the quadrangle, and soon a crowd of amazed boys, among whom were Kildare and Darrell, arrived.

"Merry," exclaimed Kildare, "what on—"

"We've got him, Kildare!" gasped Tom Merry. "The lunatic—"

There was a hoarse shout of disbelief and amazement, but when the two seniors examined the man all doubts disappeared as to Tom Merry's capture.

"You're plucky bounders, I must say!" said Kildare to the Terrible Three, who, being relieved of their captive, were free to rise. "How did you manage it?"

Tom Merry explained as much as he thought necessary, and the captured

lunatic was carted triumphantly across the quadrangle.

At the School House steps the procession was met by Blake & Co., who had just arrived, after picking up D'Arcy in the wood.

"I say, Merry," cried Blake, grasping Tom Merry by the arm, "what's the row?"

"Oh," replied Tom airily, "Manners and Lowther and I have nabbed the giddy lunatic, that's all!"

"Why, you ass," shrieked Blake, "is was Kerr?"

"Not this one!" chuckled Tom Merry. "We've got the real article, old scout!"

"Bai Jove, so they have!" exclaimed D'Arcy. "Heal's Kerr!"

Kerr arrived just then, with a puzzled look on his face.

He gasped when he heard the news.

"Oh, corks!" he moaned. "That's ere in the eye for us! What have you done with Figgins and Wynn, Blake?"

"Left 'em in a ditch in Rylcombe Lane!" chuckled Blake. "They'll be home presently, I expect."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Kerr staggered away, his face the picture of dismay.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy fixed his eyes glass into his eye, and turned to Monty Lowther.

"Lowthah," he said, "I promised you a faithful thrashing—"

"Oh, not now, please, Gussy!" pleaded Lowther.

"Bai Jove, wathah not!" said D'Arcy. "Under the cirez, Lowthah, I have decided to let you off!"

"Oh, thanks, Gussy!" said Lowther.

"I considah," said Arthur Augustus impressively—"I considah that Tom Merry & Co. have deserved well of their country, and have wedomed themselves in the eyes of the Lowthah School, bai Jove!"

"Hear, hear!"

"I say," blurted Herries, "don't forget Towser, you know!"

D'Arcy gave Herries a look of withering contempt.

"I undahstand, Hewwies," he said crushingly, "that Towshah hunted a couple of bones that were suspended from Kerr's waist—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Look here—"

D'Arcy waved his hand.

"I would have given you a faithful thwashin' altho, Hewwies," he said; "but, considering how things have panned out, I will pardon you!"

"Bravo, Gussy!"

"I considah that those tewwific boundahs, Figgins & Co., have been done completely in the eye!" went on Gussy.

"And, although I should have preferred the Fourth Form to have made the caputah, I think it hardly necessary to state that the School House is proud to have that honouh, anyway, and our heartiest thanks are due to those three Shell boundahs who secuahed the dangewous wuffian!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

And in the School House that evening there was great rejoicing, but in the New House there was weeping and wailing and gnashing of teeth!

THE END.

(Another grand, long complete school story of Tom Merry and Co., next week entitled "Playing a Part!" Order your copy in advance.)

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A Thrilling Instalment of our Great New Adventure Serial Story.



THE OPENING CHAPTERS.

Dick Danby, a stalwart lad of sixteen, obtains the promise of partnership from Captain Morgan Kidd, skipper of the auxiliary schooner Foam, and his daughter Stella, in a treasure cruise to the wrecked vessel Pathan, which was sole survivor of the Pathan, which was torpedoed, and is lying half-submerged off an island in the South Seas. In the strong-room of the ill-fated ship is two million sterling in bar-gold and money; also the Dragon's Eye—a wonderful diamond.

Otto Schwab, posing as a Dutchman—though in reality the commander of the U-boat which sank the Pathan—and Sulah Mendoza, a villainous Malay, are their unscrupulous rivals for the treasure.

Harry Fielding and Joe Maddox join the expedition, also Wang Su, a Chinese boy.

Soon after they set sail from Fiji, the Red Rover, Schwab's ship, is in pursuit. Captain Kidd turns the boat's gun—which he calls the Bull Pup—upon the advancing enemy, and brings down a sail. Then he fires again.

Now Read on

Dick's Peril.

