

GRAND LONG COMPLETE CAMPING STORY INSIDE!

The

GEM

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LIBRARY

20 Pages.

Every Wednesday.

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A MEETING WITH SOME OLD FRIENDS.

(An incident from the grand long complete story of the campers of St. Jim's.)

"MY READERS' OWN CORNER."

Half-a-crown is paid for all contributions printed on this page.

OUT OF THE FRYING-PAN.

Mrs. Brown was thoroughly tired of the borrowing propensities of her neighbour, Mrs. Smith. First, it was a household utensil that was wanted, then some small article of grocery. The other day there was a knock at Mrs. Brown's door. There stood Mrs. Smith's little girl. "Please," said the caller, "mother wants to know if you will lend her some pepper and the big flat-iron." "Tell your mother," said Mrs. Brown angrily, "that I have other fish to fry." The little girl was back again in a few minutes with a dish. "Please, mother wants to know whether you will lend her some of the fried fish?"—John Nimmons, 7, Nimmie Drive, Govan, Glasgow.

IMPOSSIBLE!

"Can you call me a hansom, man?" said one gentleman to another, whom the speaker had taken for a waiter. The individual addressed looked the questioner critically in the face for a moment or two, then said very slowly and thoughtfully: "I'm really afraid I can't!"—E. Taylor, 10, St. Peter Street, Preston, Lancs.

SOME COLOUR.

A new cook had a lobster to cook for dinner, and she was told to be sure and keep it a good colour. When the lobster appeared on the table it was of a very deep shade indeed. "What have you done to it?" asked the mistress. "Well, mum," replied the cook, "it was turning red, so I blacked it."—W. H. Davis, South View, St. Oyston Road, Clacton-on-Sea.

THE BOOT HOSPITAL.

Shobbs, the cobbler, opened a shop in the principal street of the town, and called his place the Boot Hospital. A customer brought in a pair of boots so bad that no tramp would have looked at them. "I wouldn't have these mended, if I were you," said the cobbler severely. "I would make a present of them to the deserving poor." "But I want them put right," cried the client. "This is a hospital, isn't it?" "Oh, ay," retorted the cobbler, "but it isn't the mortuary."—James Edward Howell, 12, McGill College Avenue, Montreal, Quebec.

THE SOLE.

Was the second course of the table d'hôte being served. "What's this leathery stuff?" demanded the diner. "That, sir, is fillet of sole," replied the waiter. "Take it away," said the patron, "and see if you can't get me a nice, tender piece from the upper part of the boot with the buttons removed."—Arthur Clayton, 10, Rossington Grove, Spencer Place, Harehills, Leeds.

HIS ALARM CLOCK.

Brown was grumbling about the alarm-clock he had bought. He had given nine-shillings-and-elevenpence for it, and it was not to be trusted. "But," said his friend Jones, "why pay all that money? I have a dog that is as good as any alarm. He barks every morning at half-past five. I can depend on him, too. All I have to do is to get out of bed and hit the animal on the head." "Oh, barks, and I know it is time to rise."—Walter Hope, 6, Carlton Road, Mile End, E. 1.

PRETTY EVIDENT.

The Third Form had been reading a book about a prisoner. D'Arcy minor had been unusually attentive. "The captive lay up on his bed, dreaming of home, and pining for the sight of his loved ones. Suddenly through the prison window came a bar of sunlight darting hither and thither into the dark corners, as though to brighten up the dreary prison life. The prisoner sprang from the bed and ran to the window to peer out . . ." "Now," said Mr. Selby, "why was he so anxious to look outside?" "To see who threw the soap, sir," replied Wally D'Arcy.—R. Bromley-Bancroft, 15, Princess Street, Nelson, Lancs.

WHEN YOU THINK OF IT.

"No, sir," said the manager, "no house in the country, I am proud to say, has more people pushing its line of goods than ours." "What do you sell?" asked the customer. "Perambulators," was the reply.—Michael Graham, 4, Central Terrace, Athlone, Ireland.

WEATHER PREDICTIONS BY ANIMALS.

These are more common than would be credited by town dwellers. Cats are said to wash right over their ears when rain is coming. They also become restless and wander aimlessly about the house when a thunder-storm is brewing. A donkey will signal bad weather by braying. Bees are peculiarly sensitive to rain. They hasten back to the hive and remain there. The peacock raises its unlovely voice as an indication of wet. A swallow flies high in good weather, low when the barometer falls.—W. Evans, Plas-y-don, Deganwy, North Wales.

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A Grand Long Complete Story of the St. Jim's Campers.

By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

CHAPTER 1.

A Postcard for Tom Merry.

"SUPPAH's ready!"
"Hear, hear!"

Solomon, the donkey, had already had his supper, and lain down to slumber. His final "hee-haw" had died away into the dusk. Towser, the bulldog, deep in the grass, was worrying a bone. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, the swell of St. Jim's, was tending the pot that hung from three sticks, gipsy fashion, over the camp-fire.

There was an appetising scent from the simmering pot. Tom Merry & Co were hungry after a day's march, and the smell of the stew was more welcome to them than the scent of the wild flowers and honeysuckle round about the school-boys' camp.

The St. Jim's campers looked very ruddy and cheerful, if a little dusty, in the glimmer of the camp-fire, as the last red gleam of the sun disappeared behind the Warwickshire hills.

There were seven in camp, without counting Solomon and Towser. Tom Merry and Manners and Lowther, of the Shell; Blake and Herries and Digby and D'Arcy, of the Fourth.

Most of them were busy. There was always something to do in camp.

Tom Merry carefully fed the fire under the swinging pot, while Gussy kept an eye—or, at least, an eyeglass—on the simmering stew. Monty Lowther sorted out plates, while Manners looked for the mislaid knives and forks. Jack Blake, needle and thread in hand, was mending a hole in the lining of his trousers' pocket, working rather under difficulties. Digby had just reached port with a pail of water. Herries was deeply interested in the performances of Towser with the bone. But the whole party rallied to the call of supper.

"Where's Cardew?" asked Tom Merry, as the plates were handed round.

The eighth member of the tramping party was absent.

"Bai Jove! He hasn't come in yet," said Arthur Augustus, looking round. "He went out for a walk, I think."

"He'll be like for supper," said Manners. "What the thump has he gone wandering for?"

"He said he was going to send a picture postcard from the village," remarked Herries.

"What rot! Picture postcards aren't in Cardew's line."

"Well, that's what he said. Are there any dumplings in this stew?" asked Herries, holding out his plate.

"Yaas, wathah, deah boy. I made eight," said Arthur Augustus. "I think they will be wathah nice."

"Oh, good!"

"Cardew's dumplin' will be cold if he does not come in," said Arthur Augustus, rather distressfully. "A cold dumplin' is not vevy nice. It is liable to become wathah hard, I believe."

"Impossible in this case!" said Lowther, who was surveying the dumpling in his plate with a fixed and stony gaze.

"Do you think so, Lowthah?"

"Well, I don't see how it could become any harder than it is already," said Lowther affably. "I've blunted my fork on this one."

"Welly, Lowthah—"

"Anybody got a battering-ram or a Tank?" asked Lowther. "If not, I fear I shall not be able to negotiate this dumpling."

"These dumplings are as tendah as chickens," said Arthur Augustus warmly. "I made them vevy carefully."

"Did you use flour for them?" asked Blake. "Not plaster of Paris by mistake?"

Tom Merry glanced round into the shadows. He wondered why Ralph Reckness Cardew had not turned up. For a week Cardew had travelled with the St. Jim's walking party, and they had pulled together pretty well.

But Tom had wondered several times how long the dandy of the Fourth would care to stand the strenuous life of tramping by day and camping by night.

"We're not going to wait supper," said Blake. "The stew's all right, excepting the dumplings."

"They are the vevy best part of it, Blake."

"We can save them to chuck at any animals that come wandering round the camp," continued Blake. "Being harder than stones—"

"You uttah ass!"

"Dash it all, I hope that ass Cardew hasn't lost himself!" said Tom Merry. "If he came back through the wood it's easy enough to get lost."

"He would see the camp-fire," said Manners.

"Perhaps he's hooked it," suggested Herries. "I've thought once or twice that his nibs was getting fed with washing-up and work."

"Well, he wouldn't drop out without telling us, I suppose?" said Tom Merry.

"I will keep his suppah in the pot to keep warm," said Arthur Augustus considerably. "He is bound to be hungwy when he droops in."

"If he drops in at all!" said Monty Lowther. "I remember he told us he was going to hang on with us till he was bored. Now, Gussy was talking to him quite a lot this afternoon."

"Welly, you ass—"

"Here he comes!" exclaimed Blake, as there was a foot-step in the shadows. And the campers all looked round.

But it was not Ralph Reckness Cardew who appeared. It was a country youth, in a smock, with a round, ruddy face. He came into the circle of light from the camp-fire, and blinked.

"Hallo, my infant!" said Monty Lowther cheerily. "Have you had your supper? If you'd care for eight dumplings—"

"Pway don't be an ass, Lowthah!"

The ruddy youth grinned.

"Be you Tom Merry?" he asked, looking round the party.

"I'm the chap you want," said Tom, with a smile. "What is it?"

"I've got a message for you, sir."

"Something happened to Cardew, bai Jove! I twist he has met with no accident!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus anxiously.

The ruddy youth fumbled in his smock. He produced a picture postcard in a rather rumpled condition.

"If you be Tom Merry this be for you!" he said.

"Who gave it to you?" asked Tom.

"Young gent," answered the youth. "Real young gent he was, too. He gave me a ten-bob note to bring this here postcard to this here camp, sir. Gave it to me in the village, he did, and told me where to find you, and to ask for Tom Merry. And he said there wasn't any answer."

And handing the postcard to Tom, the ruddy youth ducked his head, and strode away into the dusk.

Tom glanced at the card.

On one side was a view of Warwick Castle. On the other was the address—"Tom Merry, St. Jim's Camp, Somewhere in Warwickshire"—and a message in Cardew's elegant writing. A curious look came over Tom's face as he read.

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"From Cardew?" asked Arthur Augustus.

"Yes."

"Jolly queer that he should send us a message," said Blake, puzzled. "He said he was going to send a picture postcard from the village. Is this what he meant?"

"Read it out, Tommy!"

Tom Merry read out the message. It ran:

"Dear Merry,—I'm sending you this as I've got only just time to catch my train—"

"To catch his train!" ejaculated Blake.

"That's what he says," answered Tom. "Listen to the rest."

"Go ahead, dear boy. This is vewy wemarkable," said Arthur Augustus.

"Many thanks for your kindness and hospitality. I've enjoyed myself tremendously, and had no end of a good time."

"That's wathah nice," commented Arthur Augustus. "But if he was havin' a twemendous good time, what is he catchin' a twain for? It is vewy wemarkable indeed."

"Get on with the washing, Tom."

Tom Merry continued:

"But the stipulated date has now arrived, so I am compelled to bid you a reluctant and affectionate farewell."

Kindest regards,

"R. K. CARDEW."

The St. Jim's campers looked at one another. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy took off his eyeglass and polished it thoughtfully.

"Cheeky ass!" commented Blake.

"I woadly do not quite catch on to this," said Arthur Augustus. "What does he mean by the stipulated date? There was no date mentioned for his leavin' us that I am aware of."

Tom Merry laughed.

"I suppose he means—"

"I woadly do not see what he means, Tom Mewwy."

"He said when he joined us that he would stay with us till we bored him—"

"Bai Jove! Does he mean that we have bored him?" ejaculated Arthur Augustus. "The cheeky boundah—"

"Cheeky ass!" grunted Herries.

"Silly owl!" growled Manners.

"I know what I'm going to do," said Blake. "I'm jolly well going to punch his nose when we see him at St. Jim's next term!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

Tom Merry twirled the postcard into the camp-fire, and sat down to finish his supper. Cardew had been an amusing travelling-companion in some ways, but his sudden departure left the chums of St. Jim's quite unmoved. Monty Lowther remarked, however, that it raised an important question. Who was going to have Cardew's dumping? There were no offers.

CHAPTER 2.

Towser Causes Trouble!

"GEE up!"

"Get a move on, Solomon!"

Solomon, the donkey, blinked thoughtfully at the St. Jim's juniors, and got a move on. The bright morning sun was shining down on woods and lanes and meadows, and Tom Merry & Co. had turned out early for the road. Solomon was packed with great care, as usual. Breakfast was over, and the schoolboy tramps were ready for another day. Seven schoolboys and Solomon took the road, and Towser brought up the rear.

The route lay by a lane that ran through scented woods, unfenced on either side. Occasionally a rabbit scuttled across the path, and on such occasions Towser betrayed signs of excitement. Towser was a very grave and serious dog, as a rule; but the sight of a rabbit always had an exhilarating effect upon him. More than once Herries had to drag him in by main force to keep him from an unlawful pursuit.

"Jollay place, this," Arthur Augustus remarked. "Waw-waw is a vewy nice countay—"

"Not quite up to Yorkshire," remarked Jack Blake.

"Wats!"

"Or Cumberland," said Monty Lowther. "Now, in Cumberland—"

"Or Hampshire," suggested Tom Merry, with a laugh.

"Yaas, wathah! Now, in Hampshire—"

"Hallo, where's Towser?" exclaimed Digby.

The juniors' argument on the subject of their respective counties was interrupted. Towser had disappeared.

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"Herries, you ass, you ought to have led him!" exclaimed Tom Merry, as the party came to a halt.

"I was leading him," said Herries. "He's slipped his collar. It was loose, you know."

"What was it loose for, fathead?"

"Towser likes it loose."

That, apparently, was a full and satisfactory explanation, from the point of view of George Herries.

"Weally, Howwie—" began Arthur Augustus warmly. "He's just wandered into the wood, that's all," said Herries.

"Only!" ejaculated Lowther. "It may get us into a fearful row if he bags somebody's rabbits."

"Yaas, wathah! I have wemarked befoah, Howwie, that that brute has no respect watevah for a fellow's twousahs. But if he begins baggin' a fellow's wabbits—"

"Oh, rot!" said Herries crossly. "You fellows are always down on Towser—the quietest and most harmless dog there ever was. Why shouldn't the old chap have a rabbit now, and then if he fancies one?"

