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No. 808.
Vol. XXIV.
August 4th, 1923.



D'ARCY MAXIMUS ARRIVES!

(A Startling Incident from the Amusing Grand Long Complete School Story of the Famous Tom Merry & Co. at St. Jim's, contained in this issue.)

Published by Howard Baker Press Ltd, 27a Arterberry Road, Wimbledon, London, S. W. 20.





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OUR COMPANION PAPERS.

"THE BOYS' FRIEND" Every Monday
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MY DEAR CHUMS,—Next week the special August Bank Holiday Number of the GEM will be in your hands. I am sure you will admit it is the finest issue of the favourite Wednesday story paper that ever was. A notable departure on this occasion in the make-up will delight all readers of Martin Clifford's splendid series of yarns of St. Jim's.

A 25,000 WORD COMPLETE STORY.

That is what I have arranged for this extra fine number of the old paper. Times without number I have been asked for a longer yarn of the famous school, and I should have been glad in the extreme to oblige in this respect. But there have been difficulties in the way—obstacles of one sort and another. The plain fact is, we never do get enough space in the GEM. It would never do, for instance, to curtail other features, because those attractions are looked for regularly. But this time the point has been gained. For once we shall have a magnificent story of St. Jim's, which will run out to 25,000 words, and, in taking this step, I know perfectly well that I am meeting the wishes of countless readers.

OLIVE AND THE COLONIALS.

There is another thing. In point of fact, there is so much that I should like to say about this special number that I am in danger of exceeding my space, but I will make an extra special effort to give some sort of an idea of the programme. The new story is right on the nail. It will please readers at home, and it has a big appeal to my chums overseas. The latter are always insistent on the point that more Colonial characters should be introduced. Those readers have got their way at last. The yarn describes how a number of Clive's friends come over to meet the St. Jim's fellows, with the result that St. Jim's has a tougher proposition than any it has yet experienced. St. Jim's has won many laurels in sport, but on this occasion it has to face the problem of keeping its position in sport. The Colonials are keen players at all games, and prove themselves thoroughly worthy adversaries.

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That's the time when we get the biggest tug-of-war. St. Jim's is all out to maintain its position. The Colonials mean to carry all before them. Just look out for the coming grand story, and see how they get to work, and what happens. It is a real summer yarn, fresh and buoyant, and distinct from the first line to the last, with the true spirit of jolly good sportsmanship. And what fine fellows these visitors from the big Dominions are! They seem equal to anything, ready for any test of endurance, and they show the British doggedness—it spirit all the time. I am going to take this opportunity of expressing my hearty thanks to the legion of Australian readers of the GEM. I am

constantly hearing from my staunch supporters in the great island continent. Communications reach me from New South Wales, Victoria, the great West Territories, and the far north beyond Rockhampton in Queensland, and it is the same chorus of approval of the GEM and the brilliant stories of St. Jim's.

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THE TUCK HAMPER.

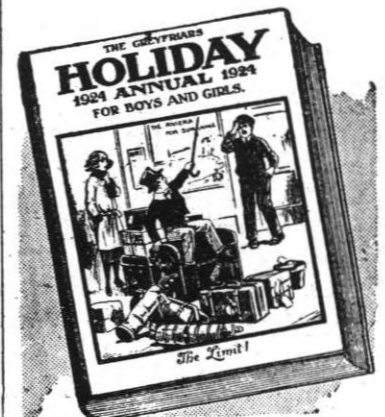
Our merry page of sparkling storyettes will have enhanced fascination next week, for I am giving an increased number of half-crowns for smart jokes. Take particular notice of this feature. There are several attractive surprises in preparation.

BRAIN WAVES.

A correspondent writes to me to suggest that it would do Gussy a world of good to spend his next holidays in the wilds. Personally I doubt it, but if chance did throw D'Arcy amidst strange surroundings he would carry off the situation all right. He has heaps of pluck. Another friendly commentator asks me whether it would not be possible to give a complete biography of all the characters. That's really another "Who's Who." The feature in question has always been popular, but there is no room at present to revive it. Maybe later on something may be done. For the moment I recommend my chum to keep on the look-out for the next volume of the "Holiday Annual." It will appear on September 1st, and the book will be found to contain a great many interesting details respecting the characters at St. Jim's.

Your Editor.

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D'ARCY MAXIMUS!



CHAPTER 1.

Tom Merry Takes a Hand!

WHACK!

"What the thump—" ejaculated Tom Merry.

Whack!

Tom stopped. Manners and Lowther followed his example. That sound of loud and energetic whacking came from the other side of the leafy hedge, and each whack was followed by a grunt of pain.

Whack!

"Sounds like beating carpet!" remarked Manners.

Whack!

There was a rustling on the other side of the hedge, and the hawthorns wavered and shook, as if some animal were struggling to get free. Then a voice was heard—a most unpleasant voice:

"Ah! Would yer? Take that!"

Whack, whack!

Tom Merry knitted his brows. Manners and Lowther looked serious. It was no business, exactly, of the chums of St. Jim's, but it was clear that somebody in the field on the other side of the hedge was beating an animal, and the Terrible Three did not like the idea.

Whack!

The stick came down again on a tough hide harder than ever. The whack sounded almost like a pistol-shot.

"Look here, that's got to stop!" said Tom Merry.

"But—"

"I'm going to see, anyhow!"

Tom Merry looked along the hedge. There was a gap a little farther on, and Tom ran towards it, and jumped over the ditch and plunged through. His comrades followed him. The chums of the Shell were walking back to school after a visit to the village, and as afternoon classes were almost due they had no time to waste. But Tom Merry seemed to have forgotten that little circumstance for the moment.

He jumped into the field, and ran along the inner side of the hedge as another loud whack rang out.

A donkey was tied to the hedge, with its head down. The owner of the unpleasant voice was standing with a stick in his hand—a heavy, nobby stick—whacking the donkey as if he were beating a carpet. The donkey plunged and wriggled and kicked and grunted, and the man dodged the kicking heels and whacked with untiring energy.

"Stop that!" rapped out Tom Merry.

"What?"

"Stop it!"

The man stopped, and turned on the St. Jim's junior with a glare of mingled amazement and rage. He was not a nice man to look at. He looked like a tramp who had had hard luck. He was a little fat man, and he wore an ancient morning-coat, the tails of which brushed his calves, evidently having been made for a much taller gentleman. He wore tattered trousers of a bright check pattern, and boots in such a dilapidated condition that, as Monty Lowther immediately remarked to Manners, they could not call their soles their own. A red muffler was wound round his neck in lieu of a collar, and a battered bowler-hat was jammed on the back of his bullet head.

A more unpleasant-looking character the chums of the Shell had never seen. His face was stubby, and almost coppery in hue from the long use of refreshments not of a non-alcoholic nature. There was about him a lingering aroma of beer and rum and stale tobacco.

A Highly Amusing Extra-Long School Story of the Chums of St. Jim's, Introducing a quaint new friend in D'Arcy Maximus.

By

MARTIN CLIFFORD.

"You torking to me?" demanded this gentleman.

"Just that!" assented Tom Merry. "You've whacked that donkey enough. Let him alone."

"It's my donkey!" roared the copper-faced gentleman, in great wrath.

"You're not going to whack it any more!" said Tom Merry resolutely. "What has it done, anyhow?"

"Never mind wot he's done! I'm going to whack him jest as much as I like—and I'll whack you, too, if you give me any lip!"

And, to show his independence, the copper-faced gentleman raised the stick again, and brought it down with a terrific whack on the donkey.

The hapless animal squealed and squirmed.

Tom Merry's eyes blazed.

He made a jump at the man, grasped him, and whirled the stick away before the copper-faced man knew what was happening. With a swing of his strong arm, Tom tossed the stick half-way across the field.

"Well, I'm blowed!" ejaculated the copper-faced man.

"You lay 'ands on me—you lay 'ands on Bill 'Itchings! I'll learn yer!"

And he jumped at Tom Merry.

Tom backed quickly.

"I don't want to handle you," he said, "but—"

"I'll 'andle you fast enough!"

And Mr. Hitchings came on with a rush, with a pair of big fists thrashing the air.

Tom Merry stood his ground then, and put his hands up. Certainly he was not looking for a fight with a frowsy tramp; and he did not want to handle Mr. Hitchings, only to save the donkey from further ill-usage. But it was too late to think of that. Tom had no fears for himself, so far as that went. He was sturdy and strong, and he was the best boxer in the Lower School at St. Jim's, and he felt quite equal to handling a beer-soaked specimen like Mr. Hitchings.

Two clawing hands were knocked aside, and then Tom Merry's right came home full upon Mr. Hitchings' crimson nose. The nose had already looked almost as red as a nose could be; but it was much redder after that drive. Mr. Hitchings sat down so suddenly that it seemed to him as if the solid earth had jumped up to meet him.

"Ooooooh!" he spluttered.

"Good old Tommy!" said Monty Lowther. "Always stand up for your relations!"

Manners chuckled.

"My eye!" gasped Mr. Hitchings. "I been knocked down! You've knocked down Bill 'Itchings! Why, I'll limb yer!"

Mr. Hitchings scrambled up, and rushed on Tom Merry again. But the process of "limbing"—whatever that was—was not carried out. He came up against two hard-hitting fists, with clear, steady blue eyes behind them. Only one of Mr. Hitchings' frantic drives reached Tom Merry's face, and it made him blink a little. Then his fists were beating a tattoo upon Mr. Hitchings' features, and the tramp staggered back, and back, till his feet caught in a root, and he sat down again with a bump.

"Oh crimes!" he gasped.

Mr. Hitchings was not in a hurry to get up this time. He sat and blinked at Tom Merry with a furious face.

Monty Lowther, in the meanwhile, had cast loose the halter that secured the donkey to the hedge.

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"Cut it, Neddy!" said Lowther.

Neddy did not understand the words, but he understood that he was free. He threw up his heels and bolted.

"Good!" said Manners. "The brute would take it out of him after we were gone. Good!"

"Stop that donkey!" yelled Mr. Hitchings.

"Stop him yourself!" chuckled Tom Merry. "Looks as if you'll have a run for it. Serve you jolly well right!"

Mr. Hitchings staggered up.

"Another time, I'll limber yer!" he gasped. And then he crammed his battered hat on his head, and started in frantic pursuit of the donkey.

"Go it, Neddy!" roared Lowther.

Neddy was "going it," evidently anxious to keep out of reach of a cruel master. He plunged through a gap in the hedge into the road, and careered away down the lane towards Rylcombe, with Mr. Hitchings gasping and puffing in wild pursuit.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The chums of St. Jim's returned to the road, Tom Merry rubbing his nose. They walked on towards the school, Mr. Hitchings and the fugitive donkey vanishing in the other direction.

"We were bound to chip in," said Tom. "Blessed if I know how the law stands in the matter, but—"

"I don't suppose Mr. Hitchings is very keen on the law," grinned Monty Lowther. "I shouldn't take him for a staunch upholder of the rights of property—not when he's near a hen-roost, anyhow."

Tom Merry laughed.

"Besides, you had to butt in," said Monty. "Blood is thicker than water."

"What?"

"Chap ought to stand by his long-lost brother," said Monty argumentatively.

"Fathead!"

And the chums of the Shell hurried on to St. Jim's—Tom Merry occasionally rubbing his nose, where Mr. William Hitchings' knuckles had landed.

CHAPTER 2.

Arthur Augustus Butts In!

"STOP 'im!"

"Bai Jove!"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy of the Fourth Form at St. Jim's paused in his elegant saunter along Rylcombe Lane.

Arthur Augustus was feeling very chippy that sunny summer's afternoon. He had visited his tailor at Rylcombe. The local tailor, of course, was not entrusted with the task of making the beautiful garments that encased the elegant and aristocratic limbs of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. That task required a sartorial genius only to be found in the West End of London. But Mr. Wiggs was very good at repairing and pressing and other humbler branches of his great profession. Arthur Augustus often spent a pleasant half-hour in Mr. Wiggs' little shop, discussing the important question of clothes, and selecting such minor garments as a necktie or silk socks or a waistcoat.

On this occasion Arthur Augustus had found a waistcoat that was really "the thing." When Gussy decided that a thing was the thing undoubtedly it was the thing. And he had put it on in Mr. Wiggs' fitting-room, and he was delighted with the result. Feeling that his new waistcoat was in harmony with the remainder of his elegant attire, Arthur Augustus was naturally in a happy mood, and looked upon the whole universe with a benevolent eye.

But even the waistcoat was driven from his mind by the sight of a runaway donkey careering down the lane towards him, with a frantic man in furious pursuit.

"Stop 'im!" raved Mr. Hitchings.

"Oh deah!"

Arthur Augustus was an obliging youth. He would always have done anything for anybody, asked or unasked. Now he was dismayed, but he did not think of refusing the request. A tussle with a runaway donkey was quite likely to have a ruinous effect on his clothes—that glorious waistcoat might suffer. But he hesitated only for a moment, and then he did his best.

He jumped in the way of the careering donkey so suddenly and efficiently that his silk hat rolled off the back of his head and fell in the dust.

But Gussy did not heed it.

He threw up his hands in front of the donkey and shouted:

"Hi!"

The donkey stopped.

On either side of the fugitive the hedges were high and thick, and in this spot the lane was narrow. Neddy's flight was cut off. But as Mr. Hitchings came lumbering and panting on behind, the donkey, apparently in a desperate mood, made a rush to get past Arthur Augustus.

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With great presence of mind Arthur Augustus caught the halter that was trailing from the runaway's neck.

Neddy's career was checked, but he did not stop. He spun round as Gussy pulled on the rope, and Gussy spun after him. Bump!

The donkey's head came in violent contact with Arthur Augustus' new waistcoat.

"Oh cwumps!"

Arthur Augustus sat down under the shock.

Crunch!

With a thrill of utter horror, Arthur Augustus realised that he had sat down on his silk hat!

He let go the rope; but Mr. Hitchings came panting up at the same moment, and he caught it.

"Got yer!" gasped Mr. Hitchings.

Arthur Augustus picked himself up. Then he picked up the silk hat. He held it up and gazed at it. It looked something like an opera-hat and something like a concertina. It looked hardly anything like the beautiful topper Arthur Augustus had taken for a walk that afternoon.

With a heavy heart, Arthur Augustus began to punch it out into something like the shape of a hat. He had to get back to St. Jim's, and he could not go without a hat. But that silk topper looked really beyond repair. Arthur Augustus was not a heavy-weight, but he had sat on it quite hard.

While Arthur Augustus was deeply intent on the problem of the hat Mr. Hitchings hooked the halter round his arm to make sure that Neddy could not bolt again, and then sought in the hedge for a stick. He broke off a short branch which was thick enough for his purpose, and then started on Neddy—restarting after the interval, as it were, with terrific energy.

Whack, whack, whack, whack!

Then Arthur Augustus forgot even his damaged hat. Gussy had a tender heart, and he would not have hurt a Prussian Hun if he could have helped it.

"Bai Jove! Stop that!" he shouted.

Whack, whack, whack, whack!

Gussy ran towards Mr. Hitchings and caught his arm.

"Pway westwain your wage!" he exclaimed.

"Eh!" ejaculated Mr. Hitchings, perhaps a little perplexed for the moment by Gussy's remarkable accent.

"I have no doubt you are wathah enwaged by your donkey wunnin' away, my good fwend," said Arthur Augustus. "But there is a limit, you know. I am suah that when you are coolah you will wegwet whackin' the poor bwute in that howwid mannah."

"My eye!" said Mr. Hitchings. "I tell yer, I'll whale this 'ere donkey till he can't 'ardly crawl! That's what I'm going to do, young feller-me-lad, so you can put that in your pipe and smoke it!"

"You will make me wegwet that I caught the donkey for you!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus warmly.

"I'll give yer tuppence for ketching 'im!" said Mr. Hitchings derisively. "Now get outer the way while I larrip 'im!"

"But I weally pwotest—"

Whack, whack, whack, whack!

The donkey squealed and dodged and scrambled, but Mr. Hitchings, with a tight grip on the halter, whacked and whacked as if he were beating a carpet.

"I ordah you to stop it!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus, now thoroughly roused. "If there were an officah of the law heah, I would give you in charge for cwuety to animals!"

Whack, whack, whack!

It was too much! Obviously Mr. Hitchings was amenable to only one kind of argument, and Gussy was driven to employing it. He clenched his noble fist and hit Mr. Hitchings in the eye.

Mr. Hitchings staggered, and, fortunately, lost his footing on the edge of the ditch. Then he reposed amid stinging-nettles, with a series of horrid ejaculations. Arthur Augustus patted the donkey's head gently.

"Poor old chap!" he murmured soothingly. "It's all wight! I'll see you through."

The donkey seemed to be an affectionate creature. He snuggled his muzzle under Gussy's arm.

"I'll out yer!" Mr. Hitchings was gasping, as he rolled in stinging-nettles. "I'll out yer!"

There was a positively murderous look on his coppery face as he came scrambling out of the ditch, the rough stick gripped in his hand. Arthur Augustus realised that he was in danger. He could not have handled Mr. Hitchings as Tom Merry had done; and there was the stick, which Mr. Hitchings only too plainly intended to use.

"Come on!" gasped Arthur Augustus to the donkey; and, holding the halter, he led Neddy away up the lane at a run.

"Stealing a man's donkey!" roared Mr. Hitchings. "I'm arter you, you young thief!"

Arthur Augustus looked back. The ruffian was in full



The donkey plunged and wriggled and kicked and grunted under the heavy lashings from the stick of its owner, who was dodging the kicking heels and whacking with untiring energy. "Stop that!" cried Tom Merry, plunging through the hedge. The man stopped, and turned on the St. Jim's junior with a glare of mingled amazement and rage. (See page 3.)

chase, with the stick brandished. Arthur Augustus was as brave as a lion, but his bare hands would not have been of much use against that lashing stick. And Mr. Hitchings was gaining fast. But the swell of St. Jim's was equal to the occasion. Arthur Augustus could ride anything; his horsemanship was superb. And though he had never yet tried donkeymanship—so to speak—it was evidently high time to try it. He leaped on the back of the donkey and urged Neddy at top speed towards St. Jim's.

Clatter, clatter, clatter! went the donkey along the lane, gracefully ridden by the swell of St. Jim's.

Panting with rage, Mr. Hitchings came on behind, brandishing the stick. St. Jim's was in sight now, and Arthur Augustus sighted the backs of three juniors walking towards the school. They turned at the same moment, and stared at the wild rider.

"Gussy!" yelled Tom Merry.

"Can't stop, dear boys!" gasped Arthur Augustus. "There aren't any weins on this beast—"

The donkey thundered by.

"Great pip!" said Monty Lowther, with a whistle.

"Here's that brute again!" said Manners. "Gussy's rescued your relation, Tom."

"Fathead! Let's collar that cad!"

The Terrible Three turned back. They waited for Mr. Hitchings to come up, with grim looks. But Mr. Hitchings did not come up. He stopped and burst into oratory.

Leaving him to it, Tom Merry & Co. walked on to the school—where Arthur Augustus D'Arcy and Neddy had already arrived.

CHAPTER 3.

A Surprise for St. Jim's.

ARTHUR AUGUSTUS was a good rider. He had ridden without saddle before, too, and he was in no danger of losing his seat, though he had neither saddle nor stirrups. But controlling his steed was quite another matter.

Like a good horseman, he could guide his mount with his knees; but he could not stop him by any means whatever. Neddy was thoroughly terrified by his beating and by the raging voice of Mr. Hitchings; and Neddy evidently was thinking out only one problem—that of putting the greatest possible distance in the shortest possible time between himself and Bill Hitchings.

So Neddy galloped on, at a speed more appropriate to a racehorse than a donkey. The school gates were close at hand, and Arthur Augustus strove frantically to stop his steed. But pulling at Neddy's large ears only seemed to urge him on faster. It looked as if Arthur Augustus would be carried past the school, and borne away into unknown and unexplored regions of the county of Sussex—when after-lessons were almost due to begin in the Fourth Form room. Anything was better than that; and Arthur Augustus strove to turn the donkey in at the gateway before it was too late.

In that he was successful. Neddy did not seem to mind where he went, so long as he went at top speed. Obviously, he had no relationship to the celebrated donkey that "wouldn't go." He wheeled in at the gateway, and Taggles, the porter, who was adorning the gates with his portly presence, jumped out of the way just in time.

"Here!" roared Taggles, in amazement and wrath.

"Clatter, clatter!"

"You ain't allowed to ride in gates, Master D'Arcy, and well you know it!" shrieked Taggles.

"Weally, Taggles—"

The rest of D'Arcy's remark was lost as he careered onward. There was a yell in the quadrangle, and a hundred pairs of eyes were turned on the bareback rider.

"Gussy!" shouted Blake of the Fourth.

"Gussy!" roared Herries and Dig.

"Old Gus, at it again!" ejaculated D'Arcy minor, of the Third. "My only Aunt Jane! What will Gus be at next?"

"Stop, you young ass!" shouted Cutts of the Fifth.

"Whoa!" roared Figgins.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Most of the fellows had been heading for the class-rooms; but the sight of Arthur Augustus banished all memory of classes. They stood and yelled.