CAPTAIN KIDD had missed the ship, but his shell had smashed the pursuing vessel's starboard sweeps, with the result that she swung round, almost in her own length, and the Foam glided past her unarmed.

Captain Kidd thrust another cartridge into the breach.

But he was certainly the softest-hearted pirate that ever sailed the deep, for, though he knew that the Malays succeeded in gaining a footing on the Foam they would have slain every soul on board without mercy, he could not bring himself to fire upon the crowded deck.

Leaving the gun, he sprang to the bulwark.

"There, you sham, half-baked pirates, that'll teach you to give Morgan Kidd a wide berth in the future!" he cried.

The Malays heard the words in silence, and, though the greater number were armed with pistols or rifles, not a shot was fired at the chivalrous old skipper.

Overcast by the unexpected appearance of the quick-firer, they were only too glad to see the Foam circle round and resume her voyage.

Old Kao shook his head.
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"It is ill done, Barking Dog! The world would have been the better by the drowning of yonder dogs," he declared.

"Bah! They've had their lesson," replied the skipper. "Besides, if this calm lasts, we'll be able to get too good a start even for the Red Rover to overtake us."

And such seemed likely to be the case, for the last they saw of the Red Rover she was lying like a log on the horizon, as though she had given up the chase.

Nor did they see anything of her the next day. During that night, as often happens in those regions, the calm was followed by a cyclone, which, though it only lasted a few hours, left the Foam with a badly-sprung mizen-mast.

"Isn't that Tarivao, Kao?" asked Captain Kidd, pointing to an island that lay some five miles due east of where the cyclone had left them.

The Samoan replied with an affirmative nod.

"Then there should be a bay, with splendid anchorage, on this side of it. It's hidden from the sea by a tall bluff, and there's plenty of pole to be got for the cutting," remarked Captain Kidd.

"And there's no inhabitants to trouble us, unless some have drifted there from other islands," added the Samoan.

"Make for the island, Stella. It'd be worse than falling in with Mendoza if we were caught in a gale with our masts half above the side," directed the skipper.

And Stella, who, with Dick's help, had stuck gamely to the wheel throughout the cyclone, headed the Foam towards the distant island.

Although the wind had fallen the sea had not yet gone down, and the schooner made bad headway over the long Pacific billows.

But, owing principally to the girl's skilful steering, the Foam made land at last, and, coned by the old Samoan in the bows, slipped through the projecting coral reef into a bay, so landlocked that Captain Kidd declared Mendoza could not find them unless he knew they were there.

A more delightful spot than this bay—which Dick promptly christened Stella Cove, after the lovely mate of the Foam—it is impossible to imagine.

Approached by a narrow "dog's-leg" channel, it was completely hidden from the sea.

On either side of the entrance arose tall, tree-clad bluffs, which sloped down towards the centre of the bay, forming an almost circular pool, with a girdle of

silver sand, bounded by a fringe of coconut-palms, beyond which appeared the varied flower-coloured jungle, which makes the South Sea Islands such a paradise of gorgeous tints.

Even before the Foam had come to anchor a Samoan had dived overboard, and, swimming ashore, vanished in the jungle.

Two hours later he returned with the information that that part of the island, at any rate, was uninhabited, and the work of replacing the injured spar was at once proceeded with.

There was no lack of timber, and, with everyone on board lending a hand, a new mast had been cut, trimmed, and floated to the Foam, ready to be stepped in the morning, before dark put an end to their labours.

As the sun rose, with a splendour such as is nowhere seen to such perfection as in the Southern Seas, Dick Danby sprang from the mattress spread near the wheel on which he had passed the night, yawned, nodded to Wang Su, who at that moment thrust his grinning face out of the fore-castle-hatch, and, leaning over the side, gazed into the clear waters beneath him.

A perfect fairyland met his eyes.

Immediately beneath the ship's keel was a tiny plain of yellow sand, above which disported numerous gaudy fish. Innumerable sedate crabs, lobsters, crabs, and creatures of that ilk, moved hither and thither, on breakfast intent.

Closer in shore, a reef of white and red coral, built in the most fantastic beauty by its tiny architects, rose, like the wall of some giant's palace, to within some half-dozen feet of the surface.