"Nice for the rabbit, anyhow!" murmured Lowther.

"Just as good as being potted by some silly owl with a gun!" retorted Herries.

"We've got to gather him in," said Tom. "For goodness' sake, call to the brute, Herries! There's a dozen notices up along this lane about keeping out of the woods and keeping dogs on the leash. We don't want to land into a row with some giddy land-owner. These woods are private property."

Crack!

The report of a gun echoed through the woods.

"Herries! Herries!" barked the old chap through the woods.

"Hark!"

The ring of the gun was followed by a loud yell from the distance.

"Help!"

"My only hat!"

Faintly from the distance came a deep-toned growl.

"Towser!"

"Come on, for goodness' sake!" exclaimed Tom Merry. "We might have known that blessed dog would get us into trouble!"

Leaving Solomon in the lane, the juniors rushed into the trees in the direction of the gunshot.

They burst into an open glade, where a startling scene met their gaze.

A gun lay in the grass, and close by the gun was Towser, squatting. His eyes were fixed on a youth in shooting-clothes who was scrambling on the branch of a tree.

The branch was bending under the young fellow's weight and creaking ominously as he clung to it.

Every minute it seemed as though the branch would break, and that the unfortunate sportsman would fall to the ground, where the awaiting Towser squatted.

"Oh cwumbs!" ejaculated Arthur Augustus.

Herries ran towards Towser, taking not the slightest heed of the young man in the tree. All his concern was for his precious bulldog. There was a slight scratch on Towser's neck, and Herries' eyes blazed with wrath as he saw it.

"The rotter!" he panted. "He fired at Towser!"

"Help!" yelled the young man on the branch, scrambling frantically to keep his clumsy hold. "If that dog's yours, call him off!"

"Call him off, Herries!" gasped Tom Merry.

Herries snorted.

"Rats! That howling cad's tried to shoot Towser! Towser's going to have his whack as soon as the clumsy lout real down!"

"Call him off!" yelled the young man in the tree, as the branch swayed and creaked.

"Gr-r-r-r!" came Tom Towser.

The bulldog's eyes were fixed on the sportsman above, with a deadly gleam in them. There was no doubt whatever what would happen to the young man if he came within reach of Towser's powerful jaws.

The sportsman clambered desperately on the branch, and got his legs over it, and caught at the branch above for support.

He was a little safer now, though still in a rather precarious position. Towser sat and watched grimly.

"Will you call that dog off and take him away?" hissed the young man, glaring down at the St. Jim's party.

Tom Merry looked up at him not very cordially. The young man did not look an attractive youth. He had a rather vacant face, with narrow eyes set close by a nose of the snub variety. But, to judge by his expensive clothes, he was a young man of wealth, and evidently a young man with no small opinion of his own importance, to judge by the rest of him.

"Did you fire at the dog?" demanded Tom Merry.

"Dogs are not allowed in these woods!" snapped the young man. "You should lead your dog!"

"That's no reason for trying to shoot him!" exclaimed

Tom Merry angrily. "You are a cad and a brute to do such a thing!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"He wasn't even after a rabbit!" said Herries savagely. "Just noising in the wood, and that cad fired at him. Why, I'll smash every feature on the silly mug's face if he comes down!"

"I—I'll have you prosecuted!" gasped the unhappy sportsman. "By hech! If a fellow can't go shootin' on his father's land without bein' set on by a gang of tramps, it's—"

"If you chawactewise us as twamps, you boundah—" began Arthur Augustus wrathfully.

"Help!" roared the young man. "Jones! Brown! Gibbons! Hang the fellows! They ought to be somewhere about! What the thunder are they paid their wages for? Help!"

"Bring Towser away, Herries," said Tom. "We don't want to scrap with an army of keepers, old chap."

"That cad tried to shoot him—"

"Never mind. He didn't succeed—"

"But I do mind!" snorted Herries. "I'm going to thrash the rotter within an inch of his life!"

"Yaas, wathah! I quite approve of givin' the wuffian a fearful thwashin'!"

"He's asked for it!" remarked Blake.

"But we're trespassing here—" said Tom.

"Bai Jove! That's wathab sowious—"

"Yes, you're trespassing, and I'll have you locked up for it when my keepers come along!" snorted the young man in the tree. "You don't know whom you have to deal with, you young scoundrels!"

"And don't care, you rotter!" snapped Herries.

"The fellow is not a gentleman!" said Arthur Augustus, taking a calm survey of the young man through his celebrated eyeglasses. "One of those new-wich boundahs, I suppose, who have been buyin' up country estates and settin' up in a posish they are not entitled to."

The young man glared down at Arthur Augustus as if he could eat him.

"His manners have not the repose which stamps the caste of Vere de Vere," remarked Monty Lowther.

"I'll have you locked up for trespass, as sure as my name's Algeron de Jones!" gasped the young man in the tree.

"Help! Where are those dashed keepers? Help!" The branch swayed, and Mr. De Jones nearly rolled off. Towser gave a deep growl, and his teeth gleamed. The sportsman made a desperate clutch, and saved himself in time.

"Take that dog away!" he howled.

"I'll tie him up if you like," said Herries, "on condition that you come down out of that tree and put your hands up."

"Yaas, that's a faiah offah!"

There was a rustle in the underwoods, and a young man came into view with a gun under his arm. He also was in elegant shooting-clothes, and a gold-rimmed eyeglass was screwed into his eye. He stared at the scene in the glade, and ejaculated:

"Good heavens!"

"That you, Smythe?" gasped the young man in the tree.

"Yes, old bean! What's the dashed trouble?"

"Shoot that dog!" shouted Mr. De Jones. "Shoot him dead, Smythe!"

"Oh, heh! You've been treed, poor old bean!" said Mr. Smythe. "I'll jolly soon settle the bow-wow!"

He was raising his gun, when Herries came at him like a wild bull. A set of knuckles that seemed like iron crashed on Mr. Smythe's chin, and he went whirling, his gun flying from his hands and spinning into the bushes. Mr. Smythe collapsed on his back, with a howl that rang through the woods.

"Yarooop!"

Herries stood over the astonished Mr. Smythe, brandish- ing his fists.

"Get up and have some more!" roared Herries.

"Yurrrgh!"

"Shoot my dog, will you?" raved Herries. "Shoot Towser! Gerrup, you cad! Gorrup, you apology for a bunny rabbit! I'm going to smash you!"

"Good heavens! Oooch!" spluttered Mr. Smythe.

"Help!" wailed the gentleman in the tree.

Mr. Smythe sat up and rubbed his chin dazedly, and blinked at the juniors. He seemed to be trying to discover whether his chin was still there. It felt as if it wasn't.

"Lemme alone!" gasped Mr. Smythe. "Hands off! I'll call the police! I'll prosecute you! Oh, my word! Oooocooch!"

"Help!" yelled Mr. De Jones.

"The sooner we're out of this the better," murmured Lowther. "We shall have the keepers here soon, and they won't be so easy to handle as this silly ass."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Come on, Herries—"

"I'm not coming till I've walloped that cad in the tree!" snorted Herries.

"But we're trespassing—"

"I don't care!"

"You are bound to care, Herries," said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy severely. "It is w'ong to twespas on anothah chap's ground."

There was a sound of a movement in the woods at a distance. It probably heralded the arrival of the keepers, and Tom Merry & Co. were rather anxious. They stood upon very uncertain ground, as it were. Certainly the two nutty sportsmen had no right to shoot at the dog, but there was no doubt that the juniors were trespassing on forbidden ground. It was a knotty legal point.

Blake took Herries by one arm, and Digby took him by the other. He was forcibly dragged away from the gasping Mr. Smythe, much to that gentleman's relief. It did not seem to occur to Mr. Smythe to get up and tackle Herries, though he was a head taller. He seemed to prefer to repose in the grass until the incensed junior was gone.

"I'm not going till I've thrashed that cad Jones!" roared Herries.

"You are!" chuckled Blake.

"This way!" said Digby.

"Move him on!" said Tom Merry. "Come on, Towser! Call your blessed dog, Herries!"



CHAPTER 3.

Herries Is Not Satisfied!

"YUURRRGGGGHEH!" spluttered Mr. Smythe, as he sprawled in the grass. "Oh! Ow! Groogh! Yooocooch! Oooocooch!"

"Well hit, Herries!" chuckled Blake.

"Here come Cardow!" exclaimed Blake, as there was a footstep in the shadows. The campers all looked round. But there was no Ralph Cardow who appeared. It was a country youth in a smock. The youth produced a picture postcard. "Be Tom Merry here?" he asked. (See page 3).

Lowther had picked up Towser's collar, and he slipped it on the dog and secured it, and grasped the chain. Towser was led away after his master, and this time it was Herries who proved the more difficult of the two to lead.

But he was led, and the St. Jim's party emerged into the footpath at last.

Fortunately, Solomon had remained where he was left, and he was found quietly and sedately browsing. Tom Merry caught him, and led him on, and the juniors resumed their way at an accelerated pace. Herries loudly protested, but Blake and Dig did not let go his arms. The walking-party had wisely decided that the sooner they were clear of the vicinity, the better. Certainly, they did not care two straws for Messrs. Smythe and De Jones; it was the doubtful, legal aspect of the matter that worried them.

They emerged into a road at last, and the wood was left behind; and, beautiful as the woodland was, the juniors were glad to see the last of it—in the circumstances!

Only Herries still regretted that he had left the spot without altering the aspect of Algermon de Jones' features.

"We shall never see the cad again!" growled Herries. "I shall never have a chance of smashing his boko for him! It was simply rotten of you fellows to yank me away before I'd smashed him!"

"Wats! Do you want to be wun in for twespassin'?" demanded Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

"I wouldn't mind, after I'd smashed that cad!"

Evidently George Herries was not to be reasoned with; so his chums did not attempt to reason with him. They marched on at a good rate; though Solomon eyed them reproachfully from time to time, as if he did not understand the cause of the unusual hurry and did not like it. But for once Solomon did not have his own way.

Tom Merry & Co. were quite glad when the wood was left a couple of miles behind. It was close on noon now, and they looked out for a suitable spot for the midday halt. Tom Merry glanced into a green paddock attached to the grounds of a rather garish-looking, red-brick mansion. A rural youth was leaning on the gate, sucking a straw, and Tom addressed him.

"Know whom this field belongs to, kid?"

The boy nodded, and jerked a thumb towards the red-brick mansion.

"That's where the owner lives," he answered. "Mr. De Jones."

"Oh, my hat!"

Tom Merry & Co. decided to keep on. Mr. De Jones was not a person of whom they desired to ask permission to camp in a paddock.

"That would be the young cad's father, I suppose!" said Herries, glancing in through the high bronze gates, as the party passed the mansion. "Wouldn't care to ask favours of any of the tribe! Looks more like a dashed picture-palace than a house—some new-rich gang, I suppose!"

The juniors chuckled. The mansion did not look as if it had been designed and decorated by a person of the best possible taste. But it was evidently on account of Towser that Herries was inclined to believe the worst of the tribe of De Jones.

"Made their money in the war, I expect," continued Herries morosely. "Yah! I wish I'd jolly well licked that puppy! You fellows oughtn't to have dragged me away like that! I—"

"Peace, my infant!" said Monty Lowther. "Let's hear the end of De Jones and all his concerns! You talk too much, old chap!"

"Rats!" grunted Herries. "If ever I come on that cheeky puppy again—"

"Dry up!" roared Blake.

And Herries smothered and dried up.

"Here's a giddy village!" said Tom Merry, as they rounded a bend in the road and an ivy-clad inn and two or three cottages with red roofs came into sight. "We can buy some things here, and camp on the common. Hallo! There's somebody camping there already!"

A caravan stood on the common, with a horse tethered near grazing. The juniors glanced at it in passing; but the caravanners were not in sight. Possibly they were doing the sights of the neighbourhood.

"Don't want to camp next another gang!" said Blake. "Let's keep on through the village!"

"Yass, wath!"

"Right-ho!" agreed Tom.

The St. Jim's party pushed on, stopping at the village store to make a few purchases, and they left the village, which was called Ashpen, behind and came out into a lane among wide green meadows. At a cross-road a little further on there was a wide patch of grass beside the road, and there they decided to halt.

Solomon was relieved of his pack and staked out, and the purchases made in the village were laid out for lunch. A light but very agreeable lunch of bread and cheese and rashers, washed down by ginger-beer. When it was over, the

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juniors stretched themselves in the grass to rest under the shade of the big elms that grew along the field's edge. They chatted drowsily in the warm afternoon as they rested, and they did not hear a rather heavy footfall on the grass, and were not aware of the approach of a stranger, until a fat voice fell upon their ears:

"I say, you fellows!"

"My hat!" ejaculated Tom Merry.

He spun round in astonishment. The voice was familiar to him—and the speaker was familiar, too, as soon as Tom's eyes fell upon him! He was a fat youth, whose waistcoat seemed a size too small for him, though its circumference was extensive. A straw-hat was on the back of his bullet-head, and a gorgeous necktie seemed to reflect the sunshine, rivaling in its hue the celebrated coat of Joseph. A pair of big spectacles were perched on his fat, little nose, and he blinked cheerily through them at the surprised juniors, and nodded and grinned.

"I say, you fellows, fancy meeting you!"

"Bunter!" ejaculated Tom Merry. "Bunter of Greyfriars!"

"Billy Buntah, bai Jove!"

CHAPTER 4.

An Old Acquaintance!

BILLY BUNTER nodded and grinned.

He seemed very pleased with this unexpected encounter; but Tom Merry & Co. were very doubtful about the pleasure of it. In fact, the pleasure was all on Bunter's side.

The chums of St. Jim's knew Bunter very well—too well, in fact!

They had seen him often enough when visiting Harry Wharton & Co. at Greyfriars, and they had seen him at St. Jim's, too. And they hadn't retained any pleasing recollections of Billy Bunter—quite the reverse, in fact!