Clatter, clatter, clatter! came Neddy along the gravel. Taggles came trotting in pursuit, shouting.

Mr. Railton, the School House master, appeared on the steps.

"D'Arcy! Stop at once!" shouted the Housemaster.

"Awfly sowwy, sir!" gasped Arthur Augustus. "He won't stop!"

"Boy! How dare you——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Silence! D'Arcy, this outrageous conduct——"

"Stop him!" shouted Blake.

There was a rush of the juniors round the donkey. Neddy came thundering right on to the School House, as if he intended to charge up the steps and rush into the House.

Fortunately he did not!

At the bottom of the steps he came to a sudden halt, and Arthur Augustus not quite prepared for the suddenness of it flew over his head.

"Oh cwumps!"

Arthur Augustus sat just at Mr. Railton's feet, without being quite clear as to how he had got there.

Having landed him, Neddy would have scudded off again, but, fortunately, Talbot of the Shell had caught the trailing halter.

Neddy was a prisoner again. Talbot soothed him with a gentle hand.

"Oh cwumps!" gasped Arthur Augustus breathlessly. "What's that?"

"That" was Mr. Railton's grip on the back of his collar, jerking him to his feet.

Arthur Augustus staggered up.

"Ow! Thank you, sir, I can stand without assistance," he said innocently.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The Housemaster almost glared.

"D'Arcy! What do you mean by riding that ridiculous animal in the quadrangle! What do you mean by it, sir?" thundered Mr. Railton.

"I weally didn't mean anythin', sir. You see, he wouldn't stop."

"You should not take donkey rides if you cannot control the animal, you utterly stupid boy!"

"If you will allow me to explain, sir——"

"Nonsense! Take that animal back to its owner at once!" snapped Mr. Railton.

"I caught it wunnin' away, and——"

"Oh, if it is a runaway animal, that alters the case! You should not have ridden it, however."

"Yaas; but——"

"You are a ridiculous boy, D'Arcy!"

"Weally, Mr. Wailton——"

Mr. Lathom, the master of the Fourth, appeared in the doorway. He gave the swell of St. Jim's a benignant blink through his glasses.

"If the animal was running away, Mr. Railton, surely it was right for D'Arcy to catch it," he remarked. "It might have run into a motor-car, and caused a serious accident."

"That is true, Mr. Lathom, but it should not have been brought here."

"Quite so! You should have taken it to the police-station, D'Arcy, if it has no owner."

"You—you see, sir——"

"Taggles, kindly take charge of that donkey," said Mr. Railton. "It may be placed in the paddock for the present. No doubt the owner will apply for it."

"Yessir."

Talbot handed the halter to Taggles, who led the donkey away. Neddy gave Arthur Augustus a blink as he went, and, jerking the rope out of Taggles' hand, trotted back to the swell of St. Jim's.

Mr. Railton had gone back into the House, frowning, and Arthur Augustus was following him in, when there was a yell.

"Your major wants you, Gussy!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Arthur Augustus spun round, and came face to face with Neddy.

"Bai Jove!"

Neddy proceeded to bump his rough head on the swell of St. Jim's, evidently as a demonstration of attachment. Animals always "took" to Arthur Augustus—horses, dogs, white rabbits, even stray cats had displayed regard for him. Neddy evidently was of an affectionate disposition, and, as he was, was not too asinine to realise that he had found a friend.

"Oh cwumps!" said Arthur Augustus. "Weally——"

"Isn't it ripping to see relations so fond of one another!" chirped Monty Lowther.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Lowthah, you uttah ass——"

"Let brotherly love continue!" said Manners.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Weally, Mannahs——"

"Come up, you brute!" howled Taggles, dragging at the rope.

But he dragged in vain. Neddy, like all donkeys, had a vein of obstinacy in him. He planted his four feet firmly, and refused to budge.

"He won't go without Gussy!" gasped Blake. "He's found his long-lost brother, and won't part with him!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Come up, will yer?" howled Taggles.

"Bless my soul!" said Mr. Lathom. "Perhaps you had better lead this—this quadruped away, D'Arcy."

"Yaas, sir!"

Neddy trotted off quite contentedly with D'Arcy. The swell of St. Jim's led him into the paddock, and closed the gate on him. When he left him, Neddy looked at him reproachfully over the gate.

Arthur Augustus was late for classes that afternoon. He had a good deal of brushing down to do before he was presentable enough for the Form-room. But Mr. Lathom excused him, and Arthur Augustus dropped into his place unrebuked.

And, for some reason, the rest of the Fourth persisted in glancing at Arthur Augustus and grinning, evidently seeing a comic side to his adventure with the donkey. But Arthur Augustus hardly noticed it. He had ample food for thought, without paying attention to the Fourth, or even to his lessons. He had left a squashed silk hat somewhere in Rylcombe Lane—his handsome new waistcoat bore signs only too visible of Neddy's snuggling, affectionate muzzle—and somewhere outside the gates of St. Jim's there was an enraged gentleman who claimed ownership of Neddy—a claim that it would be hard to deny or refute. And while lessons droned on that afternoon, and the juniors exchanged humorous whispers and winks, Arthur Augustus was dismally wondering whether classes would be interrupted by the arrival of an infuriated donkey-owner and a policeman.

CHAPTER 4.

A Point of Law.

"D'ARCY MAXIMUS!"

Monty Lowther made that remark when the Shell came out of their Form-room.

"What's that?" asked Tom Merry.

"I was thinking of the new member of the D'Arcy family now at St. Jim's," explained Monty Lowther. "We can't call him D'Arcy minor—there's already a young ass here called D'Arcy minor——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"D'Arcy minimus won't do, as he's the biggest of the three," went on Lowther thoughtfully. "Not the biggest ass in one sense, but in another. D'Arcy maximus will fill the bill."

"Hear, hear!" grinned Tom Merry. "But is Gussy's big brother staying?"

"Let's ask him."

The Fourth were out, and Study No. 6 were found in the quadrangle, in deep consultation. Blake and Herries and Digby were grinning, but Arthur Augustus looked very serious. The Terrible Three came up with cheerful smiles.

"Is your brother staying on at St. Jim's, Gussy?" asked Lowther.

"Eh? Yaas, wathah, if you mean young Wally."

"I don't mean D'Arcy minor. I mean your brother Edward."

"Bai Jove! I weally fail to see——"

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"If you don't stop ill-treatin' that donkey, you wuffian," cried Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, "I shall have to use force and make you!" He clenched his noble fist and hit Mr. Hitchings in the eye. The ruffian lost his footing on the bank of the ditch and staggered backwards. (See page 4)

"Neddy for short!" explained Lowther.

"You uttah ass!"

"If he's staying, we're going to call him D'Arcy maximus," said Monty Lowther. "That all right?"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Blake & Co.

"Weally, Lowthah, I wefuse to allow you to call that donkey D'Arcy maximus!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus hotly. "I shall feel called upon to give you a feahful thwashin' if you do anythin' of the kind!"

"If he stays," continued Lowther, unheeding. "I suppose he'll go into the Fourth with the others!"

Blake & Co. did not laugh this time. They glared.

"You funny ass!" began Blake.

"You cheerful idiot!" said Herries.

"You cheeky chump!" said Digby.

"Order!" said Tom Merry, laughing. "The fact is, we had a narrow escape of bringing that donkey home ourselves. It was Lowther who let him loose, while I was punching Bill Hitchings for whacking him."

"Bai Jove! I punched him, too!" said Arthur Augustus. "I hit him in the eye, you know!"

"This isn't Bill's lucky day!" chuckled Monty Lowther. "Tommy punched his nose, you punched his eye and pinched his donkey!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"That is just what we were discussin', deah boy!" said Arthur Augustus. "I should like to feah your opinion, if you can wefwain from uttahn' fwivolous wemarks. Of course, I shall wefuse to hand that donkey back to that wuffian!"

"Oh!" said the Terrible Three.

"I am wesolved on that," said Arthur Augustus firmly. "That howwid wuffian has made bwuises and bumps all ovah the poor beast, and he is not fit to be the ownah of anythin' livin'! He can buy a motah-car if he likes, and whack it. But it is not wight for him to own an animal; and I shall wefuse to allow him to have Neddy."

"There's such a thing," said Manners thoughtfully, "as the law. Thought anything about that, Gussy?"

"The law is against cwelty to animals, Mannahs!"

"Yes; but it's against pinchin' donkeys, too."

"It seems to be wathah mixed," said Arthur Augustus. "But if there is a law for givin' that poor old donkey back to that wuffian, there must be somethin' sewiously w'ong with the law. I suppose it is owin' to laws bein' made in the House of Commons instead of the House of Lords. I have always considered that a wotten awwangement."

"Oh, my hat!"

"I twust," said Arthur Augustus, "I twust to be able to althah all that when I am gwown up. But that will not help Neddy now, you know."

"It won't, for a cert!" grinned Lowther.

"The Head allows the fellows to keep pets, within weason," went on Arthur Augustus. "Would keepin' a donkey be wegardad as bein' within weason?"

"I rather fancy not!" grinned Blake; "especially somebody else's donkey!"

"I wefuse to admit that that person Hitchings has any claim to the donkey, Blake. He has forfeited his claim by his bwutality. I am suah that is good law!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"There is nothin' to cackle at," said Arthur Augustus. "Now, what I am weally afwaid of is this—that bwute Hitchings may come sneakin' w'ound the school, twyin' to steal the donkey!"

"To—to steal it!" gasped Tom Merry.

"Yaas. Of course, I don't want to wun any fellow down; but I must say I am convinced that that man is capable of stealin' the donkey. He looked to me an uttably dishonest wascal!"

"Oh crumbs!"

"I am not well up in law, you know," said Arthur Augustus.

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Augustus. "What I want to know is, could I give him in charge if he attempts to steal the donkey?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Weally, you fellows—"

"You burbling ass!" howled Herries. "He's jolly likely to give you in charge, I think!"

"Weally, Hewwies—"

"I wonder he hasn't been here already," said Tom Merry. "What will you do if he comes along with a bobby, Gussy?"

"I thought of that in class, deah boy; till it stwuck me that owin' to his cwelty, I was justified in takin' away the donkey!"

"I don't think the bobby would agree."

"I should be sowwy to see a bobbay so ignowant of wight and w'ong as not to agree, Tom Mewwy!"

"Oh, my hat!" said Tom.

"Now, what I was goin' to say is this—"

"Hee-haw!" came a sudden interruption.

"Bai Jove! That's Neddy!"

"Was it?" asked Lowther. "I thought you were speakin', old chap!"

"Hee-hee-haw!"

"What a voice!" gasped Blake. "Perhaps he's calling to you, Gussy! I suppose you understand the language?"

"Weally, Blake—"

"Hallo, look there!" exclaimed Dig.

The juniors had been walking down to the paddock, where Neddy had been left. They looked at him over the gate. Digby pointed to the fence on the further side, where the palings separated the paddock from the fir plantation. Over the fence a battered bowler hat and a coppery face rose into view, and a pair of sunken, glittering eyes looked searchingly round.

"Bill!" ejaculated Manners.

"After his donkey!" grinned Blake. "Good-bye to D'Arcy maximus!"

"Bai Jove! Back me up, deah boys!"

Arthur Augustus vaulted over the gate, and started across the grassy paddock at a run. The juniors looked at one another.

"The man can't be kept from taking away his own donkey, can he?" asked Herries dubiously. "I know he's a brute, but—"

"The S.P.C.A. could prosecute him, and then the magistrate could order Neddy to be taken away from him if he's found guilty of cruelty," said Manners.

"Yes; but now—"

"I'm afraid the brute's got the law on his side," said Tom Merry ruefully. "And the law's the law, isn't it?"

"Except for Gussy. He's above the law," chuckled Blake. "Anyhow, I'm not going to let that hooligan handle him, so here goes."

And Jack Blake jumped over the gate, and rushed after his noble chum. And Tom Merry & Co. followed.

CHAPTER 5.

Well Done!

BILL HITCHINGS was over the fence, and running towards the donkey, and he was nearer to the animal than Gussy was. But at sight of his old enemy, Neddy flung up his heels and bolted, followed by a stream of strong language from Mr. Hitchings. Mr. Hitchings darted in pursuit, and found Arthur Augustus D'Arcy like a lion in his path.

"Stop, you wottah!" shouted Arthur Augustus, manfully facing the ruffian.

Mr. Hitchings did not stop. He rushed on and grasped Gussy, and it might have fared ill with the swell of St. Jim's had not Jack Blake reached the spot in time.

Blake grabbed Mr. Hitchings' red muffler, and dragged him away from Arthur Augustus by main force. The ruffian went with a crash to the ground, and Herries, coming up breathlessly, sat on his chest. Digby took a flying jump and landed on his legs.

"Oh crimes!" howled Bill Hitchings. "Gerroff! You're squashing a bloke! Gerroff! Ow!"

"Hold the wottah!" gasped Arthur Augustus excitedly. "I'll wush off and telephone for the police. I'm goin' to give him into custody."

"Stop, you ass!" roared Blake.

"Weally, Blake—"

"You can't lock a man up for stealing his own donkey, you frabjous fathead!" roared Tom Merry. "If you bring a bobby here he'll make you give Hitchings his donkey."

"Wubbish! I should wufuse to do anythin' of the sort!"

"I can see Gussy ending his days in gaol!" said Monty Lowther. "A chap who starts at fifteen stealing donkeys—"

"Weally, Lowther—"

"Will you let a bloke gerrup?" howled Mr. Hitchings. "I'll 'ave the lor on yer! That there's my donkey, and I tell you straight I'm taking him away. I am that! I'll 'ave you

charged with stealing 'im, and you can lay to it. Gerroff a cove's weskit, blow you!"

Herries sat tight. Mr. Hitchings was a good deal safer on the ground sat upon.

Tom Merry turned an anxious glance back towards the school. The arrival of a master or a prefect on the scene would have been very awkward. Sympathy, no doubt, would have been with the unfortunate Neddy, but the rights of property were the rights of property. Fortunately, the paddock was not in sight from any of the school windows.

"We've got to settle this somehow," said Tom. "That brute could be prosecuted for cruelty. We're witnesses. But in the meantime—"

"In the meantime he has the legal right to keep the donkey," said Manners. "You see, it's his."

"No getting out of that," said Tom. "But the first thing the brute will do will be to beat it."

"You can lay to that!" gasped Mr. Hitchings. "I'll cut its hide off its bones, and you can lay to it."

"You see, deah boys, we cannot possibly allow the bwute to take the donkey away," said Arthur Augustus.

"It's my donkey!" roared Mr. Hitchings, with deep indignation.

Evidently Mr. Hitchings was a fine old crusted Tory on the subject of the rights of property when it was his property. It is very probable, however, that he was a bit of a Bolshevik with regard to other people's property. As he wriggled on the ground, with three juniors standing or sitting on him, a silver spoon dropped from the tail-pocket of his ancient coat, and a sticky stream that oozed from another pocket showed that there were eggs there, or had been till Herries sat on him. It was very doubtful whether Mr. Hitchings had come by those eggs honestly, and certainly the silver spoon could not be considered an heirloom in the Hitchings family. Digby picked up the silver spoon.

"Gimme that!" shouted Mr. Hitchings. "That's mine!"

"Bai Jove! The howwid wottah has been stealin' spoons!" said Arthur Augustus. "Now he has come to steal my donkey."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Are you going to let a bloke gerrup?" shrieked Mr. Hitchings. "I'll out yer! I will that. I'll go to the perlice!"

"And tell them where you got that spoon?" asked Monty Lowther, and the juniors chuckled.

They could guess now why Mr. Hitchings had not invoked the aid of the law in recovery of his donkey. He had good reasons of his own for keeping at a safe distance from the gentleman in blue.

"I—I picked it up!" gasped Mr. Hitchings. "Findings keepings."

"I dare say a bobby will pick you up and keep you one of these days," said Manners.

"I am goin' to telephone—"

"Boys!"

"Oh, great pip! The Head!"

Dr. Holmes had entered the paddock through the private gate that opened from his garden. Doubtless the raucous voice of Bill Hitchings had reached him as he paced the quiet garden, meditating upon the works of Q. Horatius Flaccus.

"It's all wight, deah boys," said Arthur Augustus calmly. "Don't wun off, I shall explain to the Head."

Dr. Holmes advanced upon the group with a stern brow. Herries jumped off Mr. Hitchings' chest. Digby stepped off his legs, and Monty Lowther removed a boot from his waistcoat. Bill Hitchings, with a grunt, scrambled to his feet.

"What does this mean?" exclaimed the Head. "What are you doing here? You are not allowed in the paddock. Who is this man?"

Bill Hitchings made a sudden grab at the silver spoon in Dig's hand, snatched it away, and ran for the fence. The tails of his enormous old coat flapped wildly behind him as he fled.

"Aftah him!" shouted Arthur Augustus.

"Stop!" exclaimed the Head.

"Weally, sir—"

"What does this mean?" demanded Dr. Holmes.

"That wotten wuffian came heah to steal the donkey, sir," explained Arthur Augustus.

Tom Merry & Co. gasped, but they were silent. Brute as William Hitchings undoubtedly was, the juniors could not regard his raid on the donkey exactly as stealing. But Arthur Augustus evidently did with the deepest sincerity, and they gave Gussy his head.

Dr. Holmes glanced at the donkey, which was now peacefully browsing at a little distance.

"Oh, yes, the—the ass!" he said. Dr. Holmes was too serious and solemn a gentleman to call an ass a donkey. "Mr. Railton mentioned that a runaway quadruped was here, waiting to be claimed by the owner. Bless my soul! And that disreputable-looking person actually attempted to steal it!"

"Yaas, wathah, sir!"
 "Oh dear!" murmured Blake, feeling a great deal like suffocating.

"I rushed up in time to stop him, and these fellows backed me up, sir," said Arthur Augustus. "I twust, sir, that you approve?"

"Most certainly!" said the Head graciously. "I am very glad indeed that you were able to prevent an act of dishonesty."

It had not dawned upon the Head that the disreputable-looking person was Neddy's owner. He could not guess that. Had he guessed, his views on the subject would not have coincided probably with Gussy's. Fortunately, he didn't guess.

"I shall speak to Taggles, and warn him to keep a look-out," said Dr. Holmes. "The animal must, of course, be returned to the owner as soon as possible. It cannot very well be turned loose. If it is not claimed to-day I will have an advertisement inserted in the local paper, which will doubtless come to the knowledge of the owner."

"Oh, bai Jove!" murmured Arthur Augustus. "I—I was goin' to explain, sir— Wow-wow! What did you kick me for, Blake, you awful ass? Ow!"

"You may go, my boys!" said the Head sharply. "You have done very well—very well indeed; but kindly leave the paddock at once!"

"Yaas, sir; but— Leggo! Leave go my arm, Blake! I am just explainin' to the Head that I— Yow-ow-ow!"

Arthur Augustus was helped away by his friends. The Head frowned a little as they went, and then he smiled. Arthur Augustus was in a breathless state by the time the juniors got him safely out of the paddock. It was not till they were in the quad that they let him go.

Then the swell of St. Jim's jammed his celebrated monocle into his eye and glared at his comrades with wrath and indignation.

"You uttah wuffians! You have dwagged me away befoah I could explain to the Head—"

"Dear old man," said Blake, "you're not going to be sacked from the school for donkey-stealing, so long as we're your keepers."

"You uttah ass! I wegard you—"
 "Give your chin a rest, old bean," said Blake. "I say, if the Head shoves that ad. in the local paper it will bring that ruffian here, won't it?"

"I don't suppose he'll wait for the ad.," said Tom Merry, laughing. "He will call on the Head, I expect, and claim the donkey."

"Then I shall wequest the Head to give him into custody."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Weally, you fellows—"

"Gussy's too funny to live," said Monty Lowther. "Still, it's splendid of him to stand by his big brother like this."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You uttah ass!" roared Arthur Augustus.

The Terrible Three chortled, and walked away to the School House to tea. In the paddock D'Arcy maximus browsed contentedly, apparently quite satisfied with the change of ownership.

CHAPTER 6.

Who Stole the Donkey?

D'ARCY MAXIMUS was still at St. Jim's on the following day, and by that time his fame had spread through the school. Nearly every St. Jim's fellow had had a look at the donkey; even Sixth Form fellows went to look at him. His name, given by Monty Lowther, remained a fixture. Nobody ever mentioned him without calling him D'Arcy maximus—which had a most exasperating effect upon D'Arcy of the Fourth and upon D'Arcy minor of the Third also. Fags in the Third made the most of the little joke, with the result that Wally had a series of fights on his hands that day. He had to punch Hobbs before breakfast; in the morning break he had a fight with Jameson; after third lesson he was seen scrapping with Curly Gibson; and after dinner Wally of the Third and Reggie Manners were discovered rolling in a passage in deadly combat. Of all the Third only Levison minor refrained from chipping Wally about D'Arcy maximus—he was a very tactful youth in some ways. Scrapping was not a new experience for Wally of the

(Continued on next page.)