To the walls of this submarine palace, as Dick called it in his own mind, were attached bunches of the most beautiful sea-anemones he had ever seen, some clinging to the coral itself, others holding fast to gorgeously-tinted shells.

Lured by the beauty of that underwater paradise, Dick Danby flung off the jacket of his pyjamas, and dived overboard.

Straight to the coral rock he swam, scattering parrot and sun fish to right and left, and sending the startled crabs and lobsters scuttling in all directions.

As he swam along the front of the exquisite coral facade, he saw a lovely white anemone, its feathery tips tinged with scarlet, attached to a semi-transparent pearl shell to one side of a cavernous opening in the coral.

Determined to secure both shell and anemone for Stella, he rose to the sur-



A lithe, graceful form shot past Dick, and he caught a momentary glimpse of Stella Kidd, her beautiful face set in a look of calm concentration as, apparently without even stopping to take aim, she fired her automatic pistol at the onrushing beast.

face to refill his lungs, for he had already been nearly two minutes under water.

He saw Wang Su squatted on the schooner's bulwark, for all the world like one of the nodding mandarins to be seen in shop windows.

"Come in, Wang! I'll hold you up!" he cried.

The Chinaman shook his head with more than usual energy.

"Watel wet! Me 'fraid!" he replied.

With a laugh, Dick straightened his legs, raised his hands above his head, and sank like a stone to the bottom.

He touched the sand a few feet from the cavernous opening, and, grasping protruding pieces of coral, to keep himself from rising to the surface, approached the cave.

Stopping down, he glanced into its dark interior.

A thrill of the most utter loathing and terror swept through his frame.

He was gazing straight into a pair of large, cold, evil-looking eyes, which glared at him from either side of a huge, parrot-like beak, set above an awful oval mouth.

Clean Shot.

PARALYZED with terror, Dick Danby remained for a fraction of a second gazing into those awful orbs, which, though cold and dead like those of a corpse, yet shone with a malicious light that seemed to turn his very blood to ice.

Instinct, rather than reason, came to his rescue.

Digging his feet deep into the sand, he kicked out with all his might to thrust his body surface-wards.

But, quick though he was, the octopus was quicker.

Swift as thought itself, a huge tentacle shot out from the cavern, and a fearful sucker-armed feeler closed round his ankle.

Feeling as though a thousand red-hot needles were closing round his limb, Dick Danby struck out with all his might in a desperate attempt to reach the surface.

Too late! A second tentacle enveloped his other leg, and, with sheer terror creeping into his heart, he felt himself being dragged back towards the coral rock.

The thought of the fearful fate awaiting him lent additional strength to his arms, and a momentary hope thrilled his veins as he felt himself rising nearer the surface.

But, moored in its coral fastness, no human strength could avail against the fearful strength of the octopus.

Suddenly a yellow form shot past him, slowly at first, then with terrible swiftness, Dick felt himself being drawn towards that gaping mouth.

Already he seemed to feel that awful beak tearing at his flesh.

Suddenly a yellow form shot past him through the water.

The next moment the pull on his left ankle relaxed, then a feeling as though his right leg had been drawn from a scorching fire and plunged into icy water gave him unspeakable relief, and he found himself shooting upwards.

As his head arose above the waves, Dick Danby took in one deep breath of the sweet, clear air he had thought never to breathe again, and gazed round him.

He shuddered as he saw a stout, leathery, brown mass, its underpart lined with fearful saucer-like suckers, floating by his side for a few seconds ere it sank to the bottom.

Then he looked down, to find the coral rock, whose deceitful beauty had nearly lured him to his doom, hidden beneath a dark, inky cloud.

But the man who had saved him was somewhere beneath that fearful sepia, which is the natural smoke-screen of the hard-pressed octopus, and, unarmed and well-nigh exhausted though he was, Dick was about to dive through that

awful fluid to his assistance, when a yellow form came in view, and the next moment Wang Su shot to the surface!

"Wang!" ejaculated Dick. Then, the need of action gone, his sorely tried strength failed, and all was blank.

But only for a few moments.

When he recovered his senses, it was to find himself being propelled through the water by two swimmers, each of whom held a hand under one of his arms.

A strand of long, golden hair swept across his face.

He turned, to find that the second swimmer was the lovely mate of the Foam.