But Bunter was evidently pleased; and common politeness compelled the St. Jim's party to nod and grin.

"Bunter," said Tom Merry. "I—I never expected to see you wandering around in Warwickshire, Bunter!"

"Bai Jove! No!"

"Happy surprise on both sides, what?" said Bunter, seating himself on a camp-stool from which Arthur Augustus had risen.

Gussy had been going to sit down again, but Bunter did not seem aware of the fact. Still, it was only polite to offer a visitor a seat, and Arthur Augustus was very grateful about it.

"Praw, sit down, Buntah!" he said.

"This stool is all right," said Bunter cheerily. "I don't mind taking a little rest. You fellows had your lunch?"

"Yes."

"Rather early, weren't you?" asked Bunter. "I haven't had mine!"

The hint was taken. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy immediately placed at Billy Bunter's disposal the remnants of the lunch.

"Well, I was going back to lunch," said Bunter, "but I'll take a snack with you, since you're so pressing. What are you fellows doing? Caravanning?"

"Walking tour," explained Tom Merry.

"Won't run to a caravan, what?" said Bunter sympathetically. "Hard times, what? I understand."

"Weally, Buntah—"

"It's not exactly that!" said Tom, a little nettled. "We decided on a walking tour because we wanted to."

Bunter winked.

"My dear old chap, you can be quite frank with me," he said. "I've been there myself—I know what it's like to be hard-up on a holiday! Only occasionally, of course; but such things do happen! So you're tramping round?"

"Yes," said Tom curtly.

He was already fully satisfied with what he had received of Bunter's fascinating society. But there was evidently more of it to come. Bunter was eating busily, and certainly did not mean to shift until the last remnant of the eatables had been shifted.

"We're caravanning," explained Bunter, with his mouth full.

"Oh! That was your turn-out we passed in the village, I suppose?" asked Manners.

"Yes; that's my caravan," said Bunter, with a nod.

"Yours?" asked Tom.

"I've got a few friends with me; but I'm really running the show," said Bunter. "We're stopping a few days at Ashpen, as I've got some cricket on. Caravanning's ever so much better fun than walking!"

"Oh!" said Tom. That was his only rejoinder to Billy Bunter's exceedingly courteous remark.

"Oh, yes, rather!" said Bunter, with a nod. "No end better, you know. No comparison, in fact! If it will run to a caravan next week, you fellows, I should certainly advise you to spend the money on it. Any more biscuits?" asked Bunter.

"Sowwy, no, Buntah!"

"Well, I'll finish this cake, if you don't mind."

"Not at all, deah boy!" said Arthur Augustus politely. "I could do with another ginger-pop, if it really isn't bothering you fellows too much."

"Heah you are, Buntah!"

"Thanks, Gusey!" said Bunter. "I'm really pleased to see you again, old scout! Rem-ember the time I came to St. Jim's?"

"Y-a-a-s!"

"Jolly, wasn't it?"

"Bai Jove, I—I—I mean, I'm vewy pleased you found it jolly, Buntah!"

"You fellows camping long here?" asked Bunter, looking round—not at the St. Jim's fellows, but in search of something further to eat. But there was nothing more to eat. Bunter had demolished what had been intended as tea for seven, and there were no more worlds for him to conquer.

"Not long," said Tom Merry. "In fact, we're moving on immediately. Only a midday rest, you know."

"Yes, you get fagged tramping, I suppose," assented Bunter. "Now, I'm a jolly good walker."

It was really a gift of Bunter's, the way he could import some disagreeable reflection into the most casual remarks.

"We are not exactly fagged," said Blake. "It's usual to take a rest at midday when a fellow's on a tramp."

Bunter smiled.

"My dear chap, I understand perfectly," he answered. "Take plenty of rest—that's my advice. Wait till you're really fit before you put on the strenuous-life bizney."

"We are fit!" bawled Herries wrathfully. "Do you think we're not fit, you fat duffer?"

Bunter quite started. He was accustomed to giving his little "digs" at people, relying upon their politeness to see him through, as it were. Herries' politeness had apparently failed all of a sudden!

"Really!" said Bunter loftily. "If that's the way you talk to a chap who's dropped in to speak to you—"

"Cheese it, Herries, old chap!"

Herries snorted.

"You—you see, Bunter—" stammered Tom Merry.

"St. Jim's manners—what!" said Bunter, curling his fat lip. "It's all right, I dare say. Not how we act at Greyfriars, of course. But schools are different!"

"Weally, Buntah!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy feebly. George Herries retired from the spot, with red face, and began to look after Solomon's packs. He felt that he couldn't stand Bunter long without another outburst. Digby strolled after Herries. He, too, seemed to have had quite enough of the charms of Bunter's society.

"You fellows getting any cricket in the vac?" asked Bunter, blinking at Tom Merry through his big spectacles. "I suppose not?"

"Owing to the limited horsepower of Solomon," said Monty Lowther, "we are not carrying a cricket outfit around with us."

Bunter blinked at him.

"That's the best of caravanning," he said. "Now, we've got our cricket outfit, and we're getting some cricket here. That's really why I told Wharton I'd hang on a few days at Ashpen."

"Oh, Wharton's with you?" exclaimed Tom Merry, interested at last in Billy Bunter's remarks.

"Yes—several of my Greyfriars pals," said Bunter. "Wharton and Bob Cherry and Nugent, and Bull and Inky. Five of them in all—I told them I could take just five."

"Oh!" said Tom, rather puzzled. He could hardly imagine Harry Wharton & Co. joining in an excursion of which Billy Bunter was the leader and director.

"We've got a cricket-match on for this week," said Bunter. "We're playing a country-house team. Like to see the game?"

Tom Merry & Co. exchanged glances. They were interested in cricket, and they would have liked to see Harry Wharton & Co. play the country-house team, undoubtedly. But they were not yearning for any further acquaintance with William George Bunter.

"I—I think we shall be at a distance by then, unless it's to-day," said Tom, after gathering the opinions of his comrades from their looks. "It's not to-day?"

"Oh, no—to-morrow!" said Bunter.

"H'm! We shall be a dozen miles away," said Manners. "Thanks, all the same!"

"Not at all," said Bunter. "You're welcome, if you'd like to come. I'll tell you what. Come around to the caravan to supper this evening—we'll give you a jolly good supper—and camp alongside till to-morrow. I'll be glad to have you."

Bunter issued that invitation in quite a lofty way, as if he were conferring no end of a favour on the St. Jim's party. That alone would have led to a refusal; but, in addition to that, Tom Merry & Co. doubted very much whether William George Bunter was so important a member of the caravanning party as he stated, and whether he had any right to issue invitations at all. So the St. Jim's juniors shook their heads.

"Many thanks," said Tom, "but I think we shall get along the road!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"About time we started," said Lowther.

"My dear chaps, do come!" urged Bunter. "If you come to supper, there will be something a bit more decent than usual. Wharton can't refuse to let me do some shopping on a really decent scale—I—I mean, I—I should see that there was a decent supper. And—"

Tom Merry rose.

"Excuse us, Bunter," he said, "I think it's time for us to move on!"

"High time!" said Blake, jumping up.

"You fellows ready to move?" called out Herries. "I've nearly finished packing Solomon!"

Bunter rose rather discontentedly.

"Bit rotten, travelling with a donkey, isn't it?" he asked.

"No end of a worry—what!"

"We don't find it so."

"Easily satisfied—what!" said Bunter. "I say, isn't it rather cruel to load up a donkey like that?"

Herries gave a sort of convulsive snort. He picked up D'Arcy's malacca cane, and made an involuntary movement towards Bunter. Arthur Augustus headed him off just in time.

"Cruel?" repeated Tom Merry, staring at Bunter.

Bunter nodded.

"Yes, seems so to me," he said cheerily. "Don't you think so?"

"The donkey isn't heavily loaded," said Tom, breathing hard. "He has quite a good time of it, and carries his load



The juniors burst into an open glade, where a startling scene met their gaze. A gun lay in the grass, and close by the gun was Towser, squatting. A youth in shooting clothes was clinging desperately on the branch of a tree. "Help!" yelled the young man. (See page 4.)

quite easily, Bunter. I should think you could see that for yourself, if you use your eyes."

"I believe in kindness to animals," said Bunter.

"That was quite a praiseworthy statement, in itself, but, of course, Bunter's tone implied that he was the only fellow there who believed in kindness to animals."

Tom Merry opened his lips, but closed them again quickly.

"Let's get on, you fellows," he said abruptly.

"Yaas, wathah—for goodness' sake let's get on!" gasped Arthur Augustus. "I—I really think we had better be movin'."

"I say, you fellows, don't hurry off!" said Bunter. "I'll tell you what—it's nearly a mile to my caravan, and I'd like to ride the donkey home. You don't mind?"

"We do rather!" said Blake. "Kindness to animals, you know."

"Oh, really, Blake—"

"Our donkey can't carry a ton," said Lowther. "He's a hefty animal, but there's a limit, Bunter—and you're the limit!"

"Look here, you fellows," exclaimed Bunter, "I'd really like a ride back to camp, and I think you might lend me your donkey!"

"Go and eat coke!" said Herries, breaking out again, as it were.

"Let's get off, for goodness' sake!" said Blake, in a murmur. "I shall kick him if we stay here any longer, and that wouldn't be polite!"

"Good-bye, Bunter!"

"But I say—"

"Ta-ta, old top!"

The St. Jim's party moved out into the road. Billy Bunter blinked after them through his big spectacles, wrathfully and indignantly. His indignation, indeed, was great. He rolled out into the road after the St. Jim's juniors.

"I say, you fellows!" he exclaimed emphatically. "I've had a rather long walk, and I want to ride home. I'd like you to lend me your donkey. Now, I hope you're not going to refuse."

"Good-bye, Bunter!" said Tom Merry, as if he had been completely deaf while the Owl of Greyfriars was making his remarks. "Gee up, Solomon!"

Solomon "gee'd" up, and the St. Jim's party moved on quite quickly.

CHAPTER 5.

Bob Cherry's Recruits!

"HALLO, hallo, hallo!"

There was the ring of a bicycle-bell on the road. A cyclist jumped off his machine, with a smiling face, to greet Tom Merry & Co., before they had proceeded a hundred yards from the cross-roads. The seven juniors of St. Jim's greeted him with answering smiles; they were quite glad to see Bob Cherry of Greyfriars.

The estimation in which they held that cheery youth was very different from the estimation in which they held William George Bunter.

"You fellows roaming around here!" exclaimed Bob.

"How jolly lucky for me to drop on you like this!"

"Yaas, wathah, Chewwy, deah boy!" said Arthur Augustus cordially, and he shook hands with the Greyfriars junior, and then barely-suppressed a little yelp. Bob Cherry's grip was vigorous, like everything about the cheery Bob.

"Jolly glad to see you, old top!" said Tom Merry heartily.

"We're caravanning," said Bob. "Camped on the village common at this very blessed minute! You must have seen the old bus if you came through the village."

"We saw it," said Tom. "And we've met Bunter since—"

Bob Cherry chuckled.

"Bunter? So he nosed you out, did he? Amazing how that fat boulder noses everything out! What are you chaps up to?"

"Travelling with a donkey," said Tom Merry, with a smile.

"How jolly ripping!" said Bob. "We're caravanning; bit of a tight fit for us, with Bunter thrown in. If you're not in a hurry to get along, suppose you give us a look-in. All the chaps will be glad to see you. There's five of us, without counting Bunter, and you know them all. Come along to the camp and have some tea."

"There was a slight pause."

"Tom Merry & Co. would gladly have accepted that hearty invitation, but having already refused a similar invitation from Billy Bunter, they felt a little doubtful about doing so."

"In a hurry to get on?" asked Bob.

"Our time's quite our own," said Tom Merry, smiling.

"We're just loafing round from one county to another, and taking it easy. We'd be jolly glad to see your crowd, Cherry."

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"Yaas, wathah!"

"Then trot along with me," said Bob. "The fellows will be no end pleased to see you. You'll have to stand Bunter, if you don't mind that. We stand him, somehow."

The fact is, Bunter asked us to come, and we declined," said Tom. "We—we—you see—we thought—"

"We'd have been jolly glad to see you, if you'd come in with Bunter," said Bob. "But I understand perfectly. But now I'm asking you—"

"We'll come along, and be jolly glad!" said Tom.

"Yes, rather!" said Blake.

"I say, what a jolly old dog!" said Bob, looking at Towser. "I've seen him before. Towser, isn't it? I say, Towsey—Towsy—Towsy!"

Towser gave Bob Cherry a thoughtful stare, and then came up and rubbed his nose on him. Bob Cherry patted his head affectionately. Herries beamed on the Greyfriars junior.

"Yank Solomon round!" said Tom Merry. "Gee up, Solomon! Get a move on, you brute! Hard-a-port!"

Solomon was persuaded to turn round, and the whole party walked back towards Ashpen, Bob Cherry wheeling his bike.

A fat figure rolled out into the road and joined them, with a rather uneasy blink at Bob.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! Bunter!" roared Bob Cherry.

"I—I say, Bob—"

"Hold my bike a minute, D'Arcy, while I kick Bunter—"

"Bai Jove!"

D'Arcy held the machine, and Bob made a run at the fat junior. The Owl of Greyfriars skipped out of the road with great activity.

"Come back and be kicked, Bunter!"

Bob Cherry chuckled, as he took his bike again and wheeled it on.

"Bunter's been at the grub," he explained. "He cleared out the caravan larder, and he's been dodging my boot ever since. He won't dare to turn up in camp till he's perishing of hunger."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Billy Bunter blinked morosely after the party, as they walked into Ashpen. But he did not venture to join them again. He followed disconsolately at a distance.

"I was just getting back to camp, when I dropped on you fellows," said Bob Cherry. "I've been over to Warwick to see a chap, but he wasn't there. Rotten luck, what?"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Greyfriars chap, but he's away for his holidays," said Bob. "I've been recruiting, but I've had no luck."

"Recruiting?" said Tom.

