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A SPILL ON THE RIVER!

(Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, pursued by the angry riverside land-owner, makes a dash for safety! An Amusing Incident from the Grand, Long, Complete School Story of Tom Merry & Co., of St. Jim's, entitled; "CHUMS OF THE RIVER!" contained in this issue.)

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CHUMS OF THE RIVER!

A Screamingly Funny Story of the Famous Chums of St. Jim's, telling of their Amusing Experiences on holiday aboard the Elizabeth Ann.

By Martin Clifford.

CHAPTER 1.

The Strenuous Life!

"WUFFIN' it!"

"Eh?"

"Wuffin' it!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy firmly.

Herries and Digby stared. Jack Blake made a mental jump, as it were, and grasped the meaning of his noble chum.

"Oh! Roughing it!" he said.

"Yaas, wathah! When I say wuffin' it, natuwally I mean wuffin' it," said Arthur Augustus innocently. "The fact is, deah boys, I am not goin' to allow you fellows to slack duwin' this vacation."

"Slack!" roared Blake.

"Yaas. My ideah is that we should have a weally stwenuous time, and keep ourselves up to the mark—or, wathah, I will keep you fellows up to the mark."

Jack Blake, of the St. Jim's Fourth, looked at the Honourable Arthur Augustus as if he could have eaten him. Herries grunted, and Digby grinned.

Arthur Augustus, at that moment, did not look very strenuous; indeed, he might almost have been suspected of slacking himself.

He reclined in the armchair in Study No. 6, in the School House at St. Jim's, with a soft and silken cushion behind his noble head. His elegant legs—carefully arranged to avoid spoiling the beautiful crease in his magnificent trousers—rested upon another chair. On a third chair at his elbow stood a glass of iced lemonade. In his noble right hand was a Japanese fan, with which he gently fanned himself as he laid down the law on the subject of the strenuous life.

Blake and Herries and Digby sat in a row on the study table, swinging their legs. There did not seem much else to sit upon, as the strenuous Gussy had appropriated most of the chairs.

Arthur Augustus fanned himself and proceeded.

"We've had some vewy hot weathah. I do not wegard that as a weason for slackin'. Keep goin', you know—keep goin' stwong! That's the pwopah maxim, wintah or summah."

"Well, my hat!" said Blake.

"I have weally been shocked to see you fellows loungin' about as if you were too tired to live," said Arthur Augustus severely. "Sittin' about the studay, and spawlin' in armchairs, and all that."

"Well—"

"My ideah is to buck you up in the vac," said Arthur Augustus. "You see what I mean?"

"Oh, yes," said Blake, with a nod; "and you'll see what I mean—in a minute or two."

"Wuffin' it," said Arthur Augustus, "is what you want—or at least what you need. I'm goin' to take you fellows undah my wing, and keep you at it, hot or cold. We're not goin' to loaf aound this vac, dwinkin' lemon squash and

sittin' in the shade. We're goin' to wuff it. My ideah is a twip up the wivah."

"What river?"

"The Thames, of course, you ass. I've thought it all out. We're takin' a boat, and campin' out, and doin' our own cookin', and so on. It will bwing you fellows up with a wound turn. Nothin' like jollay hard work to cure slackin'."

"Not a bad idea," assented Dig. "Tom Merry's talking about a boat up the river these holidays. I suppose you bagged the idea from him."

"Weally, Dig, I should not be likely to bag an ideah fwom a Shell fellow. I may have heard Tom Mewwy talkin' it ovah with Mannahs and Lowthah, but that is not to the point. I have thought of this stunt, because it seems to me sewiously necessawy to buck you fellows up. Hard work, and plenty of it—that's what you fellows want."

Arthur Augustus paused to fan himself, and then to take a sip at the refreshing lemonade.

"We'll get on the boat at Wichmond or Kingston," he went on, having refreshed himself. "Then it will be a case of 'Wow, bwothahs, wow!'"

"I don't see where the woe comes in," said Herries, puzzled. "Fellows generally expect to be jolly on a trip up the river."

"When I say 'wow,' Hewwies, I mean 'wow,' not 'woe.' You fellows will wow, and I shall see that you put your beef into it."

"Oh, row!" said Herries, enlightened.

"Yaas, wow! Of course, we shall have a mast and a sail—but I want to see you fellows exert yourselves a bit. Slackin' gwows on a fellow," said Arthur Augustus, stretching his elegant legs a little—still with a due regard to the crease in his trousers. "The more you slack, the more you hate to buck up, and that won't do for this studay, you know. Hot weathah or cold, this studay is goin' to lead the stwenuous life."

Arthur Augustus arranged the silken cushion a little more comfortably behind his noble head, and regarded his chums seriously through his eyeglass.

"Well, of all the cheeky asses—" began Herries.

"Weally, Hewwies—"

"Of all the cheeky chumps—" said Digby.

"Weally, Dig—"

"What are you doing at the present moment, you lazy-bones?" roared Blake.

"Eh? I'm explainin' to you chaps that we're going to wuff it," said Arthur Augustus, raising his eyebrows. "I twust I make my meanin' cleah. I do not want to hurt your feelin's, but I am weally determined to put an end to the slackin' that is goin' on. Look at you fellows now—sittin' in a wow like a lot of tired hens—"

"My word!" said Dig.

"Look at the way you were playin' cwicket this aftah noon," continued Arthur Augustus warmly. "Makin' wuns—why, you were makin' walks, not wuns. Just loafin' along! I weally sat howwified, watchin' you."

"You weren't even making walks!" snorted Herries. "You were squatting under a tree."

"I was thinkin' out the pwogwamme for the vac," said
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Arthur Augustus, with dignity. "I have to do all the thinkin' that is done in this studay. I'm not complainin', of course—it's up to a fellow of tact and judgment to do the thinkin'. Now, I've mapped it all out. We're goin' to have a few weeks up the wivah, and you fellows are goin' to wuff it. It will do you no end of good. I feel it my dutay to put you thwough it."

"You cheeky, footling ass—" began Blake.

"Pway don't waise your voice, Blake, old fellow. I have mentioned quite a lot of times that I dislike bein' woared at."

Jack Blake breathed hard through his nose. A lecture on slacking from Gussy, in his present happy and comfortable attitude, was really trying to the patience, especially when the weather was hot, and Blake had been playing cricket while Gussy loafed.

"Now you fellows know what you're goin' thwough," said Arthur Augustus, with a kind smile. "Make up your minds to it, and you will find it all wight. And it's nevah too soon to begin, you know. Don't stay there sittin' on the table in that idle way. Take a wun wound the quad befoah tea."

"You coming?" asked Herries, with a glare.

Arthur Augustus shook his head.

"No; I have some more details to think out. Besides, I am not a slacker like you fellows, you know, and do not need buckin' up. Now, take a little wun, and leave me to—"

"To your lemonade?" asked Blake.

"No, you ass; to—"

"To your armchair?" asked Dig.

"Weally, Dig—"

Blake slipped off the table, with a determined expression on his face. Herries and Dig followed his example.

"Come on," said Blake. "We'll take a little run. We'll trot round the quad three times before tea, full speed ahead."

"That's wight!" said Arthur Augustus encouragingly.

"And Gussy shall come with us!"

"Bai Jove! I have alweady mentioned—"

"Come on!"

"I wefuse to do anythin' of the sort, Blake. I— Bai Jove! Leave go, you wuffian! Yawwooh!" roared Arthur Augustus, as his three grinning chums seized him, and yanked him out of the armchair.

"This way!" grinned Blake.

"Leggo! You howwid ass—"

"Run for it!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The strenuous life descended upon Arthur Augustus suddenly and overwhelmingly. Blake had hold of his right arm, Herries his left. He was rushed to the study doorway at a speed that made his noble head swim.

Dig followed behind, helping Gussy on his way. Dig's method of handing out assistance was effective, if not grateful or comforting. He let out his feet alternately, and dribbled Arthur Augustus into the passage. A series of terrific howls rang along the Fourth Form studies.

"Come on!" roared Herries.

"Yawwooh! Help!"

Four juniors went along to the stairs with a rush, Arthur Augustus struggling wildly in their midst.

They went down the stairs almost as if the staircase were a toboggan. They landed in a breathless heap, and by that time Arthur Augustus had lost his necktie and his eyeglass and his temper, and there was no crease to speak of left in his trousers. But his strenuous chums did not pause. They rushed him out into the sunny quad.

With his arms linked in those of his comrades, and with Dig still lending effective assistance from the rear, Arthur Augustus proceeded to trot.

It really was very warm weather for such strenuous exercise, and Arthur Augustus was bedewed with perspiration before he had made the round of the quad. Fortunately, as they came by the New House, Figgins & Co. spotted the School House enemy in their territory, and made a rush at them. In the melee that ensued Arthur Augustus made his escape.

"Come back, you slacker!" roared Blake.

But Arthur Augustus, though he heard, heeded not. He ran for his life. And when Blake & Co., later, met in Study No. 6 for tea there was an expression of lofty dignity on the noble countenance of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, but he made no further reference to the task he had set himself of bucking up his chums.

It was only too probable that another lecture on that subject would have been followed by another trot round the quad, and like so many advocates of the strenuous life, Gussy had a disinclination to apply his maxim to himself.

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CHAPTER 2.

A Go!

"WE shall want a boat!" remarked Tom Merry thoughtfully.

"That," said Monty Lowther, with great gravity, "is a sine qua non. This study can do most things that other studies can't. But even this study can't go boating without a boat."

"It will have to have a waterproof locker," said Manners.

"For the grub?"

"For my camera."

"You're taking your camera?" asked Lowther.

"Yes, ass."

"I thought this was going to be a holiday."

Manners of the Shell did not deign to reply to that observation. He simply sniffed.

"There will have to be a tent," said Tom. "We shall have to camp on shore, and it might rain."

"Pretty sure to, if we don't take a tent," assented Lowther. "If we do, probably it won't rain. In fact, a tent is a sort of insurance against rain."

"And an oil stove for cooking," said Tom. "And a spirit stove for boiling the kettle."

"And a kettle to be boiled on the spirit stove!" said Lowther.

"Be serious, fathead. We've got a lot of things we need," said Tom Merry. "We can hire a boat at Kingston."

"We'll do the whole jolly old river," said Manners. "A series of good photographs of the Thames from Kingston to Oxford will be worth keeping."

"Keeping dark?" asked Lowther.

"Fathead! There's one thing," said Manners thoughtfully. "We shall want plenty of films."

"Good," assented Lowther. "We may need a camp fire at times. Films burn remarkably well. You can always start a fire with a roll of films."

"If Lowther is going to be a silly idiot—" began Manners.

"He isn't going to be," said Tom Merry. "He is—present tense, not the future."

"We shall have to be careful with the money, if it's a long trip," said Manners. "But absolutely essential things we must have. Two dozen rolls of films, say—"

"Old man; the Thames has been photographed to death," said Lowther. "There's nothing new under the sun, so far as the Thames is concerned. I suggest leaving the camera at home—"

"Ass!"