Her face was pale, and the eyes that met Dick's were full of concern.

"You came to my rescue too, Stella!" he cried gratefully.

The girl laughed.

"Well, I don't exactly know what I came for," she confessed. "I had just come on deck for my morning dip, when I saw that yellow old fraud, Wang, dive overboard with a knife between his teeth. Then I saw you come to the surface with a face as white as father's shore-going ducks, so I naturally hastened along to see what the excitement was about."

Ere Dick could reply they had reached the Foam, and as by this time he had recovered from the faintness which had rendered him unconscious, he was able to follow Stella up the booby ladder that hung over the side.

"Wang, you have saved me from a fate worse than I care to think about," he cried, grasping the Chinaman's hand. "But why on earth did you make out you could not swim, you wily little Celestial?"

"Me top-hole pearl diver!" confessed Wang Su. "Me no say me no could swim."

"Well, you certainly didn't say so; but when a chap sees another kicking about

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in the water and yelling for help, he naturally thinks the said chap can't swim," declared Dick.

"Pool 'Chinaman, no heepee what white mans 'ink," whined Wang. "Well, thank goodness you could swim, old chap, or I'd be the chief dish for an octopus's breakfast by this time," laughed Dick.

Then he turned to where Stella had been a moment before.

But the girl had hastened below to change out of her bathing dress; so Dick retired to his cabin, where he found one ankle somewhat swollen, and his leg marked by red, circular wounds where the repulsive creature's tentacles had fastened.

Fortunately, he had kept on his pyjama trousers, and the cloth had afforded him some measure of protection, with the result that by the time he had bathed his wounds and anointed them with ointment from the skipper's medicine-chest, he was but little the worse for his adventure.

But it was an experience he will never forget, and which he cannot speak about, even to the present day, without a shudder.

He was subjected to a great deal of chaff from Captain Kidd and his chums, who, British-like, hid the concern they really felt beneath a joke and a careless laugh.

By breakfast the new mast had been steeked, and as there was nothing more the Kanakas could not do better than the inexperienced boys. Stella suggested a run ashore to gather yams and coconuts, and to dig taro roots, the leaves of which make a splendid substitute for green vegetables.

As the Kanaka scout had reported signs of wild pigs on the island, the boys carried their rifles.

Although all were accustomed to the luxurious growth of those sub-tropical islands, there is a variety in the beauty of the vegetation which prevents the gorgeous mass of colour that meets one at every step from becoming monotonous, and the four adventurers enjoyed every minute they were ashore.

But first they filled the boat with yams, bread-fruit, bananas, green coconuts, and many other delicious fruits, then plunged inland in search of wild pigs to replenish the schooner's larder.

But they were too noisy to prove good hunters, and they were several miles from the shore before they encountered their first porker.

And then it was more by luck than skill, for they had reached a stretch of swampy grounds, and had ceased to make the woods ring with their merry laughter and snatches of song, when Joe Maddox alighted on a huge old boar.

Alighted is the proper word, for he tripped over a trailing vine, and, plunging forward, sprawled headlong into a huge tuft of the lily-like taro root.

There was a loud squeal, an angry grunt, and Joe was pitched into the midst of an exceedingly prickly bush by the old boar upon whose sleeping form he had inadvertently fallen.

"Don't shoot, Harry!" cried Dick, whose experience, when a captive amongst the savages, had taught him that one of the most dangerous animals on earth is an old boar which has been driven out of the herd, as this one evidently had, or it would not have been alone.

But he was too late. Even as he spoke Fielding pulled the trigger, and the hastily-aimed bullet scarred a painful,

but not dangerous, wound along the beast's shoulder.

With a vicious grunt the boar stopped dead, wheeled round, and charged straight at where Joe Maddox was struggling to break free from the thorns which held him as in a vice.

Again Harry Fielding fired—and missed!

Frantically Dick strove to bring his rifle forward, for, despairing of seeing any pigs, he had slung it over his shoulder.

His heart almost ceased to beat, for the boar was already within twelve feet of his chest.

With a momentary pang of despair, he realised that whatever he did now would be too late.

But even as the despairing thought flashed through his mind a lithe, graceful form shot past him, and he caught a momentary glimpse of Stella Kidd, her beautiful face set in a look of calm concentration, as, apparently without even stopping to take aim, she fired her automatic pistol at the onrushing beast.