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- | | |
|---------------------|-----------------------|
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| 2. Nottinghamshire. | 10. Somerset. |
| 3. Surrey. | 11. Derbyshire. |
| 4. Kent. | 12. Warwickshire. |
| 5. Lancashire. | 13. Gloucestershire. |
| 6. Hampshire. | 14. Leicestershire. |
| 7. Middlesex. | 15. Northamptonshire. |
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No. 3	
No. 4	
No. 5	
No. 6	
No. 7	
No. 8	
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No. 10	
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Third, but that afternoon he was showing a lot of signs of conflict. "Arthur Augustus was quite shocked when he met him in the quadrangle.

"What on earth have you been up to, you young waspcahion?" demanded D'Arcy major sternly. "You look like a prize-fightah!"

Wally glared at him.

"I've a jolly good mind to lick you, as well as that mob!" he said wrathfully. "I've licked four chaps, and I've a jolly good mind to make you the fifth!"

"Weally, Wally—"

"You frabjous chump!" roared the indignant Wally.

"I—"

He was interrupted. From the distance came the voice of Piggott of the Third calling:

"How's your big brother, D'Arcy minor?"

And Wally darted off in hot chase of Piggott, leaving Arthur Augustus D'Arcy staring.

"Bai Jove!" said Arthur Augustus.

Racke and Crooke of the Shell came out of the School House, and they exchanged a grin. And Racke called out: "Who stole the donkey?"

Arthur Augustus fairly spun round. There was a howl of laughter from a dozen fellows who heard Racke's query.

"Are you addressin' me, Wacke?" exclaimed Arthur Augustus hotly.

"Nobody in particular," smiled Racke. "Only just askin' a question. Who stole the donkey?"

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

"If you are implyin' that I have stolen a donkey, Wacke, I—"

"Not at all! I only want to know, you know!" chuckled Racke. "Who stole the donkey?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I regard you with contempt, Wacke!" And Arthur Augustus turned haughtily on his heel and walked away, with his aristocratic nose high in the air. A howl from a dozen fellows followed him:

"Who stole the donkey?"

"Bai Jove! This is gwoing' quite unpleasant," murmured Arthur Augustus. "I weally do not see any gwoonds for mewiment in this mattah, but those young asses seem to."

Ralph Reckness Cardew passed D'Arcy in the quad.

"How's your brother, old bean?" he asked.

"I am afwaid Wally has been fightin', Cardew," said Arthur Augustus unsuspiciously. "He looks fwightfully disweputable."

"I didn't mean the little Obadiah. I meant the big Obadiah," explained Cardew—"D'Arcy maximus, you know. Oh gad!" Cardew fled as the enraged Gussy made a rush at him.

Arthur Augustus was looking quite grim as he came up to the Terrible Three in the quad. They tried hard not to smile.

"This is gwoing beastly, you fellows," said Arthur Augustus. "I am not sowwy I wescued the donkey, you know, but the fellows seem to be goin' to chip a fellow to death about it, you know. I think I shall have to sell him."

"Sell him!" exclaimed Tom.

"Yaas, wathah! If I can find a kind mastah for him I shall sell him cheap. Money is no object, you know, in the circs."

"You blessed Bolshevik!" roared Tom Merry. "You can't sell another man's donkey!"

"Wubbish!"

"Fancy Gussy on the treadmill!" said Monty Lowther, with a sigh. "What will the House of Lords say?"

"Wats! I think I had bettah put an advertisement in the local papah—donkey for sale to a kind mastah," said Arthur Augustus.

"The Head's sent an advertisement along!" grinned Manners. "Levison took it down to the office for him after dinner. He's advertising for the donkey's owner."

"That is all your fault, you fellows. If you had allowed me to explain to the Head yestahday, he would not have put his foot in it like this."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"If that fellow Hitchings would weform and be decent I would give him the donkey for nothin'," said Arthur Augustus generously. "But that is out of the question, of course."

"Talk of angels!" said Monty Lowther. "There he is!"

"Bai Jove!"

A disreputable figure in an ancient morning coat and a battered bowler hat had appeared at the gates. The gates were open, but Taggles, the porter, had emerged promptly from his lodge as William Hitchings walked in. Taggles raised an indignant hand.

"Houtside!" he said haughtily.

"Come orf, old covey," said Bill Hitchings. "I'm 'ere arter my blooming donkey."

"Houtside!" repeated Taggles, still more majestically.

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"Let a cove pass!" roared Mr. Hitchings; and he gave Taggles a shove, causing that old gentleman to sit down quite suddenly. Mr. Hitchings strode on victoriously—but only for a few paces. Then he found Kildare of the Sixth in his way.

"Outside!" said Kildare tersely.

"I'm arter my donkey!" roared Mr. Hitchings. "Think you're going to steal my donkey?"

"Oh!" exclaimed Kildare. Like all St. Jim's, the captain of the school had heard of D'Arcy maximus. "I—I see! Sorry! If you're the owner of the donkey, that's all right, of course. But you shouldn't have come in that way. Taggles."

"Ow!" said Taggles, scrambling to his feet.

"The donkey's in your charge, I think," said Kildare, with a smile. "If this man is the owner, you'd better hand the animal over."

"Don't look to me as if he is," said Taggles savagely.

"Looks to me like a blinking tramp!"

"It's my donkey!" roared Mr. Hitchings. "I ain't going without my donkey! I'll bring a pleeceman next, and you can lay to that!"

Kildare eyed him very doubtfully. Donkey-owners keep donkeys for some kind of work, as a rule; and Mr. Hitchings did not look as if he had anything to do with work of any kind. It was quite possible, of course, that some unscrupulous tramp, hearing that there was a runaway donkey to be had, would put in a claim for it.

"You'd better see the Housemaster, I think," said Kildare at last.

"I'm going to see the 'eadmaster!" said Mr. Hitchings.

"My donkey 'ave been stolen, and I'm laying a complaint!"

"Don't be an ass!" said Kildare gruffly. "Your donkey—if it's your donkey—was found loose and brought here by a junior boy!"

"And there he is!" snorted Mr. Hitchings, pointing a dirty finger at the elegant figure of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

"That's the young cove what stole my donkey!"

"D'Arcy!"

"Yaas, Kildare?" said Arthur Augustus calmly, coming up.

"I understood that you found the donkey running loose?"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Did you know that this man was the owner?"

"Yaas!"

"Great Scott!" Kildare stared at the swell of the Fourth.

"You know this man is the donkey's owner, and yet—"

"He is not the owner now!" explained Arthur Augustus.

"I ham!" roared Mr. Hitchings emphatically.

"What do you mean, D'Arcy? You've not bought the donkey, I suppose?"

"Nevah thought of it, deah boy. I wescued him fwom that bwute."

"Rescued him?" said Kildare dazedly.

"Yaas, wathah! The wuffian was ill-tweatin' him, so I wescued him. I cannot allow his claim to be the ownah now. It is not wight for a man to own an animal if he ill-tweats him."

"Ark at 'im!" said Mr. Hitchings.

"You—you—you cannot allow!" gasped Kildare. "You young idiot—"

"Weally, Kildare—"

"Who stole the donkey?" came Racke's voice from the distance.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I'm goin' to prosecute that young 'ound," said Mr. Hitchings, seeing his advantage, and following it up. "You think you can steal a pore man's donkey, because you belong to a big school? I'll show yer!"

"I wefuse to discuss the mattah with you, you wascal!"

"I shall report this to your Housemaster, D'Arcy," said Kildare. "Wait here a minute, my man, while I get the key of the paddock."

"Yes, sir!" said Mr. Hitchings civilly.

"Kildare—you are not going to give my donkey to that wuffian—"

Kildare did not heed. He went into the School House to speak to the Head, and came back in a few minutes with the key of the paddock. He signed to Mr. Hitchings to follow him. The ruffian, with a triumphant leer at Arthur Augustus, lounged after the Sixth-Former.

Arthur Augustus seemed rooted to the ground.

"Can't be helped, old man," said Tom Merry. "You've done all you can."

"Wats!"

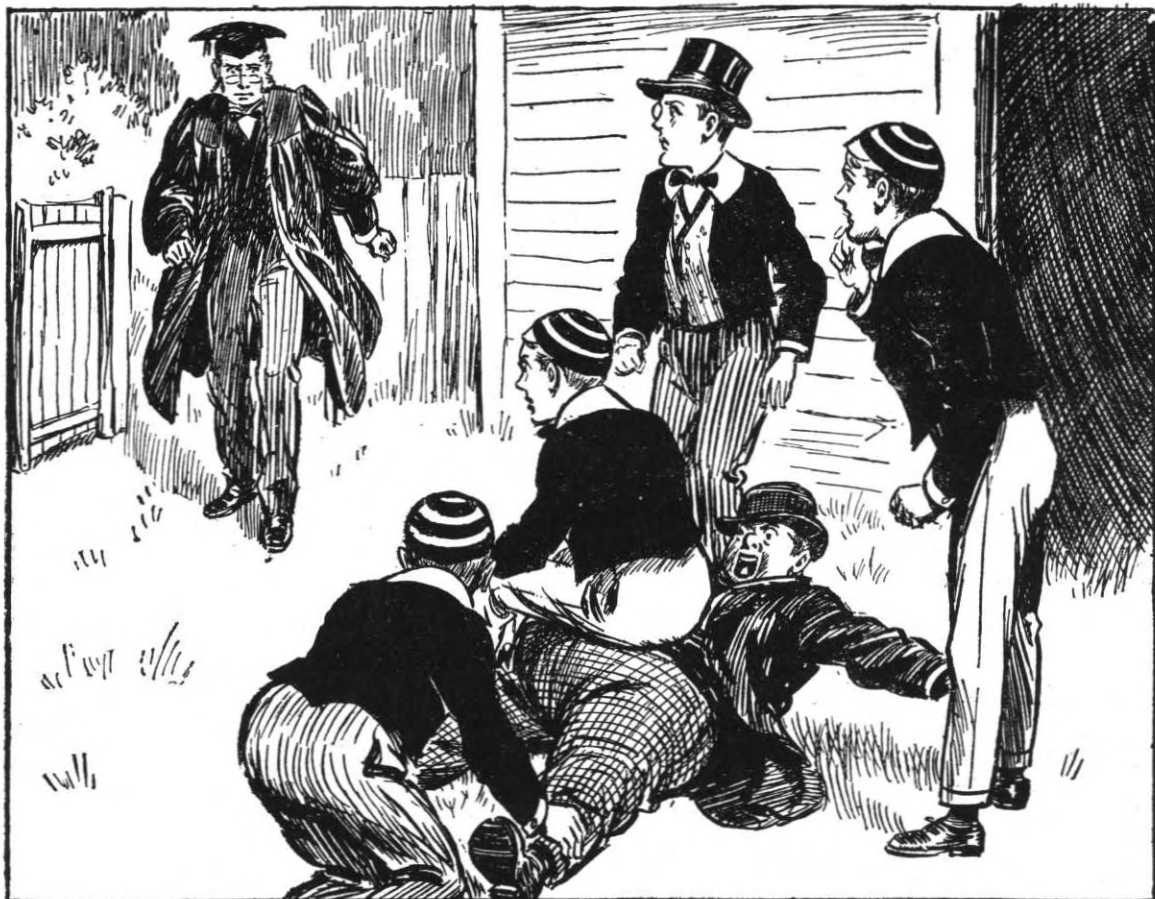
"Take it smiling, old top!" urged Blake. "Can't back up against headmasters and prefects and things!"

"Wubbish! I wefuse to allow that wuffian to take my donkey away!"

"It isn't your donkey!" shrieked Blake.

"Bosh!"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, with a grim and determined expression on his noble face, started for the gates. Kildare



Dr. Holmes entered the paddock through the private gate and advanced upon the scuffling group on the ground with a stern brow. "It's all wight, deah boys," cried Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "Don't wun off, I shall explain to the Head!" Bill Hitchings grunted under the weight of the juniors. (See page 8.)

and Mr. Hitchings were in the paddock by that time, and lost to sight. Tom Merry & Co. exchanged a helpless look. They were sorry enough to see Neddy handed back to a cruel master; but they did not see what was to be done to prevent it. Evidently Arthur Augustus considered that something had to be done, and was going to do it. Tom Merry & Co. followed him out of gates, and found him watching the wall of the paddock where it bordered the road near the fir plantation.

"Gussy, old man—" said Blake.

"Are you fellows backin' me up?"

"What's the game, you awful ass?"

"I am goin' to wescue Neddy fwom that bwute!"

"But you can't!" howled Blake.

"Wats! I wegard it as a duty!"

"Oh dear!" groaned Blake.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy had made up his noble mind. And when Arthur Augustus D'Arcy made up his mind, he was accustomed to display that firmness of a rock, which to others seemed remarkably like unto the obstinacy of a mule.

CHAPTER 7.

The Head Comes Down Heavy!

"KIM up, blow yer!"

Whack!

The paddock gate on the lane was open, and Mr. Hitchings was leading out the donkey. He gave it a blow with a stick as he led it out—a foretaste of the wrath to come, as it were. Kildare was at the gate, and he frowned angrily; but perhaps he realised that remonstrance would only make matters worse for Neddy later, for he said nothing. The gate closed on the man and the donkey, and was locked after them. Mr. Hitchings gave the donkey another whack, and led him out of the little lane into the road—where Arthur Augustus waited.

At the sight of Arthur Augustus, Mr. Hitchings scowled savagely. Possibly he read Gussy's warlike intentions in his looks.

Tom Merry & Co. stood irresolute. Exactly what to do was a puzzle to them. To kidnap the donkey, which had been handed over to its owner by orders of the Head, really seemed impossible. But the word impossible did not appear to exist for the Honourable Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

And as he came by the group of juniors, Mr. Hitchings chose the moment to bestow a perfect volley of whacks upon the unhappy Neddy. Arthur Augustus ran towards him, his eyes blazing.

"Hand ovah that donkey at once, you scoundwel!"

"Likely!" jeered Mr. Hitchings. "'Ands off, or I'll give yer a lick with this 'ere stick! Ah! Would yer!"

Whack! This time the whack descended upon D'Arcy's hat, and there was a horrible crunch. It was the second topper that Gussy had sacrificed in the cause of kindness to animals.

"Oh crumbs!"

D'Arcy staggered back, and Bill Hitchings led the donkey away at a run. Arthur Augustus dragged furiously at the crushed hat, which was jammed over his noble ears.

"Stop him, you fellows!"

"I say, Gussy—"

"Wats!"

D'Arcy tore off the clinging remnant of the hat, and rushed after Bill Hitchings. That gentleman, going at a trot, was passing the school gates when D'Arcy reached him. Arthur Augustus did not stop. He rushed right on Bill Hitchings, collared him by the neck, and dragged him over. Bill Hitchings gave a roar of rage as he sat down, Neddy's halter slipping from his clutch. Blake caught it quickly.

Bill Hitchings scrambled up and turned on Arthur Augustus and clutched him. The next moment they were rolling in the dust together—fairly in the middle of the road outside the big gateway of St. Jim's—and a yell from the quad showed that they were seen. A dozen fellows rushed up to see the unaccustomed sight of a fight outside the gates, and twenty or thirty more arrived a minute later. The gateway was crammed with juniors, shouting encouragement to

Arthur Augustus, while Tom Merry & Co. stood in the road looking on helplessly.

The combatants rolled over in the dust, struggling and punching, and then Bill Hitchings got the upper hand. He got a knee on D'Arcy, and raised a huge fist to crash down on him. Tom Merry captured his wrist in time and stopped the blow.

"Leggo!" roared Hitchings. "I'll smash 'im!"

"You won't!" said Tom coolly.

Bill Hitchings turned on Tom Merry and clutched. They struggled, and Arthur Augustus sat up dazedly, smothered with dust.

"Go it, St. Jim's!" roared the crowd in the gateway.

"Cave!" yelled Wally of the Third.

"The Head! Look out!"

The crowd parted as Dr. Holmes arrived on the scene. The Head of St. Jim's gazed at the amazing scene with horror.

"What—what—what does this mean?" he exclaimed.

"I'll smash 'im!" roared Mr. Hitchings.

"Merry! Release that man at once!"

Tom Merry wrenched himself free, and jumped back. Mr. Hitchings, staggering and gasping, burst into a torrent of explosive abuse. Kildare hurried up, and dropped a hand on his shoulder.

"Stop that!" he said curtly.

Bill Hitchings gave him a savage glare, but he "stopped it." Kildare's grasp was like iron on his shoulder.

"I—I have seen this man before," said the Head. "Is he the—the ruffian who attempted to steal that—that quadruped from the paddock yesterday?"

"Yaas, sir!" gasped Arthur Augustus breathlessly. "The same wotten wascal, sir!"

"He's the owner of the donkey, sir!" said Kildare.

"What? What? Is it possible?"

"My blooming moke!" roared Mr. Hitchings. "You, a schoolmaster, teaching your boys to steal a honest man's moke! I'll 'ave the law on yer!"

The Head's face grew crimson.

"That's enough, my man!" said Kildare, in a low voice in Mr. Hitchings' ear. "Another word, and I'll thrash you within an inch of your life!"

He compressed his grip till Mr. Hitchings felt as if his shoulder were cracking.

"Ow! No offence, sir!" said Hitchings, changing his tone.

"But a man wants his own property. This 'ere is 'ighway robbery! And me so fond of old Neddy, too! Break my 'eart to part with that moke, it would!"

"Merry!" said the Head, in a deep voice.

"Yes, sir!" faltered Tom.

"Is that man the owner of the animal?"

"I—I think so, sir."

"Very good! D'Arcy!"

"Yaas, sir!" said Arthur Augustus. He had picked himself up at last, and stood panting and shedding dust.

"You told me yesterday that this—this gentleman was in the paddock to steal the animal. You deceived me!"

"Not at all, sir! I twust you do not considah me capable of deceivin' anybody," said Arthur Augustus calmly. "What I stated was perfectly cowwect. I took this donkey away from that wuffian because he was ill-usin' it."

"What?"

"Aftahwards, he attempted to steal it. All these fellows are witnesses of his wascality."

"Oh, my hat!" murmured Blake helplessly.

"You—you took the—the animal away from its owner, D'Arcy?" stuttered the Head.

"Yaas, sir! I considahed that it was up to me. I found it wunnin' away from him, sir, and caught it for him, and the beast began ill-using it in a shockin' mannah. So I took it away."

"Bless my soul! Kildare, did you hand over the animal to its owner, as I directed you?"

"Yes, sir."

"Is it possible, Merry, that you and these others attempted to deprive this man of his ass, after the animal had been handed to him by my order?"

Tom Merry & Co. were silent.

"It was my doin', sir" said Arthur Augustus. "I felt that I could not allow the donkey to be taken away by that wuffian. These fellows had nothin' to do with it."

"Very good! You attempted to take the man's property away, in defiance of your headmaster's authority?"

"I—I am sowwy to disagwee with your opinion, of course, sir," said Arthur Augustus, faltering a little.

"Mr. Railton!" The Housemaster was on the scene now. "Will you oblige me by taking D'Arcy to the punishment-room and locking him in? I must consider whether a flogging will meet this case, or whether I must expel him from the school."

"Oh, bai Jove!"

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"Come, D'Arcy!" said Mr. Railton, taking hold of Arthur Augustus' collar.

Arthur Augustus walked in quite limply with the Housemaster. For the moment the hapless champion of ill-used donkeys seemed quite crushed.

Tom Merry & Co. waited for their sentence in their turn; but the Head did not look at them again. He had accepted D'Arcy's statement that he was responsible.

Dr. Holmes turned to Mr. Hitchings, signing to Kildare to release that frowsy gentleman. He made a gesture to the crowd in the gateway to disperse, and the St. Jim's fellows backed away.

"I am sorry, my good man, that this has happened," said the Head, with great courtesy. "The boy who interfered with you will be punished severely."

Mr. Hitchings had collected up his battered hat, and replaced it on his unclean head. Now he touched it very respectfully. His cue was that of the fond master of a favourite animal that had been lawlessly reft from him, and he played up to it.

"Thank you kindly, sir!" he said. "A reg'lar young rip he is, sir, hitting a man in the eye and stealing his moke. I'm a pore man, sir, and that there donkey is all I 'ave to 'elp me get an honest living, sir, selling vegetables and such that I grow in my little garding, sir."

It would have puzzled Mr. Hitchings to state just where that little garden was situated. But the Head was only anxious to end this painful scene.

"You have been hardly used," he said. "I can only express my regret."

"Wasting a pore man's time, sir," said Mr. Hitchings.

"Course, I might 'ave gone to the police. But I wouldn't make trouble, sir, for a kind'earted gentleman like yourself, bringing a policeman into your school, sir, and charging of your boys with stealing, sir!"

Dr. Holmes shuddered.

"Two pun I've lost," said Mr. Hitchings pathetically.

"Two whole days, sir, wasted, looking after that donkey what was took away from me by 'ighway violence, sir, and my fruit and vegetables going rotten on the barrer, sir—a 'eavy loss for a pore, 'ardworking man!"