"Or giving it to the poor."

"Oh, cheese it!"

"Every man that's ever been on the river has a stack of photographs," said Lowther. "Ye distant spires and antique towers have been done to death."

"Not photographs like mine," explained Manners. "I think we'd better put in a week at Oxford and do the thing thoroughly. I'll have some enlargements made to hang up in the study next term. There's some pretty spots, too, at Kingston, and Staines, and Cookham, and Abingdon, and Wallingford, and—"

"Are we going to spend the vacation on shore, watching Manners putting a fat head into a camera?" asked Lowther.

"Look here!" roared Manners.

"Shush!" said Tom Merry. "Dry up, Monty! You know Manners is potty about his camera, just as you are potty about your little jokes—to call 'em jokes. Listen to me, as the only sane member of the study—"

"And you're potty about cricket," said Lowther. "I shouldn't wonder if you want to take bats and stumps along."

"Well, I was thinking we might pick up some cricket—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"We can't overload the boat, you know," said Manners thoughtfully. "May as well be satisfied with the cricket we've had here. Dash it all, a fellow can't be always playing cricket!"

"Well, I like that!" said Tom warmly.

"Oh, give him his head," said Monty Lowther. "You can take snaps with your camera, Manners, while Tommy plays cricket with the barges or the hotel waiters, and I—"

"And you sit in the boat thinking out rotten puns," said Manners.

"My puns aren't rotten," said Lowther warmly. "I admit they're a bit above the intellect of this study."

"Hear, hear!" said a fat voice in the doorway.

Baggy Trimble of the Fourth rolled in, and bestowed a familiar nod upon the Terrible Three of the Shell.

The Terrible Three looked at Baggy fixedly. Tom Merry pointed to the door. The fat Baggy was not persona grata in Study No. 10 in the Shell.

"There's the door, Trimble," remarked Tom.

Baggy shut the door.



The old gentleman in the white waistcoat came along the platform at a run. "Stop!" he shouted. "Bai Jove!" ejaculated D'Arcy. "That vawy excited old gentlemen cannot be speakin' to me suahly." "Stop!" roared the gentleman again. "Porter! Stop at once! Don't you dare to take my trunk away." The porter jumped. "Your trunk, sir!" he ejaculated. (See page 8.)

Apparently he misunderstood. At all events, he did not take his departure.

"About that trip up the river——" he said.

"What do you know about it, you fat bounder?"

"I happened to hear you fellows speaking. It's a jolly odd coincidence, isn't it?"

"What is, podgy?"

"Why, that I'm taking a holiday up the river," explained Baggy. "I'd like you fellows to come. I'll supply the boat."

"Oh!"

"I'll drop my pater a line, to have a boat sent over to Kingston by rail, from Trimble Hall," said Baggy. "That will be all right, won't it?"

"Oh, my hat!"

"If by any chance it arrives too late, we can easily hire a boat, and I'll stand the tin," said Trimble. "Can't say fairer than that. The fact is, I want you fellows to come. I'm jolly keen on seeing Manners take some of his splendid photographs."

"Oh, are you?" asked Manners, his stern brow relaxing. There was one subject upon which it was always easy to pull the leg of Harry Manners of the Shell.

"Yes, rather! And then, think how merry and bright it will be, with Lowther making his little jokes and puns, and so on," said Baggy.

"Oh!" said Lowther.

"And then some cricket, you know," said Trimble, with an ingratiating grin at Tom Merry. "Nothing could be better. Several of my friends who have places up the river will be giving a cricket week, and I'll see that you fellows get a look in."

Tom Merry laughed.

"Is it a go?" asked Baggy. "Another thing is, that we

can stop for a night at Windsor. You'll like that. The castle's awfully comfortable to put up at."

"The castle?" ejaculated Manners.

"Yes. I've had an invitation there for some time, and I can bring my friends."

"Oh crumbs!"

"I really ought to have gone before this," said Trimble. "Royal invitations are practically commands, you know."

"Great pip!"

"The fact is, we shall have a splendid time, taking it altogether," said Trimble breezily. "Is it a go?"

"In a way," said Tom Merry, "it's a go!"

"In what way do you mean?"

"This—you're going!"

And with a firm hand on his collar, Baggy Trimble spun into the passage, and the door of Study No. 10 closed on him. The Terrible Three chuckled, and a fat voice came through the keyhole:

"Yah! Rotters! I won't take you now!"

And Baggy Trimble drifted away, seeking some less sophisticated study upon whom to "plant" himself for the vacation.

Tom Merry & Co. resumed the discussion of their plans for the vac, which did not include the presence of Baggy Trimble of the Fourth.

CHAPTER 3.

Question of Baggage!

I'M going to pwopose——"

"What?"

"To pwopose——"

Jack Blake held up a warning hand.

"Cut it out!" he said. "You're not!"

"Weally, Blake—"
 "As your keepers, we refuse to allow you to do anything of the kind," said Blake sternly.
 "Bai Jove! I uttably wefuse to wegard you fellows as my keepahs," exclaimed Arthur Augustus D'Arcy hotly. "Do you think I am off my weckah, you ass!"
 "It's not a case of thinking, but of knowing," said Blake. "And you're jolly well not going to propose. We bar that."
 "We jolly well do," said Digby. "I'm surprised at you, Gussy. What have you got to propose on, I'd like to know. You're only a younger son, and whatever you inherit will have to go on neckties."
 "You uttah ass!" roared Arthur Augustus.
 "Can't be did," said Herries, with a serious shake of his head. "If you've been trifling with the flapper at the bun-shop, Gussy, the vac's come just in time to see you clear. Certainly you sha'n't propose."
 "Hewwies, you wottah—"
 "Can it," said Blake. "Anything else you like; but we draw the line at proposals. Why, you're not old enough to be engaged."

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"Far from it!" said Dig gravely. "I'd like to know what our Housemaster would say to it."
 "You feahful asses—"
 "No good getting excited," said Blake. "You can buzz into the bun-shop as often as you like for ices and lemon squash, and hand ont sheep's eyes galore over the counter. But you're not going to propose. This study will see to that!"
 "I—I—"
 "I can see Gussy in a breach of promise action yet, if his old pals don't keep an eye on him," said Blake, with a sigh.
 "You uttah ass, you misappwehend my meanin'," yelled Arthur Augustus. "I was webookmarkin' that I was goin' to pwopose—"
 "And I was remarking that you're jolly well not," said Blake decidedly. "Let me catch you proposing!"
 "I wepeat—"
 "Hallo, you kids raggin'?" asked a voice in the doorway, and Ralph Reckness Cardew of the Fourth loafed in.
 "Who are you calling kids?" bawled Herries.
 "Whom, dear man, whom!" said Cardew gently. "Never forget your grammar, acquired with such painful efforts on the part of your intellect."
 "You silly chump—"
 "I was goin' to say that I pwopose—"
 "Cheese it!" said Blake. "Can it! Cut it out! Keep this dark, Cardew; we don't want all the House to know that we've just stopped Gussy on the point of popping the question."
 "By gad!" said Cardew.
 "I was thinkin' of nothin' of the kind!" shrieked Arthur Augustus. "I wegard your wemarks as uttably fwivolous and in wotten bad taste. I do not believe that you weally misundahstand me at all. I was goin' to pwopose that we should join forces with Tom Mewwy and his fwriends in our twip on the wivah."
 "Oh!" ejaculated Blake. "You weren't thinking of the flapper at the bun-shop?"
 "Certainly not, you ass!"
 "Or Mary the housemaid?"
 "I wegard your wotten jokes as wihald, Blake, and I wefuse to weply to them. I'm goin' to pwopose—"
 "Not a bad idea," said Blake. "You can propose to the Shell chaps to join us on the river, if you like. I've already asked Tom Merry, and he's agreed. But you can sing it over again if you like."
 "You uttah ass, you did not tell me—"
 "Does a chap ever have a chance of telling you anything?" demanded Blake. "You use your chin instead of your ears, old bean. Do you happen to want anything, Cardew?"
 "Lots!" answered Cardew.
 "Give it a name."
 "I hear that you fellows are takin' a boat up the river for the vac."
 "You've got it."
 "Like me to come?"
 "Well, my hat!" said Blake, staring at the dandy of the Fourth. It was utterly unlike Ralph Reckness Cardew to join himself to any party without being asked, and a boating

trip up the river, which was likely to include a good deal of roughing it, was not at all in Cardew's line. Cardew of the Fourth preferred to take things easily, and Study No. 6 could hardly imagine him doing the river in anything but a luxuriously appointed houseboat.
 "I'm a very entertainin' chap, when I get goin'," said Cardew modestly. "I'll sit an' watch you fellows rowin' and towin' as long as you like."
 "Weally, Cardew—"
 "And I sha'n't bore you very long," went on Cardew. "I'll join up at Kingston, and take a long farewell at Hampton Court. You can stand me for that distance. I'll try to stand you."
 "You'd fall down dead if you had to do any pulling," said Herries, with a grunt.
 "I shouldn't do any pullin', old bean. But if you'll be good pals, and ask me to join your party, I'll be ever so much obliged. You see, I'm in serious need of a prior engagement."
 "A what?" ejaculated Dig.
 "A prior engagement," explained Cardew. "Levison and Clive are planning out a walkin' tour in the West of England. Walkin', you know! Walkin' on a chap's own feet!"
 "You couldn't walk on anybody else's," grunted Herries.
 "Well, I could," said Cardew. "Thus!"
 "Yow!" roared Herries, as Cardew trod on his foot.
 "You silly ass, what are you up to?"
 "Walkin' on another chap's feet."
 "Ha, ha, ha!"
 Three juniors in Study No. 6 chuckled, and George Herries glared. Ralph Reckness Cardew rattled on cheerily.
 "Clive and Levison have settled that I'm going with them. I've settled that I'm not. I'm not goin' on a walkin' tour until some genius invents a way of walkin' sittin' down. No good tellin' them so—they won't take 'No' for an answer, and a chap can't argue in hot weather. My idea is to have a prior engagement fixed up ready. See?"
 "I wegard you as an ass, Cardew!"
 "And a lazy slacker!" said Herries.
 "And an idle loafer," said Blake.
 Cardew nodded.
 "How well you know me!" he remarked. "That's the best of public-school life—fellows get to know one another so thoroughly. Is it a fixture?"
 "Hallo, here he is!" Ernest Levison of the Fourth Form looked into the study, and Sidney Clive looked in over his shoulder. "Looking for you, Cardew!"
 "Well, you've found me," said Cardew, with a sigh. "I'm just finishin' arrangin' with these fellows about the vac. We're goin' up the river in a boat together."
 Levison's face fell.
 "You ass, I didn't know you were fixed for the holidays!" he said. "I thought you were coming tramping with us."
 "Just what I should have enjoyed," said Cardew regretfully. "Trampin' along dusty roads, smellin' the petrol from the motor-cars, is exactly the thing I've always pined for. But I can't go back on my arrangement with D'Arcy and his pals, can I?"
 "I suppose not," said Clive.
 "Weally, Cardew—"
 "After promisin' Blake—"
 "Well, that's all right," said Levison. "You might have let us know that Blake had asked you, though, you ass."
 "He couldn't very well," said Blake.
 "Why not?"
 "Because I haven't asked him."
 "What?"