There was a loud report, a spurt of white smoke from the weapon's short

"Hi!" cried Joe Maddox, with fine scorn. "If Harry hadn't been such a specialised specimen of an ass as to fire at an old tuskier when he hadn't one chance in ten of killing it outright; if I hadn't been such a ditto ditto as to trip over the beast, I wouldn't have had to spend the rest of my natural life pulling thornbushes out of my anatomy, and you wouldn't have had the chance of proving what we all knew before, that you are the pluckiest, readiest, and best girl-chum three chaps ever had!"

"And if you keep on talking a lot of nonsense, I'm going back to the Foam," countered Stella, walking off in pretended dudgeon.

The boys hesitated and glanced at their quarry.

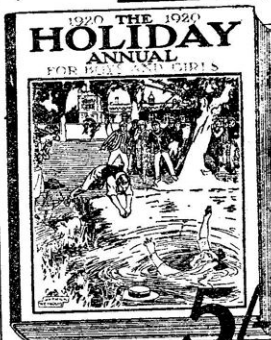
"Aren't we going to carry it down to the boat?" asked Harry Fielding.

Dick Danby grinned.

"Henry Fielding, respect old age!" he said reprovingly. "Besides, no knife made of human hands would penetrate its hide, or human organs digest its flesh."

Realising that their chum had spoken the truth, and that the old boar was perfectly useless for food, Harry and Joe followed him as he hastened to overtake their lovely companion.

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muzzle, a squeal of pain, and the fierce animal struck fairly in the centre of its forehead by the brave girl's bullet, turned head over heels ere it fell dead alongside its intended victim.

Rushing forward, Dick dragged his chum beyond the reach of the boar's last convulsive struggles.

Then he turned to Stella.

"You splendid girl!" he ejaculated, "on a earnestness that brought a blush to the young heroine's cheeks and a low, rippling laugh from her lips."

"Hear, hear!" agreed Joe, who seemed more bewildered by the rapid succession of events than frightened. "I have been in a beastly state by now but for you, Stella. I'll not forget what you've done as long as I live."

"Don't be absurd, Joe! Dick would have shot the beast seconds before if he could have got at his rifle," retorted Stella.

A Close Call.

HALF an hour later they stood on the summit of the tree-clad bluff which, protruding into the narrow channel by which the Foam had entered the sea, masked the tiny inlet from the sea.

A splendid view rewarded their toil—some climb.

On one side stretched the boundless expanse of the blue Pacific, on the other the picturesque little bay, with the Foam lying motionless on its sleeping waters, and beyond it the rising verdure-covered slopes of the island.

For some minutes the three boys and the lovely mate of the Foam stood drinking in the beauty of the scene.

"What a perfect paradise this could be made!" cried Dick enthusiastically.

"A little bungalow where that double row of palms forms a natural approach to the forest, a snug plantation island, a—"

Stella grasped him by the wrist, and, sinking on her knees, dragged him down by her side, motioning the others to take cover.

Dick gazed at the girl resentfully. A half-angry remonstrance at being cut short in the midst of his rhapsody was stifled as his eyes instinctively followed the direction of Stella's outstretched hand.

Then he drew in a long, deep breath.

About half a mile from the shore, and the same distance to southward of the bluff, her white sails shining in the sun, the silver water splashing from her bows, was the Red Rover.

Leaning over before a favouring wind, she seemed scarce to do more than skim over the waves as she swept swiftly towards them.

Half a minute before Stella had been a laughing, care-free girl, her lovely face aglow with happiness.

Now the smiles had vanished; her lips were closed in an expression of alert determination, and her eyes, which a moment before shone with merriment, now flashed with the light of battle.

"Get aboard as quick as you can, Joe! Tell my father what you have seen, and that the Red Rover shall not enter the bay whilst we hold this bluff," she said

calmly, but in quick, commanding tones. Though a girl, the other obeyed her unquestioningly.

Barely had the words left her lips ere Joe was rushing down the precipitous slope towards the bay, whilst Dick and Harry unslung their rifles and refilled their magazines.

Running, jumping, and at times, as he lost his footing, rolling several feet down the slope, Joe Maddox continued the descent of the bluff.