It was difficult for Tom Merry & Co. to listen to that statement without speaking; but the expression on the Head's face did not invite intervention. Tom made a sign to Blake, who was still holding the donkey's halter. Blake nodded, and quietly slipped the halter from the animal's neck and let it fall. Neddy was free again—and it was up to his master to catch him when he wanted him. Certainly he had no right to expect help from the St. Jim's fellows.

Mr. Hitchings, pitching his tale of woe to the Head, did not observe that little by-play.

"Not that I'm thinking so much about the money, sir," went on Mr. Hitchings. "It's a lot to a pore man, but, bless you 'eart, sir, I ain't afraid of work—I'll work a bit 'arder, and make it up somehow. But I'm fond of that there donkey, sir—that's 'ow it is! Broke my 'eart, it did, when he was took away. Only friend I've got, sir, in the world, is that there moke. It's 'ard on a man, sir!"

"It is shameful!" said the Head warmly. "I am very sorry indeed. Certainly I shall make up the amount you have lost by the foolish, utterly inconsiderate action of a boy belonging to this school. I think you said the sum was two pounds?"

Mr. Hitchings could scarcely believe in his good luck when his dirty fingers closed on two pound-notes. His reflections at that moment were that a fool and his money are soon parted, and that there is no fool like an old fool. He did not utter those reflections aloud.

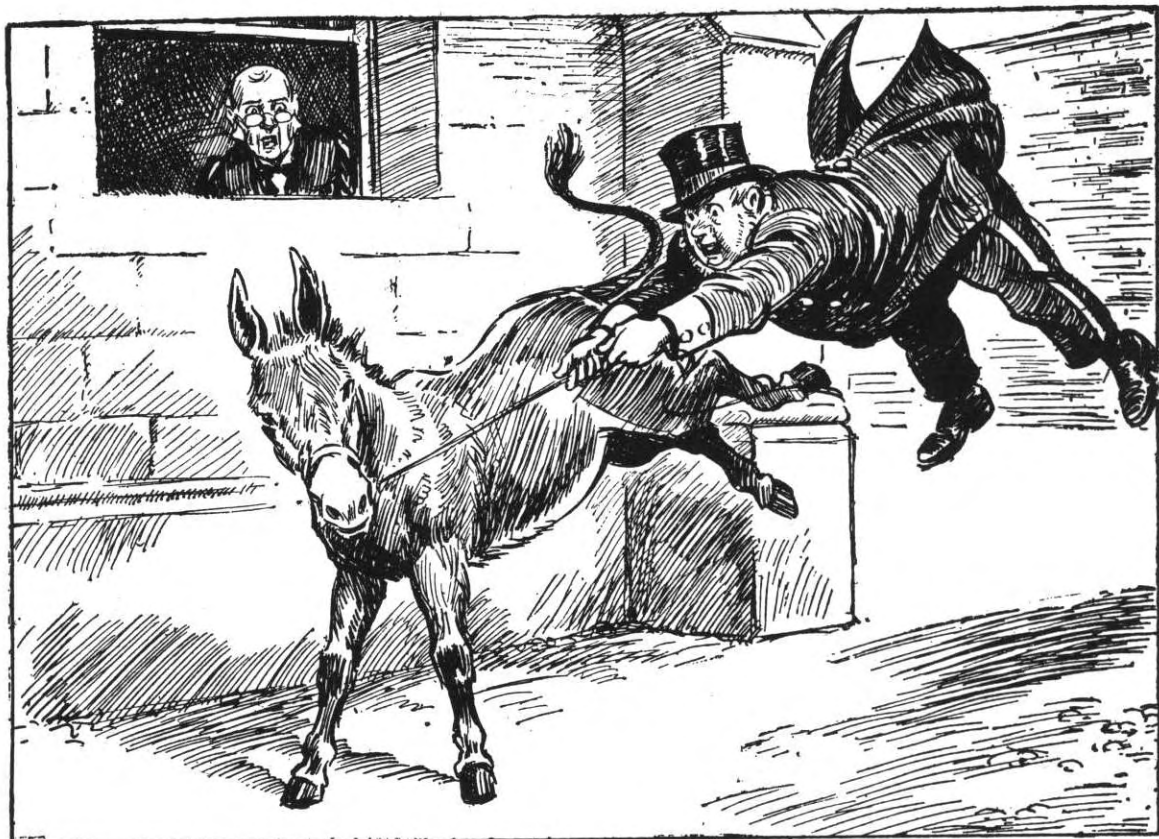
"Thank you kindly, sir!" he said. "I knew you'd see justice done, sir—you wouldn't see a honest man put upon. Arternoon to you, sir!"

And, touching his battered hat again, Mr. Hitchings turned round for the donkey. A happy programme was before Mr. Hitchings. First he was going to lead Neddy into some quiet, secluded spot where he could thrash him till his arm ached, uninterrupted by a policeman. Then he was going on to the Green Man to revel in the undreamt-of quantity of intoxicating liquor that could be purchased for two pounds.

But there was a hitch in the programme. Neddy was loose—and the moment his master stepped towards him Neddy threw up his heels and fled for his life.

"Stop 'im!" howled Mr. Hitchings.

Nobody offered to stop Neddy. Bill Hitchings rushed desperately after him, brandishing the stick, and howling out anathemas, which had the natural effect of making Neddy put on his very best speed. Donkey and owner disappeared in clouds of dust up the road, both going strong. But Cardew of the Fourth remarked that the odds were two to one on D'Arcy maximus—and Tom Merry & Co. could only hope that the hapless donkey would get clear.



"You himage!" The voice floated into Mr. Linton's study window, and the Shell master rushed to his window and glared out. For a dreadful second he supposed that Taggles was addressing him, then his face turned into a smile as his eyes fell upon Taggles clutching frantically at a donkey's halter. (See page 17.)

CHAPTER 8. Absurd!

"Gussy's for it!" That was the general opinion in the School House at St. Jim's. The adventure of "D'Arcy maximus" had ended disastrously for the swell of St. Jim's.

In Nobody's Study, in the School House, Arthur Augustus was locked in. The Head, it was understood, was debating, in the depths of his learned mind, whether the delinquent must be expelled, or whether a flogging would meet the case. Neither was welcome to Arthur Augustus, who was upheld by a firm consciousness of having done well—in fact, having done the only thing possible in the peculiar circumstances. Gussy was pained and grieved by his headmaster's wrong-headed view of the matter which was so simple and clear to Gussy himself.

So Arthur Augustus sat in solitary state, on the edge of the bed in the punishment-room, and bore his disaster with dignity. He could only hope that the Head would come round to a more reasonable view of the situation—a view more worthy of a gentleman who had the distinction of being D'Arcy's headmaster!

But in the School House, among D'Arcy's many friends, there was great dismay.

Everybody, or nearly everybody, sympathised with Gussy. But they did not look at the matter as Gussy did. They understood how the Head looked at it. All the Head knew was that D'Arcy had taken away a man's donkey, having decided on his own responsibility that the man was not a suitable person to keep animals. Arthur Augustus might be satisfied with that proceeding—but it was absolutely certain that no headmaster could possibly be satisfied with it.

Nobody really thought that D'Arcy would be "sacked." Monty Lowther pointed out that even the Head had sense enough to see that Gussy was a born ass, and not really responsible for his actions. And the St. Jim's fellows gladly credited the Head with that amount of sense.

But a flogging was a certainty, in the general opinion. The affair had angered the Head deeply. He discussed it that evening in his study with Mr. Railton.

"The man Hitchings would have been fully justified in

bringing a constable here and charging a St. Jim's boy with theft," he said. "Imagine the talk—the scandal—the disgrace."

"It is certainly very serious," assented the Housemaster. "D'Arcy, of course, does not comprehend."

"He is old enough to understand common honesty," said the Head. "His action in taking away the animal was stealing."

"He seems to have justified it on the ground that the animal was ill-used."

The Head gave a sound that resembled a snort. If the headmaster of a public school, and a Doctor of Divinity, could be supposed to snort, certainly Dr. Holmes snorted.

"So far as that goes, D'Arcy seems to have some grounds," observed Mr. Railton mildly. "I have spoken to several of the boys, and they all concur that the man Hitchings treated the donkey with great cruelty. Merry of the Shell interfered with him for that reason, before D'Arcy saw the donkey at all. Manners and Lowther were witnesses of his brutality. Kildare tells me that Hitchings struck the animal brutally, and without cause, as soon as it was handed over to him."

"He stated to me that he was very attached to the animal."

Mr. Railton coughed.

"He did not strike me as a truthful man," he remarked.

"It may be as you say, Mr. Railton; but this is lynch law. There are laws in this country to restrain and punish persons who ill-use animals. We do not live in an American Western state, where every man takes the law into his own hands," said the Head. "D'Arcy's proper course was to inform the police, or to mention the matter to his Housemaster, and leave it to your judgment."

"Perfectly so, sir," said Mr. Railton. "Though in the meantime, the man would no doubt have disappeared with the donkey."

"It is not for a boy in the Fourth Form to take the law into his own hands," said the Head. "I am really surprised that Hitchings did not call in the police."

He frowned portentously.

(Continued on page 17.)

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TIM O'CARROLL GOES TO SCHOOL AND DOES SOME DETECTIVE WORK ON HIS OWN!



THE SECRET of the CLOISTERS!

BY EDMUND BURTON.

Another of the Amazing Exploits of
ANTHONY SHARPE—Investigator.

CHAPTER 1.

The Man on the Road!

TIMOTHY DENNIS MICHAEL O'CARROLL, Anthony Sharpe's juvenile partner, was as keen as mustard—smart, intelligent, and unusually observant—but he wasn't educated in the accepted meaning of the term. Having run wild for the most part of his life about the dock district of London, he had never been to school; and his master, after due consideration, decided that his young assistant should glean at least the rudimentary knowledge of books and such things, which is the lot of the average lad of Tim's age.

Thus we find the erstwhile street gamin, clad in the orthodox grey trousers and black pea-jacket, seated in the corner of a railway carriage, which was bearing him to Southavon—the nearest station to St. Mary's College, just outside the town of that name.

There was only one other individual in that compartment—a red-faced, freckled youth of about Tim's own age, who, clad in like manner, was seated in the opposite corner, from which position he had intently studied his companion from the moment of the latter's entry. Presently his curiosity evidently getting the upper hand of his reserve, he ventured a question:

"Going to school?"

Tim looked round with a start. He had barely noticed the other's presence until that moment, being too much occupied with his own thoughts and misgivings, about this new change of life he was embarking on.

"Yes," he replied slowly. "I'm bound for St. Mary's College, Southavon. Do you know it?"

The freckled one grinned.

"I ought to," he said, "since I'm just enterin' my fourth term there. What's your name? Mine's Dexter."

Master Dexter was plainly a gentleman of direct speech; he didn't favour any beating about the bush, and Tim found himself rather impressed by the straightforwardness of his conversation.

"Me? Oh, I'm Timothy Dennis Michael O'Carroll," he answered, giving his appellation in the full.

Dexter nodded seriously.

"A Frenchman evidently," he said.

And O'Carroll frowned darkly.

"No, I ain't!" he snapped. "I was born in London, but me blood's real Irish, an' I'm— However, that doesn't matter. Say, what kind of a place is this school?"

His companion instantly dropped his

semi-bantering attitude and became quite enthusiastic.

"What kind of a place is it?" he repeated. "It's the best place in the world, you may take it from me! The Head's a brick, and so are most of the Form masters. In fact, there are very few duds of any sort at St. Mary's—except perhaps one or two rotters in the Sixth. Why, you'd be surprised to know how many famous men were educated at our college—statesmen, soldiers, admirals—"

"How long does it take to get there?" Tim cut in, not wishing to be treated to a detailed history of every successful person the school had cast loose upon the earth.

"'Bout two hours by this train, which is a fast one," replied his informant. "Have a chocolate?"

He extended a bulky bag, and the conversation drifted along in various channels until the express eventually drew up at Southavon.

Hurrying out, Dexter looked round for a conveyance of some kind, but none was in sight. A thin drizzle had commenced to fall, and he gave a snort of disgust.

"No bus!" he growled. They generally send the old motor down to meet arrivals, but probably the main crowd came by an earlier train. We seem to be the only two on this, an' I guess we'll have to foot it."

They started to walk up the long hill towards St. Mary's—a good three-quarters of a mile of heavy going—and had accomplished about half the distance when a tall, thin figure was seen approaching in the middle of the roadway. The man glanced casually at them as he passed, and Tim, habitually of an observant nature, did likewise at him. Then he muttered something, which caused Dexter to turn sharply towards his companion.

"Eh?"

"Nothing!" O'Carroll said. "I was merely thinkin' aloud. Er—funny-lookin' johnny, that fellow who's just passed us. Never saw such a jet-black beard in my life."

"Oh, that chap!" Dexter shrugged his shoulders. "Yes, he's odd-looking, sure enough. His name's Potterton, an' he's just rented the Priory Cottage from the Head, to whom he paid a fairish sum down, I believe. Potterton's an anti—"

"Antediluvian?" suggested Tim.

"No, you ass; an antiquarian!" Dexter corrected. "He's interested in old buildings an' things like that, so that's why he's taken the Priory Cottage, which stands in the college grounds. He wants

to poke round and make investigations, probably for some book he's writing. Well, that's his affair, an' he's welcome so long as he doesn't interfere with us."

But half of what Dexter said had fallen upon deaf ears. Potterton, Potterton? So that was the man's name, and yet—Where had Tim seen that face before, he asked himself? There was something in the expression—rather a cadaverous expression—and in the depths of the sunken eyes, that seemed to be strangely familiar. But he couldn't place the man, strive how he would, and finally had to give it up as a bad job. After all, everyone is said to bear a strong facial resemblance to someone else, which probably explained the familiarity of Potterton.

"Here we are!" Dexter said, scattering O'Carroll's thoughts at that moment. "This is the college. Fine place, eh? That's our wing yonder," he pointed. "An' that's the Priory Cottage I mentioned old Nosy Potterton had rented"—indicating a dilapidated-looking building half-hidden by a thick shrubbery on the left-hand side of the gravelled drive. That the place was still habitable, however, was indicated by a thin wisp of blue smoke which feathered from its solitary twisted chimney.

"Queer tastes some folk surely have," Dexter remarked. "Why, that place must be as damp as the bottom of a water-mill. Evidently old Potts doesn't suffer from rheumatism."

CHAPTER 2.

The Oiled Lock—The Midnight Visitor!

THE next couple of weeks passed quietly enough, Tim O'Carroll gradually getting accustomed to his new environment. He found St. Mary's College to be just what Dexter described—a fine place—and liked the majority of those with whom he came in direct contact.

"Look here," Dexter said one day, when the pair found themselves rather at a loose end, owing to the inclement weather prevailing. "I've never showed you the old cloisters, have I? Then come along; nobody ever goes down there now, but they're rummy old places which might interest you."

St. Mary's was a very ancient building for the most part, some of it dating back to the fifteenth century, and contained many cellars and curious winding passages far below the level of the ground.

Dexter conducted O'Carroll down to these and showed him round, pointing

out an object of special interest occasionally. Finally, as they were about to return to the upper regions, Tim suddenly stopped dead, his training under Anthony Sharpe causing him to notice something which had apparently escaped his companion's observation.

"Look here," he said, "I thought you told me this place was never used. Then what's that for?"

He pointed to a small, iron-studded door, almost concealed in the shadow of a massive stone pillar. It was rusty for the main part, but the lock and hinges showed visible traces of something having been smeared upon them.

"H'm!" Dexter muttered. "That's funny! Been oiled recently, evidently."

He pushed against the barrier, but it was immovable, and, scarcely bothering further about the matter, they left the place.

"Maybe the Head's storing furniture or something down there," Dexter suggested, but Tim offered no comment.

Yet could they have had the barest inkling of what lay behind that closed door, they would have been considerably flabbergasted, to say the very least of it!

Timothy Dennis Michael O'Carroll stirred uneasily in his slumbers and opened his eyes. What had awakened him he did not know, but something must have done so, for he was usually a sound sleeper.

Ah! What was that light moving down the middle of the dormitory, now stopping, now passing on? What was that faint sound like the clink of money?

Tim felt a strange tickling sensation in his spine as the light halted at the foot of his own bed. He saw his clothes moved, and heard the rattle of cash in his pockets. Then the light shone upwards for a second and rested on the face of Potterton, the new tenant of Priory Cottage!

Tim could not have spoken even had he wished to do so. All he could do was watch. He lay there with his eyes half shut, breathing regularly as though he were still sleeping.

Potterton passed on from bed to bed, pausing for a brief while at each. Then the faint click of the doorlatch announced his departure.

The obvious thought flashed through O'Carroll's brain—could this Potterton be a thief? Had he ever seen him before whilst working with his master, Anthony Sharpe, which would explain why the man's face seemed vaguely familiar when he and Dexter passed him on the road a fortnight ago? The majority of the boys at St. Mary's came of wealthy parents, who kept their sons liberally supplied with pocket-money, and—

Tim wasted no further time in conjecture. Slipping out of bed, he noiselessly opened the dormitory door and passed out into the corridor. Two or three flights down the great staircase a dim light was bobbing about, and Tim followed, his bare feet making no sound.

Gradually he overhauled his quarry until there was only a single flight between them, but the light still kept steadily onwards. They had now passed the ground-level, and were entering the labyrinth of winding passages and curious hiding-places. What on earth was Potterton going here for? This was not the way to the Priory Cottage, which stood in the shrubbery near the main gate.

O'Carroll held his breath as the bobbing light paused; then with difficulty restrained an exclamation, for the man had stopped outside the mysterious iron-studded door and produced a key, which he inserted in the lock. Next moment he had passed inside, and Tim, stealing forward, pressed his ear to the metal

work. A strange rasping noise came from within, as if someone were filing or scraping at something; then, suddenly spotting a slight crack just level with his head, from which a shaft of brilliant light streamed, O'Carroll glued his eye to this.

It was well that Anthony Sharpe's young assistant had been trained to smother his feelings in unusual circumstances, otherwise he would surely have given himself away, for at a bench set against the far wall of that mysterious cellar behind the iron door Potterton was busily working, his tall, thin form stooping over his task, and his black-bearded face thrown into strong relief by the light of a powerful acetylene lamp fixed to the wall. On the bench were a collection of queer-looking appliances—crucibles, ladles, and so forth, and at one end was a little heap of silver coin. That is, they would have been puzzling appliances to the ordinary individual, but Tim O'Carroll knew what they were at once. And, what is more, he believed he now knew who the man with the black beard was, strange though it may seem!

"Gentleman Dick!" he muttered. "Well, this is a most amazing biz! I can't understand it; perhaps the gov'nor can!"

There was scarcely any doubt about the tall man's identity in O'Carroll's mind now. Not long before, Anthony Sharpe had told him about a coining gang he had smashed up, and shown him various photographs of the chief delinquent. This man, who was of good birth and education, went by the name of "Gentleman Dick," and was, in Sharpe's opinion, one of the cleverest makers of "snide" silver coin who ever existed. He rarely touched paper money, preferring to stick to the circulation of coin only.

Tim had his description off by heart, and the photos had been so exceptionally good that, as he continued to peer through the chink, his belief became a conviction that he was now looking at their original, despite the fact that, in the official description, Gentleman Dick's beard was lightish brown, not black.

But what was Gentleman Dick doing here, of all places? One would have expected to find such a clever coiner working in some more populous district than Southavon; and, above all things, he—

Tim's line of reasoning was rudely broken by a sudden movement on the far side of the iron door. The acetylene lamp was lifted, and the tall figure of the coiner moved towards the right-hand side of the cellar, beyond the range of the watcher's vision. Then the light seemed to gradually fade, and with it went the swiftly receding patter of footsteps. Suddenly a muffled thud sounded, then silence.

Tim waited for quite a long time at his vantage-point, but no further incident occurred to grip his interest. The cellar remained silent and in darkness. Then, the chill of the stone flags upon which he stood beginning to make itself felt, O'Carroll beat a hasty retreat back to the dormitory.

CHAPTER 3.

Two Telegrams—Enter Anthony Sharpe!

THE next day—Thursday—was a half-holiday at St. Mary's; consequently, Thursday was greatly welcomed by the Southavon shopkeepers, since it usually meant a regular invasion of their premises by the college boys.

On this occasion, however, O'Carroll buttonholed Dexter before anyone left the school. His face was as solemn as an owl's, but his eyes were gleaming brightly.

"Look here," he said, "you know all these fellows better'n I do. Go round the whole lot, an' tell 'em to spend no money to-day—not a cent, mind! If they do they'll likely find themselves in trouble!"

"What the dickens—"

"I've no time to explain now," cut in Tim, "but you'll learn all about it later—this evening, if I'm makin' no big mistake. I'll only tell you this—all the money in my pockets is bad—counterfeit—and probably yours is of the same kind, as most likely is the case with the rest of the fellows' cash. No!"—as Dexter seemed about to pursue his inquisition, "I'm not sayin' any more about it now; I've got too much to do, an' too little time to do it in. It doesn't matter how I know; it just happens that I'm able to recognise dud stuff when I see it."