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"The fact is, I asked Blake," said Cardew. "Fishin' for invitations—you know my way. Now it's all fixed up—"
 "It isn't!" said Blake.
 "Not by long chalks!" said Herries emphatically. "You can look in some other study for a prior engagement, you silly fathead!"
 "Yaas, wathah!"
 Clive burst into a laugh, and Levison grinned. Cardew looked dismayed. Levison slipped an arm through his.
 "Come on," he said. "We want you to go over the map with us, and help us fix up the route. We're getting as far as Cornwall."



The officer marched Arthur Augustus D'Arcy away, the gentleman in the white waistcoat following, raging. Tom Marry & Co. followed on behind, in a state of great dismay. Youthful inhabitants of Kingston joined in the procession, and passed personal remarks on Arthur Augustus D'Arcy that brought the crimson into his noble cheeks. (See page 9.)

"Not with me!" groaned Cardew. "My constitution won't stand it. Make it a motor trip instead, and I'll stand the car."

"Come on!" grinned Clive.

Cardew was walked away by his chums to Study No. 9. There he had the pleasure of watching Levison and Clive marking out towns and villages on the map across the south of England—every one of which was to be reached on foot. In Study No. 6 a chuckle followed the departure of Levison & Co.

"That chap Cardew is a sillay ass," remarked Arthur Augustus. "I cannot help wegardin' him as a sillay ass, though he is a welation of mine."

"Perhaps that's the reason," suggested Dig thoughtfully.

"Weally, Dig—"

"I hope they'll give him plenty of walking," said Blake. "It will do him good. Anyhow, seven will be enough for one boat—we shall want a good size in boats for seven. We can't take much baggage."

"I am takin' pwactically nothin'," said Arthur Augustus. "I shall not have more than thwee cabin twunks, and a hat-box, and a portmanteau, and a couple of attache-cases."

"Not more than that?" asked Blake.

"No, dear boy."

"Less, perhaps," suggested Blake.

"I could not vewy well do with less, Blake. A fellow must take some decent clothes. You nevah know what may happen."

"Oh, we do sometimes!" said Blake. "I know what will happen to your trunks if you bring them, for instance. They'll be lost overboard before we start."

"Weally, Blake—"

"How many toppers are you taking?"

"Only two."

"Is that all?" asked Blake sarcastically. "We'll, you're not taking two—you're taking one. One will be useful, if we have to bale out the boat!"

"Bai Jove! If you are thinkin' of usin' my silk toppah to bale out the boat, you wuffian—"

"You're not forgetting your evening clothes, I hope?"

"I am not likely to forget them, Blake."

"Good! We shall want something to clean the oil-stove and to wipe out the frying-pan!"

Arthur Augustus fixed his celebrated monocle in his eye, and gave his chums a stern look.

"I twust," he said, "that there is not goin' to be any nonsense on this subject. I shall insist upon takin' all wequisite articles. Pewwaps I can manage with one twunk, if it is a wathah large one."

"Perhaps you can," assented Blake. "Perhaps you can manage without one at all. What sort of a boat shall we want, fathead, if we take a big trunk apiece?"

"It is not necessawy for you fellows. You are vewy careless in your attiah anyway, and you're bound to look like a lot of twamps. There ought to be one well-dressed membah to keep up the cwedit of the partay. You fellows can take a bag each. But I shall certainly wequiah one big twunk and a hat-box!"

"You silly owl—"

"Oppwobwious expvessions, Blake, will not make any diffewence to me," said Arthur Augustus frigidly. "Even if we are goin' wuffin' it up the wivah, I shall insist upon bein' decently dussed."

"I tell you—"

Arthur Augustus waved a lofty hand.

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"Let it dwop, deah boy. No good arguin'."

"Yes, I'll let it drop—into the river," said Blake; "and, if you're not jolly careful, I'll let you drop after it."

"Wats!"

And the argument ended there; each of the juniors in Study No. 6 keeping to his own opinion. Arthur Augustus' opinion was that he was going to have a big trunk on the river trip. The opinion of Blake and Herries and Dig was that he wasn't. And it remained to be seen which of those contrary opinions was well founded.

CHAPTER 4.

A Trunk Mystery!

"KINGSTON!"

"Here they are!" said Tom Merry.

The Terrible Three were waiting on the platform when the train came in. The vacation had started in glorious weather; and St. Jim's was far behind the juniors now. The seven comrades had arranged to meet at Kingston for the beginning of the trip, and the Terrible Three were first on the spot.

The train stopped.

An aristocratic lace under a handsome straw-hat looked out of a carriage window, and Tom waved a hand to Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. Blake & Co. descended from the train.

"Here we are again!" said Blake cheerfully. "You fellows got your traps with you?"

"Yes, rather!"

"Same here. Let's get away to the boat."

"Hold on, deah boy!" said Arthur Augustus. "I've got a twunk on this twain."

"A trunk!" yelled Manners.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"And what are you going to do with the trunk?" asked Lowther.

"Have it cawried to the boat, of course."

Blake chuckled.

"Don't worry about your trunk, Gussy, old bird!" he remarked. "Your trunk isn't in the train."

"The luggage is bein' taken out now," said Arthur Augustus. "I had bettah go and look for it."

"Nothing doing," said Blake. "You see, I went along to the guard's-van at the last stop and changed the label on it."

"Wha-a-at?"

"It's been taken out of the train long ago, and it's now well on its way to Eastwood House," explained Blake. "I thought that a more merciful way of getting rid of it than chucking it into the river."

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared the Terrible Three.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy turned his eyeglass upon Blake with a frozen stare.

"You—you have depwived me of my twunk!" he ejaculated.

"Just that!"

"You uttah wottah! Then I have nothin' left exceptin' this bag."

"We'll let you keep that," said Blake generously. "If it's in the way, we can always chuck it overboard."

"Of course we can," agreed Tom Merry. "Keep it for the present, Gussy."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy breathed hard through his noble nose.

"I should be sowwy, Blake, to begin the holidays by givin' you a feahful thwashin'," he said.

"You would—if you started on the job!" assented Blake.

"We shall not be able to start yet. You fellows had bettah put up at an hotel in Kingston while I go aftah my twunk."

"I can see us doing it!" grinned Blake.

"In the cires—"

"In the cires, let's get off," suggested Tom Merry. "The boat's waiting for us below the bridge."

"I wefuse to go without my twunk. I believe you are pullin' my leg, Blake, and I wefuse to cwedit that you have been guilty of the wuffianly pwoceedin' you have desewibed. I am goin' to get my twunk."

And Arthur Augustus D'Arcy started at a run along the platform towards the guard's-van of the halted train.

"The trunk's really gone?" asked Tom Merry.

"You bet," answered Blake. "It ought to be home by this time. But let's give Gussy a few minutes to pore over the baggage, if he enjoys doing it. Give him five minutes."

And the six juniors sat down to wait five minutes for the swell of St. Jim's.

Meanwhile, Arthur Augustus lost no time. He really could not believe that Blake had been guilty of so Hunnish a proceeding as depriving him of his baggage. To start a river trip without evening clothes did not seem a possible

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proceeding to Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. Moreover, his neckties were in the trunk—as matters were, he had only the necktie he stood up in, so to speak. Then there were silken vests, and silken shirts, and collars galore, and beautifully-worked slippers, and many changes of trousers and decorative waistcoats. It really seemed impossible to believe that he had been deprived of all his supplies at one fell swoop. In spite of Blake's statement, Arthur Augustus expected to find the big, heavy leather trunk he had so carefully packed.

It was not to be seen in the stack of luggage landed on the platform. Arthur Augustus looked in the guard's-van.

The train was about to move on, and he had little time. The guard was coming along.

"Bai Jove! There it is!"

A huge trunk stood in the guard's-van—a huge leathern structure. There was no time to make a close examination, but it was of the same size and make as D'Arcy's trunk.

He seized it, and, exerting all his strength, rolled it out on the platform. It required some exertion to move that trunk, but Arthur Augustus was desperate.

Crash!

The trunk landed as the guard jumped into the van.

"What the thunder——" exclaimed the guard.

"It's all wight!" gasped Arthur Augustus. "My twunk was neahly left on the twain."

He jumped off as the train started. The guard stared after him, and said some things that were fortunately drowned in the noise of the moving train.

From a carriage farther along the train a man jumped, leaving a door swinging. He was a fat gentleman in a silk hat and a white waistcoat. Apparently he had changed his mind at the last moment about going on in the train.

His jump landed him heavily on the platform, and he sat down with a thud, and gasped spasmodically for breath.

Arthur Augustus did not notice him.

The swell of St. Jim's was fully occupied with his trunk, which he had so fortunately rescued at the last moment.

"Portah! Portah!"

"Yessir?"

"Pway put my twunk on a twolley, and bwing it along for me."

"Yessir."

There was a "tipping" look about the Honourable Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, which always brought him kind attentions from porters and waiters. The porter, heedless of several other passengers who did not look so tipping, landed the huge trunk on a trolley and started wheeling it away, with Arthur Augustus walking by his side.

By that time the gentleman in the white waistcoat had recovered his breath, and staggered to his feet.

He came across the platform at a run.

"Stop!" he shouted.

"Bai Jove! That vewy excited old gentleman cannot be speakin' to me, suahly," murmured Arthur Augustus.

"Stop!" roared the gentleman in the white waistcoat. "Porter! Stop at once! Don't you dare to take my trunk away!"

The porter jumped.

"Your trunk, sir!" he ejaculated.

"Bai Jove!"

The gentleman in the white waistcoat waved a furious hand.

"Send for a constable! Fetch a policeman! Take that young scoundrel into custody! I charge him with stealing my trunk! Send for a constable at once!"

CHAPTER 5.

Horrid!

ARTHUR AUGUSTUS D'ARCY stared at the old gentleman like a fellow in a dream.

Really, it seemed like a dream to the Honourable Arthur Augustus.

This infuriated old gentleman, with the white waistcoat and the purple face, was charging him, Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, with stealing a trunk, and demanding the police!

It was really difficult to believe that it was real.

The porter stopped, and stood scratching his head, nonplussed. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy certainly did not look like a railway thief. But the old gentleman, evidently a respectable man, was in deadly earnest. He brandished a gold-headed stick at Gussy.

"Stand where you are!" he roared. "Attempt to escape and I will stan you!"

"Bai Jove!" said Arthur Augustus faintly.

"Send for the stationmaster! Send for the police!"

"Well, blow me if this don't beat it!" said the porter. "Ere comes the stationmaster."

The stationmaster was coming up hurriedly; a crowd was gathering already. Along with the crowd came Tom Merry Co., wondering what on earth was the matter. A policeman appeared in the offing, and bore down upon the scene.

"Now, what's the trouble here?" asked the stationmaster.