The bay reached, he plunged into its sleeping waters, without waiting to hail a boat, and swam swiftly to the schooner. In the meantime, Stella and her two companions had come to the verge of the cliff, and, screened from view by the thick undergrowth, watched the approach of their foes.

Presently the graceful schooner was immediately beneath them, and so close that they could almost have pitched a stone on to her crowded decks.

A more picturesque set of ruffians than her crew could not have been found in all the Southern Seas.

Malays and Chinamen to a man, they lolled about the decks in finery that is so dear to the hearts of the brown-skinned rovers, whose forefathers had been the scourge of those island-dotted waters until the strong arm of Britain had chased them from the seas.

"Look, here's Mendoza and his fellow-fugue, Otto Schwab," whispered Harry Fielding, glancing along his rifle at the German, who was leaning on a deck-chair beside the half-breed.

He looked inquiringly at Stella.

But the girl shook her head.

"It is too like murder," she replied.

"Wait!"

"Keep well under cover, and follow me," she added, leading the way to the extreme edge of the bluff, which commanded the narrow entrance to the bay.

Stretched on the soft, green grass on the edge of the cliff, she rested her rifle on a moss-grown rock.

"Cover Schwab, Dick! Harry, make sure of Mendoza. I will deal with the steersman. Don't fire until I give the word!" she ordered, as calmly as though directing her Kanaka crew to furl sail.

Again the Red Rover came alongside the unseen watchers.

They could hear the harsh voice of the German, the shriller tones of the Portuguese, rising above the lazy droning of the crew as the schooner glided by beneath them.

Anxiously Stella watched the schooner's progress.

Her face was pale, but her rich, red lips were set in an expression of grim determination.

A unwilling to open fire though she was, she was prepared to give the word should those on board the schooner detect the entrance to the hidden bay, and prepare to enter it.

"Should they tack make it impossible for anyone to take the wheel," was her last order, as the Red Rover's bowsprit came in line with the twisting channel.

Her companions nodded, their blood afire with the lust of battle.

Well they knew that from where they lay they could make it impossible for the schooner's crew to handle their craft by shooting down anyone who approached the wheel, with the result that, borne on the incoming tide, the Red Rover must certainly run on to the rocks and become a total wreck.

Hitherto the speed at which the schooner sailed had aroused their unwilling admiration.

But now she seemed to crawl, so anxiously did they watch her, as she drew first abreast the channel, then past it.

Dick Danby's fingers crooked over the trigger of his rifle, as Mendoza rose to his feet, and, shading his eyes with his hand, gazed apparently right into the bay.

But the next moment he breathed a sigh of relief as the Portuguese sank back into his seat, and the schooner continued on her way.

"Phew! That was a long two minutes!" said Dick Danby, as he wiped the perspiration from his streaming brow.

But though the outlaws had passed the entrance of the bay, it was not until she had left the island well astern that they felt they could breathe freely once more.

But the appearance of the Red Rover had banished the enjoyment of their run ashore.

Leaving Harry Fielding on the bluff to watch the Malay vessel, lest she should tack and return, Stella and Dick made their way to where they had seen an open space in the trees, which looked as though it might be a taroo swamp.

If so, it would be the most likely place in which to find pigs.

Nor were they disappointed.

Working their way to windward of the low-lying ground, they crept silently through the undergrowth, until at last Dick, who was slightly in advance, came to a sudden halt, and beckoned Stella to his side.

Less than a score of paces from them a dozen half-grown wild pigs were ruttling up the taroo-plants to get at the succulent roots.

"I'll take that big fellow on the extreme right; you make sure of the chap next him, and if we have time we'll both have a slice at the young sow with the patch of white on her shoulder," whispered Dick.

Stella nodded, as her elbows planted firmly in the yielding grass, she raised Joe's discarded rifle to her shoulder.

"Got him?" asked Dick Danby.

"Just behind the shoulder," replied Stella, her cheek nestled against the stock of the rifle.

"Then, fire!" cried Dick, pulling the trigger of his rifle.

So close together as to sound like a single report, the two fired, and the doomed pigs, shot through the heart, dropped dead on the ground.

With frightened squeals the remainder of the herd took to their heels at a pace which would have left any dog but a greyhound far behind.

But, quick though they fled, the hunters' bullets sped faster, and the young sow rolled over with a broken back.