Jack Dexter looked anxiously at his chum, as though wondering if the latter had suddenly gone potty; but realising



Tim O'Carroll saw his clothes move and heard the rattle of the cash in his pockets, then a light shone upwards, disclosing the face of Potterton, the new tenant of Priory Cottage.



Anthony Sharpe, with the assistance of Dexter and O'Carroll, pounced upon Potterton, and a fierce struggle ensued.

how desperately serious Tim was, and impressed thereby, he did as requested.

The other lads looked as dumbfounded as Jack, but Dexter was popular with everyone, and he had his way. In any case, the thing savoured of mystery, and that whetted their appetites, inducing them to fall in with O'Carroll's wishes, if only for the sake of hearing more about it later.

Very shortly afterwards Dexter and Tim walked into the Southavon Post Office. Here the latter, who had fortunately discovered a sound two-shilling piece which had been overlooked by Potterton when substituting bad money for the good silver in the boys' pockets, despatched a brief wire. Dexter, who was looking over his shoulder as he filled in the form, uttered a subdued whistle.

"Anthony Sharpe!" he gasped. "Sharpe, the great detective! What's it mean? Who—"

"Shut up!" Tim rapped back. "Come outside an' I'll tell you!"

It was a very mystified Dexter who listened to Tim O'Carroll's disclosure of his true identity, and to the account of the previous night's discoveries. But he vowed to keep his tongue quiet until events developed.

An hour or so later Sharpe's reply was wired back to the post-office, and shortly after dusk the pair met the investigator at the railway-station.

Dexter was introduced, feeling immensely pleased that he should afterwards be able to claim the personal acquaintance of such a celebrity, and a move was made to a neighbouring restaurant, where, in a secluded corner, the plan of action was discussed.

"Yes," Sharpe remarked, "I've no doubt the fellow is Gentleman Dick—the description tallies, and he would be at large again just about this time, having served the stiff sentence I got him. This Priory Cottage is near the gate, you say?"

Tim nodded.

"Yes; but won't you tackle the cellar first, sir?" he asked. "He evidently goes there after dark."

Sharpe smiled.

"That's just why I'm going to the cottage in the first instance," he said.

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"You've described what you saw in the cellar very clearly, and it's given me an idea that Mr. Gentleman Dick may give us the slip if we're not careful."

"But what's he doing here, sir?" O'Carroll asked. "Why should he pick on a small place like Southavon to start work afresh immediately he comes out? It doesn't seem natural, considerin' that he'd probably do so much better in the big cities."

Sharpe shrugged his shoulders. "He's chosen Southavon, I guess, because he wants to lie low for a while. I harried him too much, with the help of the Yard, before, and he's resuming operations very gradually. As to why he should select this place particularly, perhaps the fact that he was born and bred here may explain it."

O'Carroll looked surprised. "Is that so, guv'nor?" he said. "I never heard that before."

"Yes; it's quite true," Sharpe resumed. "Potterton, alias Gentleman Dick, alias several other names, was born, bred, and educated at Southavon. In his boyhood another school stood very near where St. Mary's College is now, but it was pulled down in part to make room for the more elaborate institution as you know it. Potterton went to this school, where he doubtless became familiar with his surroundings, whilst exploring as youngsters will. Consequently, when he found it advisable to remain in obscurity for a while, it was natural that Southavon should first suggest itself to him. He therefore came down here, with his beard dyed a jet black, and a few other alterations in his appearance very possibly, posed as an antiquarian, and rented the semi-dilapidated Priory Cottage from your headmaster. Why he chose the cottage specially we must endeavour to find out, and I fancy the result will fit in with my present theory. Anyway, he plainly intended to flood Southavon with spurious coin, and hit upon a most cunning method of doing so—a method which would have removed all possibility of suspicion from him—"

"By changing the cash in the boys' pockets and making them circulate the stuff, sir?" O'Carroll cut in. "Isn't that it?"

Sharpe nodded.

"Quite so. They would have been innocent accessories," he replied. "And now," he glanced at his watch, "we must interview the local gentlemen in blue. Come along!"

Shortly after darkness had properly set in, Sharpe and the boys, accompanied by a couple of constables, made their way cautiously to the Priory Cottage in the shrubbery. The building was in darkness, and no answer was given to Sharpe's knock when he rapped upon the door. His second summons being likewise ignored, an entry was made by means of a side window, and, leaving the constables on guard, the others climbed through into the dark passage beyond. Here Sharpe's electric torch soon dispelled the gloom, and a close inspection of the building was begun.

It did not take very long. The place was small, four rooms only, and all were vacant. A bed was made up in one of them, ready for the night, which suggested that the bird had not flown for good.

"Ah! He's coming back, then!" the investigator murmured. "That's just as I expected."

"But why not try the cellar?" Tim asked in surprise. "That's probably where he is now."

"Of course, that's where he is," he agreed. "I guessed that all along; but to reach the cellar means disturbing the college, interviewing the headmaster, and kicking up a general fuss, during which Mister Dick might give us the go-by! On the other hand, if we wait here— S'sh! Quiet, for your lives!"

He broke off suddenly as a strange grating sound came from not very far away—from the wall on their right, as a matter of fact. The trio drew back silently, and watched in the darkness, which was at that moment riven by a line of white light, and presently a tall panel swung open, allowing the bearded figure of Gentleman Dick to pass through into the bed-room.

Sharpe was on his man before the latter realised that anyone was there save himself, yet, for all that, he put up a determined struggle, which necessitated the assistance of both Dexter and O'Carroll before he was finally overpowered and handed to the constables, who were summoned by Sharpe's whistle.

"Take him away," the investigator said. "I'll follow presently. What a pity, my friend, that you are going back to where you came from so soon! Some of you fellows never learn your lesson."

The man made no reply, and the trio dumbly watched him as he disappeared into the gloom between the forms of the burly officers. Then Sharpe stepped through the open panel.

"Mind your necks!" he warned, as the others crowded after him. "There are steps here, as I expected. Go carefully!"

They descended a long flight, traversing a passage far beneath the ground-level, and finally emerged through another door into a small cellar, which contained a long bench littered with queer-looking tools.

"Well," Sharpe smiled. "Recognise where you are?"

"Rather!" Tim replied. "But how did you know it would turn out like this, sir?"

"I didn't know for certain. I merely reasoned it out from what you told me," his master answered. "You mentioned, you will remember, that when you watched outside this cellar you noticed the light gradually fade, also the sounds

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"I shall not expel D'Arcy, as I can see that the foolish boy acted from humanitarian motives, and unthinkingly," he said. "But he must receive a very severe warning. I think he had better remain in the punishment-room for a few days, where he will have leisure to reflect upon his folly, and come to a better frame of mind."

That plan of the Head was carried out. The next day Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was absent from his place in the Fourth Form room.

Twice during that day the hapless champion of Neddy was taken out for exercise in the quadrangle, while the other fellows were in class. But when classes were dismissed, he was locked up in the punishment-room again. He had ample time to meditate upon his folly—if he chose to pass his time in meditation.

As punishment diet was very thin, and the punishment-room lacking in entertainment, the Head probably supposed that Gussy was deep in meditation—having no other occupation for his aristocratic intellect. But the Head, like most headmasters, did not know all that went on in the school under his majestic authority. He did not know that Arthur Augustus let down a string from the window of Nobody's Study, and pulled up a bag crammed with the daintiest productions of the tuckshop—a friendship's offering for which Tom Merry & Co. had pooled resources. He did not know that the string descended a second time, to pull up the latest volume of the "Holiday Annual"—which Arthur Augustus found ever so much more amusing than meditation.

Possibly for these reasons, D'Arcy put in very little meditation, and remained firmly of the opinion that he had acted with unusual tact and judgment in a difficult matter, and that the Head was rather an ass.

Meanwhile—an added source of annoyance to Dr. Holmes—his advertisement had appeared in the local paper, announcing that there was a runaway donkey at St. Jim's, giving a description of the animal, and inviting the owner to apply for it. It had been too late to stop the advertisement, when the Head discovered the facts of the case; so it duly appeared in the columns of the "Rylcombe Gazette."

Tom Merry & Co. saw it there when they looked down the cricket reports in the local paper.

"That will make the Head waxy!" remarked Lowther. "Still, it may come in useful. It may bring Hitchings back again, if he hasn't caught the donkey yet."

"I wonder if he's caught it," said Tom.

"Well, if he hasn't, he may see that ad., and think the donk's here again," grinned Lowther; "and if he turns up, we may get a chance of ragging the brute!"

That Mr. Hitchings had not recaptured the donkey St. Jim's soon had proof. On Saturday morning, second lesson in the Shell-room dealt with English literature. Mr. Linton the master of the Shell, was keen on that subject—his Form were not specially keen, but they gave Mr. Linton his head. The Form master was dissecting Gray's Elegy for the benefit of the Shell. He was dictating chosen stanzas to his class when there came an untimely, and, indeed, unseemly, interruption.

"Haply some hoary-headed swain may say—"
"Hee-haw!"

Mr. Linton stopped dead.

"Hee-haw!"

"Oh, my hat!" gasped Tom Merry. "It's Neddy!"

"D'Arcy maximus!" ejaculated Lowther.

"Hee-hee-haw!" came again, floating unmusically in at the open window of the Form-room from the quad.

"Bless my soul!" exclaimed Mr. Linton. "What—what—what—"

"Hee-haw!"

The Shell were almost in convulsions. Evidently Neddy was still uncaptured, and he had wandered back to St. Jim's and found a gate open. Mr. Linton rushed to the window and looked out.

Neddy was there! He raised his head, as if in greeting to the scandalised Form master, and remarked again:

"Hee-haw!"

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

"Silence!" exclaimed Mr. Linton in a formidable voice.

"This—is this not a laughing matter! I repeat—"

"Hee-haw!"

"I was going to say—"

"Hee-haw!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" The Shell could not help it. They roared.

Mr. Linton, in great wrath, rushed from the Form-room. The next moment the Shell fellows were crammed at the windows, looking out.

"Good old Neddy!" yelled Monty Lowther.

"Bravo, D'Arcy maximus!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Mr. Linton whisked round under the windows, brandishing a ruler. Neddy greeted him with a prolonged and quite friendly:

"Hee-haw!"

Whack! The impact of the ruler reminded Neddy of his old master, probably; he kicked up active heels, and ran. Taggles came lumbering up.

"That blessed hass, sir—" gasped Taggles.

"Drive him away!"

"Won't let a man ketch 'um, sir!" gasped Taggles.

"Dodged in at the gates, he did, and I 'owled at him, sir, and he takes no notice."

"Catch him at once, Taggles!"

Mr. Linton, very angry and disturbed, returned to the Shell-room. The juniors rushed back to their seats when they heard him coming. The Form master's face, as he entered, did not look as if Mr. Linton was to be trifled with.

Tom Merry & Co. tried hard to be grave. Faintly through the open window floated the distant voice of Taggles, adjuring the donkey to "Come up!" There were sounds of oburgation.

"We shall now resume!" snapped Mr. Linton. "Where were we—where was the place?"

"We had just got to the hoary-headed swain, sir," said Monty Lowther.

"You need not answer in that ridiculous manner, Lowther. You will take fifty lines!"

"Oh!" murmured Lowther.

The Shell resumed. Mr. Linton's eyes fairly glittered, as he dictated:

"Haply some hoary-headed swain may say—"

"Come up, you rotten brute!"

It was Taggles' voice outside.

"Bless my soul! This is intolerable!" gasped Mr. Linton.

He strode rustling to the window, and glared out.

"You himmage!" roared Taggles.

For a dreadful second Mr. Linton supposed that Taggles was addressing him.

"Taggles!"

"You blighter!" yelled Taggles. "You ugly brute!"

"Taggles!" shrieked Mr. Linton.

"It's that there donkey, sir—"

"Oh!"

"Dodging a man like billy-ho!" said Taggles breathlessly.

"Jest 'eaded 'im orf from the 'Ead's garden, sir. Come up, you beast! Oh, won't I lay this 'ere stick on you when I get 'old of you!"

"Calm yourself, Taggles!"

"Gotcher!" gasped Taggles, making a rush at the donkey, and clutching frantically at his tail.

"Take him away, Taggles!"

"Yoooooop!"

The donkey's hind-legs shot out and caught Taggles full in the chest, and the old porter sat down—suddenly and hard. He roared. Neddy trotted away contentedly. At a short distance he stopped, looked back, and remarked "Hee-haw!" perhaps to show that there was no ill-feeling.

Taggles staggered up, with an expression on his face that would have startled a Prussian Hun.

He started after the donkey, gripping his stick. But Neddy was in a playful mood. He dodged Taggles, and trampled over a few flower-beds, and trotted across the well-kept lawn, where only the Sixth were supposed to tread.

Meanwhile, in the Shell Form room, Gray's Elegy was dealt with with as much gravity as the Shell could muster. And among the Shell lines fell so thick that morning, that at the end of the lessons Mr. Linton hardly knew how many he had handed out.

CHAPTER 9.

Arthur Augustus is Justified!

TOM MERRY & CO.—richly lined, as it were, but in very cheerful spirits—crowded out of the School House, and came on the Fourth coming out. They rushed to inquire after Neddy. They found Taggles with a look on his face that was positively homicidal.

"No, I ain't caught him!" snorted Taggles. "No, I ain't; and, what's more, I ain't a-going to! 'Tain't my job to ketch blooming donkeys! You go and ketch him, if he's to be ketched!"

"Good egg!" said Tom Merry. "We'll do it!"

"Yes, rather!"

Neddy was soon sighted, sauntering under the elms. There was a rush of the juniors to capture him.
"Gussy ought to be here," said Monty Lowther. "Neddy's got a fellow-feeling for Gussy, and chums with him. Suppose we ask the Head to let Gussy out to catch D'Arcy maximus?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"
Mr. Railton came out of the house. He hurried across to the crowd of juniors who were surrounding Neddy.

"Is that—that the same animal?" asked Mr. Railton.
"Yes, sir, that's D'Arcy maximus," said Lowther.

"What? What did you call it?"
"I—I mean Neddy, sir!" stammered Lowther.

Mr. Railton gave him a severe glance.
"Kindly drive the animal into the paddock," he said: "I will open the gate. It seems to have escaped again from Mr. Hitchings."

The Housemaster walked away to the paddock and opened the gate. Tom Merry & Co. gathered round Neddy, and persuaded him in the same direction. Neddy made one or two attempts to break loose, but there were two or three score of juniors round him, and he was fairly rounded up. He was got to the paddock gate at last, and persuaded through, and Mr. Railton thankfully locked the gate after him.

"Thank you, my boys!" he said.
"Hee-haw!"

Mr. Railton walked hastily away. Neddy blinked over the gate at the juniors, and continued to bray.

"Hee-hee-haw!"
It was an unaccustomed sound within the precincts of St. Jim's, though Monty Lowther remarked that it reminded him a little of a Head's lecture.

Mr. Railton went into the School House and tapped at the Head's study. Dr. Holmes was looking annoyed when the Housemaster came in.

"Is there an—an ass within the gates, Mr. Railton?" asked the Head. "Several times I have heard a most unpleasant and unmusical sound, like the braying of an ass."

"It is the donkey, sir," said Mr. Railton. "The animal has wandered back. I have had him placed in the paddock."

"Very good! This is extremely annoying!" said the Head. "It is all D'Arcy's fault for bringing the animal here in the first place."

"Quite so, sir! But the advertisement in the local paper may be useful, after all, as it may bring the donkey's owner here to-day, and we shall be rid of it."

The Head looked relieved.
"Ah, yes! That is so! It is fortunate that it appeared, after all, in—in the circumstances. Probably the man will arrive to-day, if he should see the advertisement. It is most disconcerting, Mr. Railton, that such—such absurd events should transpire here. I have decided to deal with D'Arcy this afternoon. I think that, as he has now had several days in the punishment-room, a severe caning will meet the case. Perhaps you will be kind enough to bring him to me at three o'clock."

"Certainly, sir!"
After dinner that Saturday there was only one topic at St. Jim's, in the Lower School, at least—and that was the topic of D'Arcy maximus. Monty Lowther declared that it was simply family affection that had brought D'Arcy maximus back to St. Jim's—he had missed his brother. He declared that it was hard lines that Gussy should not be allowed to see his affectionate relation. But the juniors became serious on the subject, when it was learned that Arthur Augustus was "up" for punishment that afternoon.

Quite a crowd of fellows looked on with sympathetic faces when the swell of St. Jim's came down from the punishment-room, in charge of Mr. Railton, en route for the Head's study.

Arthur Augustus gave his anxious friends a kind nod.
"It's all right, deah boys!" he remarked.
"Mind you don't cheek the Head, Gussy, old man!" whispered Blake anxiously.

"I twust, Blake, that you do not considah me capable of cheekin' my headmastah!" said Arthur Augustus loftily. "I should regard such a pwoceedin' as bein' in vewy bad taste. I shall certainly point out to him that he was quite in the w'ong, howevah."

"Oh, you ass!" groaned Blake.
"Weally, Blake—"

Mr. Railton glanced round.
"Follow me, please, D'Arcy."

"Yaas, sir."

Faintly from the distance an unmusical sound floated in at the big, open doorway of the School House.

"Hee-haw!"
"Is that Neddy, you fellows?" asked D'Arcy.
"Yes, old man, looking for his long-lost brother," said Lowther.

"Bai Jove! Then you had bettah go to him at once, Lowtah!"

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"Wha-a-at?"

Arthur Augustus walked on with Mr. Railton, leaving the juniors chuckling. Only Monty Lowther did not chuckle. Somehow, Monty never could see anything funny in a joke that turned against his own humorous self.

Mr. Railton conducted the swell of the Fourth into the Head's study. A cane was lying ready on the table. The Housemaster left him alone with the Head.

Dr. Holmes fixed a stern eye upon Arthur Augustus.
"I trust, D'Arcy, that you realise by this time that you have acted foolishly, unthinkingly, and disrespectfully!" rumbled the Head.

"Not at all, sir!"

"What?"

"I am sowwy to disagwee with you, sir," said Arthur Augustus earnestly. "But the twuth is the twuth, isn't it, sir?"

"Bless my soul!" said the Head.

"You see, sir—"

"I am going to cane you with the greatest severity, D'Arcy. You have acted in a way that might be construed as stealing."

"Bai Jove!"

"It is owing to you that—that quadruped, is now at the school, instead of in the hands of Mr. Hitchings, who is doubtless searching for him!" said the Head sternly.

"Yaas, sir; I'm vewy glad of that."

"You are glad of it?" ejaculated the Head.

"Certainly, sir! Hitchings is not a pwopah person to keep a donkey. He is a howwid wuffian."

Dr. Holmes breathed hard, and picked up the cane.

"Hold out your hand, D'Arcy."

Tap! The Head looked round with great irritation as the tap came at the door, and barely contrived to moderate his expression when the door opened to admit Mr. Railton.

"Excuse me, sir," said the Housemaster. "A man has just called with reference to the lost animal—he has seen the advertisement in the local paper."

"Very good, very good! Give Mr. Hitchings his property, and—"

"It is not Mr. Hitchings, sir. Perhaps you had better see the man," suggested Mr. Railton. "It is another claimant. He gives the name of Smith, and is a small farmer of the Wayland district. I happen to have seen the man before, and know that he is respectable."

"Bless my soul!" said the Head. "Will you ask him to step in, Mr. Railton? You may stand aside, D'Arcy."

Mr. Smith stepped in. He was a stout, sunburnt, bluff gentleman in gaiters with a whip under his arm, and a straw in his mouth. He ducked his head to Dr. Holmes.

"Afternoon, sir!"

"Good-afternoon, Mr. Smith! Won't you sit down?"

"Thank you, sir!" Mr. Smith sat on the chair Arthur Augustus at once placed for him. "It's like this, sir! I see your notice in the paper—"

"Yes, yes," said the Head. "But—"

"Very kind of you to take in my moke, sir."

"Your—your what?"

"My moke, sir."

"Oh, the—the ass!" said the Head. "Oh! Yes! Quite so! But another man—a man named Hitchings—claimed the animal, Mr. Smith, and it was given up to him, but seems to be at liberty again, owing—"

"I'd like to meet that chap, sir!" said Mr. Smith emphatically. "You've advertised that moke as a runaway. He wasn't! He was pinched!"

"Pinched!" exclaimed the Head.

"Pinched, sir, by that there feller!"

"Good heavens!" said Dr. Holmes. "I—I am shocked to hear it. Several of the boys have stated that Hitchings was seen to ill-use the donkey; but they did not mention pinching it. Do you mean that the man was so base and brutal as to inflict pain upon the poor creature by means of pincers?"
Mr. Smith stared.

"Eh? I mean he pinched it," he said blankly. "Pinched it out of my field, t'other side of Wayland. Stole it, sir!"

"Oh! He—he stole it?"

"Well, somebody stole it, sir, t'other day," said Mr. Smith, "and if there's a man says it's his, he's the man, sir. One of the young gents pointed out the moke to me in the paddock as I was coming in, and it's my critter right enough, sir—and a good critter he is, too. Feeds out of my hand, sir, when I get him some nice thistles; and you should see him with the kids, sir. Romps!"