"This poor old gentleman seems to be suffewin' fwm gunstwoke," said Arthur Augustus mildly.

The poor old gentleman burst into a roar.

"Impudent young rascal! Where is there a policeman? I give this young rascal into custody!"

"Weally, sir," said Arthur Augustus hotly, "I must beg you to modewate your language. But for my wespect for your gwey hairs, sir, I should certainly punch your nose!"

"But what—" ejaculated the stationmaster.

"My trunk!" roared the old gentleman, pointing his gold-headed cane at the huge structure on the trolley.

"My twunk!" said Arthur Augustus gently but firmly.

"Mine!" roared the old gentleman. "Officer, take him into custody! I saw him from my carriage just as the

train was starting. I have lost my train. It is that young scoundrel's fault. I saw him roll my trunk out of the guard's-van, and he would have escaped with his plunder if I had not jumped from the train in time."

"Gweat Scott! The poor old fellow must be pottay!" said Arthur Augustus in wonder. "This is my twunk!"

The constable looked puzzled.

Thirty or forty passengers, porters, and other persons were gathered round the spot now in a buzzing crowd. The stationmaster looked perplexed; the porter scratched his head hopelessly.

"Take him into custody, officer!" roared the irate old gentleman. "I will come to the station and charge him."

"Bai Jove! If you claim my twunk, sir, I shall certainly give you into custody!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus hotly. "Officah, kindly take that old gentleman into custody, and I will come to the station and charge him!"

"Well, my eye!" said the officer.

"I repeat—"

"I wepeat—"

"It is my trunk!" roared the gentleman in the white waistcoat. "My initials are painted on the top."

"My initials are painted on the top!" said Arthur Augustus.

"We'll soon settle this," said the constable. "Your name, sir?"

"Egbert Montgomery Jones."

"And yours, young man?"

"Arthur Augustus D'Arcy."

The constable pointed to the disputed trunk.

"Them initials is E. M. J.," he said sternly.

"My initials!" roared Mr. Jones.

Arthur Augustus gave a jump. He looked at the initials; it really was rather a pity that he hadn't looked at them before. Undoubtedly, the initials were E. M. J., which by no stretch of imagination could be made to stand for Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

"Bai Jove!" said the swell of St. Jim's faintly.

"Well?" said the constable grimly.

"It—it appeahs that it is not my twunk," said Arthur Augustus. "It is vewy like my twunk, and I certainly thought that it was my twunk. But unless somebody has changed the initials on it, it cannot be my twunk."

"Ho!" said the officer.

The gentleman in the white waistcoat snorted.

"Impudent young scoundrel! He would have escaped with the trunk had I not seen him and jumped from the train!"

"You are quite mistaken, sir," said Arthur Augustus. "I should have discovahed that it was not my twunk, and weturned it to you."

"Pah!"

"It is a vewy unfortunate mistake," said Arthur Augustus, in great distress.

"Very unfortunate for you, my lad!" said the constable, dropping a heavy hand on D'Arcy's shoulder.

Tom Merry & Co. pushed forward.

The turn of affairs had quite dismayed the chums of St. Jim's. But they were prepared to stand by the swell of the Fourth, even if the affair went as far as the police-station.

"It's a mistake—" began Tom Merry.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"We're his friends," explained Blake. "We can tell you—"

"Take him into custody!" roared the gentleman in the white waistcoat. "I insist upon his being taken to the station!"

"Weally, sir—"

"Come alonger me, my lad!" said the constable, tightening his grasp on Arthur Augustus' shoulder. "If it's a mistake, you can explain that at the station. You shouldn't go about making these mistakes with other gents' property."

"In the cires—"

"Come along!"

The officer marched Arthur Augustus away, the gentleman in the white waistcoat following, raging. Tom Merry & Co. followed on behind, in a state of great dismay. About twenty or thirty other persons followed, apparently interested in the affair. Youthful inhabitants of Kingston joined in the procession, and passed personal remarks on Arthur Augustus D'Arcy that brought the crimson into his noble cheeks.

"Looks a young rip, don't he?"

"Young pickpocket!"

"Look arter 'im, bobby!"

"Mind he don't cut and run, Robert!"

"Wonder where he stole them trousis?"

"You're for the stone jug this time, eyeglass!"

"Oh, bai Jove!" murmured Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "I weally think that this must be some feahful dweam. It cannot weally be weal!"

It was quite an entertaining procession to the station, though Arthur Augustus and his friends did not enjoy it.

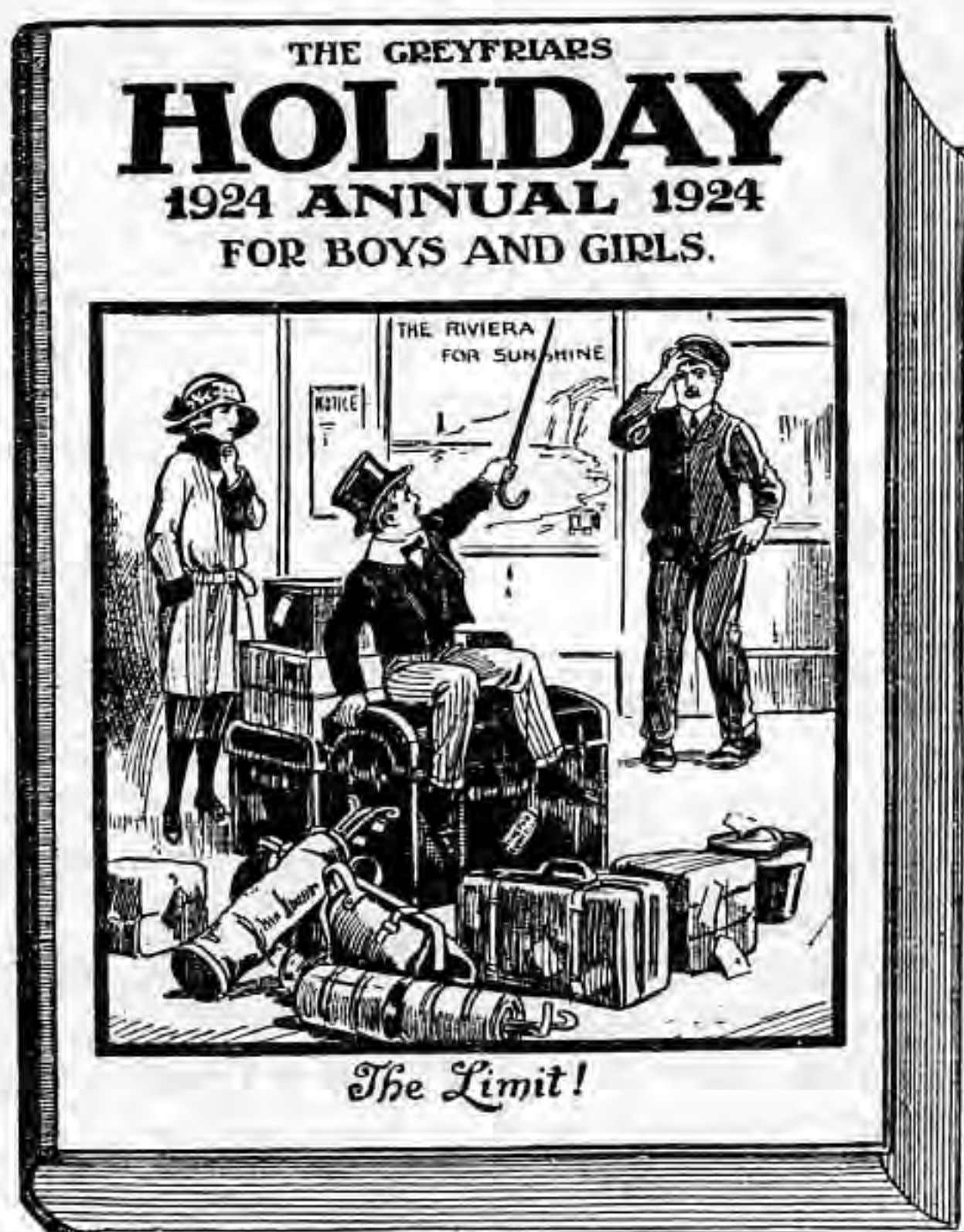
Fortunately, when the police-station was reached, the inspector in charge was not long in sifting the matter. Blake explained his proceedings with Gussy's trunk, which made the inspector grin; and Arthur Augustus explained how, in the haste of the moment, he had mistaken Mr. Jones' trunk for his own. Even Mr. Egbert Montgomery Jones was convinced at last that he had not to do with a railway thief, and realised that his charge was a little ridiculous, and became anxious to withdraw it. So all was well that ended well; and Tom Merry & Co., in deep

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relief, marched Arthur Augustus away from the police-station.

"Hold on to him!" said Blake. "Goodness knows what he will do next!"

"I twust, Blake, that you are sowwy you have caused all this twouble!" said Arthur Augustus sternly.

"I!" yelled Blake.

"Yaas, wathah! If you had not played wotten twicks with my twunk, I should not have bagged that excitable old gentleman's twunk by mistake. And now, what is goin' to be done about my twunk?"

"Your trunk?"

"Yaas. I want it, you know."

"And you won't be happy till you get it?" asked Monty Lowther.

"I wefuse to pwoceed till my twunk is wecovahed. I considah—yawwooh! Leggo! I wefuse—I pwotest—I-yooooow!"

Arthur Augustus did proceed. He proceeded in quite a hurry, and was in a rumpled and breathless state when he was plumped bodily into a boat that rocked on the water below Kingston Bridge.

CHAPTER 6.

The Old Bus!

THE boat was quite a nice boat.

It was rather roomy—which was an advantage when there were seven fellows to be accommodated on board—or eight, including Herries' feet, as Monty Lowther remarked with a gentle humour that drew a glare from George Herries.

Arthur Augustus—when he had recovered the repose that stamps the caste of Vere de Vere—examined the boat, and pronounced that it was a well-found craft. Apparently Arthur Augustus had been reading up seafaring literature, all ready for this voyage of discovery up the Thames, and he declared with an air of knowing what he was talking about, that it was a well-found craft. The man in charge of the well-found craft grinned as he heard the remark.

Monty Lowther looked perplexed.

"Are you sure of that, Gussy?" he asked.

"Yaas, wathah! I know lots about boats," said the swell of St. Jim's confidently. "You can take it fwom me, Lowthah, that this is a well-found cwaft."

"But who found it?" asked Lowther.

"Eh?"

Lowther turned to the boatman.

"Did you find it, Robinson?" he asked.

"No, sir!" grinned Robinson. "It's the blooming boat the guv'nor picked out for you, sir!"

"You misundahstand, Lowthah—"

"If it was found," said Lowther, "no doubt it was well found. It was worth finding. But in that case it ought to be advertised, for the owner to claim it. Findings ain't keepings, Gussy!"

"Bai Jove! When I say it is well found, I do not mean it is found, you ass. I mean—"

"Well, what do you mean?" grinned Blake.

"Wats!"