"Yes; looking for cricketers," explained Bob. "We've got laid in a cricket-match here, and it's coming off to-morrow, and there's only five of us—six with Bunter. Bunter's no good, of course, but we shall have to give him a bat, I suppose. We want to lick the Ashpen Hall crowd, but it doesn't look like it. You see, Wharton accepted the challenge, and we hoped to gather in some Greyfriars fellows to make up an eleven."

"I see!" said Tom.

"They're a feeble crowd," went on Bob. "Flashy style, you know; all swank and no game. But if we have to play five against eleven, they may pull it off, and they'll have the laugh of us. Wharton's quite ready to take them on, five against eleven; but I can't help thinking that it's biting off more than we can chew."

"Long odds, anyhow," said Blake.

"Bai Jove, wathah!"

"So we made up a list of all the Greyfriars chaps who live in these parts," he said, "and I've been riding like thunder to-day, calling on two of them, while Wharton's been telegraphing. But there's been simply no luck. Three chaps that he telegraphed to can't come over, and the two I've called on are away on their holidays—and there you are!"

"Hard cheese!" said Tom.

"Hard as nails!" said Bob. "We may pick up a lad or two in the village, but I'm afraid they can't be much good. We're landed in a match that the other side ought to pull off as easy as winking; and they're a swanky lot of bouncers who will crowd over us. Rotten, isn't it? We ought really to rag Wharton for landing us; but the bouncer was bragging cricket, and Harry was waxy, and so it came about. I wish—"

Bob Cherry broke off suddenly.

"My only hat!" he ejaculated.

A sudden idea seemed to have shot into Bob Cherry's brain. He almost gasped.

"You fellows!" he stuttered.

"Us!" said Tom Merry.

Bob caught him by the arm excitedly.

"Have you got to travel on before-to-morrow?"

"No, not specially."

"Care for a game of cricket?"

"Yes, rather!"

"You bet!" said Blake.

Bob Cherry's eyes danced.

"Oh, what luck!" he exclaimed. "Why, there's seven of you and five of us—that makes up eleven with one over. If six of you fellows will play—"

"If!" grinned Blake. "Seven, if you like!"
 "Hurrah! That sees us through!" exclaimed Bob, in great delight. "Why, we'll walk over Ashpen Hall. I know you fellows play—you've even beaten Greyfriars occasionally—"
 "More than occasionally," grinned Lowther. "I think honours are about even between us."

"With a full eleven, we'll make Ashpen Hall hide its diminished head, and sing small!" chuckled Bob. "Oh, what gorgeous luck! And you'll really chip in and play with us to-morrow?"

"Certainly, if you want us."

"Jolly glad to."

"I say, do you mind hurrying on a bit?" said Bob Cherry. "I want to let the chaps know; they'll jump for joy when they see my merry recruits. This is a special good egg, and no mistake!"

"Gee-up, Solomon!"

The party accelerated their pace through the village street, and came out on the common, where the Greyfriars caravan was camped. The caravanners were at home now—four juniors were to be seen—Harry Wharton, Frank Nugent, Johnny Bull, and Hurree Janset Ram Singh. They all turned and looked at the party with the donkey as the latter came up. Bob Cherry rushed on in advance.

"All serene!" he roared. "Here's the merry recruits!"

Bob Cherry waved his hand towards the St. Jim's party.

"Here you are, Wharton—here's your men! Seven to choose from—all good eggs. Now we shan't be long!"

"Good man!" exclaimed Wharton. "What splendid luck!"

And there were hearty greetings exchanged between the caravanners and the St. Jim's walking-party.

CHAPTER 6.

Algernon de Jones Looks In!

"A NOTHER cup of tea?"

"Thanks!"

"Shove the cake over, Johnny!"

"Here you are!"

"What a wippin' cake!"

The sun was sinking in the west, but it was still very warm. On Ashpen Common there was a cheery tea-party. Solomon, the donkey, was hobbled near the caravan horse; Towser lay half-asleep between the lowered shafts of the caravan. A kettle sang on a spirit-stove; and the Greyfriars and St. Jim's juniors enjoyed a bountiful repast of boiled eggs and watercress, and lettuce and radishes, and jam and cake and other good things. Harry Wharton & Co. had killed the fatted calf, metaphorically speaking, for their unexpected guests. There was a cheery buzz of talk among the juniors as they disposed of tea under the setting sun. The talk ran chiefly on cricket.

Harry Wharton was quite frank on the subject, and obviously delighted with the recruits Bob Cherry had obtained for him.

"We were in a bit of a scrape, really," he told Tom Merry. "We got jawing with the Ashpen man, and he was bragging of his cricket, and I was a bit hasty in taking him on for a match. I don't like the fellow, and he put my back up, and I thought it would be a jolly good idea to give him some real Greyfriars cricket and open his eyes. He's got a team up among his guests at the Hall, and is looking around for somebody to conquer, you know. He had the cheek to turn up his silly nose at the idea of playing a schoolboy team."

"Swanky ass!" commented Bob Cherry.

"But he took us on, and it's fixed up," continued Wharton. "We're playing to-morrow on the cricket pitch in the grounds up at the Hall. They're an older team than we are—average age twenty, I should say—"

"Phew!" murmured Tom Merry.

"You think it was a cheek of us to take them on?" asked Wharton.

"Well, that depends on what sort of players they are," said Tom Merry cautiously.

"Yaas, a lot depends on that," said Arthur Augustus sagely. "If they're any good at cricket, they ought to walk all ovah a team average age fifteen. But it really depends."

"They're pretty feeble," said Wharton. "Swank is chiefly their mark. We've won a match at the Hall yesterday, and they put up a feeble show enough. But, of course, their being so much older makes a big difference. If we'd had to play them with men short, they would have licked us, I suppose—bad as they are at cricket. And that wouldn't have taken them down the peg we wanted."

"I suppose not," said Tom Merry, smiling.

"But with a full eleven, I'm certain of beating them,"

said Wharton confidently. "I believe we shall just wallop them, and leave them without a leg to stand on. The captain is coming across this evening to make the final arrangements. I expected him to tea—at least, I was going to ask him to tea, but he hasn't dropped in yet. You'll see him when he comes, and you can judge the rest by him; they're much of a munched."

"It's a one-day match of course," continued Wharton, "and the stumps will be pitched pretty early. We've got our cricket outfit with us, and we can get the things for you fellows in Ashpen—we'd already arranged about that, in case we succeeded in bagging recruits. I don't know whether you can hit boundaries without your favourite willow, Merry—"

"I'll try!" said Tom, laughing.

"I wish we had Fatty Wynn or Talbot with us, to take their wickets," said Blake, "but we'll give a good account of ourselves, anyhow. Even Gussy can play cricket, after a fashion."

"Weally, Blake—"

"You'll only want six of us," remarked Tom Merry. "You'll have to pick your men, Wharton."

Harry Wharton shook his head, with a smile. He did not mean to take on the rather thankless task of selecting six men out of the St. Jim's seven.

"I'll leave that to you, Merry," he said. "I want you, of course, and Blake, but, for the others, I'd rather you picked them out."

"Right-ho!" said Tom.

"And we shan't be playing Bunter after all!" grinned Nugent.

"Ha, ha! I don't think we shall miss Bunter."

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! Here comes the Ashpen skipper!" exclaimed Bob Cherry. "Here he is, as large as life, and one of his pals with him."

The juniors rose to their feet, and Tom Merry & Co. looked round, in some curiosity, to see the captain of the country-house crowd. Then they fairly jumped.

"De Jones!" ejaculated Tom.

"Smythe!" murmured Blake.

There was a snort from Herries. He retired to the caravan, and sat down on the step. He did not intend to bandy polite words with the two young dandies whom the St. Jim's party had met in the woods that morning. Herries had not forgotten or forgiven the attempt to shoot his precious bulldog.

De Jones and Smythe came across the common with a lounging and rather lackadaisical air. They were dressed in light frocks, now, of a very fashionable cut, and wore expensive Panama hats, and expensive jewellery. There was a glimmer of gold and a glitter of precious stones about them as they walked from watch-chains and links and studs. It was evident that the two nutty young men had plenty of money, and expended a good deal of it in the adornment of their persons.

Tom Merry & Co. exchanged quick looks. They had not expected to meet Algernon de Jones again; but here he was, turning up like a bad penny. They realised now that the garish, red-brick mansion they had passed that morning was Ashpen Hall, and that De Jones was the skipper of the country-house team they had engaged to meet as recruits for Harry Wharton's eleven. The position was rather awkward, and required tact.

"You know these fellows?" asked Wharton, rather surprised by the peculiar looks of the St. Jim's crowd.

"Ye-e-es," stammered Tom.

"Yaas, wathah!" murmured Arthur Augustus.

"We—we met them this morning," said Blake. "We had rather a row, I'm afraid."

"Just a bit of an argument," said Digby. "Smythe's got a trace of it on his chin now."

"Oh, a scrap!" said Wharton, rather taken aback.

"Yes, a little one," said Tom. "Herries knocked Smythe down for trying to shoot his dog. I'm afraid we were trespassing in De Jones' woods. Towser had got loose, you know, and we went after him. Perhaps we'd better retire from the scene, in the circus."

"Stay where you are!" answered Wharton. "It needn't make any difference. You're in my eleven now, and it doesn't matter whether you're on bad terms with the Jones bird. It's nothing to do with the cricket."

De Jones and Smythe sauntered up, and nodded carelessly to Wharton. The manner of the nutty young man was insufferably superior; and Tom Merry understood quite well Wharton's strong desire to take them down a peg or two. The two nuts did not seem to observe the St. Jim's party at first, but De Jones gave a slight start as his eyes fell on them, and he muttered something to his companion. Smythe put up a gold-rimmed eyeglass, and glanced at the juniors, and shrugged his narrow shoulders. That was all the attention the nuts deigned to bestow on the heroes of St. Jim's. They very carefully avoided looking at them again, devoting all their attention to Harry Wharton.

"Just dropped in to tell you how we stand, Wharton," drawled Algernon de Jones. "Will it suit you for stumps to be pitched at eleven to-morrow?"

"Earlier if you like," answered Wharton.

De Jones shook his head.

"Couldn't very well make it earlier, dear boy. You see, I don't turn out till about ten."

"Make it eleven, then," said Wharton.

"Right! Double innings, I suppose?"

"I thought so," said Wharton.

"That will mean two innings for you and one for us," yawned Algernon.

Wharton smiled grimly.

"Perhaps!" he said. "It might possibly mean only one innings for us and two for you."

"I feel a bit of a dashed fool playin' a schoolboy gang at all," said De Jones. "The other fellows have been raggin' me about it. But I made the arrangement, and I'm stickin' to it! After all, it will be a bit of easy practice for us, an' I told the other fellows so; didn't I, Smythe?"

"You did, Algy," answered Smythe.

"I don't know what you other fellows will be doin' for lunch," remarked De Jones, gazing at the horizon. That remark apparently was meant to convey that he did not intend to provide lunch for the visiting eleven.

"That's all right," said Wharton quietly. "We shall get our lunch in our caravan. We'll bring it along near the ground."

"Oh, don't put it on our grounds, please!" said De Jones.

"We won't!" assented Wharton, still quietly.

"Fellow must draw a line somewhere," explained De Jones. "I draw it at caravans and things."

"Bai Jove!" murmured Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. He was almost overcome by the polished manners of Algernon de Jones. Mr. de Jones was the most thorough and finished specimen of the "bouncer" that Arthur Augustus had ever happened upon.

"My dear chap," said Bob Cherry, with great gravity, "you can rely upon us. We won't allow so vulgar a thing as a caravan to come between the wind and your nobility."

There was a faint chuckle from somewhere. Mr. de Jones gazed at Bob Cherry, and nodded rather vacantly.

"Yes, exactly," he assented. "Keep the thing out of sight, you know. I think that's about all, you kids. I'll look for you about eleven in the mornin'."

"Right-ho!" said Wharton.

And Mr. de Jones and his friend Smythe wheeled round and walked off, with a glimmer and a glitter, and an air of being bored with the universe generally.

CHAPTER 7.

Bunter is Not Pleased!

TOM MERRY drew a deep breath when the nutty pair were gone. Harry Wharton looked at him, and smiled.

"Much of a muchness, from what we've seen. They look as if they can play cricket—I don't think!" grunted Jack Blake.

"It will do them good to give them a thumping good wallop at cricket," said Tom. "It may take just a little of the gas out of them."

"That's my idea," said Wharton. "The game is to play hard and fast from the start, and not give them a look-in if we can help it. We'll keep them hard on the go all the time. I hope we shall be able to lick them with an innings to spare. That would bring the bragging bouncers down off their perch a little, I think. I wish we were going to meet them at football instead of cricket. We'd jolly well give them a rousing time."

"We'd turn their dashed hair grey!" said Bob Cherry regretfully. "Still, we can give them some exercise at cricket."

Washing-up was the next item on the programme for the caravanners, and the St. Jim's party drew together to consult as to which member of the party was to stand out of the cricket. But that question was quickly and unexpectedly settled.

"You needn't worry over that," said Herries. "Leave me out."

"Bai Jove! That is vewy nice of you, Hewies, vewy self-sacrificin', and all that!" said Arthur Augustus.

"I wouldn't play cricket with those cads for anything!" Herries growled. "I wanted to handle them when they were here. I'd have done it, only I didn't want a row with the Greyfriars chaps about. But I'm not going to their dashed red-brick mansion, and I'm not going to play cricket with them. That would go to bump Jones on the boko next time I see him. So you can count me out."

Tom Merry laughed.

"Well, that settles the point," he said. "You can look after Solomon and Towser, Herries."

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"Towser doesn't need looking after," retorted Herries. "But I'll stay with the caravan."

Tom Merry had expected the "standing out" of one member of the party to prove a knotty point, for, of course, all the party were keen on cricket. So Herries' decision came as a relief. And all the party agreed that the farther Herries was from Algernon de Jones, the better. A "bump" on the "boko" would certainly have spoiled the harmony of the proceedings, though Algernon doubtless deserved one.