"Dear me!" said the Head. "Then—then—in taking the—the ass away from the man Hitchings, this boy was really recovering stolen property from a rascally thief?"

"Just that, sir; and I'm much obliged to him for doing it. Thank you, young gentleman," said Mr. Smith, looking at D'Arcy.

(Continued on page 27.)

A GRAND YARN OF DRAMA AND SPORT IN THE ADVENTUROUS WEST!



Hyram Coutts' stiff task finds the Six Stalwart Chums of Thunder Creek equal to the occasion. A Topping Dramatic Story By

GORDON WALLACE.

CHAPTER 1.

An Extraordinary Proposition!

HIRAM COUTTS, who was an elderly, businesslike gentleman, with grizzled hair and the keenest eyes it was possible to have, gave the six Sportsmen of Thunder Creek a very keen and regarding stare. He liked the look of them. And, judging by what he already knew of them, he liked more than the look. Still, he was critical in his regard of them.

"You're some boys," he remarked at length. "You certainly saved my house—with probably me in it—from being blown sky-high by that dynamiting gink last week. And I like you for it, though I have paid you well. Cost me a thousand dollars, that business did!"

"Which thousand dollars was very welcome—for Syd," said Jim Raven, the leader of the Sportsmen, thoughtfully. "Now, sir, what about a job in this newest colony of yours? Do you want six dashed good Sportsmen? Fellows who'll take a hand at anything that's clean and straight."

"I've heard a lot about you fellows and your sports," said Mr. Coutts. "That corporal of the Mounted Police—Nevin—is never tired of talking about you. But before I offer you a job I'd like to see something that you can do in the way of sport. What can you do, you fellows?"

"Everything," said Pete Craddock, who was a Yankee, and, accordingly, quite satisfied with himself, though there was nothing else wrong with him. Coutts laughed at that. "I mean," Pete added, "each one of us is an expert in at least one kind of sport."

"Huh! Well, there's goin' to be plenty of sports on Dominion Day, which is only a few days off," said Coutts. "How'd you like to show me what you can do then?"

"We'd be delighted to," said Jim Raven; then he remembered a conversation he had had recently with his comrades. "But we've all fixed it up to go to Red Wheat City for Dominion Day. That's a little town that has more sportsmen to the square inch in it than any other place in Alberta. We really belong somewhere near there. We come from Thunder Creek, if you know the place."

"I know it," said Coutts. "I know Red Wheat City, too. It's all you say. So they're having a celebration there on Dominion Day, are they?"

"Sure, the biggest of its kind," said Jim Raven. "At first we thought we'd stay around Edmonton for the day; but we've heard so much about what they're going to do, that we'd made up our minds to pay a visit to our—well, our temporary home town."

"What sort of sport are you best at?" asked Coutts. "Name your own special line."

The Sportsmen looked at each other. None were braggarts, although none were ashamed of their prowess. Then Jim Raven, as the leader of this happy-go-lucky, free-hearted little clique, spoke. "I fancy myself a bit with the gloves," he said modestly.

Young Syd Patterson, son of a man in prison for stack-burning, is being educated in England by the Sportsmen of Thunder Creek. These stories tell how his youthful "godfathers" raise the funds.

And that broke the ice.

"Give me a horse to ride or drive," said Craddock, "and I'll do my best with the beast."

"A'm Scotch," said Sandy Graham. "A'm fond o' tossin' the caber and puttin' the shot. Maybe a wee bit curlin' is no so bad in the winter; not in the summer, though."

"I swim," said Pat O'Hara briefly.

For an Irishman he was not over-talkative.

"I like to try a throw with a wrestler somewhere near my own weight," Digger Harrison, the Australian Sportsman, said.

"And I'll pole-jump with anybody, run with most, and jump with the rest," said Canadian Smiler Dickinson. "Not bragging, of course, because a fellow can only do his best. But—well, I love trying to win at those things. Pretty average at other things."

Coutts laughed. He was a pretty fair sportsman himself. No one but a

sportsman would spend his life collecting crowds of deserving young Britons and bringing them out here to this spacious land of Canada, where he had a way of forming colonies of them, and getting them settled down to a healthy, hard-working life.

"Say, boys," he said, "I've got a proposition to make to you. I'll give you a special job on one condition, and I'll go with you to Red Wheat City to see you carry out the condition. You all go to that place, and on Dominion Day each take a hand at your own special line of sport, and win! Four out of the six of you have got to win. If you do, I'll give you a job to your liking."

"What's the job, though, sir?" asked Jim Raven. "There's plenty of work going, without our having to excel at sports to get 'em."

"Up at Elkhorn Bend," said Coutts. "I'm forming a new colony. The men come out in about a month. They'll all be pretty well isolated for a bit, and no doubt they'll get a bit homesick and lonely. I don't want that, for they're all young fellows, many of them ex-Service men, and I want 'em to settle down happily. It is a pet scheme of mine, this one." Coutts had organised many colonies before this. "So you prove to me you're as good at sport as you think you are, and I'll hire you all to go and mix in with the Elkhorn Bend Colonists, and just keep 'em interested by organising sports of all kinds—football teams, cricket, lacrosse, boxing matches—everything you can think of. I'll pay you well, so long as you keep those men from getting bored and homesick. That a deal?"

It was an extraordinary proposition. But it was an appealing one to the Sportsmen of Thunder Creek. They were light-hearted youngsters, all of them, who loved sport much more than they cared for work. The reward seemed quite adequate. For a while after winning it—if they did win it—they would simply live for and in sport. And they would be mingling constantly with Brits, who were all bound to be sportsmen, too. Perhaps they did not think over it too closely. They were not in the way of thinking over anything much with too great seriousness. Jim.

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Raven spoke for his comrades, after having been nodded to by them.

"Done!" he said. "We'll have a shot for that! It's rather nice to have another motive for winning at sport besides cash! Up to now we've been frankly out after money; but now, since we got your thousand dollars, the money hardly comes into it. You see, there's a kid, back at home—"

"I know all about that boy, Syd Patterson," said Coutts. "Corporal Nevin's told me, and I admire you for what you're doing for him, though—well, there are other ways of making cash besides sport. However, you'll close with me? If you win four out of six events, you'll all get a job with me at a hundred a month and your food. And you'll have plenty of time to pick up odd sports prizes, because I'm going to offer a lot."

"We'll be at Red Wheat City on Dominion Day," said Jim Raven; "and we'll have a regular old day out, too! I think we'll find sport to suit all of us there."

CHAPTER 2.

By Fair Means or Foul!

THE six Sportsmen arrived at Red Wheat City the night before Dominion Day, and were greeted with welcoming smiles by most of the townspeople present when they alighted from the train and looked about the little station, which they had not seen for several weeks. The citizens smiled indulgently when they saw the six Sportsmen unload their horses from the car the train had brought along. For the stalwart chums of Thunder Creek would not have gone far without those faithful animals. Keeping them was sometimes a problem; but they never minded fasting themselves if their horses could be fed; and they all had good animals.

Even the night before the Dominion Day sports the town showed signs that there were going to be sporting events in it within the next few hours. Men were walking rugged horses up and down; one or two were driving horses in trotting sulkies. And there were posters plastered all over the tiny station, announcing the following day's happenings.

That, perhaps, was why the townsfolk were so delighted to see the Sportsmen of Thunder Creek turn up in a body, for they had learned long ago that, even though they did not represent much hard work, they were always good for any amount of sport. A few of them cheered as Jim Raven and his comrades unloaded their horses and led them away from the station.

They put up at Adlington's hotel, and found Corporal Nevin, of the Mounted Police, already there, looking as lazy as usual, and very pleased to see them.

"So you're going to earn a sporting job, boys?" smiled the bemonocled corporal of the Mounted. "Sport for sports' sake sort of business! Well, I wish you all the luck, but you're going to have some tough guys up against you to-morrow. I've seen a few of them. There's a little clique, something like yourselves, but not quite so straight, out after all the prizes offered to-morrow—and they're going to win them somehow, so they're saying."

"Well, we're going to win them by fair means, or none at all," laughed Jim Raven.

After they had eaten supper they all went out again to make what arrangements there were to be made for the morrow. Adlington himself, the owner of the hotel at Red Wheat City, possessed, it seemed, a decent young horse that he had entered for the mile and a

half flat race, but he was not satisfied with the jockey he had obtained. He was glad to get hold of Pete Craddock and engage him to ride the colt, knowing what Pete could do with a horse. Yet he also mentioned something about the gang that had come into the town with the intention of winning every prize offered—by any means.

There was to be a boxing tournament, too, and Jim Raven eagerly entered his name for this, in the light-heavy-weight class. The man who put his name down—he was a local—did so with huge enjoyment. He had seen Jim box before this.

There was to be a swimming race up the river that flowed past the little frontier town, quite closely. Pat O'Hara entered for that, and heard there were seven others in it—six of the town, and one of the gang aforementioned.

The other events were to be held on the big recreation ground on the outskirts of the town, and would be entered for on the morrow. But the Sportsmen took care to get themselves all fixed up, and when they returned to the hotel they found Hiram Coutts there. He had come along the rough trail in a powerful motor-car. The organiser of colonies seemed almost as eager for the morrow as the Sportsmen of Thunder Creek.

The morrow dawned, a glorious day for sport—and early on the town became crowded with the Fords, the buggies, and the saddle horses of the country people who had taken a day off from their toil and had come in to spend at least one day of rare holiday. The events began early, too. When they give a day over to sport in Western Canada—they do not give many—they generally make that day as long and as full of event as possible. Therefore long before ten o'clock the events began to get worked off. A grand baseball match opened the day's proceedings, which, though none of the Sportsmen played in it, was quite a success. It was played between the team raised by Red Wheat City and a team of visitors from Minnehaha, thirty miles farther down the railroad. It was a slamming game, with lots of yelling attached to it. The home team won; but details of the game will not be given, for perhaps they were only interesting to those who actually watched it.

Then followed the pole-jumping contest, and here Smiler Dickinson began to get ready. He had plenty of support from the local spectators. And as Smiler gripped his pole he looked around at the dozen or so people who were going to compete against him. He did not particularly fear any one of them.

There was a dusky-skinned fellow, though, whom Smiler did not know. That he had Indian blood in him was apparent, and Smiler knew well enough that breeds are rather good at this sort of sport. He eyed this man over critically, and saw a tall, lithe limbed fellow of perhaps two years his senior. The man was smiling, showing white teeth freely, yet he also had a queer glint in his eye as he looked at the men who were going to struggle against him for the prize.

This man took the first jump, and did it very neatly, though certainly it was not very great height. Some applause broke out when he cleared the bar and landed prettily on his feet. He grinned, then settled down to watch the others. These took their turns. Three of them knocked the bar off, and tried again; only two managed to clear it at the second attempt. Smiler came last, and leaped very self-confidently, making by far the neatest jump of any. And so the remaining ten carried on with their second attempt. The bar was raised steadily. The less athletic men fell out gradually. Each time the bar was lifted

another peg. And so at length there remained only two in the contest—Smiler Dickinson and the breed, whose name, it seemed, was Andy.

By this time the bar was at rather a formidable height, considering the amateur nature of this event. But with a smile the breed took the jump. The way he scaled up his pole was rather admirable, and the sportsmanlike Smiler Dickinson applauded. When the breed came down safely on the other side Smiler even patted him on the shoulder, then took his own turn. He did quite as well as the breed. So the bar had to be raised again.

The breed was perspiring freely now, and Smiler was well warmed up. When Andy tried this time his shoe just tipped the bar, and cheers rang out from Smiler's supporters. But Andy, his smile gone now, tried again.

He gripped his pole, took a long start, and began to run towards the jump. He swung his long pole about in a strange fashion. Then, just as he seemed ready to dig its end in the ground, he gave a stumble, and fell, his pole sweeping around in a quarter-circle.

"Oh!" roared the spectators, for—and it seemed quite accidental—the end of Andy's pole caught Smiler Dickinson's cruel blow in the face. Perhaps Smiler was somewhat to blame. He had been standing very close to the jump.

Smiler fell back, his hands to his face. His comrades at once rushed to him, took his hands away, and found his cheekbone badly grazed and bleeding. He was blinking, too. But he manfully thrust his pals aside and smiled at Andy.

"You evidently want to win, old man?" he said. "Go ahead."

Murmurs broke out in the crowd. Then Pat O'Hara, the soul of impulsiveness, stepped forward and shook a capable fist in the face of the half-breed.

"Ye spalpeen!" he roared. "Play fair, or get out! Look at the man! Ye did that on purpose, ye omadhaun! For two pins I'd—"

But Jim Raven, his accepted leader, took the hot-blooded Celt by the arm and gently drew him away. Andy's eyes flashed, and he looked all about him. Then he smiled quietly.

"I am sorry," he said. "I did not mean it, you know, my friend!"

"Give you the benefit of the doubt," said Smiler, dabbing his bleeding cheek. "Let's get ahead. Your jump!"

Andy jumped, and tipped off the bar. Then Smiler jumped, and also tipped off the bar. Each was entitled to another shot; but Smiler Dickinson's face was more serious than usual as he waited for Andy's second attempt. He did not want to alarm his friends, but there was no denying that he had suffered considerably by that blow from Andy's pole. For one thing, he could scarcely see out of his right eye, and his head was buzzing queerly.

Andy cleared the bar at his second attempt. Manfully Smiler Dickinson strove to do the same. But though he struggled, and climbed up his pole, his heel caught the bar. So Andy won the pole-jumping event, and did not get much applause for his success.

"Maybe we'd best call it a draw," said the umpire, who himself was of the opinion that Smiler's accident had not been so much of an accident as appeared on the surface. But at that Smiler shook his head firmly. He was a sportsman. He could take a licking without whimpering. And what Smiler did raised a cheer from the spectators, though many of them looked with unfriendly glances at the victorious Andy. The people of Red Wheat City all knew about the gang that had come in to win all the prizes to-day. Perhaps the gang had been unwise in

bragging so freely about what they were going to do.

Pat O'Hara's swimming match came off at about eleven o'clock. He was ready for it—and so were many more, including Andy, the breed. When O'Hara noticed that he was going to have this man against him his heart glowed hotly.

There were boats and canoes lined up at the starting-point of this race, and Pat O'Hara found himself occupying the same boat as Andy as they all stood up ready to dive in and swim.

“None of your monkey-tricks this time, mister!” Pat said quietly to Andy, who grinned.

“Maybe so I will ask you to explain that later!” said the breed. “But now we swim, hein? You know how to swim?”

“Ready. Go!” shouted the starter, and seven healthy swimmers dived neatly into the river at the signal. Yet from the very first Pat O'Hara knew that Andy was going to be a lot of trouble to him; for Andy deliberately crossed his path twice in the first couple of hundred yards. Once the breed's fingers caught Pat on the shoulder, making the Irishman shout out angrily.

“Another break like that, ye spalpeen,” he shouted, “and I'll duck ye under and keep ye there, bedad! So mind!”

He went on with his beautiful, powerful trudgeon stroke for another two hundred yards or so, keeping as much water between himself and his most dangerous opponent as possible. By that time it was a race between Pat and Andy. The others were straggled out in the rear, for they were but ordinary swimmers when compared with the human fish who was the Irish member of Jim Raven's band of Sportsmen.

To give him his due, Andy was a fine

swimmer, too. His methods, however, were not sporting. He might have given Pat O'Hara a fine swim even had he kept to straight ways. And it is to be feared that the judges, who rode horses up-river to keep pace with the swimmers, were not more observant than they might have been. Several deliberate attempts to foul Pat passed by unnoticed, and Pat was not the sort of man to raise a protest whilst swimming.

Perhaps the Irishman's anger got about to its highest when, after crossing his path again, the breed thrust out a foot that caught the Irishman full in the mouth.

“Phaugh!” spluttered Pat, then saw the grinning face of Andy near to him. “You do that again, and, begorra, I'll bite the toes off ye! Ye're a dirty sportsman! Bad enough for a white man to put his foot in my mouth!”

He went on swimming, and got so far ahead of Andy that for another quarter-mile he was free from any attempts at interrupting him. Andy had all his work cut out to keep swimming at the pace Pat O'Hara set.

The crowd was following the race on the bank. When the final half-mile had been got over there were only two in the race who were at all likely to finish it. And by that time Pat was pretty far ahead of Andy. The Irishman did not think it too risky to spare himself a little. There was a lot of hard swimming to be done yet. He wanted to save himself up to make a finish that would be a credit to the Sportsmen of Thunder Creek.

Once or twice he looked back to see how Andy was faring. Andy was coming along in good style a matter of twenty yards behind Pat. He let the man come closer up. Indeed, he allowed Andy to come up abreast of him. And so, side

by side, they swam for a considerable distance, and a fair stretch of water was kept between the two. Then suddenly Andy let out a yell, threw up his arms, and began to make a commotion that caused Pat O'Hara to stop swimming and eye him in surprise. For Andy showed all the signs of a man who had suddenly become incapable of swimming.

At once the generous-hearted, if hot-tempered lad swam over to assist the breed. He had grasped Andy's arm in a second, and was soon supporting him. Andy, his eyes closed, his teeth showing in a grin, looked for all the world like a man taken suddenly ill with cramp. And so, for several seconds, Pat held the man's head up above the water.

People on the bank of the river began to shout across to ascertain what the matter was. O'Hara did not trouble to answer them, but addressed Andy.

“Shall I get you ashore, old chap?” he asked. “It'll be a bit o' the cramp ye've got. It'll be—Ow!”

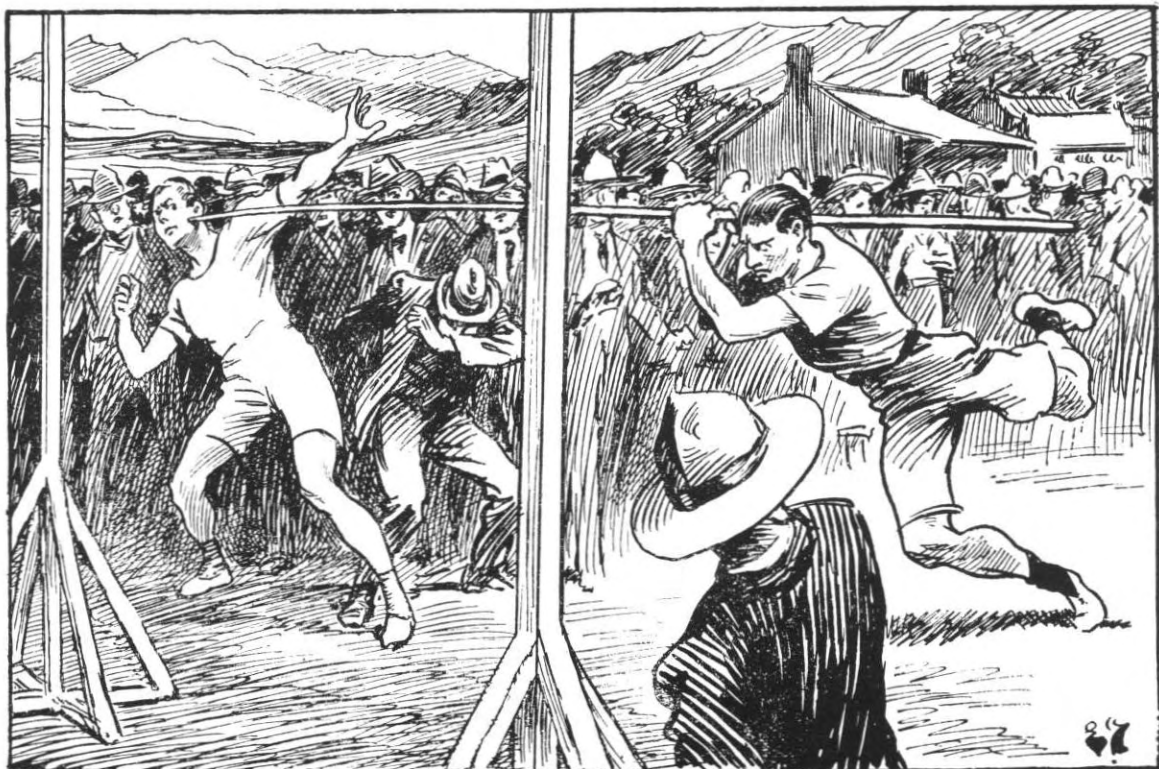
He let go his hold on the man suddenly, and almost sank as a vicious shoot of pain took him in the right calf. Andy sank, then came to the surface, and began to swim strongly up-stream again.

“Another of the blighter's tricks!” growled Pat. “Wait till I get ashore; then I'll paste him good and plenty!”

He laid himself on his back and managed to examine his right calf. There was a punctured wound there, from which blood was flowing quite freely. It was paining him considerably.

“That was done on purpose!” he growled. “He had a pin, or a needle, or something, probably fixed in his costume and stabbed me with it, to try and stop my swimming. But he didn't do that, bedad! No, sir!”