Arthur Augustus declined to pursue the subject. It had dawned upon his powerful intellect that Lowther was pulling his leg.

"The boat's all right," said Manners. "My camera will be quite safe in this locker."

"Bai Jove! I was goin' to keep my hat in that locker."

"That's the bread-box," remarked Dig.

Manners did not argue the point. He deposited his camera in the locker, with an air of being prepared to do battle for it if necessary. Gussy's hat-box lay around loose, as it were, and Jack Blake gave it a regretful glance. He felt that he ought to have dealt with that hat-box as he had dealt with the trunk. But it is never too late to mend; and Blake had plenty of time before him for dealing with the hat-box.

"Who's going to tow?" asked Herries.

"Bettah put up the mast and hoist the sail," said Arthur Augustus. "A wet sheet and a flowin' sea, you know."

"Splendid idea," said Blake cordially. "Better whistle for a wind first, though. There are certain difficulties about sailing in a dead calm without a breath of wind."

"Bai Jove! I nevah thought of that. But towin' is a wathah lazy way of doin' it. Bettah wow."

"Go it!"

"I am suggestin' that you fellows can wow. You will wemembah what I told you at St. Jim's. There is goin' to be no slackin' on board this cwaft."

"Gussy had better take the tow-rope," said Blake decidedly. "It will keep him quiet for a bit."

"Hear, hear!"

"If you are goin' to slack, Blake—"

"Here's the rope, fathead!"

"Yaas, but—"

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"Get going!"

Arthur Augustus paused. Slackness, even on a river holiday, he was very much down upon. But apparently he preferred to instruct rather by precept than by example.

"Bai Jove! I have an ideah—" he said.

"Bury it!"

"Weally, Blake—"

"Chuck it overboard!" urged Blake. "Get going with the rope!"

"My ideah is—"

"Piffle!"

"Wats! Wobinson, deah boy—"

"Yes, sir," said the boatman, touching his hat. The "tipping" look of Arthur Augustus had its usual effect on the boatman.

"Pewwaps you would like to tow the boat for a bit," suggested Arthur Augustus. "It is vevy good exahcise walkin' along the bank of a wivah towin' a boat, and the scenewy is vevy intewestin'."

"I'm your man, sir!"

"Good! You are a vevy obligin' chap, Wobinson."

"Not at all, sir. It's a pleasure to oblige a gentleman like you, sir," said Robinson.

"You flattah me, Wobinson."

Robinson took the tow-rope, and the voyage of the St. Jim's juniors began. Blake sat at the lines, and the other fellows busied themselves about the boat, getting things ship-shape and all ataunto, as Arthur Augustus described it in his new nautical language. Not that Arthur Augustus joined in getting the things ataunto. He sat on the lockers and gave directions.

The roomy boat moved rather heavily; it had a good cargo on board. It was not, as Lowther remarked, a racing craft, though Arthur Augustus persisted that it was a well-found craft. The name painted on the boat was Elizabeth Ann, but Monty Lowther promptly rechristened it the Old Bus, which was not an unsuitable name.

"This is wathah jollay," remarked Arthur Augustus, glancing with an appreciative eye at the old streets of Kingston, and the sunny towpath, and Robinson marching on with the rope. "Keep her nose away from the bank, Blake!"

"Fathead!"

"Weally, Blake, if you do not keep her nose away fwom the bank, we shall wun ashore."

"Ain't I keeping her clear?" roared Blake.

"Yaas, but you know what an ass you are, you know! I am only warnin' you, old chap."

"Will somebody prod that image with an oar?" asked Blake.

"Bai Jove! I wefuse to be pwodded with an oar, Blake, for givin' you good advice. Kingston is a vevy old place, you fellows," said Arthur Augustus. "I have been weadin' up the subject, and I am goin' to give you fellows the benefit of it on our way up the wivah. King Edward was cwowned at Kingston."

"Rot!" said Herries. "He wasn't!"

"He was, deah boy. I've been weadin' it up."

"Rubbish!" said Dig.

"I assuah you, Dig, that King Edward was cwowned King of Wessex at Kingston," said Arthur Augustus.

"King of which?" yelled Dig.

"Wessex, deah boy."

"What is the image burbling about?" asked Manners.

"You fellows don't seem to undahstand. I am not alludin' to Edward the Seventh, the pater of our pwesent gwacious King. I am speakin' of Edward the Elder, one of the old Saxon kings, you know. It was quite a long time ago."

"Are we going to have history-class all the way up the river?" asked Herries. "I had enough of that at school."

"Weally, Hewwies, you should not neglect an opportunity of impwovin' your knowledge, even on a holiday," said Arthur Augustus gently. "King Edward used to hold his what-do-you-call-it in the thingummy at Kingston, and I am sure that is worth wemembewin'."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"There is a stone, or somethin', in a market-place, or somethin', where the Saxon kings were cwowned," said Arthur Augustus, who had evidently been reading up the subject with great attention. "It was lost, or found—I forget which—at some time or other, and, afftah bein' left somewhah, was placed somewhah else, or somethin'. It's weally vevy intewestin'."

"Very, the way you put it," said Tom Merry, laughing.

"I am glad you are intewested, old chap. Of course, all that stuff about the Saxon kings can scarcely be we-garded as weal histowy, as my family did not come to England till 1066."

"Oh, my hat!"

"They came ovah with William the Norman, you know,"



Realising that there was no cash forthcoming from the St. Jim's juniors the rough-looking man stepped forward and took a kick at the spirit-stove and kettle, by way of relief to his feelings. Both went flying, and a chorus of rage arose as the hot water from the kettle sprouted over several legs. (See page 13.)

said Arthur Augustus. "That was weally the beginnin' of sewious histowy."

"That was before the Undesirable Aliens Act was passed, wasn't it?" asked Monty Lowther gravely.

"Weally, Lowthah—"

"I wish I'd been there when the Normans came," said Dig. "I'd have given the hungry brutes jip!"

"Bai Jove! It was a vewy long time ago, Dig, and you ought not to wesent the fact that my ancestahs licked your ancestahs at the Battle of Hastings."

"What?" roared Dig.

"I am only statin' a fact, deah boy."

Dig jumped up.

"Well, you ass, if your ancestors licked my ancestors, my ancestors' descendant is going to lick your ancestors' descendant," he said.

"Yawwooh!" roared Arthur Augustus, as his chum caught him round the neck and gently applied a set of knuckles to his noble nose. "You uttah ass! Welease me, you wuffian!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Arthur Augustus and Robert Arthur Digby collapsed into the bottom of the boat, apparently fighting the Battle of Hastings over again. Tom Merry seized a boathook, and sorted them out. The second Battle of Hastings was left unfinished.

CHAPTER 7.

To Tip or Not to Tip!

"HAMPTON COURT PALACE was built by Cardinal Wolsey—"

"Chuck it!"

"Who pwesented it to King Henry the Eighth in the—"

"Order!"

"Weally, you fellows—"

Monty Lowther picked up an oar.

"You see this, Gussy?" he asked.

"Yaas, deah boy."

"Next time you give us any historical information, I'm going to catch you under the chin with it."

"Bai Jove! Don't you fellows want to impwove your minds?" asked Arthur Augustus. "I am wathah surprised at your neglectin' opportunities like this. Pway don't be an ass, Lowthah, aftah I have wead up the subject to enlighten you fellows. The last King of England to use Hampton Court as a palace was George the Second—Yawwooh!"

Monty Lowther kept his word.

The boat rocked as Arthur Augustus jumped up again.

"You wotten wuffian!" he roared.

"Have some more?" asked Lowther affably. "You've only got to get on with the jolly old instruction."

"I wegard you as a barbawous bwute, Lowthah! I wefuse to tell you now that Hampton Court Palace contains a thousand apartments, though it is a fact vewy well worth knowin'."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"And I shall not inform you that the finest parts of that histowic buildin' are the Great Gatehouse and the Clock Court," said Arthur Augustus severely.

Meanwhile, Robinson was tramping patiently and industriously along the old wall of Hampton Court grounds. Robinson was to tow the Old Bus as far as Molesey Lock, and Arthur Augustus inquired who was going to tow it after Molesey.

"You are!" said Blake.

"My deah fellow, Wobinson is takin' my turn," said Arthur Augustus. "He is a vewy obligin' chap, that man Wobinson. Although he is a stwangah to me, he offahed vewy kindly to take my turn at towin'. Pewwaps he will offah to take your turn, Blake, as he seems to like towin' boats."

"I've no cash to chuck away in tips!" grunted Blake.

"Bai Jove! I suppose you do not think that Wobinson is towin' this boat for a tip, Blake?"

"What the merry thump do you think he is doing it for, then?" demanded Blake.

"Because he is an obligin' chap, I suppose."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I weally do not see anythin' to cackle at. I certainly

shall not hurt Wobinson's feelin's by offahin' him money for performin' an obligin' service."

"Oh, my hat!" said Manners. "I fancy Robinson will hurt your feelings, if you don't!"

"I think he will—most emphatically," grinned Lowther.

Arthur Augustus frowned.

"Wubbish! I wefuse to believe that that vewy obligin' chap had any mercenawy motive in offahin' to tow the boat. Why, he said it would be a pleasuah to him."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I was vewy glad to give him a little pleasuah," said Arthur Augustus. "Certainly I shall not wisk hurtin' his feelin's by tippin' him. I wegard you fellows as asses."

Tom Merry & Co. chuckled.

After the Old Bus had passed Molesey Lock, there was a stop. Robinson came to a halt, and touched his hat to Arthur Augustus.

"I shall have to be getting back now, sir," he said.

"Yaas, deah boy," said Arthur Augustus. "I am vewy much obliged to you for towin' us as fah as this, Wobinson!"

Robinson looked at him.

"I'm glad to oblige you, sir."

"Yaas, quite so. I wegard you as a vewy good-natured and obligin' chap, Wobinson."

"Oh!" said Robinson, and he seemed puzzled.

He fanned his warm red face with his hat, and still looked across the intervening strip of water at the Honourable Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

"Good-aftahnoon, deah boy!"

"It's pretty warm work, sir," said Robinson.

"Yaas, it is failhy warm weathah," assented Arthur Augustus. "I hope you have not made yourself tired, Wobinson."

"Well, a bloke does get tired, sir," said Robinson, a little tartly. "It ain't my dooty to tow gent's boats up the river, if you come to that. I'm always glad to oblige a gent as is a gent."

"Yaas, you mentioned that circumstance befoah, Wobinson. If you are tired, deah boy, you had bettah sit down and west on the gwass, befoah walkin' back to Kingston."

"Oh!" ejaculated Robinson again.

Tom Merry & Co. tried not to smile. It was for Arthur Augustus to deal with the obliging boatman, and they left him to it. Arthur Augustus seemed to think that the matter was at an end, and seemed puzzled to know why Robinson still lingered.

"You had bettah take the tow-wope, Dig," said Arthur Augustus. "Jump ashore, deah boy."

Dig grinned, and jumped ashore and took the tow-rope from Robinson. Arthur Augustus politely raised his straw-hat in farewell.