Springing to their feet, Dick and Stella rushed forward, and, with a merciful shot, put the wounded beast out of its misery.

Leaving their game where it lay, the successful shots returned in triumph to the bay.

Hailing a boat, they were rowed to the Foam; then, sending back its crew of two Kanakas, with instructions regarding the whereabouts of the three pigs, they joined Captain Kidd in the vessel's stern.

"So the villainous pirates have got ahead of us!" was his greeting.

"Yes; but that's not of great importance, is it?" asked Dick.

"Powder and shot, lad, it's everything on a trip like this! If they got on board the wreck, we're not strong enough to turn 'em off, for one thing. For another, they'll have found it, and it'll be their salvage," was the reply.

Dick Danby looked blankly at the old skipper.

"Do you think they know where it is?" he asked, in dismay.

"No, I don't," Schwab may have a rough idea, but Stella saw 'em too quickly for them to have seen much when the sneaking spies crept aboard the Foam," was the reply.

"Besides, they would have sailed straight for Treasure Island, and not have troubled about us until we got there," interposed Stella.

"Stella, my gal," cried her admiring father, "what a headpiece you've got! If only Harry Morgan or Captain Kidd had known you, and—"

But Stella stopped him with a kiss. "Taboo, dad!" she laughed. "I've had trouble enough with my old twentieth-century pirate to be troubled with a seventeenth-century one."

"But that is neither here nor there," he said more seriously. "We've got to establish our right of salvage before those bloodhounds get to the wreck, and the sooner—"

"Hullo, what's up with Fielding?"

As he spoke he pointed to the slope leading to the bluff, down which Harry Fielding was falling, rather than running, in frantic haste.

(Another long instalment of this splendid adventure story will appear in next Wednesday's issue of the GEM. Order a copy now.)



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VARIOUS IMPORTANT SUBJECTS.

By this time, I hope the majority of my friends have managed to secure the "Holiday Annual." The great work has gone with a rush. Hot cakes might come a respectable second, but they could not hope for anything better. The "Greyfriars Herald," too, is on the eve of production, and will, I know, be acclaimed everywhere as it deserves. Of course, by this time we are well on towards winter, and there is really no reason at all why it should not be a very jolly winter, with all the little differences one reads about in the papers, and hears talked of, smoothed away. The coming of winter always sets people thinking hard, for, somehow, as each winter arrives, it seems to be very special. Many folks say they dread it; but when it comes to the point, have not you noticed how easily one gets along with the season? For winter, with its spells of south-west, mild weather, and with the sports and interests which it brings, is no bad time after all said and done. We shall have a better winter this year than last. The towns will be brighter, there will be more doing, more things and cheaper in the shops, and easier days generally.

THOSE DARK EVENINGS.

I hope my friends will find plenty to amuse them in the long evenings. Crowds of debating societies crop up, and they are excellent, while lots of fellows take up amateur theatricals, and give selections from Shakespeare, and so forth. I hope these shows will not be handicapped by a sulky super, as in the case of a performance where an old man was put on at the last moment—the regular player being ill—and told to go on and say: "My lord, the King awaits you!" The chief actor swung round, he was busy thinking about a little plot he had got tucked snugly up his sleeve, and shouted: "What sayest thou, varlet?" Well, the emergency chap did not like being, dubbed a varlet—thought it was meant to be uncomplimentary, while, moreover, he disliked having to say the same thing twice. So he strode up to the tragedian, poked his nose into the actor's classic physiognomy, and growled out: "Nou 'eard!" That is not the way to help a play onward. But as to amusements during the season that is with us there is no shortage of them, and we might—who knows?—see a real, old-fashioned Fifth of November celebrated again, with Catherine wheels, Roman candles, rockets, and golden rain, just as we used before the war.

YARNS AND REALITY.