Anger possessed his soul again. This member of the gang that was out to



Gripping his pole the dusky-skinned fellow began to run towards the jump. Then, just as he seemed ready to dig it end in the ground, he stumbled and fell, and the end of the pole caught Smiler Dickinson a cruel blow in the face.

win all the sports' events by any means had gone a step too far. And when Pat O'Hara got really angry, he did not think of much else but his own feelings. He put on a spurt such as he had seldom put on in his life. His leg was paining him, but was not stopping his swimming—yet. Swiftly he overtook the man who had been shamming. Andy saw him coming, and put on a spurt. But Pat O'Hara overtook him at length, swam straight up to him, and, raising himself in the water, dealt Andy a cracking blow on the jaw with his fist. Andy sank at once, with a gurgle, and Pat waited for him to come to the surface again. Then he hit him again, on the nose this time; and the water was tinged with blood at once.

"And that finishes it!" growled Pat. "I'll be disqualified for doin' that. But it was worth it." With which he went on swimming; though Andy, dazed by the two blows he had received, swam to the bank and climbed out of the water.

Of course, it was no race. A scene followed, and Pat was charged with fouling; Andy was charged with something even worse. It was never settled who was in the right or who was wrong. The race was abandoned. And the Sportsmen, getting together, realised that already they had lost two out of the six events for which they had entered. They would have to win the other four, or else they would not win the sporting job Hiram Coutts had offered them.

"So it looks as though we'll have to try harder to beat that gang of dirty sports!" said Jim Raven. "You chaps will have to put a bit into it, and try to keep out of trouble. One good thing is, that Andy bloke won't be allowed to enter into anything more against us. But there are others of the gang left. So you others must get busy. My boxing match don't come off until to-night. I'll have to spend the rest of the time seeing you get fair play."

CHAPTER 3. Well Won!

"YOU aren't managing to do so well, you fellows," said Corporal Nevin. "You'll have to buck up. Of course, I know you've had foul play against you up to now; but you've got to win the next four events, or else you'll have to go to work for a living."

RESULT OF THE GREAT "HAMPSHIRE" CRICKET COMPETITION.

In this competition one competitor sent in a correct solution. The First Prize of £5 has therefore been awarded to:

FRED BUMPUS,
73, Leigham Court Drive,
Leigh-on-Sea.

The Second Prize of £2 10s. has been divided among the following four competitors whose solutions contained one error each:

W. Kemp, 33a, Headstone Road, Harrow-on-the-Hill; Norah Bumpus, 73, Leigham Court Drive, Leigh-on-Sea; Ronald Kirkham, 45, Kenilworth Road, Seacombe, Cheshire; Mrs. H. L. Bumpus, 73, Leigham Court Drive, Leigh-on-Sea.

Sixteen competitors, with two errors each, divide the ten prizes of 5s. each. The names and addresses of these prizewinners can be obtained on application at this office.

SOLUTION.

Hampshire was at one time regarded as the cradle of cricket. For many years the county's cricket was under a cloud, but during late years the club has done wonderfully well. Her chief players to-day include the Hon. Lionel Tennyson, a grandson of the poet, and Mead, the fine left-hand bat.

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"You needn't rub it in," said Jim Raven. He and all his fellow-Sportsmen, save Sandy Graham, were watching the Highland sports now, of which there were many at the recreation-ground. For the Scottish element was very strong in the Red Wheat district. "I'll bet that notches a point for us." For just then Sandy, looking a very young giant in singlet and—wonder of wonders—the kilt he had borrowed from somewhere, hurled the weight a distance that beat any other previous attempt by at least two feet. Nor could that be beaten again. Panting and triumphant, Sandy came and joined his comrades, and was duly patted on his burly back.

"Then comes the wrestling," said Nevin. "There are only four people in that. Whom have you drawn for first round, Digger?"

"Dan, the livery-stable man," answered Digger Harrison. "A good sportsman. The gang's man has drawn Hal Fergus, the blacksmith."

"Then the gang's man will have to try his fouls on the blacksmith first, and he'll be warned before you meet him—if you have to meet him!" smiled Nevin. "Pon my word, that gang's fouling in every event where possible! Dirty crowd! And only to get up a little cheap fame! They're going to tour the country later, I hear, as professional sportsmen. This is a bit of an advertisement for them. Up to now it's been a dashed bad advertisement! Ah, the wrestling commences!"

The wrestling was exciting, but did not last long. And Digger Harrison easily got Dan, the liveryman, on his back. And the Sportsmen cheered a little ironically when they saw Hal Fergus, the blacksmith, put the gang's man down on both his shoulder-blades. Which left Digger and Hal to wrestle it out between them.

It was a good match, well played. Both wrestlers were clean sportsmen. The blacksmith was considerably older than Digger, but his age proved to be no advantage to him. After almost ten minutes of fierce effort, Digger, the Australian, came out on top. Hal Fergus was beaten, and when the decision went against him he congratulated the victor handsomely.

"I'm getting too old in the back for the game," said Hal. "I guess I'd rather have you beat me than anybody!"

And the spectators cheered. Thus did the Sportsmen of Thunder Creek win two of the events.

Next followed the flat race, which was exceedingly well managed. The little town's racecourse was used for this, and everybody at the recreation-ground migrated over to the racecourse to watch that, and other events that had horses as their leading figures.

The trotting matches, a jumping competition, and an exhibition of cowboy riding went down very well. But when the mile and a half flat race was announced the interest of the town was great. For, as it happened, there was only one horse that was a native of Red Wheat City in for the event. The others were all strangers, with strange riders. The gang had brought with them a great, raw-boned, fiddle-headed beast that looked dangerous. But Pete Craddock, booked to ride Adlington's mare, Cherry Blossom, was not particularly afraid of it. He did look at the rider with some suspicion, however, knowing how, up to the present, the gang had striven to get the best of things.

Four Aces was the name of the gang's horse. And the whole field started very well! But Four Aces, when the first round was half-way over, certainly tried to crowd Cherry Blossom over against the rails, so that Pete Craddock had to shout protestingly at the gang's jockey. But Cherry Blossom was wily. So was Pete. He managed to edge his horse away from the rails so that Four Aces had them to himself. After then Pete got his little mare a length ahead, and kept her so until the third round of the course was all but completed. Then Four Aces put on a spurt, got half a length ahead of Cherry Blossom, and for the next hundred yards there was such a race run that the gang's jockey had no time to foul. Pete won the race by a neck and no more. Red Wheat City went mad with delight, and the citizens' opinion of the Sportsmen of Thunder Creek went up several points higher than it had previously been. Clean sportsmanship seemed to be justifying itself. In some manner it had got around the town that Jim Raven and his doughty chums were working for a big stake, and, favourites as the Sportsmen were, the citizens were highly sympathetic towards them.

The citizens also knew that out of the six events the six Sportsmen had won three—that there was only one more chance for them to win Coutts' reward. And they knew that that was the boxing match, or tournament, that was to come in the evening. Until then, of course, there would be plenty of amusements. So they all settled down to enjoy themselves till eight o'clock, when the boxing would commence in the implement warehouse at Red Wheat City. Always did Hogarty let them box in his warehouse, as this place was almost ideal for the sport, having plenty of room for a ring to be erected, and also space in galore for spectators.

"I've seen the draw for the first round," said Nevin shortly before eight. "There will only be three rounds, Jim, old son, and you're lucky. You're going to meet that infernal gang's man in the first round. Get rid of him, and I think the other two will be easy for you. Further, there seems to be disgust felt on the part of that gang, because you Sportsmen are beating 'em. Well, beat 'em good and hard, and then I'll have a thing or two to say to at least one man amongst them!"



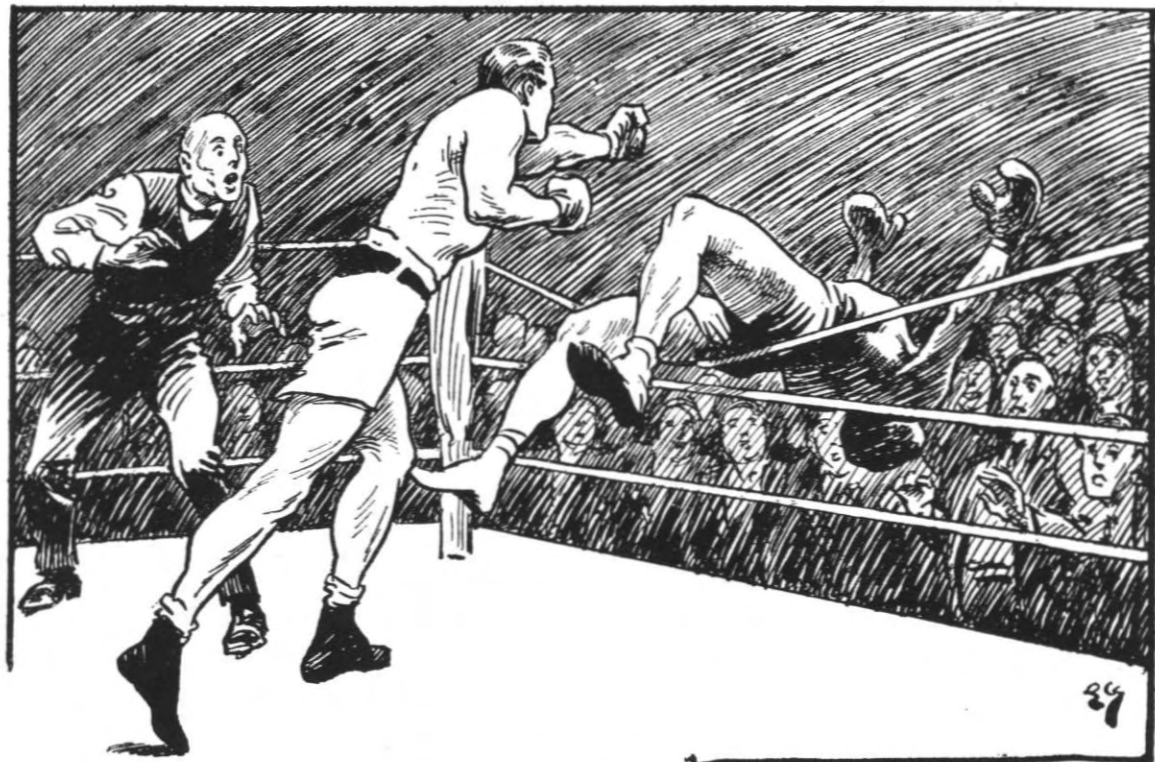
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Jim Raven's long left shot out and caught Weeks full in the jaw, lifting him clean off his feet and over the ropes, to land full-length across the knees of three of the Sportsmen of Thunder Creek! The bout was over in five seconds!

The man who had drawn to fight Jim Raven in the first round was named Weeks. And he was a hefty individual, looking a born scrapper. When Jim Raven saw him first he sized him up as a fellow who would foul on every possible occasion, and Jim could usually size up a boxer. And perhaps he was right, though he gave Weeks no chance to show what he intended to do. For the very moment the call of "Time!" came Jim hopped into the middle of the ring, his eyes glued to the eyes of Weeks. Weeks grinned a little self-confidently, and aimed a half-contemptuous blow at the head of the Sportsmen's leader. To do this he had to throw himself open to attack—only for the fraction of a second, perhaps, but long enough for Jim Raven to get, full swing, his long left to work.

The audience themselves never expected this bout to end so quickly. They were even then only settling themselves comfortably in their chairs when Jim's left connected with Weeks' jaw with a crack that sounded high above the murmurs of the spectators. And so great was the weight Jim got behind his blow that Weeks was lifted clean off his feet over the ropes, and landed full length across the knees of three of the Sportsmen. There he lay limp, and breathing like a pig.

"Here, take him!" said Digger Harrison coolly, and lifted the man up.

He placed him on the floor of the ring, and the referee counted him out slowly.

"How long did it take him?" several spectators asked.

But nobody seemed to know. Certainly the bout had not lasted more than five seconds. So did men who treated Jim Raven too lightly usually fare at his hands.

Jim rested while the others in the

round had their fights, then polished off the man who met him in the second round, doing it so efficiently that the Sportsmen's leader's popularity grew. And in the final, when both boxers faced each other after the call of "Time!" Wolf Jameson shook his head and walked back to his corner. There he took off his gloves unashamedly.

"I'd rather be a coward for a minute than a dead man all my life!" he remarked. And perhaps his fellow-citizens sympathised with him. They had seen Jim's way of dealing with an opponent on two occasions this evening. "I'll scratch this round and give you best, Jim—bless ye!"

Later that evening Hiram Coutts came to the triumphant Sportsmen of Thunder Creek, as they sat in the smoke-loom at Adlington's Hotel.

"Get ready to come along to Elkhorn Bend with me to-morrow evening," he said. "My men are coming out in less than a month, and I want you to have your sports arrangements all fixed up for them when they get here. It'll seem a sort of welcome for them. And I wonder what that'll be?"

For a disturbance had sprung up in the street outside.

They all looked out of the window. What they saw interested them all immensely. For a mob of excited citizens were coming along with a dozen or so struggling, shouting men in their midst. Immediately after the mob came a wagon that contained a barrel, obviously full of tar, judging by the amount that slopped over the edge. And in the wagon was also a feather bed, at which a man was even then working with a knife.

"There goes the most of the gang!" said Jim Raven. "I say, I hope they aren't too rough with 'em!"

Andy, the half-breed, was amongst the mob's prisoners. He was yelling in fright. But the angry citizens, wearied of a day of foul attempts on these strangers' part, heeded him not. The crowd passed on, and what happened to the gang the Sportsmen did not see.

But, even as the tar was splashed about, even as the feathers began to adhere closely to the defeated gang of dirty sportsmen, Corporal Nevin strolled into the hotel. Upon his face was a quiet smile. He rubbed his monocle.

"I'm glad you beat that dirty lot!" he said. "By the way, the leader of them—man called Briggs—turns out to be a much-wanted crook from Chicago. Chicago won't want him much longer, because I've pinched him. He's in gaol now, so I don't think that gang'll trouble other communities much. Thought you'd win through, though. Well, had a good day?"

"Topping!" said Jim Raven. "We've had as much sport as we want, while we've not had to worry about the money for Syd! And we've had a holiday, too!"

"In fact, you've enjoyed sports for sports' sake!" smiled the corporal. "And to-morrow you go to work. See they're good boys, Mr. Coutts! They need a sharp eye keeping on 'em!"

"I'll give 'em so much sport they'll get just sick of it!" laughed the promoter of colonies.

"Try us!" jeered the Sportsmen of Thunder Creek in chorus.

THE END.

(Don't forget that you really must order next week's GEM well in advance, as it will contain one of the finest stories Martin Clifford has yet written, and 25,000 words in length, too!)

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EVERYBODY SAYS THIS STORY IS A THRILLER!



A plucky Lancashire boy sets out to track down the "Spider," whose evil power has become the curse of Lancashire. This is famous David Goodwin's most powerful story.

THE OPENING CHAPTERS.

TOM COMPTON, a young piecer, formerly of Barton's Mills, sets out to track down the "Spider," whose evil power has become the curse of Lancashire.

Mill after mill has suffered at the hands of this treacherous foe. At last Tom, by chance, actually catches the Spider in Barton's Mill. He gives chase, but the Spider, a sinister figure in blue goggles, makes good his escape.

Later, another mill is threatened, and Peter Grant, the manager, calls for Compton's assistance. Tom hurries to the scene, and is just in time to avert disaster. After this Tom receives a strange message—a call for help from Mr. Kane, who is made prisoner by the Spider in an old hulk out at sea. Tom effects a rescue, and a fierce fight with the Spider's men ensues. Tom makes good his escape, however, only to find that Kane has mysteriously disappeared again.

Reaching Hargreave Buildings in safety, he rushes noisily up to Kane's private office, and is just in time to see a picture slide back into position, covering a secret exit from the room.

Very shortly afterwards, Tom discovers that there is a secret lift, and that pictures conceal doors giving on to the lift. He enters the Spider's office through one of these doors, and then makes the startling discovery that Morton Kane and the Spider are one and the same man. The Spider is furious.

A fierce fight ensues, but Tom escapes unhurt. Walking along the street, a shadowy figure, whom Tom believes to be Gale, hands him a note purporting to have come from Dick Stearns, informing him that the Spider is sailing for America.

Following instructions, Tom gets aboard the vessel, but learns just in time that it is doomed. He escapes, however, in one of the ship's boats with the captain, from whom he asks for a signed statement.

(Now read on.)

A Clever Ruse!

"YOU'RE a smart lad," muttered the skipper. "I don't see the game, but give us hold, and I'll do it."

He wrote away rapidly, while a home-ward-bound tug, signalled by the first officer from one of the other boats, bore down towards them.

"Thank you, skipper!" said Tom, taking the writing-block back from the captain. "It seems a queer time for writing logs, but I have my reasons. If I were you I'd say as little as possible till the Board of Trade inquiry comes on, and then tell everything. I'll arrange my big hit to come off on the same day, or the morning after—that's provided we're not all conveniently murdered before then, which is quite on the cards, let me warn you."

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"Right!" said the skipper grimly. "I'm the handiest shot this side of Cape Hatteras, and I'd like nothing better than to have them try. But why can't we drop on this swab Spider at once?"

"Because the police daren't touch him," said Tom. "I've tried them. They've been bitten once, and won't believe. Even your story, when the wreck's inquired into, won't convince 'em. You've no proof to connect the Spider with the outrage. But when the whole thing's pieced together, and the world knows it, they'll have to. And it'll mean the gallows!"

Tom turned to the two men who were rowing, and looked at them carefully. The inspection satisfied him.

"Witness the captain's statement in writing," he said to them. "Sign here." The two seamen signed.

"I believe you'll do it, lad," said the captain. "And now here's the tug alongside, and we shall get back quicker aboard her."

Dennis nudged Tom just as the tug slowed up, and pointed to a swiftly moving black speck in the distance speeding towards them.

"Yon's Dick, for a dollar!" he whispered.

Tom borrowed the captain's glasses and looked eagerly.

"By George, you're right!" he said. "Skipper, I'm not coming with you. There's a friend of mine yonder. Can you leave Dennis and me the boat?"

"Ay, an' welcome!" said the skipper, mounting the side of the tug, his men following him. "I guess you know what you're doing, youngsters, and I'll ask no questions. I'll bear what you said in mind. Good-bye, an' good luck to you!"

Away went the tug, with the Ivornia's crew aboard, and two of the boats towing behind. The moving speck in the distance—which had resolved itself into a long, brown naphtha-launch—paused where it was till the tug had steamed nearly out of sight, and then came flying up to the boat like a swallow. She had a crew of two, including the engineer, and Dick Stearns, waving gleefully, was at the helm.

"There you are!" cried Tom, waving towards the forlorn topmasts of the Ivornia. "There's all that's left of the Spider's ship. He's bust his own sloto this time!"

"Well done!" said Dick, as soon as he had heard the news. "By George, it was a narrow shave, Tom! I made

sure you were past praying for when I got your note. But the Spider's in our fingers at last!"

"Yes; provided we keep out of his till we drive the blow home," said Tom. "But what's that yonder?"

A second speck, like Dick's launch when it was in the distance, only larger, was speeding out from the shore.

"It's the Spider," said Dick slowly. "He has come to offer terms."

"Or to wipe us out!" said Tom grimly.

"By Jove!" said Dick suddenly. "You mean she's armed? A queer place to try on piracy; but the Spider's equal to that. If that's the game, we can go one better. Bailless, open the compartments and sink her flush, and rout out that swivel!"

"What d'you mean?" cried Tom, as the crew busied themselves.

"You'll see," said Dick. "I borrowed this launch; she belongs to an old friend of mine. She was built for wild duck and goose shooting down the coast here in winter, and she carries a big punt-gun, carrying nearly two pounds of shot—like the Essex launches! She has sinking compartments, too, to let her down flush with the water, and I fancy we ought to be able to make the Spider sit up with that outfit!"

Rapidly the launch subsided till her decks were flush with the water, and the two hands came up, dragging a huge swivel-gun, with a nine-foot barrel, and fixed it on to its stanchion forward.

"Cartridges in the locker forward!" cried Dick. "They're loaded with shot. Shove one in—quick!"

"And cover the gun over with tarpaulins," said Tom. "We won't show off till we've got 'em within range. This is a fine idea! Can you trust your men, Dick?" he added in a whisper.

"As myself," replied Dick, looking through his glasses. "Ah, pity! It isn't the Spider. But it's an old friend of yours, Tom—it's Joseph Reynolds!"

"What!" cried Tom. "By Jove, then the Spider's sent 'em out with orders to have a last whack at us! He must have got the news as soon as the Ivornia sailed. And Reynolds begged for the job, you bet. He's got a big score to pay off against me, since I borrowed his whisksers."

"There's a lot of paying-off to be done," said Dick grimly. "Look at the sweep! They think they've got us safe. That's a much more powerful craft than this, and steel-bowed, too."

"At 'em!" cried Reynolds' voice,

calling to his men, as the powerful launch rushed forward. "Cut 'em down!"

The tow-haired rascal—for he was in his wig and whiskers again—crouched in the stern of the launch, gripping a revolver in his yellow fist, and his face was livid with rage and hate.