"Good-bye, Wobinson! Much obliged!"

The Old Bus glided on, Dig towing. To the surprise of Arthur Augustus, though not to that of his comrades, Robinson followed the boat, instead of walking back to Kingston. He proceeded to make remarks as he walked.

"You with the glass eye!" he called out.

Arthur Augustus started.

This apparently was a reference to his celebrated eye-glass. It could not be called a respectful reference.

"Bai Jove! Did you address me, Wobinson?" he ejaculated.

"Did I?" said Robinson. "Yes, I think I did. I asks you a question, you with the glass eye. Do you call yourself a gent?"

"Gweat Scott!"

"Do you?" repeated Robinson, raising his voice and showing signs of excitement. "I asks you, as man to man, do you call yourself a gent?"

"I feah that the poor fellow is suffewin' fwom sun-stwoke," said Arthur Augustus, with real concern. "I should be sowwy to think that he has been dwinkin'."

"Do you call yourself a gent, you with the glass eye?" roared Robinson, displaying no signs whatever now of being a good-natured and obliging boatman.

"Weally, my deah fellow," said Arthur Augustus, in distress, "you pain me vewy much. I certainly do not call myself a gent, if you wequiah a weply to your wathah widiculous question. I twust that I am a gentleman; but gent is a wathah no-class expression which I should be sowwy to heah applied to me!"

"'Ere I've towed that blinking boat up from Kingston," said Robinson. "'Ot weather, too; very 'ot!"

"But you must have been awah that the weathah was hot when you started," said Arthur Augustus.

"And you ain't so much as asked a man whether he's got a mouth on 'im!" continued Robinson.

"Gweat Scott! But I am perfectly well awah that you have a mouth, my good fellow—a failhy large one, in fact."

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"Call yourself a gent! If I'd knowed that this was a bank 'oliday crowd without a brown among the lot, think I'd 'ave towed this blessed old barge from Kingston to Molesey!"

Robinson shook a fist at Arthur Augustus.

"Not so much as a 'arf-crown in your clothes, what?"

"Yaas, wathah! I have quite a large numbah of half-crowns, as it happens, Wobinson. I do not see the point of your wemark. You seem to me to be wandewin' fwom the subject."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Pway do not cackle, deah boys! Judgin' by his look, I feah that Wobinson is angwy about somethin'. Is anythin' the mattah, Wobinson?"

"A blooming himage with a glass eye!" said Robinson. "Making out he's a gent, and swindling a bloke!"

"Gweat Scott!"

"Here, catch!" called out Tom Merry, and he tossed a half-crown to the indignant boatman.

Robinson caught.

"Thank you, sir," he said. "You're a gent, you are. As for that himage with the glass eye, I'd come on board and punch his silly 'ead, if he wasn't a friend of yours, sir!"

And Robinson, with a last glare of defiance and scorn at Arthur Augustus, touched his hat to Tom Merry, and walked away towards Kingston.

"Bai Jove!" said Arthur Augustus at last. "I think I compwehend. The man wanted a tip!"

"You really think so?" asked Blake.

"Yaas, wathah; I am convinced of it now!" said Arthur Augustus. "I am sowwy to take such a low view of Wobinson, but aftah his words and conduct I feel perfectly suah that what he wanted was a tip."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I twust you fellows do not think that I am doin' Wobinson an injustice?" asked Arthur Augustus. "It weally seems to me perfectly cleah that what he wanted all the time was a tip!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"What do you fellows think?"

But the fellows did not state what they thought. They only roared, and Arthur Augustus shook his noble head seriously, quite distressed by the low view he was compelled to take of Robinson.

CHAPTER 8.

The River Ruffian!

"SUNBUWY is a pwetty place——"

"Halt!"

"What!" ejaculated Arthur Augustus, as Jack Blake rapped out that command and held up a warning hand.

"Cheese it!" said Blake.

"I was goin' to wemark——"

"Cut it out! We don't want to know anything about the jolly old kings who were crowned at Sunbury."

"Bai Jove! I have never heard that any king was cwowned at Sunbuwy, Blake!"

"Well, then, if it's an old Norman castle, don't tell us!"

"But there isn't——"

"Thank goodness! If Queen Elizabeth slept at the inn, we don't want to know."

"I am suah I do not know whether Queen Elizabeth slept at the inn or not, Blake. I was goin' to say——"

"Don't! If King Charles stopped there the night before his head was cut off, keep it to yourself, old pippin."

"But he didn't, that I know of!"

"Or if Charles the Second hid in Sunbury Lock after the battle of Worcester, keep it for an exam paper."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I wegard you as an ass, Blake. I was goin' to wemark that Sunbuwy is a pwetty spot, and we might as well have tea——"

"Oh!" said Blake, rather taken aback. He was ready for tea himself, though unprepared to digest any more historical information from Arthur Augustus. "Well, that's all right! How was I to know that you were talking sense for the first time in your life?"

"Weally, Blake——"

"This little meadow seems a jolly spot," said Tom Merry. "Bump the Old Bus into the rushes!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

The Old Bus was bumped ashore and the tow-rope made fast. The St. Jim's juniors scrambled out on to the bank.

It was quite a pretty little meadow near Sunbury, backed by old elms, with a red-roofed house in the distance. A more charming spot for tea could not have been desired.

And the juniors had it to themselves. They had passed plenty of boats and punts and canoes and parties of picnickers, but this pretty little meadow was quite solitary.

So they lauded, hoping that nobody had any objection

to their camping for an hour or two on that green patch of land, if it was private land. Blake remarked that he didn't believe in landowners bagging the banks of a river and saying that they were private property. Arthur Augustus differed, possibly because a river ran through the extensive property of Eastwood House, the home of the noble Gussy. Blake's home was in the town of Wakefield, in Yorkshire, so he had no prejudices on the subject—not in the way that Gussy had, at all events. However, whether the meadow was public land, private land, or any other kind of land, the seven juniors stretched their legs upon it and camped for tea, with the Old Bus tied up to the bank.

The kettle was filled from the water-keg in the boat, river water was not to be trusted. The spirit-stove was lighted and burned steadily in the still summer air. The kettle began to sing with quite a cheery home-like sound.

Tom Merry sliced a loaf, and Manners spread the slices with butter. Lowther opened a jar of jam. Herries, with the oil-stove in the boat, boiled eggs. Digby made a frantic search of the stores for salt and happily discovered some. Arthur Augustus gave Herries directions with regard to the correct boiling of eggs, with a hint or two to Manners about the way to spread butter. When the kettle boiled, however, Gussy volunteered to make the tea, which was industrious, though not useful, as Tom Merry had to make it again when it was discovered that Arthur Augustus had left the tea out of the pot.

Seven cheery juniors sat round in the grass or on cushions from the boat to enjoy their tea, and they enjoyed it thoroughly. It was agreed on all hands that a holiday up the river was the best wheeze that ever had been wheezed.

Tea was getting on nicely when a gentleman with a pug nose and a velvet jacket came through the elms and walked across the meadow towards the camping party. The juniors glanced at him.

"Bai Jove, that chap doesn't look satisfied!" said Arthur Augustus. "I wondah if he is the ownah of the house yondah. Boat-keeper, pewwaps, or a gardenah."

"Leave this to me, deah boys!" he said. "I know what is the mattah. A tip will fix it."

Evidently the swell of St. Jim's had learned his lesson from Robinson.

"Well, I don't want to interfere with gents enjoying themselves," said the man in the velvet jacket, more amiably. "If a matter of five shillin's wouldn't 'urt you, stay and finish your tea, and welcome!"

"Vewy good!"

Arthur Augustus drew a handful of silver from his pocket and proceeded to count out five shillings. The rough-looking man's eyes gleamed.

Tom Merry rose to his feet.

"Put that money back, Gussy," he said.

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—"

"How do you know the man belongs to the place at all, fathead?" snapped Blake. "More likely some moocher looking for mugs to plunder."

"Jolly likely, I think!" grinned Lowther.

"Bai Jove!"

Arthur Augustus rattled the silver back into his pocket. There was a black scowl from the pig-nosed gentleman.

"That does it!" he exclaimed. "Get off this 'ere land!"

"Go and eat coke!" said Tom Merry politely.

"Are you goin'?"

"Not in the least."

"And we're not giving you anything, dear man," said Monty Lowther. "So trot along and look for mugs!"

The rough-looking fellow scowled savagely. He had felt certain of five shillings; probably having annexed a good many shillings in his time in the same way. But he realised that there was nothing to be done with the St. Jim's party in the way of blackmail.

He stepped forward, and took a kick at the spirit-stove and kettle, by way of relief to his feelings.

Both went flying, and there was some hot water in the kettle, which spouted over several legs. A chorus arose from the campers.

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Leave me to deal with him if he cuts up wusty. I will soothe him down all wight!"

The pig-nosed man came up to the camp. There was a big stick under his arm with knobs on it, and his look was unfriendly.

"What do you think you're doing 'ere?" he inquired.

"Weally, my deah fellow—"

"We haven't thought very deeply on the subject so far, my good man," said Monty Lowther gravely. "But coming to think of it, we think we are camping out and having tea."

"This 'ere is private land."

"My dear man, we've no objection to that," said Lowther, good-humouredly.

"Not at all," grinned Blake.

The man glared at them.

"My guv'nor's given me orders to keep trippers off his land," he said.

"Quite right of your guv'nor," said Monty Lowther affably. "Blessed if I should like trippers on my land, if I had any."

"That there your boat?"

"Yes," said Tom Merry.

"Well, git into it and clear!"

"We haven't finished tea."

"Do you want to be run in for trespass?"

"Bow-wow!"

"If my guv'nor sees you 'ere—"

"Fetch him along," said Tom; "we'll talk to your governor, not to you!"

"I've got my orders," growled the man in the velvet jacket. "Course, I ain't saying that if a gent treats me like a gent I wouldn't treat him like a gent!"

And he gave the tea-party an expressive look. Arthur Augustus slid his hand into his pocket.

The man grinned, and started to walk away. But he did not take more than three steps.

Tom Merry was after him like an arrow from a bow, and he grasped the rascal by his dirty collar and whirled him back.

"'Ands off!" roared the pug-nosed gentleman, grasping his stick.

But it was not a case of hands off; it was a case of hands on, and many of them. Before the river ruffian could use his stick, Manners and Lowther had hold of him, and Blake had jerked the stick away, and flung it far out into the Thames. The next moment the pug-nosed gentleman came to the ground with a heavy bump.

"Duck him!" shouted Herries.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Leggo!" roared the pug-nosed man. "Don't you shove me near that blinking water! Oh scissors! Let a bloke alone!"

He struggled desperately, but all the seven juniors had hold of him now. He was rather a hefty ruffian, but he was quite helpless in the grasp of seven.

"Now, you rascal!" said Tom Merry sternly. "Own up that you don't belong to these parts, and were only trying to get money out of us!"

"Let a bloke go!"

"Do you own up?"

"Anything you like!" gasped the pug-nosed gentleman. "Take your blinking knee off my blinking chest!"