More and more I see how popular the extra features are with readers. This is, of course, all due to the vividness with which the characters are drawn. People get so deeply interested in the fellows who move through the stories, that they are eager to know more. Ralph Reckless Cardew provides a case in point. It is not such a very long time

ago that we had the story called "Cardew of the Fourth," but the figure of the grandson of Lord Reckless immediately became prominent, and he might have been appearing in the tales for donkey's years, so to speak. In certain characteristics, he suggested Vernon Smith of Greyfriars, and, maybe, there was a far-away note of D'Arcy in him as well, but these resemblances were infinitely remote. Cardew stood out with rare distinction, and the stories in which he plays a part are as well remembered as any. Mr. Martin Clifford has never done better work than this. You remember where Cardew wants to ease the anxieties of his grandfather, and phones the old gentleman up to say all is well. Beneath his sarcasm, and his mocking indifference to most things, Cardew has the fine feelings of a gentleman, who would not hurt anybody. He stands out magnificently in that early yarn—one or two on—in which Catts acted so shabbily. With such characters as this, an author is always safe, and sure to please. Readers want to hear more and still more of a popular favourite, and even the plot is on many occasions subsidiary to the delineation of a character. It is natural enough. It is humanity which must interest humanity. Everything is there.

MORE DETAIL.

Now I have made a start in the Annual—or, at least, it is a carrying-on—of the other side of the stories, the little personal bits which please my friends. The recollections proved a big success, and one of these days I hope to offer something more in that line. There is really a lot to be told. Nobody has yet come anywhere near the end of the business of preparing a paper for the press. One has to be quite certain that Master Bagley Trimble still retains all his hold on readers. Perhaps I get a letter telling me that we are having too much Baggy. Of course it is only one opinion, but straws show which way the wind blows, and the fact is significant enough to give any ordinary straw a swelled head. For, as the poet said, every day is a fresh beginning. Every morning people have to start afresh. What served for yesterday, will not be to be remembered. The public changes its mind, and the public has to be considered, and have its new tastes catered for—or there is soon trouble brewing.

THE THINGS THAT MATTER.

Well, we have to hear more of what goes on behind the scenes, and how some of the fellows get on at home, whether they do their bit at home, and so forth. Possibly it is this thirst for further information which prompts so many correspondents to ask me when "Tom Merry's Weekly" is coming out again. So far I have not had a real opportunity to consider the great point, though I will faintly admit that the bright little leaflet in question was immensely appreciated.

But it was only a leaflet, not a pair-horse paper on the lines of the "Greyfriars Herald." "T.M.'s Weekly" came as a supplement to the GEM, nothing more.

WHAT THE EDITOR DOES.

It strikes me sometimes that a few of my friends really fancy that the Editor has a soft job; that he kills time by taking long holidays at the seaside, or roaming amidst the picturesque mountains thinking out things, and telephoning to his staff when he has anything special to say. I was actually asked to day whether I replied to letters. Think of that, now! Of course I do! The editor of a paper has to work harder than anybody—even harder than the office-boy, of whom we have heard such a lot these recent times. I am not denying the intense love of work displayed by the O.B., that worthy is not happy unless he is slaving, and he accomplishes wonders in his way; in fact, without a doubt he thinks he manages the whole business. But, all the same, the Editor has to be there. It is he who plans what is to be done, who tells writers to write, and how to write it. He has to say tactful things to the printer, and persuade the artist to do his best. If the Editor did not work all the time, it is quite as likely as not that he would never receive such compliments as this: "The Companion papers are a thousand times better than anything else." That comes from a reader at Finsbury Park. And so say all of us!

READERS' CORRESPONDENCE.

Daniel Cohen, Upper High Street, Oudstroom, Cape Province, South Africa, with readers, 12-14.
Miss B. Caskey, Shannon House, Sligo, Ireland, with girl readers interested in photographs.
W. M. Duberley, c/o, Egis Assurance Co., Ltd., P.O. Box 30, Port Elizabeth, South Africa, with readers anywhere, 17-19.
David Wilson, P.O. Box 204, Port Elizabeth, S. Africa, with readers anywhere, interested in stamp-collecting.
H. Savage, c/o Stephen Fraser & Co., Port Elizabeth, Cape Province, S. Africa, with readers, age 14.
F. A. Zipp, P.O. Box 45, Langlaate, Transvaal, S. Africa, with readers anywhere, 16-19.
H. Gregor, P.O. Box 92, Port Elizabeth, S. Africa, with readers anywhere, 19-22.
A. Smith, 17, Pimbridge Street, Greenwich, S.E. 16, would like to hear from readers with a view to forming a Correspondence Club in the S.E. district.

Your Editor