Dick's launch, sunk to her gunwales, and hardly moving, looked water-logged and helpless. The Spider's vessel evidently meant to ram her, and already the steel stem was within twenty feet of her side.

Suddenly Dick's launch shot swiftly ahead, and the other just missed by a short yard, dashing past her stern.

"Round her, you fools!" shrieked Reynolds, firing his revolver wildly at the boys. "At her again!"

"Off with those tarpaulins!" cried Tom, as the enemy's launch swerved round and showed her broadside. "Let her have it on the water-line!"

Boom!

The big swivel-gun hurled its contents slap into the Spider's launch with a terrific report, and a chorus of yells arose. At that short range the hateful of shot struck her in a solid mass, tearing a hole in her side nearly a yard across, and in rushed the water, making the wretched craft heel heavily.

"We shall drown! We shall drown!" shrieked Reynolds, flinging his arms round the man next him, who shook him off, with a frightened curse.

"There you are, beauties!" cried Tom, casting off the Ivernian's boat, which was towing astern of Dick's launch. "It's more than you deserve; but crowd into that and be happy. Whether you get ashore or not is your own look-out. But I bet we're well rid of you! Clap on the power, Dick, and off we go!"

The crew of the sinking launch dived overboard to clear themselves of her, and as Tom and Dick sped away they saw the enemy climb dismally into the open boat that Tom had left them, Reynolds being hauled in last, half dead, and full of sea-water.

"They won't tackle us again, and they've a fifteen-mile row to get ashore," chuckled Dick. "We're well out towards the Dee estuary, and there isn't as much as a fishing-smack in sight. Where to now, Tom?"

"Can't you guess?" said Tom. "I'm a bit puzzled for the moment," said Dick. "Whether on land or sea, there's no safety for you; and you want breathing space to arrange that plan of yours."

"There's one place that's neither by land nor sea," said Tom, "and I'm going there. The old hulk where they decoyed me to rescue Morton Kane from drowning, and nearly finished me. Full speed ahead, Dick, and I'll show you the way!"

The Finishing Touch!

"THE very thing!" exclaimed Dick. "It's the last place on earth they'll search for you, since it was their own hiding-place. They've given it up now. But what are you going to do there?"

"Look here," said Tom, "I can't tell you what the exact plan is, because I haven't settled the details yet. It'll be a bombshell that'll astonish all Britain through. I've got part of what I want. But it's a job that can't be done absolutely single-handed. Now, of all the men you know, do you know an expert foreman-printer—one who can be absolutely trusted, and who's afraid of nothing? I want him to work with me in the hulk."

"My eye!" said Dick. "Yes, I know the very man—one who's an agent in my service, too."

"Splendid!" said Tom. "Hold on. This won't do. We mustn't go near the hulk till dark. If I'm interfered with again we shall be done for. Keep her off the land a bit. You must put me on the hulk as soon as night falls, and fit me up with necessities out of the launch. Next night, you must bring your man off secretly, and with him the things he'll want—type, stereo-sheets, and all the other apparatus. But everything must be simple, and not heavy. I'll make you a list."

"But, great Scott," said Dick, "you're not going to prepare an account of the thing for publication! The most daring paper in Britain wouldn't look at it."

"I know that," said Tom. "Not a chance of it. But just lend your ear."

He whispered half a dozen words, so lightly that not even Dennis could hear them.

"Heavens and earth!" said Dick, starting. "Do you think it can be done?"

"I'll do it or go under," said Tom quietly. "Now we'll draw up that list of things I want."

They worked hard together for some time, while the launch lay in the lonely wilderness of the shoal-strewn sea that lies between the Dee and Mersey mouths. Tom, Dennis, and Dick all laid their heads together for the final attack, and little Dennis's advice was by no means the worst of the three.

"I begins to see what tha's at, Tom," he said at last, "an' I've got something that'll help. I bought a camera wi' that brass tha' gave me some weeks ago, an' I've been amusin' myself. I've got a snapshot o' Morton Kane, an' one o' the Spider. I ketched the last gentleman at the outside doors o' the buildin' one day, after a lot o' trouble."

"By George, Denny, you're a little genius!" said Tom excitedly. "Didn't he spot you?"

"Nay. He'd ha' paid me some o' the attention he's been givin' you if he had. I'll send the photos wi' the other things."

"I'd have given fifty pounds apiece for those photos!" exclaimed Tom. "And, by George, you shall have two hundred pounds for the pair, Dennis! Now, lads, we'd better be creeping inshore. It's getting dark."

They made their way in cautiously, feeling their road by the lead-line, and an hour later, in the hush of darkness, Tom stepped aboard the old hulk that had already played so grim a part in his struggle with the Spider. Plenty of food and drink, blankets, and other gear from the launch were put on the hulk for him; and then they prepared to leave their young comrade to his lonely vigil.

"Good-bye, old boy, and good luck!" said Dick. "To-morrow night about the same time you can expect us, and neither man nor devil shall stop us!"

"Good-night, Tom!" called Dennis, and then the launch shot silently away into the night.

The Winning Hit!

TOM stood and listened for a few minutes to the lapping of the tide round the black timbers of the hulk; then he took his belongings below, and made himself comfortable.

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As those who have followed this story know, the upper and lower decks of the old ship were sound, and her after-cabin dry and cosy, though beneath it the tide flowed in and out through the vessel's weed-hung ribs. Tom lit his lamp inside, and made up a bed with blankets, stowed his provisions in a corner, and looked to his revolver. Then, after putting everything in order, he put the light out, and turned in for the night, for he was badly in need of rest.

He awoke at dawn, made himself some coffee over a spirit-lamp, cooked a good breakfast, and after demolishing it, got out his fountain-pen and writing-block, and settled down to work.

All day he wrote steadily, only stopping for meals. As the dismissed editor of the "Clarion" had said, he was a good writer, and he made the most of his ability. All his papers were with him. Sometimes he chuckled dryly as he wrote, and sometimes his face grew hard and grim. The Spider would have been sadly uneasy could he have looked over the boy's shoulder.

Nothing occurred to disturb him, and towards evening Tom stopped writing, and carefully corrected what he had done. Then, with a sigh of relief, he went out on deck as the darkness fell, and paced up and down in the cool night air, straining his ears, till he heard the faint throbbing of a launch's propeller in the distance. In five minutes she was alongside again.

"You, Dick?" said Tom, as he saw his friend in the stern. "I didn't think you'd come."

"I wanted to make sure there was no hitch," said Dick. "They haven't an inkling yet—the enemy, I mean. Here's your man, and you can trust him like steel. All the things are here. Hand them out, you men. The Spider's moving heaven and earth to find you and kill you before you've time to strike, Tom! His men are scouring the country, but they've lost the trail."

"Good!" said Tom. "Forty-eight hours more, and I shall be ready to deal the final blow. My eye, it will be a starter! I've been hard at work all day."

"There's one more thing," said Dick. "It may cause you trouble. The 'Clarion's' foreman is an absolutely honest man—about the only one in the building. He does his work, and he knows nothing of the Spider's schemes, nor that Kane and the Spider are one. He thinks he's working for Kane the philanthropist. See?"

"I'll remember," said Tom. "And now you'd better get back, old boy. Give my best wishes to Dennis, and look out for me when I need you. If I'm smashed in the final struggle, though, I shan't pull you down with me."

"I'll stand or fall by you!" said Dick. "Good-night, Tom!"

"Come below!" said Tom to his new ally, when the launch had gone.

He lit the lamp, and had a good look at the printer—a smart, capable-looking man of thirty, with a strong, alert face.

"I've only got an inkling of this job, sir," he said, "but I'm told I'm to act entirely under your orders. There's a strong sup of danger in it, by what I can tell, but I'm not scared, and the pay's quite to my liking."

"All right," said Tom; "then let's get to work at once. It doesn't run to Linotype machines, but you'll have to set up this manuscript in these formes, and then we'll take a stereo impression of the lot."

They laboured like blacks at the work, and soon it began to take shape. Never
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Boom! The big swivel-gun hurled its contents slap into the Spider's launch, tearing a big hole in its side.

in the history of letters, probably, was there a stranger task, or one in more weird surroundings.

Tom re-wrote and revised much of his work, and in the silence of the black hulk, with the salt tide gurgling among the timbers, was evolved one of the finest pieces of journalism of the century, for it was the history of the Spider's crimes, put together fact by fact by a master hand, and set up in type as it went along.

Proof, upon proof, piece by piece, it was built up. The portraits of the Spider and Morton Kane, of which "process-blocks" had been made, were set in, together with the arch-criminal's cipher-key and his infamous ledger of crimes, with the translation of it set by its side.

"Why," said the printer's foreman, as the work progressed, and page after page was screwed up in solid blocks of metal type, "these here formes are just the size of the 'Clarion' pages!"

"You're an observant man!" said Tom grimly. "Go ahead; we mustn't waste time. I suppose you know what would happen to you if my enemies discovered us here?"

When pages are set up in type, as everybody knows, the paper is not printed direct from them. A sheet of papier-mache is pressed over the type, and takes a mould of the whole. Then molten type-metal is poured into the mould, and the result is a solid block, from which the printing is done. This casting is the last process, and Tom did not attempt it on the hulk; it would have been impossible.

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Tom had now a set of light, portable papier-mache moulds which held the whole history of the great criminal and his works—which no other living man knew—and the proofs of his guilt, the fruits of the long, deadly struggle through which Tom Compton had passed in the last four months.

It needed but an hour in a foundry to set these moulds in printing order, and a few swift machines to set the story rolling in tens of thousands. Yet what newspaper on the face of the globe would dare to touch it?

"At last!" said Tom, as the moulds were carefully packed together, and he took charge of them. "We are just in time. The launch should be here in half an hour, and it's nearly midnight. Heave all the type and gear overboard, and leave no trace!"

It was done. The last vestiges of the work were removed when the launch came alongside, and sitting by the engineer was Dennis Gale. The boys greeted each other warmly, and Tom stowed himself aboard with his precious moulds, the printer following.

"Good!" said Tom, with a sigh of relief. And he leaned back in the launch's stern and thought rapidly. The great blow was ripe to strike.

In half an hour he and Dennis were ashore and in a fast car, burning the miles as they sped towards Dunchester. Within two miles of the city Tom called a halt.

"I'll go on alone from here," he said, "on foot and across country. I shall be just in time if I'm not stopped. You go ahead, Denny, any way you please. We mustn't be seen together. Whether we'll meet again, Heaven knows. But

I've prayed for the best, and I trust the victory will be ours to-night. Good-bye, Denny! You're the pluckiest little partner ever a fellow was blest with!"

The boys exchanged a heartfelt hand-grip, and Tom struck out across the dark fields, carrying his precious burden with him. He reached Dunchester at two in the morning, and made no halt, but went straight through the by-streets to Hargreave Buildings.

There was no time for waiting or planning; a bold stroke was his only chance. He walked straight into the half of the building that by repute was Kane's.

The great newspaper was just about to be put to press. The printers were in the composing-room and foundry, and the editorial staff in their quarters.

Dick stepped boldly up into the foreman printer's little office, and found him alone—a hard-headed, unbending Scotsman, by name Macleod. This was he whom Dick had mentioned as the honest man.

"Paper gone through?" said Tom.

"No," said the foreman, glancing at him. "I'm just passin' the stereotypes. What is it? Message frae Mr. Kane?"

"The five front pages are not to go through," said Tom, producing his moulds. "These are to take their place."

The shrewd Scotsman threw a glance of keen suspicion at Tom.

"What does this mean?" he said angrily. "By whose orders, eh? Heaven preserve us, what's this?"

He ran his practised eyes over Tom's moulds, easily reading the impressions, and at first glance he turned furiously on the boy.

"What dirty trick is this?" he said savagely. "What lies are these? Tell me who sent ye here with this—quick!"

"Man," said Tom earnestly, "it's Heaven's own truth! Read it!"

Macleod read, and his face grew white.

"'Tis a lie!" he gasped. "Ye muckle loon, the police shall hold ye for this! Who set ye at it? Who thoct I'd play this on my employer? D'ye ken I'm an honest man?"

"Mr. Macleod," said Tom, "if I didn't know you were an honest man, I should say to you, 'Here are seven hundred pounds in Bank of England notes. See them? They are yours if you pass those pages.' But I know you're an honest man, so I'll ask you if, for the sake of an employer who is a scoundrel and murderer, you will cheat justice and help an accursed cause. This is the only way of bringing this arch-criminal to his due, and to save all Dunchester. Choose!"

Macleod looked wildly over the pages again, and his throat contracted. Then he passed a trembling hand over his brow.

"I see!" he said hoarsely. "I must have been blind. Yes, I see now. I'll go away. I can't betray my part. Ay, laddie, take those muckle moulds to the foundry an' see them through, an', remember, John Macleod was an honest man till he came here!"

The foreman staggered out of the room, and Tom, quietly putting the moulds together, sought out the foreman's "devil," and sent him with them to the foundry, where the molten alloy was run into them, and the great betraying sheets of metal were fixed to the cylinders of the machines. Then rose the vast whirl and hum of the engines, and the secret hung between life and death.

(Look out for the thrilling conclusion of this story in next week's GEM.)

"D'ARCY MAXIMUS!"

(Continued from page 18.)

"Pway don't mench, sir," said Arthur Augustus politely. "I did not know that the wascal had stolen the donkey, of course; but he was vewy bwutal to it, so I took it away. I felt bound to pwotect it."

"Well, you're a good sort, you are!" said Mr. Smith heartily. "Brutal to my donkey was he? Oh, don't I wish I 'ad him here!"

Dr. Holmes did not share that wish. He would not have been gratified by a terrific scrap in his study.

"I am vewy glad the donkey is yours, Mr. Smith," said Arthur Augustus. "I was goin' to give him, or sell him, to a kind mastah, if I could find one for him. I can see that you are a kind mastah."

"You bet your shirt on that," said Mr. Smith. "Why, that donk's one of the family with us. All the kids cried their eyes out when he was gone. Hunted for him everywhere, sir, till I see your advertisement in the paper." Mr. Smith rose. "Well, sir, I won't waste your time. Can I take the donkey now? Mr. Railton will answer for me, if you ain't satisfied."

"I am quite satisfied, Mr. Smith," said the Head courteously. "I am very glad that a boy of this school has been instrumental in recovering your property for you."

And Mr. Smith took his leave, and was escorted to the paddock by about fifty juniors in great state.

Dr. Holmes turned to Arthur Augustus. His look was uncertain. The swell of St. Jim's stood with quiet, though conscious, dignity.

"H'm!" said the Head.

Matters were changed now. It was fairly clear that, if Arthur Augustus had not bagged Neddy from Mr. Hitchings, that unscrupulous gentleman would have driven the donkey by this time far beyond the possibility of recovery. Arthur Augustus' action had prevented a cruel act of theft!

"H'm!" said the Head again.

He did not touch the cane. He coughed twice, and then once more. Then he said:

"You may go, D'Arcy!"

"Thank you, sir!" said Arthur Augustus demurely.

And he went.

Mr. Smith departed from St. Jim's with his arm lovingly round Neddy's neck, the donkey in an evident state of happy contentment. And a crowd of fellows called out as he went:

"Good-bye, D'Arcy maximus!"

To which D'Arcy maximus cheerfully replied:

"Hee-haw!"

Arthur Augustus was justified! In Study No. 6 he pointed out, at considerable length, that he had been right all along. Blake & Co., and the Terrible Three cheerfully admitted that Gussy had been right all along, and only asked him whether he didn't miss his big brother—D'Arcy maximus!

THE END.

(There will be another grand story of Tom Merry & Co. next week, entitled: "Sportsmen All!" by Martin Clifford. DON'T FORGET THIS IS OUR 25,000-WORD SPECIAL STORY!)

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THIS WINS OUR TUCK HAMPER. A BIT OF HIS OWN BACK!

Jones, while buying a ticket for the theatre, was rudely brushed aside by three flappers who got their tickets first. By luck, Jones got the seat next to them. After several turns, a comedian appeared and said: "If there is any young lady in the audience who thinks she could learn to love me, will she please stand?" Jones then said to the flappers: "May I pass out, please?" The girls stood up at once, and the audience roared. But no one enjoyed the girls' discomfiture more than Jones.—A tuck-hamper filled with delicious tuck has been awarded to R. Norris, 324, New Hall Lane, Preston.

EGGS-ACTLY!

"Waiter!" From the table by the window the voice of an elderly man rose in wrathful accents. "Waiter!" "Yes, sir?" replied the much-harassed one. The elderly man, overcome by his emotions, made vain efforts to speak. Then: "Take this egg away!" he roared. "Take it away!" "Yes, sir," said the waiter, as he glanced wistfully at the offending article. "And—what shall I do with it, sir?" "Do with it!" The enraged customer rose menacingly

from his chair. "Do with it?" he bellowed fiercely. "Why, wring its neck!"—Half-a-crown has been awarded to J. E. Jordan, 28, Lansdowne Hill, West Norwood, S.E.

SO NEAR, AND YET SO FAR!

Reggie, swinging a swagger cane, sauntered across the threshold of his tailor's shop in Saville Row. "G'-morn'ing!" he drawled. "I—I—er—believe I owe you—" "Yes, sir," beamed the tailor hopefully. "Quite so, sir." "I was going to say I believe I owe you an apology for keeping you waiting so long for your money. So I just called in to—er—to pay you—" "Quite so, sir—quite!" The tailor rubbed his hands together delightedly. "I was about to say—er—I called in to pay you the apology. Er—good day!"—Half-a-crown has been awarded to Harry N. Warriner, 10, Ingram Road, Thornton Heath, Surrey.

INFINITELY SMALL!

A diminutive Cockney was deer-stalking in the Highlands, where he had engaged the services of a tall and powerful gamekeeper. The day was particularly warm, and the keeper, irritated at the ways of his little master, gave vent to his ruffled feelings by groaning at regular intervals at the midges which swarmed around him. "I cannot understand," said the Cockney patronisingly, "how the midges bother you so much. I haven't got so much as a single bite yet." "Hoots!" replied the other contemptuously. "They hivna noticed ye yet!"—Half-a-crown has been awarded to Miss Jeanne Drover, Brightstone, Mill Hill, Cowes, I.O.W.

A HAIRY TALE!

A guest at a seaside hotel complained

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to the manager. "Your cooking arrangements are conducted in a very slovenly way. At lunch to-day I found a hair in the soup, a hair in the honey, and a hair in the apple sauce." "Well, you see," the manager explained, "it was supposed to be hare soup. The hair in the honey came from, I suppose, the comb. But I can't for the life of me understand about the hair in the apple sauce, for I bought those apples myself, and they were all 'Baldwin's'!"—Half-a-crown has been awarded to Barbara P. White, 8, Cefn Parc, Skewen Neath, South Wales.

WHO KNOWS?

An old country woman was giving a lecture to a gentleman friend on the evil effects of strong drink. "Do you know, John," she said, "you are robbing yourself of years of your life?" "I don't know about that, Jane," said John. "I've reached sixty-seven, an' it don't look like killin' me yet." "No; but, John," answered Jane, "if it hadn't been for the drink ye might ha' been seventy-seven by now!"—Half-a-crown has been awarded to Miss W. Patrick, 22, Kingston Road, Evington Road, Leicester.

ENGLAND'S UNKNOWN HEROES!

Some men, dressed in civilian clothes, gathered together in the smoking-room of a seaside hotel, were discussing the joys and sorrows of life at the Front. "Well, I've been in the Army, and had a very interesting time," said one. "Ever got really alone near the enemy?" asked another. "Rather! I once took two of their officers." "Unaided?" "Of course! And the very next day I took eight men." "All wounded, I expect?" sneered a listener. "You didn't get hurt, did you?" "Just a scratch, that's all, and the next day I followed that up by taking a transport wagon and a big gun." "Sir," said a disagreeable auditor, "I think you must be a big romancer." "No," said the hero, "I'm not that. I'm a photographer!"—Half-a-crown has been awarded to A. Pedder, 27, Myrtle Road, Sutton, Surrey.

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THE SECRET OF THE CLOISTERS!

(Continued from page 16.)

of footsteps. That suggested strongly that Potterton must have left the place by some other exit, and what was more natural that, in such an old nest as this is, it should communicate with another building—the Priory Cottage, which he had purposely rented to carry on his—

them!—antiquarian researches? That seems clear as mud, doesn't it?"

"I think, youngster," said Anthony Sharpe to O'Carroll, as they bid him good-bye at Southavon Station the following day, "that if you finish your first term here it will be enough. Frankly, I want you back with me, for you're invaluable!"

He held out his hand to Dexter, slipped something that crackled into Tim's palm, and jumped into his carriage just as the train started to move out.

"Well, I never!" gasped Jack, as he

stared after the receding rear-coach. "Fancy you bein' linked with the famous Anthony Sharpe! But it's hard lines that you must leave at the end of term; we were only gettin' to know each other properly, an' I'm beastly sorry!"

"Same, here!" said Tim. "But business is business!"

THE END.

(There will be another grand Anthony Sharpe story soon, boys. Keep a sharp look-out for it. Meanwhile don't forget next week's great 25,000-word story of Tom Merry & Co.)

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