"Bai Jove! The howwid wottah admits that he was extortin' money," said Arthur Augustus. "I should nevah have thought of that, you know. We had bettah give him a feahful thwashin'!"

"Duck him! He looks as if he hasn't had a wash for months," said Manners.

"Hear, hear!"

"Yooooooop!"

Splash! The man with the pug nose swamped into shallow water, with a terrific yell that rang across the river, and caused glances to be turned on the spot from half a dozen passing boats.

The blackmailer struggled and splashed in the water, and crawled out drenched and dripping.

"Chuck him in again!" exclaimed Blake.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Oh, gad!" ejaculated the pug-nosed gentleman, and he started at a frantic run across the meadow.

"Aftah him, deah boys!"

"Oh, let him rip!" said Tom Merry, laughing. "He won't bother us any more. Let's finish tea!"

And the juniors sat down again cheerfully in the golden setting sun, while the drenched and dripping gentleman with the pug nose vanished over the horizon.

CHAPTER 9.

The Passenger!

"YOU young rascals!"

"Bai Jove!"

Tea was finished, and the St. Jim's fellows were putting their things together to be replaced in the boat, when a stout gentleman in a white waistcoat came striding on the scene. He came from the red-roofed house that was visible in the distance behind the elms; and he came with purple wrath in his podgy face.

And the seven recognised him at once. He was the fat gentleman with whom Arthur Augustus had found trouble at Kingston, and whose name was Egbert Montgomery Jones. He was grasping a gold-headed cane in his right hand, and was obviously in a state of considerable annoyance.

"What are you doing in this meadow?" he demanded. "I know you, you young rascals—I've seen you before!"

"Bai Jove! I weally twusted that we had done with you, Mr. Jones!" said Arthur Augustus. "I am shocked at you! I wefuse to give you anythin'!"

"What?"

"Not a shillin'!" said Arthur Augustus firmly.

"Wha-a-a!" gasped Mr. Jones, almost too taken aback to articulate.

"Not a sixpence," said Arthur Augustus. "I am surprised at you, attemptin' to extort money f'rom campin' picnicers. You look as if you have plenty of money, though you do not know a good tailah. I wefuse to tip you!"

The expression on Mr. Jones' face was extraordinary. Tom Merry & Co. burst into a shriek of laughter.

Evidently Arthur Augustus, after his experience with the pug-nosed gentleman, supposed that Mr. Jones was on the same "lay." But really that was not displaying the tact and judgment of which Gussy believed himself the possessor.

Egbert Montgomery Jones was probably the owner of the red-roofed house, and the land adjoining, and doubtless had some thousands a year; at all events, he certainly was not the same kind of man as the pug-nosed gentleman, though his temper appeared to be no better. But the powerful intellect of Arthur Augustus D'Arry moved in mysterious ways its wonders to perform. His impression was that he had to do with another blackmailer, and he wasn't taking any.

"There is nothin' to cackle at, you fellows!" said Arthur Augustus, as his comrades yelled. "It is not a laughin' matter for this person to attempt to extort money f'rom us for campin' here, like that othah wascal!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Extort money!" gasped Mr. Jones. "Am I dreaming?"

"Certainly you are dreamin', if you think you will get any tips out of us!" said Arthur Augustus indignantly. "So fah f'rom givin' you a half-crown, I will not even give you twopence!"

Mr. Jones did not reply in words. Words could not possibly have expressed his feelings.

He aimed a blow at Arthur Augustus with his gold-headed cane.

The swell of St. Jim's jumped back, and only the brim of his straw hat caught the cane. It spun from his head like a tipcat.

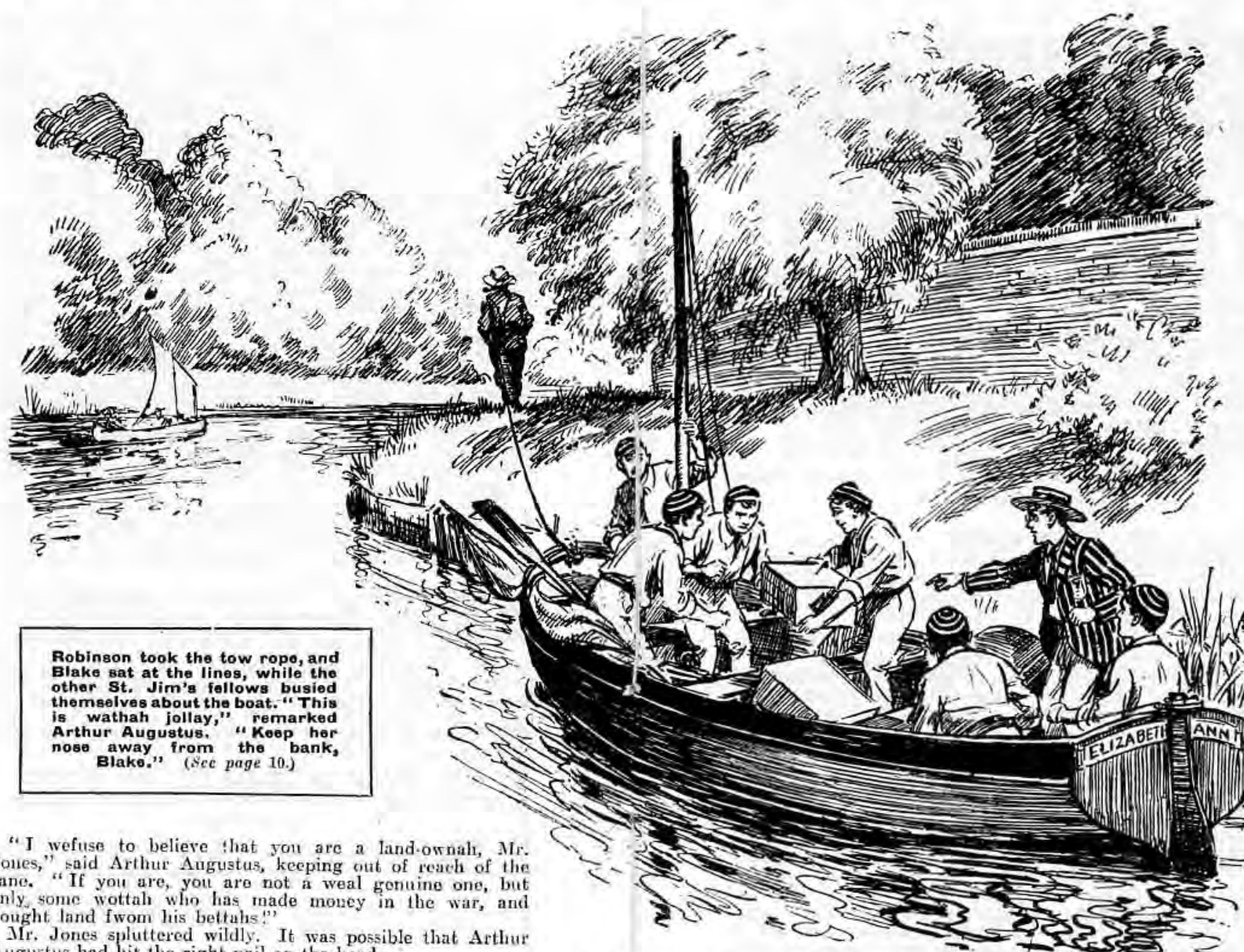
"Oh!" gasped Arthur Augustus. "Bai Jove! Collah the wuffian, you fellows!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"This is my land!" roared Mr. Jones. "That is my house! I will have you prosecuted for trespass! I will telephone for the police!"

"Take it calmly, old gent!" urged Monty Lowther. "We haven't hurt your old land. We're not going to take it away with us in the boat, you know!"

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Robinson took the tow rope, and Blake sat at the lines, while the other St. Jim's fellows busied themselves about the boat. "This is wathah jollay," remarked Arthur Augustus. "Keep her nose away from the bank, Blake." (See page 10.)

"I wefuse to believe that you are a land-ownah, Mr. Jones," said Arthur Augustus, keeping out of reach of the cane. "If you are, you are not a weal genuine one, but only some wottah who has made money in the war, and bought land f'rom his bettahs!"

Mr. Jones spluttered wildly. It was possible that Arthur Augustus had hit the right nail on the head.

The swell of St. Jim's stooped for his straw hat and picked it up, and Mr. Jones jumped at him at the same moment.

Whack!

The hapless Gussy was fairly caught bending. He gave a fearful yell as the cane landed.

"Yawooooooooop!"

"Oh dear!" gasped Blake, almost sobbing. "Gussy will be the death of me yet! I say, look out, Gussy! Hook it! He's after your scalp!"

One whack did not satisfy the gentleman in the white waistcoat. Indeed, he looked as if he could have hanged, drawn, and quartered the swell of St. Jim's and smiled over the process. He pursued him with the cane, lashing out with energy.

Arthur Augustus made a run for the boat, and leaped into it from the bank.

The boat rocked as he landed, and he rolled on the floorboards. The next moment the boat was rocking still more violently, as the fat gentleman jumped into it after Arthur Augustus.

Fortunately, he lost his footing as the boat rocked and jumped, and sat down violently, with an impact that deprived him of his breath. Blake wiped away his tears.

"Come on!" he gasped.

The juniors jumped into the boat with their belongings. Jack Blake cast loose the rope, and two or three oars shoved off. Mr. Egbert Montgomery Jones was still sitting and gasping. He staggered to a seat at last, and plumped there, and found a dozen feet of water between him and the bank.

"Put me ashore at once!" he bawled.

Blake shook his head.

"You're a jolly old pirate, that's what you are," he said. "You've boarded this craft illegally. We're going to hand you over to the police at Walton."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Mr. Jones staggered to his feet, and brandished the gold-

headed cane. Arthur Augustus caught up a boathook for self-defence.

"Get back to the bank at once, or I will thrash you all round, you young ruffians!" roared Mr. Jones.

"Bow-wow!"

The infuriated Mr. Jones made a "lick" at Blake with the cane. Blake dodged the lick, and closed in, jerking the cane away from Egbert Montgomery Jones. With a twist of his arm, he sent it whirling away, and it dropped in the grass on Mr. Jones' own land—far out of his reach at the present moment.

"You—you—you—" spluttered Mr. Jones.

The juniors chuckled. Mr. Egbert Montgomery Jones had entered their boat of his own accord, and they were not bound to approach the bank and put him ashore. Their opinion was that the choleric Mr. Jones required a lesson, and their opinion also was that he was going to have it.

"Do you hear me?" raved Mr. Jones. "Get to the bank at once! I am going to telephone to the police to deal with you!"

"What an inducement!" said Monty Lowther.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Row, brothers, row!" sang Monty Lowther sweetly.

Four oars were put out, with Blake, Herries, Dig, and Manners pulling. The Old Bus was not a fast boat, that was certain; she was broad in the beam, and she had plenty on board. But four stout rowers made her move at a fairly good pace, and Mr. Jones' red-roofed house sank out of view behind trees.