The St. Jim's walkers pitched their tent that night within a stone's throw of the Greyfriars caravan, and the two parties had a cheery supper together before they turned in. Billy Bunter joined the supper-party, with a rather uneasy eye on Bob Cherry. But the good-natured Bob had already forgotten his resolve to kick Bunter.

Bunter heard of the new arrangement with regard to the cricket with almost breathless indignation.

"Six St. Jim's chaps and you five!" he exclaimed. "That makes eleven! Wharton! We do come in!"

"You don't come in at all, my fat tulip!" he answered.

"You're leaving me out of the eleven!" roared Bunter.

"My dear old porpoise, you'll be more useful in the caravan," said Frank Nugent. "You can scrub it out from end to end while we're playing cricket."

"Hear, hear!" chortled the caravanners.

Billy Bunter gave his comrades a glare that almost cracked his spectacles.

"Well, of all the ungrateful rotters!" he exclaimed. "Treating a fellow like this, after urging him to come with you, fairly begging of him to cancel his other engagements—"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared the caravanners.

"Lord Mauleverer wanted me at his place," snorted Bunter.

"He's giving a cricket week, and he begged me to come, with tears in his eyes. I had to refuse, as you fellows had practically tied me down. I've a jolly good mind to cut the party, and push off to Mauleverer's place to-morrow morning," said Bunter wrathfully.

"Do!" chuckled Bob Cherry.

"Jolly good idea!" exclaimed Wharton heartily. "A bit rough on Mauly, perhaps, but otherwise a really good idea."

"Why not start this evening?" suggested Johnny Bull.

"We'll all walk with you to the station, Bunter, and give you a send-off."

Bunter blinked at his comrades. Then he gave a feeble, fat grin.

"He, he, he! You fellows shouldn't make these little jokes before visitors, you know! Pass the cake, Merry, will you, old chap?"

After supper the juniors turned in, in their respective quarters, and slept soundly through the summer night. They were up early and bright in the morning, making their preparations for the visit to Ashpen Hall. In good time the caravan and Solomon were seen in motion, and the party started for the Hall. Mindful of Algernon de Jones' commands, they did not enter the De Jones' territory; the aristocratic eyes of Algernon were not to be offended with the sight of so vulgar a thing as a caravan. The camp was pitched by the roadside, a short distance from the Hall; and Herries was left in charge of it, with Billy Bunter, while Tom Merry & Co. accompanied the Famous Five of Greyfriars to the cricket-ground.

CHAPTER 8.

First on the Field.

"GOOD-MORNIN'!"

Mr. Smythe spoke very languidly, as if the effort of speaking was almost too much for him. He was strolling aimlessly on the drive when the schoolboy cricketers came along.

"Good-morning!" said Harry Wharton. "We're in good time, I think."

Mr. Smythe consulted an expensive gold watch.

"Awful good time!" he answered. "It's a quarter to eleven. I haven't had brekker yet."

"Is De Jones about?" asked Bob Cherry.

"I hardly think he's up."

The cricketers looked at one another. They had arrived in good time, with cricket-bags complete; and it was rather a facer to discover that the rival captain was not out of bed yet—though the game due to begin in a quarter of an hour.

Mr. Smythe smiled at their expressions.

"I suppose you don't mind waitin' a bit," he suggested.

"I fancy very few of the fellows have had their brekker. We're not early birds here."

"It appears not," said Wharton.

"Kept it up a bit late last night," explained Mr. Smythe. "The merry jazz and the flou'ing bowl, you know. Old Hunks is away—Algernon's father, you know," said Mr. Smythe confidentially. "He's away in Birmingham—lookin' after the dashed old business, I dare say—and Algy is runnin' the show. And I will say this for Algy—when he runs a show he knows how to make the fur fly." And Mr. Smythe nodded with evident approval of Algy.

"When are we likely to play?" asked Nugent.

Mr. Smythe considered.

"Well, I'll wander in and tell Algy you've come," he said. "I'll wake up the old bird, just to oblige you. He'll curse me black and blue—he wakes up bad after a champagne night. But I'll risk it. You fellows can wander round and see the sights, or you can stack yourselves up at the pavilion yonder. Do any dashed old thing you like, you know," added Mr. Smythe amiably. And he lounged off into the house.

"Well, my hat!" said Tom Merry.

Wharton compressed his lips.

"Let's get on the ground, anyhow," he said.

The juniors had the cricket-ground to themselves, save for a man who was rolling the pitch. They were glad to see that the pitch was a good one and in good condition. And the day was going to be beautiful.

Eleven o'clock struck from somewhere, but not a soul appeared on the ground.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! Here's the merry Jones-bird!" ejaculated Bob Cherry.

Algernon de Jones came lounging down at last, at half-past eleven. He looked rather sickly—possibly the result of the "champagne night" his friend Smythe had referred to. He gave Wharton a languid good-morning, taking no notice of the St. Jim's fellows.

"Sorry to keep you waitin'!" he yawned.

"Oh, don't mind!" said Johnny Bull sarcastically.

"We'll be ready soon. I've told the fellows to get ready. We're letting in some people to see the game—villagers, and all that, and the servants, you know," said Algernon. "You fellows don't mind a little crowd seewin' you licked, what?"

"We don't mind their seeing the game."

"We'll try to put you out of your misery quite early," said De Jones. "Don't want to fag about all day."

"Two chaps here will umpire, if you like. Make any arrangement you please, old beans."

"Anything you like," said Wharton. "What we really want is to get going."

"I'll tell the fellows to get a move on."

Algernon de Jones drifted away to the house again.

"Nice boy!" murmured Blake.

Harry Wharton looked at the St. Jim's fellows rather apologetically.

"I don't know that I ought to have landed you chaps in this," he said. "It isn't much catch for you, waiting about for those cads. I was an ass to have anything to do with them."

"Oh, it's all right!" said Tom Merry, laughing. "We'll wake 'em up, anyway, when we get to cricket!"

"Yes, we'll do that!" growled Wharton.

It was a quarter of an hour later that Algernon de Jones drifted on to the ground again, with Smythe and two or three other nutty-looking youths. One by one the rest of the house party dropped in. Meanwhile, some spectators were gathering—servants from the Hall and folk from the vicinity. It was not a large crowd—about twenty all told. But it seemed that Algernon liked an audience of some sort to witness his prowess with bat and ball.

The cricketers were glad to see stumps pitched at last. It was past twelve o'clock when Algernon & Co. were ready to play, and then they did not look very keen. Late hours and champagne did not contribute to liveliness of spirits in the morning; and the Hall party, too, seemed rather to pride themselves on looking upon cricket as a bore. But they were ready at last, all arrangements were made, and the two captains tossed for the innings. Algernon de Jones won the toss and elected to bat.

"Turn your chickens into the run, old bean!" he said by which he apparently meant that the schoolboy cricketers were to field.

Harry Wharton gave the ball to Hurree Jamsat Ram Singh.

"Give 'em jip!" he said; and the nabob nodded, and announced that the jipfulness would be terrific.

Algernon de Jones came on to open the innings, with Mr. Smythe at the other end.

Algy stood at the wicket in a commanding attitude, with the willow in his grasp, and faced Hurree Singh's bowling with calm confidence.

The other batsmen looked on with languid interest from the pavilion. The fieldsmen grinned. They knew Hurree Singh's quality as a bowler; and they could guess Algy's as a batsman. They rather thought there was a surprise in store for Algernon.

There was! The ball came down like a bullet, and Algernon gave one blink and swung his bat around. The ball whipped off the middle stump.

De Jones blinked at the wicket.

"Good heavens!" he ejaculated.

"How's that?" sang out Tom Merry.

De Jones gave another blink, and seemed satisfied that it was "out." He walked away to the pavilion with a more serious face. Evidently he had received the surprise of his nutty life.

CHAPTER 9.

Something Like Cricket!

"WHAT a giddy procession!" grinned Monty Lowther. "Yaas, wathah!" chuckled Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

And the whole field grinned.

A "procession" it was; there was no other word for it. The batting powers of the Ashpen Hall crowd, to judge by their talk and their manner, were wonderful. To judge by their play, their powers were of the most strictly limited kind.

Hurree Jamsat Ram Singh disposed of three wickets in the first over. In the second, Jack Blake disposed of two for two runs.

In the third, Tom Merry and Monty Lowther each caught out a man, and three runs were taken.

Seven down for five runs was the glorious total, so far.

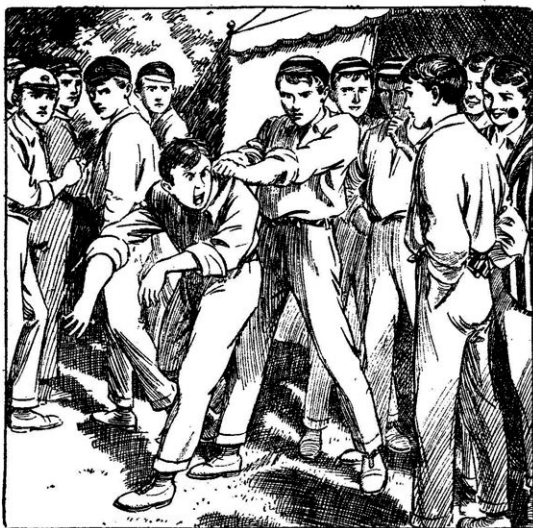
The tramp cricketers wanted to be polite. But they could not help smiling. The melancholy Jacques himself would have smiled if he had been there.

Algernon & Co. did not smile.

They looked astonished at first, then irritated, and then decidedly bad-tempered.

Algernon's voice, at the pavilion, was heard admonishing his merry men, and slanging them when they came bootless home. But, really, it was not Algernon's business to slang them, considering his own duck's egg.

Algernon had distressfully wondered whether the innings would make him late for lunch when it started. He was soon relieved on that point.



Algernon de Jones wriggled in Bob Cherry's powerful grasp. Bob was wrathful. He shook the wriggling Algy like a rat. "You rascally fraud!" roared the indignant Bob. "You want to crawl out before you're quite licked, do you?" "Yaroh!" roared Algy. (See page 12.)

At the present rate of progress, the innings was likely to be over in time for a quite early lunch.

"For goodness' sake buck up!" Algernon implored, as a new man went on. "The people are simply grinning at us!"

The "people" grinned again at the performance of that batsman. He took two runs, and then he was stumped.

"Eight down for seven!" murmured Tom Merry. "They'll get nearly a run a wicket if they put their best into it."

De Jones & Co. did rather better than that, however. They bagged a total of fifteen runs by the time the last wicket was down. The schoolboy cricketers came off the field. Algernon de Jones gave them a morose look. There was a slight diminution of his swank.

"When do we bat?" asked Wharton politely.

"Oh, after lunch," said Algernon. "Say, three."

"Right-ho!"

"If we don't bat till three, though," remarked Bob Cherry, "that doesn't leave much time for another innings each. We don't want this giddy match to be left unfinished."

"Wathah not!" said Arthur Augustus.

De Jones shrugged his shoulders.

"We'll be on the ground at three," he said.

"Three will do," said Harry Wharton quietly.

After lunch the tramp cricketers rested till it was time to turn up on the ground again. They were well in time. But three o'clock chimed out without Algernon & Co. putting in an appearance.

Evidently the lofty Algernon was keeping them waiting on purpose; but the schoolboys bore his insolence patiently. It was half-past three when the nutty eleven came lounging down to the ground.

"You fellows been waitin'?" he asked.

"Half an hour," said Wharton.

"So sorry!" smiled Algernon.

Algernon & Co. went into the field. Tom Merry noticed that the spectators were all gone now. Apparently De Jones did not want any witnesses to that match after his experience of the first innings. He felt, perhaps, that the result was not likely to contribute to his glory.

Harry Wharton opened the innings, with Tom Merry at the other end. The Greiffraters junior received the bowling, and knocked it right and left. He knocked up four for the first ball, and for the second he had scored two, when his wicket was knocked over after his bat was well on the crease. He smiled.

"Out!"

Wharton jumped.

The umpire looked at him coolly.

"Out!" he repeated. "Next man in!"

Harry Wharton controlled his feelings with a great effort. The umpire was a pal of Algernon's, and evidently they had been putting their heads together over lunch. The juniors had expected feeble play, but they had not thought of foul play, which was what they were going to get now.

Wharton joined the batsmen at the pavilion.

"That wasn't out!" exclaimed Bob Cherry excitedly.

"Why, I saw—"

"We've let ourselves in for this," said Wharton ruefully.

"Get in, Bob, and don't give the cads the ghost of a chance to play foul."

Bob Cherry looked very grim as he went in. He knocked up a dozen runs before the umpire had a chance at him. Then he was given "out," and with feelings in his breast like a volcano on the verge of eruption, Bob carried out his bat.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy played Tom Merry at the wickets. The two St. Jim's juniors played with great care, never giving the wicket a chance. The runs piled up more slowly in consequence, but they piled up, and the total stood at thirty-five, when Algernon de Jones caught Tom Merry out. It was an easy catch, but a wonderful one for Algernon. Jack Blake came on in Tom Merry's place.

Blake added five to the score, and then Harry Wharton decided to declare the innings at an end. He had still his second innings to fall back on in case of necessity, but it was not likely to be needed. Algernon & Co. hadn't a chance of knocking up the required twenty-six runs to win in their second innings.

With a scowl of forty Wharton felt safe in declaring. Algernon de Jones received his communication with a thoughtful brow.

He was considering. Consideration showed him that he was booked most certainly for defeat, and that the visitors would have a whole innings to spare. It was a painful knowledge for Algernon, who had intended to walk all over the schoolboys in the most lofty way, and dismiss them well-licked. Algernon looked very unpleasant.

"Haven't I seen you before somewhere?" he asked suddenly, addressing Tom Merry.

Tom gave a start at the sudden question.

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"Yes," he answered. "I suppose you remember that we met yesterday in the wood?"

"Yes, I thought I'd seen you somewhere," he said deliberately. "You're one of that poaching gang—"

"What the thump do you mean?" exclaimed Tom. "You knew me when you saw me last evening with these chaps?"

De Jones shook his head.

"Never, noticed you, or I shouldn't have consented to play you," he said coolly. "Now I recognise you, I'm afraid I must decline to continue. I'm sorry, Wharton, but that's final. The match will be discontinued."

And Algernon de Jones turned loftily and walked away.

CHAPTER 10.

An Exulting Finish!

THE schoolboy cricketers simply stared for some moments. Then it dawned upon them that the superb Algernon was taking this method of cutting short the match in order to avert a certain defeat. It was the estimable De Jones' way of "crawling out."

Algernon & Co. crowded away, grinning to one another. De Jones felt that he had scored at the finish—not as a cricketer, certainly, but he was satisfied with having scored anyhow.

But, if Algernon had only known it, the finish was not yet. As he sauntered away, Bob Cherry left his comrades, and made a sudden rush at him. Bob's heavy grasp fell upon Algernon's collar behind, and spun him round.

There was a loud yell from the heir of Ashpen Hall.

"Yaroooh! Leggo!"

"Let him go!" shouted Smythe.

Smythe rushed to the rescue, and found Jack Blake in the way. Blake gave him a playful tap on the nose.

"Have some more?" he asked.

"Yow-ow-ow!"

Smythe evidently did not want any more. He backed away with a jump.

Algernon de Jones wriggled spasmodically in Bob Cherry's powerful grasp. Bob was wrathful. He shook the wriggling Algernon as if he had been a terrier and Algernon a rat.

"You rascally fraud!" roared the indignant Bob. "You want to crawl out before you're quite licked, do you?"

"Yaroooh!"

"You apology for a worm—"

"Yaroooh! Help! Lend me a hand, you chaps!" yelled the hapless Algernon.

But the nutty cricketers hesitated. The schoolboys had gathered round Bob Cherry and his victim, and they looked too dangerous to be rushed. There was no rescue for Algernon.

"Yow-ow! Help! Send the grooms—send the footmen! Help! Yooop!" shrieked Algernon, as Bob twisted him over and rubbed his features in the grass.

"What a game!" murmured Monty Lowther.

"You slinking worm!" said Bob Cherry, still rubbing Algernon's nose industrially in the grass. "You swanking chump! You apology for a rabbit! Swank and foul play, and then crawling out! Yah!"

"Yooop! Help!"

"Bring one of the stumps here, you chaps! He's going to have a dozen on his bags!" said Bob.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Yass, wathah! That is a vey good ideah!"

Monty Lowther rushed for a stump. Bob pinned the hapless De Jones' face downwards in the grass, and Lowther wielded the stump with grace and precision.

Whack, whack, whack, whack!

"Yow-ow-ow-woooooop!"

Whack, whack, whack!

"That will do," exclaimed Tom Merry, laughing. "Chuck it, Monty! Let's get out of this!"

And, leaving Algernon de Jones wriggling in the grass, uttering sounds of woe, the tramp cricketers marched off, chuckling.

Tom Merry & Co did not see anything more of the superb De Jones. The caravanners and the walking-party remained camped together till the next morning, within a stone's throw of the De Jones' walls; but while they remained Algernon did not venture beyond those walls. Herries would have been pleased to see him, but he did not come forth.

The next morning the juniors started on their way, and the St. Jim's party walked with the caravan till their ways parted. Then seven schoolboys and Solomon went on their leisurely way, over hill and dale, by the lanes and streams and woods of merry England, with many an adventure to befall them before they gathered, at the end of the holidays, within the ancient walls of St. Jim's.

THE END.

(Look out for next week's special number of the THE GEM LIBRARY. There will be a grand long story of Ernest Levison and the chums of St. Jim's. Order your copy EARLY.)



A Magnificent Story of Life at Millford College. By IVOR HAYES.

NEW READERS START HERE.

TOM MACE, whose father is a professional crackman, wins a scholarship for Millford College. His father is rather pleased, for Mr. BILL MACE has certain unlawful reasons for wanting to see the inside of the school. Mrs. Mace darns up her son's clothes, and Tom sets off for school. In the train he overhears a conversation between a man in a sea-green suit and a muffled ruffian. The ruffian is addressed as SPIKEY MEADOWS, and there is some suspicious talk that sets the lad thinking. At last he arrives at the school, only to be jeered at by the other juniors. He sees there a lad, SIMON LUNDY, son of the man who is the squire of that part of the country in which Tom lives. Tom tries to be friendly, but Simon cuts him dead. Just as Lundy & Co. are fooling with Tom's things, a new master appears on the scene. He is Mr. GORDON GALE—the man in the sea-green suit, whom Tom had seen in the train. Tom sees the headmaster, who is kind to him, and sees also Mr. MULLINS, the master of the Fourth Form. He finds Study B—Lundy and Bradshaw's study—to which he has been allotted, but he is roughly handled. BOB PEEL finds him, is friendly, and stands him a feed at the tuckshop. Bradshaw & Co. advance upon the tuckshop. A battle royal ensues, and Tom, after being pelted with eggs, is thrown out. He knocks into a man as he falls into the lane. The others, frightened, run away. This man is SPIKEY MEADOWS. He talks to Tom, and tries to persuade the lad to leave a window open, so that he can enter the school at night, explaining the consequences if he fails to make up his mind within a certain time. Tom returns to the school. Being late, he is questioned by his Form-master, Mr. Mullins, who is startled when he mentions the name of Meadows. The mysterious Mr. Mullins, who evidently knows something of Meadows, dismisses Tom with a slight punishment. Tom reaches the dormitory, to find that a tin box containing clothes has arrived for him, the box having been tampered with and the contents, with various inscriptions first made upon them, now strewn about the floor. Tom's anger is aroused, and with Peel's assistance, he sails into the boys, but the numbers soon tell upon them.

(Now read on.)

Thrown Out!

GARNET and half a dozen others, dazed by the suddenness of the attack, joined in the fray, while that worthy warrior Luke Bradshaw stood on a bed in the rearground and shouted encouragement.

Tom and his friends fought fiercely, lashing with their fists, seeing that every blow had its billet. But numbers told. Lundy, enraged by pain and humiliation, kicked out viciously at Tom's shin.

Tom Mace gave a shrill shout of pain and dropped his arms. Almost immediately Garnet's right fist caught him heavily under the ear. Bob Peel turned to see what had happened, and he, too, was felled.

"Jump on 'em!" snarled Lundy. "I'll—"

He broke off, for footsteps had sounded on the stairs.

"Quick!" he gasped. "Let them up! Hide these things!"

The dormitory became a wild scene of frantic haste—haste to cover signs of conflict. The collars and suits were packed into the box and hidden. And not a second too soon. A head was popped in at the door, and a lazy voice asked:

"What's all this row about, you kids?"

"Nothin', Morley!" answered Lundy.

The prefect entered the dormitory and looked round.

Gerald Morley was of lazy disposition, and frequently he regarded giving impositions as far too much trouble. But when he did choose to give them they were laid on heavily.

"Right—ho!" he said lazily. He had been reading in his study, and had no time to waste on the juniors. "I'll be back in ten minutes," he said, "If there's not quiet and order then you'd better look out!"

He closed the door, and Lundy hissed out:

"Get undressed, sharp! We'll deal with that cad Mace in a minute!"

He commenced to undress, and the others followed his example. Tom stood for a moment looking round, not knowing quite what to do, nor where his bed was.

"There you are," said Peel. "That's the vacant bed, old man, so it'll be yours." He indicated a bed that stood between Garnet's and Lundy's.

Tom drew a breath. No more unfortunate position could possibly have been chosen; but he resigned himself to his fate, sat down on the bed, and commenced to take off his boots.

He dragged out his new box unmolested. As he gazed on the clothes he sighed; but there was no time then to rearrange things. He drew forth a new pair of flannel pyjamas and slipped them on.

Most of the fellows were in bed. Tom was the last. With great misgivings, he slipped between the sheets and lay quite still.

"All asleep?"

Morley's voice sounded hollow in the dormitory. As no one replied, he muttered to himself and closed the door quietly.

No sooner had his footsteps died away than Lundy, from the bed next to Tom's, sprang out and darted across to the electric light switch. The dormitory was flooded with light.

"Now, you boulder," snarled Lundy, "we don't want to sleep with you!"

"Oh, rather!" said Bradshaw. "Contaminatin'—what?"

"You shut up!" grunted Peel.

He sprang up in bed, and would have rushed out to Tom's assistance, but several of the bolder nuts ran forward and held him, struggling, in a lying position.

"Now," grinned Lundy, "Thomas Mace, my pauper, we've told you to get out! We'd put you out of the window, but, like the chump you are, you'd break your neck. But we're not goin' to have you sleepin' in our dormitory! Are we?"

"No!"

It was a regular chorus. Tom looked round upon the fellows as they sat up in their beds. But there were no softened looks.

"Mr. Mullins said I was to sleep here," answered Tom.

"Hang Mullins!" snapped Lundy. "I say you're to get out! I'll give you till I count three. You can get out of bed, and take some of those bedclothes with you."

Tom Mace sat still. His face was white, and, though outwardly composed, his heart was beating fast.

"You refuse?" snarled Lundy. "All right! Chuck him out!"

There was a rush to obey the order, and in an instant Tom was surrounded and grasped by hostile hands.

He struggled frantically, but he had no chance. He was hauled bodily from his bed and dragged, protesting, to the door, which Garnet had flung open.

"Get his bedclothes!" ordered Lundy.

But already some juniors had dragged the blankets, sheets, and pillows from Tom's bed.

"One, two, three—out!"

With a chortle of glee the cads of the Fourth hurled the unfortunate scholarship lad into the passage, where he rolled over and over on the cold floor.

"That's a reminder that we don't want you!" spoke out Lundy. "Here's a pillow for you!"

He hurled out the pillow, and it caught Tom full in the face, sending him back to the floor with a gasp.

Blankets, sheets, and a bolster followed in succession. Then the door was slammed.

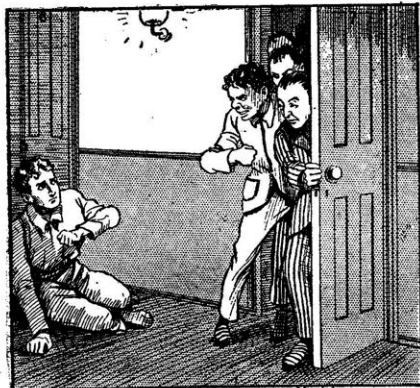
Sick at heart, he listened as the key was turned.

They had locked him out!

"What have I done?" he moaned. "Why should I suffer this? Aren't I as good as they? Oh, you cads! You snobs! Why can't you live and let live? What have you got against me that I should suffer so?"

"But I don't care! Whatever comes, I shall win through!"

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"One—two—three—out!" With a chortle of glee the cads of the Fourth hurried the unfortunate scholarship lad into the passage. "That's a reminder that we don't want you," growled Lundy.

You can kick me, hurt me, bruise me; I sha'n't whine to you!" He buried his face in his hands and tried to cool his burning cheeks.

But what was the good? He sat there till his sneezes warned him that he would catch cold—till, weary at heart, he at last composed himself for his first night's sleep in the school.

With a blanket wrapped around him, and a pillow beneath his head, he sank to sleep at last, cold, tired, and miserable. But he still had courage. He was still as determined as ever that he would win through at whatever cost, whatever they brought against him.

The Chagrined Lundy.

CLANG, clang, clang! The ringing-bell boomed forth the next morning, and Tom Mace awoke with a yawn.

He stared round him in some amazement, wondering, at first, how he came to be sitting on the cold floor of the passage with only a blanket wrapped round him.

He sat up, and remembrance came to him. Of course, he had been thrown out of the dormitory, his own dormitory, by Simon Lundy and the other snobs of the Fourth Form at Millford College!

He sighed. Why were they all against him? Why wouldn't they give him a chance? It didn't seem fair!

Tom gave a weary sigh. He had hoped for so much—he had hoped that this was to be for him the dawn of a glorious future, a future in which he could forget his past and his home. Here he had hoped to forget his father—the man who had been against him all his life.

Tom's meditations were rudely interrupted by the opening of the dormitory door.

He turned round, and glanced up into the face of Simon Lundy. Lundy leered at him from the doorway.

"So you are awake at last?" he said. "Had a good night?"

Tom stared at him coldly, but made no reply. A hot retort was on his lips, but he knew that his best plan was to take the cad's taunting words "lying down," as it were.

"You'd better come in now, anyway!" sneered Lundy, seeing that the scholarship lad gave no reply.

But Tom made no movement. He could see that Lundy merely wanted him to move from the passage before a master came on the scene. Many a lad who had been badly treated as Tom had would have exposed the cad of the Fourth. But Tom Mace was of different make. Although he intended to come into the dormitory before he was seen by master or prefects, Tom determined to give the cad a thorough fright.

"Suppose I refuse?" he asked. "What then?" Simon Lundy scowled. Bradshaw, his fellow-blackguard, had appeared in the doorway, and was peering over his leader's shoulder.

"Make the awful rotter come in!" he said.

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Lundy scowled. That was just what he had been unsuccessfully trying to do. He saw that bullying would not serve his purpose. And, to tell the truth, Lundy was just a little frightened that, in throwing Tom from the dormitory, he had gone too far. So now he resorted to softer words.

"I—I—I say," he said feebly. "Play the game, you know. You might come in, Mace. It was only a little joke."

Bradshaw's dreamy mind did not work fast enough to allow it to understand the reason for his leader's sudden change of front; but, as usual, Bradshaw saw fit to mimic Lundy's sentiments.

"Oh, rather!" he murmured. "Do come in, 'know." Tom smiled grimly to himself. He could see that, every moment, the great Lundy was getting more and more nervy. Tom Mace was beginning to enjoy the situation.

Bob Peel's head appeared in the doorway. "That's right, Tommy, my lad!" he chuckled. "Make the rotters sit up!"

Tom smiled at his friend.

"I intend to," he said.

Lundy's face wore a heavy scowl, and Bradshaw was looking a little serious. By this time quite a crowd of fellows had gathered in the doorway, and were staring curiously at Tom's strange bed on the floor. Many of them, no doubt, regretted having thrown the scholarship lad from the dormitory.

"Silly-ass idea, anyway, chucking the rotter out!" growled Garnet.

"I suppose you had nothing to do with it?" retorted Lundy hotly. "That's what I like about all you chaps. You don't object to anything—I provide I take the risk. You were all in it as much as I, and don't forget it!"

Bob Peel gave a hearty laugh. "Oh, hark at the merry blades!" he chortled. "What a giddy change!" He broke off. "Look out, Lundy!" he cried. "Cave! Beware!"

At that sudden warning, Lundy gave a guilty start, and grabbed at some of the blankets that lay scattered on the floor.

The fellows who had been standing in the doorway stamped back into the dormitory.

"Oh, my hat, you blessed funks!"

Bob Peel was almost doubled up with laughter.

"You silly asses!" he roared. "No one's coming—that was my little joke."

Lundy's face blanched. "Joke!" stammered Bradshaw. "Oh, I say!"

Lundy scowled.

"You fool, Peel!" he snapped. "I suppose you think that's jolly funny?"

Bob Peel nodded cheerily, and Tom Mace grinned. "Yes," he answered, with a nod. "I must confess I do think it funny. Don't you, Tom?"

"Yes, of course," laughed the scholarship lad. "Frightfully funny!"

"Like a lot of rabbits running for their holes!" grinned Peel. "Oh, you awful funks!"

It is said that contempt will pierce the thickest skin. Certainly, the majority of the snobs went very red in the gibe. Only the "sloppy" Bradshaw remained unperturbed. But then it was possible, nay, probable, that the full meaning of that sally had not yet soaked into his dreamy brain.

Tom Mace rose to his feet and shivered slightly. It had been none too warm out in the passage. Indeed, had it not been summer, it was extremely probable that Tom would have caught a very severe chill. Lundy had at least to be thankful for that.

The scholarship lad, ever generous, deemed that the cads of the Fourth had had quite enough punishment, and he gathered together what remained of his unconventional bed, and carried it into the dormitory. He flung the clothes down on to the bedstead.

"There they are," he said quietly. "I'm not going to arrange them. If you want to cover up your tracks"—he shrugged his shoulders—"you're welcome to."

And he commenced to dress. In the dormitory there was a silence, an ominous silence, broken only by an occasional chuckle from the high-spirited Peel. To Peel, the whole incident had seemed most amusing.

But, apparently, from the scowl that blackened the august brow of Simon Lundy, that worthy, at least, was unable to find in that scene in the passage anything the least bit amusing. He felt that his prestige had been lowered; and, to tell the truth, it had. But it did not in any way tend to make Simon think more of Tom. If anything, he was more than ever embittered against the scholarship lad.

Tom, with rather worried eyes, was looking at his Eton clothes. They still bore the inscriptions that Garnet had placed upon them, and the darns were still prominent. But, fortunately, all the jackets had not been so maltreated. And the scholarship lad selected one that had been raised by the

industrious but destructive hands of Garent, and slipped it on.

"Topping!" said Peel admiringly. "By Jove, they're a good fit, Tom!"

The scholarship lad nodded.

"Yes," he replied. "I think they've made them rather well."

"Not bad for ready-mades!" sneered Garnet; and there was a snigger.

Tom did not reply; but Bob Peel grinned.

"Hallo! You're chippy now, Garn—eh? Got over the fit of the funks all right?"

Garnet scowled, and, after that, dressed in silence. Then Tom and Bob went downstairs together, leaving the others still dressing.

"Poor old Lundy!" laughed Bob Peel, shaking his head. "Always bites off more than he can chew! If you only get half a chance, Tom, challenge the rotter to a fight; that'll settle him for once and all. Take 'em all on, one at a time. There's not one of the rotters can really fight, you know."

"I—I don't want to fight," said Tom. "It isn't that I'm afraid, but I want to get through the school on my merits, not by fighting. Fighting, after all, is no argument!"

"Perhaps you're right, Tommy," said Bob Peel thoughtfully. "But I should like to see you wipe up the floor with old Lundy. It would just serve the silly rotter right. I know you can, 'cos I saw you use your fists in the tuck-shop."

"I don't mind what they say about me," answered Tom; "but"—his eyes took on a hard look—"but if the rotter ever says anything against my mother—"

Peel nodded.

"Good man!" he said. "I can't say I quite agree with you; but if you can stand it"—he shrugged his shoulders—"all the better. But old Lundy wants a hiding—regularly, too." He gets uppish and out-of-hand.

They were standing in the Hall, and Tom gazed round him curiously.

"What do we do first?" he asked.

"Brekker," said Peel; "then lessons." He made a grimace. "Latin first lesson, too! I—"

He broke off and turned round, for a voice had hailed the two—a master's voice.

Tom turned and stared in surprise as the new master—the man in the sea-green suit—came towards them.

"Mace," he said, "will you come to my study for a moment, please? I want to see you."

"Yes, sir," answered Tom. He gave his chum a puzzled look, and made off to follow the master, who had turned back.

"Oh dear!" groaned Peel. "More trouble, old man!"

Tom made a grimace.

His heart beat faster, for he half guessed why the master wanted to see him. He felt certain that it had to do with Spiky Meadows for had not the man in the sea-green suit turned back the night before when he saw that Tom was speaking to Meadows?

The scholarship lad hurried after the master. Perhaps he would learn more about Meadows and more about the master. Ever since that memorable journey in the train, when he had seen the man in the sea-green suit talking to Meadows, he had been suspicious of the master. For what reason should the master of a large school speak to such a well-known criminal as Spiky Meadows? And why had he turned away the night before?

Tom's mind was in a whirl. And he could not forget the startled look that had been on the face of his Form-master—Mr. Mullins—when he had mentioned Meadows' name.

There was a mystery. Of that Tom was assured. But what the mystery was he could not hope to fathom. Not yet, at any rate. But what would he learn from the master?

What Should He Do?

THE master closed the door, and wheeled about sharply as Tom entered the room.

"Mace," he said, "last night I saw you talking to a stranger. Who was he? I presume that you knew him."

Tom stood silent for a moment before replying.

"Yes, sir," he said, at length, eyeing the master's face closely. "I have never met him before, but—but he claimed acquaintance."

It was the truth. For previous to the meeting of last night, Tom Mace had known the crook only by repute. He had known that Meadows was a friend of his father's. He had seen him in the train, but never had he spoken to the man.

"Oh!" said the master. He gazed out of the window, and stroked his chin reflectively. "Oh! And had you never seen him before? I mean—"

But he had made a slip, a slip that he could not retrieve.

"Yes, sir," answered Tom promptly. "I saw him speaking with you in the train."

"Yes, yes, of course," answered Mr. Gale quickly. "But before then?"

"No, sir."

"Then on what grounds did he claim acquaintanceship?"

"He said he knew my father."

"Oh!"

Mr. Gale was puzzled. He had hoped to elicit further information from Tom. And Tom had hoped the same with regard to the master. But matters remained as before.

"Well, Mace," said the master, "I think it would be advisable for you not to see the man again. I—I have met the man somewhere before, and—and—well, I do not think he is the sort of man you should know. The Head would most strongly object to the acquaintanceship of a junior with such a man. And I am afraid he would not regard it as a good start for you at the school. Remember in future, Mace, to steer clear of such men."

"Yes, sir," answered Tom calmly. But Tom Mace was feeling far from calm. His suspicions had been aroused when he had seen the new master talking to Meadows in the train, for the very conversation, intimate, and, in Tom's eyes, shady, had been enough to arouse the suspicions of the most unobservant of boys. And Tom had seen too much of the lower walk of life to ignore appearances. Moreover, he had learned to sort the corn from the chaff, as it were. There was no doubt as to which category Spiky Meadows belonged. And now Tom Mace held no doubts regarding Mr. Gale.

He saw in a flash that the master wanted to keep him away from the crook. And why? True, it might be for Tom's own good. But perhaps not without other reasons. Tom was rather suspicious of these blatantly good motives from people who consorted with criminals. He suspected that Mr. Gale had good reasons for not wanting him to have too much to do with Spiky Meadows.

"And I want your promise, Mace," said the master, "that you will not speak to this man again."

He eyed the lad coolly.

"I presume that there is no friendship between you, since you only met him yesterday. And I cannot really conceive that you should want to speak to him again. In every way the man is an undesirable."

"I understand, sir," replied Tom, "perfectly."

In that one word—"perfectly"—there was a wealth of hidden meaning. But the master did not notice it.

"Very well, then," said the master, more kindly. "I want your promise, Mace, not to speak to him again."

But the scholarship lad did not give the promise at once, and Mr. Gale's lips tightened. His cold, clear grey eyes became colder and more clear. Through Tom's brain was running a whirl of thoughts. How could he give that promise? Meadows was expecting to see him, for Tom had fixed an appointment for four o'clock. He must give that decision, his final decision, that, whatever came, whatever threatened him, he would never fail in the trust

(Continued on page 18.)



The master placed his hands on Tom's shoulders, and looked into the lad's eyes. "Will you promise?" he asked. "Certainly sir," said Tom. "I promise willingly!"



JOHN SHARPE.

INTRODUCTION.

John Sharpe, the great analytical detective, is engaged by Chief Burnett, of the Secret Service, to track down the band of organised and dangerous criminals operating under the guidance of Iron Hand, a fearless, clever man of dominating personality. Marna Black, one of the band of crooks, is captured, and Burnett induces Anne Crawford, a woman agent of the Secret Service, to assume Marna's identity and get into the confidence of Iron Hand.

She is instructed to keep her real identity a secret even to Sharpe; but she often assists him and sends him information concerning the movements of the gang, and he is puzzled to know just where it comes from.

Iron Hand has a number of hiding-places in different parts of the country, which are referred to as "Nests," the most important of which is Eagle's Nest, situated on a deserted cliff.

The Raid.

THERE was a very busy scene in the cellar of the old curiosity shop, which the gang were using as their temporary headquarters. Iron Hand, Potsdam, and other members of

The INVISIBLE HAND

Vita-graph



IRON HAND.

the band were present. Suddenly they ceased their labours, and looked up in great alarm at the proprietor, who entered in an obvious state of agitation.

The man conveyed the startling news to the party that there was serious danger ahead, and one look at the man's white face reassured them on this point. Consternation was plainly written on the faces of the gang. They had not expected any interruption in their plans, although, of course, they guessed that it would not be long before their audacious robbery was discovered. But how could information of their hiding-places have leaked out?

There was no time for reflection just now.

Already they could hear the ominous banging at the doors and shutters of the building by representatives of the law.

Above, outside the shop, a large motor-car had pulled up, out of which jumped detective John Sharpe, the police-chief, and a number of policemen. It was this unpleasant news which the proprietor, himself a member of the gang, had conveyed to the men working downstairs in the cellar.

Without a moment's hesitation, some of the police set about battering their way into the premises, for at the first indication of alarm the owner had bolted and locked the door. Other policemen remained on guard at various places down the street, in case any of the gang should succeed in escaping from the shop.

As the proprietor reached the top of the stairs, after conveying his message to the leader below, Sharpe and a number of police succeeded in bursting open the front door, and entering the shop.

One man immediately seized the proprietor of the establishment, who

naturally loudly proclaimed his complete innocence of the whole affair.

While this little scene was taking place, Sharpe's eagle eye noticed the door to the cellar, and without hesitation he rushed in, and descended the stairs. The chief of police and all his men, with the exception of the one already engaged in looking after the proprietor, followed suit.

They were hot upon the trail of the notorious Iron Hand & Co. once more!

Sharpe reached the cellar first, and he was just in time to see a concealed door in the wall closing behind the last of the outlaws! He hastily glanced around the cellar, but it was now completely empty.

Once more the gang had succeeded in outwitting Sharpe.

But, fortunately, they had not been quick enough to get away with their valuable booty consisting of the boxes of notes and bonds which they had acquired as a result of their recent operations.

Sharpe was quick to discover the boxes, and he soon forced one of them open. He picked up a bundle of bonds, and was able to identify them as the missing ones. The detective handed the boxes over to the care of the police-chief.

"Take them away, and all your men also," Sharpe said to the official. "The man on guard at the door may remain. Iron Hand will probably come back here later on in search of his precious stolen property, so I will hide here and wait for him!"

The chief of police gave orders for the detective's instructions to be carried out. He would like to have remained in order to render assistance to the plucky detective, but he knew that it was no use protesting.

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EVERY TUESDAY.

The police filed out, carrying with them the boxes; and the next moment Sharpe was alone!

When the gang left the cellar, they found themselves, after a short journey through an underground passage, in the luxurious rooms of Nest 2, one of their principal hiding-places.

They were surprised to find that an officer had been placed on guard here, but they soon disposed of him without any ceremony by the simple process of knocking him unconscious.

After this little incident, Potsdam showed considerable surprise at being in Nest 2 again, and he looked at Iron Hand in an inquiring manner.

The leader condescended to offer an explanation.

"No. I never told you of this connecting passage," he said. Then, with a growl, he added: "It isn't wise to tell even you everything!"

The second-in-command scowled, and shuffled away. He knew by experience that it was not wise to talk to Iron Hand when he was in one of his unpleasant moods, and the leader was not by any means cheerful at the loss of the bonds.

Presently another member of the gang entered the room through the hanging draperies.

"Well?" questioned Iron Hand. "The police have secured the boxes," the man replied briefly. "Sharpe is staying behind to get you alone!"

A terrible look of rage crossed the face of the outlaw when he heard these words. He snarled back in defiance at his servant who had brought the information, and turned towards Potsdam and Black Flag.

"Follow me!" he thundered. The men crossed the room and departed through the draperies, heading back for the cellar, while the gangsters who remained behind busied themselves in tying up the unconscious officer who had been left on guard.

John Sharpe was getting impatient. He was longing to get his hands on Iron Hand again, and he determined to wait all night if necessary, for he was convinced that the leader would return sooner or later to secure his ill-gotten gains.

To be alone in that dark, evil-smelling place was rather an ordeal, and Sharpe moved about restlessly, walking from side to side, in an endeavour to pass the time away. Would his enemy never come?

Meanwhile, something of interest was taking place elsewhere. Anne Crawford, heavily veiled, had arrived at the old curiosity shop soon after the raid was started. In order that no suspicion should be aroused, the girl entered the shop opposite, and made a small purchase. But all the time her eyes were riveted upon the scene across the way.

She saw the policeman guarding the shop, and later witnessed the proprietor being bundled into a waiting taxicab. Then a number of boxes were also placed into the motor.

When the taxi drove off Anne went to the rear of the shop, and very cautiously made her entrance. Fortunately, she managed to evade the policeman who remained on duty at the front of the building. A moment later she was on her way to the cellar!

Sharpe, down below, was vaguely uneasy. He felt that something unusual was about to happen. Suddenly he grew tense as he heard footsteps on the stairs, and he looked anxiously in that direction. So interested was he in the steps leading to the cellar, that he failed to notice the secret door, through which the gang had departed, open quietly.

Then stealthily an arm was thrust

through, which quickly encircled the detective's neck, nearly choking him.

Sharpe struggled fiercely, but in vain. He had been taken completely by surprise.

Presently the other concealed door of the cellar opened, and Iron Hand and Potsdam entered.

The inhuman leader of the gang hit Sharpe a telling blow on the head with the butt end of his revolver, and the unfortunate detective was soon rendered unconscious. Then Black Flag's arm relaxed, and he joined the other two villains.

"Quick! Take him through to Nest 2!" muttered the leader hoarsely; and the three men, bearing with them the unconscious detective, entered once more the secret passage leading to their luxurious headquarters at Nest 2.

Anne Crawford had witnessed the whole dramatic scene from her carefully concealed position on the cellar stairs.

What a good thing, she reflected, that she had not been a moment earlier, for then she would have been captured too, and could have been of no assistance to the detective whatever.

It would have been of no use for her to attempt to bluff Iron Hand on this occasion. She would not have been able to have thought of the slightest excuse for her presence in the cellar. And of course her enemy, Potsdam, would have done his best to make things as black as possible against her, even if she did succeed in overcoming the wrath of Iron Hand. He was in love with her, and she could always deal with him.

But the second-in-command had no sentiment where she was concerned, and Anne firmly believed that he really knew that she was working against the gang, and not with them. He could not, however, convince his leader of this.

Anne decided that there was no time to be lost if she were to save John Sharpe, for the gang would surely dispose of him this time.

Anne to the Rescue!

THE gang had thought out a ghastly way of dealing with the detective on this occasion. They had so often had him in their clutches, only to be robbed of their prey in the end, that they decided to take no chances this time.

When they got Sharpe back to Nest No. 2, they trussed him up and gagged him, and then carried him down to a motor-car which they had in waiting.

Potsdam started to lash the detective to the footrail. He was now conscious, and struggled, but it was quite futile. He had not the slightest chance of getting away from his captors.

But even now, at this late hour, Sharpe had a friend—the friend who had come to his assistance at various times and helped him out of awkward predicaments.

From behind a building Anne Crawford was peering, and she saw the terrible position in which the detective was placed, although at present she was quite helpless to interfere.

When Potsdam had finished his task of tying up Sharpe, Iron Hand spoke.

"We're going to give you a last ride, Mr. Sharpe," he said, with a cruel smile upon his countenance, "and when we have finished with you we shall leave you where you will never spoil our game again."

John Sharpe listened, and smiled. He did not intend to answer the outlaw's threat.

Iron Hand expected him to cry out

and beg for mercy. But this was not Sharpe's way.

The leader turned to his followers. "Beat it!" he said briefly. "Back to the old place!"

The rest of the gang shuffled off, and Iron Hand and Potsdam entered the car and started the motor. Then, like a flash, Anne Crawford left her hiding-place, and, unnoticed by the two men in the motor, she climbed on the back of the vehicle.

A few seconds after the car started one of the gang chanced to turn his head, and he caught sight of the huddled figure of a woman clinging to the rear of the car.

He shouted out with the idea of attracting the attention of the two occupants of the car, but, owing to distance and the noise of the engine, he was unable to make himself heard, and he walked on, muttering to himself.

The motor-car quickly gathered speed, and the two occupants of the front seat, Black Flag and Iron Hand, were engaged in conversation.

The car passed rapidly through the main road, and then ran down a long, rough road, passing by a stretch of rocky shore, which ended in a sandy beach.

It was when the car reached the rocky road that Anne Crawford received rather a shock.

As the vehicle progressed along the bumpy thoroughfare, and in the end it succeeded in throwing her off, and she fell with a crash to the hard, unsympathetic ground.

Although considerably shaken up, the girl was, fortunately, unhurt.

The motor sped on, and the occupants were quite unaware of the fate which had befallen their unknown passenger.

After a minute or two, when Anne got over the first shock of the fall, she picked herself up and took a look around the scene.

Presently something attracted her attention, and she hurried off in a direction at right angles to that taken by the two leaders of the gang in their car.

Soon the plucky girl arrived at a spot near some cross-roads, where a horse was tethered in front of a small dwelling-house.

Anne took quite a fancy to the animal, and as she required to use it in the interests of justice, she decided within herself that there could not possibly be any harm in borrowing the animal for a time.

Anne speedily untied the horse, and the next moment had succeeded in leaping to his back.

She rode off just as the owner and another man emerged from the house. They quickly caught sight of the supposed thief, and started to yell frantically at the top of their voices.

But Anne took not the slightest notice of their excessive excitement over such a trifle.

The owner, however, was not inclined to see one of his favourite horses disappearing before his eyes, and he decided on pursuit. With this object in view he hastened over towards his stables.

Anne Crawford got every ounce she possibly could out of the horse. She was determined to render whatever assistance she could to the unfortunate detective, for she knew only too well that the position for him was a desperate one.

Iron Hand would not show John Sharpe the slightest mercy on this occasion. Of this the poor girl was convinced.

She spurred on the horse once more, hoping against hope that she would be in time to save him.

The car had now taken a rocky road on the shore side, and Anne could see it

"WHAT HAVE YOU AGAINST ME?"

(Continued from page 15.)

the school imposed upon him—he would never become a thief. Meadows had threatened to show him up at school. Tom smiled to himself bitterly. Was it but an idle threat? He straightened himself up. Even if the threat were carried out, what did it matter? He would not be blackmailed into stealing!

The master placed his hands on Tom's shoulders, and looked into the lad's eyes.

"Will you promise?" he said.

"Certainly, sir!" said Tom, drawing a breath. "I promise willingly. I will not be the man again, not of my own accord. But—well, you know what these men are like, sir. If he accuses me I must speak, or he will cut up nasty. You know what I mean, sir."

"Yes, yes, Mace. Of course, if the man accuses you and speaks, then you may speak to him. But do not go out of your way to see or speak to him. That is all I ask you to promise. If he finds that you do not desire his company he will leave you alone willingly enough, I think."

The master turned back to his desk, and made a motion that the interview was ended.

When Tom Mace reached the Hall again Peel was waiting for him.

"Licked?" asked Bob sympathetically.

"Oh, no!" laughed Tom. "Why should I be?"

"Oh, I don't know!" replied his new chum. "Masters have funny little ways, you know. Old Gale was there yesterday when you were ragged, and in the funny way masters have he might have blamed you, and licked you."

"No," said Tom. "As a matter of fact, Peel, it was about yesterday, but nothing to do with the scrap. Not directly."

anyway. You remember that man I told you about—the friend of my father's—I met yesterday?"

"Yes."

"Well, Mr. Gale saw me speaking to him, and he has warned me that he is not a desirable companion—"

Peel laughed.

"On that tack, was he?" he chuckled. "A giddy curtain lecture? Naughty bad man, and all that?"

"Something like that," replied Tom. "Anyway, I promised I would not try to see the man again. I'm sure I don't want to," he added.

"Oh, like that, is he?"

"Yes."

Peel led the way to the breakfast-hall, and the subject of Spike Meadows was soon forgotten. Tom devoured his breakfast eagerly, for he had a good appetite, and was hungry.

All through the meal Lundy darted venomous looks at him, looks that boded ill for Tom in the not far-distant future. But Tom was now much happier and more at home. He was getting used to Lundy, and although it was not quite pleasant to have made an enemy, the fact did not now depress him as it had done before.

Moreover, when he was in the class-room he became still more happy. For there he was decidedly at home. When it came to any form of learning he could give the lofty Lundy hours and hours start.

Mr. Mullins had to congratulate him, although to praise anyone was like gall and wormwood to the mean-spirited Form-master.

The way in which Bradshaw's profound ignorance of the ancient and classical language of Latin was glossed over surprised Tom. But then Bradshaw was the youngest son of an earl's brother, and like a phantom before Mr. Mullins' eyes danced the prospects of an invitation to Bradshaw's home.

(This Splendid Serial will be continued in Next Week's "GEM." Order EARLY.)

CHAT ABOUT ST. JIM'S AND GREYFRIARS.

News is to hand that Harry Noble, the kangaroo of the Shell, battled for four and a half hours in a recent cricket-match against Greyfriars. I wonder what Armstrong will think of this?

So poor Mr. Latham is laid up with an attack of the "shivers." Surely the worthy master of the Fourth Form did not put his shirt on the last big race?

Well, this week we come to the end of our popular camping stories. Doubtless, most of you will be sorry that it is so. I may add that the campers themselves are not displeased that their tramping "vac" has finished. Needless to say, our famous chums of St. Jim's have many strange experiences coming along—there is hardly ever a dull moment with them.

Ernest Levison, whom we all feared had again gone on the wayward path, reappears in our coming special number. Many features of interest dealing with this favourite character will also appear in this bumper number, together with another fine art portrait to add to your already grand collection. Readers would do very well to keep a sharp lookout for this great number, not forgetting to place an early order for it with their newsagent.

I am told that Harry Manners, the amateur photographer of St. Jim's, has had the misfortune to knock over his dark-room lamp whilst developing his camping photos. Of course, the "spill" caused a slight fire, and the incident has reached the ears of the Head. The evidence will, no doubt, be heard in "camera."

I think if only Harry knew who the culprit was who "split" on him, it

would not be long before he "snapped" him up!

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy still proves himself to be a very good-hearted chap. He has just offered David Llewellyn Wynn the use of one of his fancy bathing-costumes. I should think the Falstaff of St. Jim's will just about get into it in time for next season.

THE INVISIBLE HAND.

(Continued from page 17.)

distinctly. She was heading for the same direction, but on a road from which Iron Hand could not see her.

The villainous scheme of the two outlaws became apparent to the distracted girl as she watched the car make for the sea and then suddenly stop.

She saw the leader step out. Black Flag remained for a moment longer. He speeded up the engine, moved the clutch, which permitted the car to start, and then hastily jumped over clear of the vehicle.

The motor jumped forward, leaving the two villains interested spectators as it headed for the surf.

Sharpe quickly became conscious of the water entering the tonneau of the car, and he struggled fiercely to free himself, but it was useless. The gang had tied him up far too securely.

He felt that he was a doomed man. There seemed to be no hope whatever for him on this occasion.

The water crept up, and in a few moments would completely cover him. The chassis was now deep in water. Sharpe felt that the end was near.

(To be continued next week.)

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EDITORIAL.

My Dear Chums,—

Next week I am publishing a special Levison Number of the "Gem," and feel certain my chums will declare it to be a record issue. I am not going to say that there are no more popular characters than Ernest Levison, for there are; but for long past Levison has occupied a prominent place, and has won innumerable friends. Next week's "Gem" will

contain plenty of interest concerning him and his minor, while Doris Levison also comes in for mention. The stories of St. Jim's would not be complete without this trio. I am giving special information, and the complete tale—well; there is no need for me to state it will be one of Martin Clifford's very best. The number likewise contains a long instalment of the gripping serial: "What Have You

Against Me?" which brings further evidence of the grit of Tom Mace, and the fine spirit he shows when faced with his many troubles at Millford College. In addition there will be a splendid portrait story dealing with Ernest Levison. So you see next week's fine issue contains a heap of good things. Get your "Gem" early.

YOUR EDITOR.

ANSWERS TO READERS.

MRS. RALPH CARDEW (Gravesend).—Unsuitable prize pairs are never acknowledged. Such a task would be quite impossible. I can't answer some of your questions. No. 1. Silas Racke, the convict who appeared in a very old GEM story, is not related to Aubrey of the Sheld Form. No. 2. The Special Levison Number will appear next week. No. 3. The recent yarn dealing with Baggy Trimble was not intended to be a Special Number. No. 4. You want "old Levison" to reform again, and have some smokes and carry on in the same manner that Cardew did. Mighty queer sort of reformation that! No. 5. I can't say for sure whether Cardew has given cards up altogether. He is such a remarkable character, and seems to be unable to live without these frequent outbursts. Look

how he carried on with poor old Wildrake, for instance! Bernard Glyn has made wonderful inventions, but he has not made a working model of Arthur Augustus yet. He stated that one day he would, I know. But only time can tell whether he will be successful.

G. TODD (Rannock, Kilmacolin).—Tom Merry's bat is an "Exceller," and is the usual standard size. The St. Jim's colours are red and white. Tom Merry does not field at any particular spot. I cannot tell you where Talbot would field. The wicket-keepers usually assist in the bowling.

"CHEROKEE" (Federated Malay States).—No. Figgins is not in love with Cousin Ethel. There is merely a firm friend-

ship existing between them. I expect Cousin Ethel will have something to say on this subject in her "History of St. Jim's," in the GEM. No. 2. You will no doubt, be pleased to know that Gladys Racke is totally unlike her brother. No. 3. Well, it is very difficult to say who would win in a boxing match between Gussy and Grundy. Gussy once licked the burly Sheld fellow, but on points Grundy is the better man. No. 4. Dr. Holmes has only one daughter, I think. No. 5. I think Tom Merry ought to be able to whack Bob Cherry in a fair fight. Bob has licked the junior captain at St. Jim's before now, though, and it would only be Tom's age, height, and weight which would make him the victor.

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