The gentleman in the white waistcoat really seemed quite beside himself. He was being carried away; and there was no help for it. Obviously, he had no desire to try swimming.

"You young scoundrels!" he spluttered. "I'll have you prosecuted for this!"

"For what?" asked Monty Lowther, in mild surprise.

"Do you know that you're trespassing?"

"Wha-a-a!"

"Trespassing on our boat—private property," said Monty Lowther severely. "Quite as much as we were trespassing on your land, if it is your land, old scout. You'll have to prove that you didn't come on board to steal our spoons."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Yaas, wathah!" chuckled Arthur Augustus. "The fellow is practically a pirate on the high seas."

Mr. Jones sat on a thwart and gasped for breath. Apparently he was beginning to realise that he was in the hands of the Amalekites.

"You—you—you—" he stuttered.

Monty Lowther, at the lines, kept the boat well away from the bank. Mr. Jones was not to have a chance of jumping.

"Will you put me ashore?" gasped Mr. Jones frantically. "I've got a dinner-party at my house at seven-thirty."

"They'll enjoy dinner all the more without your features at the table," said Monty Lowther consolingly. "Don't worry!"

"Take me back at once!"

"Dear old man!" said Lowther. "He really thinks that we shall put the boat back. If we weren't jolly good-natured chaps, we should make you walk the plank for boarding our craft in that piratical way."

"Yaas, wathah!"

Mr. Jones gazed at the wide stretch of water between him and the bank. The red-roofed house was far out of sight now. Even if he was landed, Mr. Jones had a good walk before him to get home. Possibly he repented him now of his ferocious pursuit of Arthur Augustus into the Old Bus.

"I—I—I'll give you ten shillings to take me back!" he spluttered at last.

"Bai Jove!"

"You cheeky ass—" began Herries indignantly.

"Couldn't you spring a little more than that, out of the war-profits?" inquired Monty Lowther gently.

"You extortionate young rascal! I—I'll give you a sovereign!"

Monty Lowther shook his head.

"I'm afraid we couldn't do it for a quid!" he answered. Mr. Jones drew a deep breath.

"What will you take me back for?" he asked at last, controlling his righteous wrath.

"Make it a thousand pounds, and we'll think it over," said Monty Lowther genially.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Mr. Jones spluttered with wrath. He was not likely to make it a thousand pounds; and he realised, too, that the humorous junior was only pulling his substantial leg.

The boat glided on, with seven schoolboys smiling cheerily, and Mr. Jones, the unwilling passenger, scowling blackly and thunderously.

It was quite a pleasant row on the golden Thames, but it was plain that Egbert Montgomery Jones did not enjoy it the least little bit. He was taking it easy while the St. Jim's fellows did the work; nevertheless, he was not enjoying it.

He spoke again when Walton appeared in sight in the distance, with quite a venomous look.

"I shall call a policeman as soon as we reach Walton," he said.

"What will you call him?" asked Lowther.

"Eh?"

"I generally call a policeman Robert, or bobby for short," explained Monty Lowther humorously.

Mr. Jones gurgled.

"Wait till we get there!" he gasped. "I will have you taken into custody! I will charge you with trespass and assault! I will—"

"Dear old man, all that won't wash!" said Lowther. "Still, you might waste some time, and give us some bother. Gentlemen, chaps, and fellows, I am getting tired of the society of this ratty old gent. Shall we chuck him overboard?"

"Hear, hear!"

"If you dare—" shrieked Mr. Jones in alarm.

"Bai Jove! I object to chuckin' the old donkey ovah-board, you fellows!" said Arthur Augustus. "Pewwaps he cannot swim, and we do not want to hang on for days at Walton attendin' a beastly inquest!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Monty Lowther steered for the bank. He selected a spot where a thick wood grew down to the water, evidently private property, a fact that was made conspicuous by a number of boards, each of which warned trespassers that they would be prosecuted.

The boat's nose bumped on the bank.

"Jump for it, Jonesy!" said Lowther.

"I refuse to land here!" roared Mr. Jones.

(Continued on page 28.)

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QUITE SUFFICIENT!

The mistress beamed on her maid-of-all-work. "I'm going to get you another chair for the kitchen," she said. "Sure, I don't need it, ma'am," replied the girl. "But you have only one," the mistress persisted. "One's enough," responded Norah. "But you have company some evenings, don't you?" the mistress queried in surprise. "Well, only gentlemen, ma'am," replied Norah, dropping her eyes.—A Tuck Hamper filled with delicious tuck has been awarded to M. Lowson, 95, Gilmour Street, Thornaby-on-Tees.

SYMPATHY ASTRAY!

It was Saturday night. In the gutter stood a large, red-faced woman. On her ample form was displayed a card bearing the words: "Disabled policeman." Passers-by, stopping to read the card and to drop coppers into the woman's outstretched hand, soon formed quite a small crowd, and at last the inevitable man in blue appeared on the scene. "What's this?" he asked the woman, pointing to the card. "It's all right, guv'nor," replied the woman. "I disabled him last night, and I'm collecting the fine now!"—Half-a-crown has been awarded to W. Mitchell, 5, North Shore Street, Canbeltown, N.B.

SO SIMPLE!

Old Sandy, the shepherd, was very proud when his son won a scholarship for the Agricultural College, and told the news to all his friends and neighbours. Walking down a lane one day he was accosted by another shepherd, who stopped for a chat. "Hoo's your lad getting on at the college?" inquired his friend. "Oh, fine," was Sandy's reply. "He's just learned a new quick way of counting sheep. Wonder you an' me didn't think of it before." "And what way is that, Sandy?" asked the shepherd friend. "Oh," answered Sandy, "he simply counts the legs and divides by four!"—Half-a-crown has been awarded to Edward Tasker, 7, Walpole Street, Haxby Road, York.

AND THEN SHE WONDERED!

A certain old lady from town had come down to a flourishing country village to stay for a few weeks. A farm hand, also a stranger to the village, found the lady sitting in a field, reading. As he was not sure of his way, he asked her if she knew where Johnson's Farm was. "I am very sorry, but I am a perfect stranger to these parts," came the reply. "But please, ma'am, do you happen to know where the river is, because I know the farm is near it?" asked the labourer. "I am sure I don't know," she answered. "Or have you seen the Parish Church while you've been here?" "I am unacquainted with the village, my man, so ask me no more," was the curt reply. "Well, ma'am, do you happen to know your way home?"—Half-a-crown has been awarded to Miss W. H. Smith, 2, Grove Mansions, North Side, Clapham Common, S.W. 4. The GEM LIBRARY.—No 312.

TOO EXACT!

Man to Taxi-driver: "Drive me to Waterloo, please." Taxi-driver: "Do you mean the station, sir?" "No; the battlefield, you idiot!"—H. M. Parsons, 190, The Broadway, Hendon, N.W. 4.

WASTED ENERGY.

A man hurrying along to the railway-station, was accosted by an urchin. "Carry yer bag, sir?" asked the boy. "No, thanks!" snapped the man. "I'll carry it all the way for sixpence," persisted the lad. "I tell you I don't want it carried!" retorted the man. "Don't yer?" said the boy. "No, I don't!" fumed the man angrily. The urchin broke into a quick trot to keep up with his victim's hasty strides as he asked in a tone of innocent inquiry: "Then what the dickens are you carrying it for?"—Half-a-crown has been awarded to W. F. Duckworth, 8, Albert Street, Church, near Accrington.

HARD HIT!

"What became of that chauffeur of the Robinsons?" asked Smith. "Oh, didn't you hear? You know he was always a bit absentminded. Well, one day he crawled under a mule to see why it didn't go!"—Miss Marie Higgs, The House, Globe Works, Chatsworth Road, Clapton Park, E. 5.

MIXED.

It was prize-giving day, and a local councillor was addressing the boys. "My lads," he said, "the schoolwark is the bulhouse of civilisation—that is to say"—here he became slightly nervous—"the bulhouse is the schoolwark of civ—" The boys smiled. "The warkhouse is the bulschool of—I mean, of course, the schoolbul is the housewark"—the smile by this time was a broad grin—"the scowschool—" He was getting wild now. So were his hearers. He mopped his brow, gritted his teeth, and made a special effort. "The schoolhouse, my lads—" A sigh of relief went up. At last the man had got his self-control once more. He gazed suavely round. The light of triumphant self-confidence was enthroned upon his brow. "The schoolhouse is the wulbark—" And that was all.—Half-a-crown has been awarded to C. A. Cavey, 129, Maryland Street, Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada.

THE SIMPLE TRUTH!

Mrs. Mumps: "How did you ever get that paint on your dress, Mrs. Minns?" "I was leaning over Sandy's fence." "But Sandy has a notice up, 'Wet Paint.'" "Yes, I saw that, of course, but everybody knows he never tells the truth."—Frank Mooney, 369, Garscube Road, Glasgow.

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CHAPTER 1.

A Disturbing Element!

JIM RAVEN, leader of the Six Sportsmen of Thunder Creek, and Smiler Dickinson were knocking the billiard balls about in the pool-room at Elkhorn Bend, and Jim only wanted to make another couple of cannons to run out and win the game, when Corporal Nevin, of the Mounted Police, came in.

Nevin waited till Jim had finished his break and hung up his cue. Jim had beaten his fellow-Sportsman by forty in this hundred up, so naturally, perhaps, the Sportsmen's leader was feeling a little satisfied with himself. He grinned at his Mounted friend when he noticed the bemonocled member of Canada's famous force.

"Just teaching Smiler how to play pills," said Jim. "Gave him an awful hiding. Has the train come up yet?"

"No; but it's signalled as having left Fort McLean," said Nevin. "That means she'll blow along in a little while now. Hiram Coutts is coming up on her, isn't he?"

"Yes," answered Jim, and his brow grew a little furrowed. "I hope so, that is."

He looked around the pool-room as he spoke, at several men who were sitting about the tables, watching the various games that were in progress. These men did not look quite like the men who abode in that rather distant portion of Western Canada usually looked. Their clothes had not been bought at any local store. It was very plain that they were Old Country immigrants, not very long out in the West.

"And how are things shaping up at Coutts' newest colony?" Corporal Nevin asked.

Jim Raven and his fellow-Sportsmen of Thunder Creek were up in the Elkhorn Bend district now at the wish of Hiram Coutts, founder of colonies for Britishers. Coutts, having ideas of his own, had been of the impression that the presence of half a dozen stalwart sportsmen, such as Jim and his chums, would help newly-arrived colonists to settle down in their new surroundings. And hard had Jim and the rest worked to keep the interest of these men in the country of their adoption. These fellows

knew Western Canada almost inside out, and they had striven nobly to make Coutts' colonists forget their homesickness and the decided hardships of their new life. But Jim Raven's brow was furrowed as he answered Corporal Nevin's question.

"They aren't shaking down at all well," said Jim, modulating his voice so that the men sitting around the billiards and pool-tables should not overhear his words. "There's a disturbing element amongst them."

"Such as what?" asked Nevin.

"I don't know. But the men don't seem willing to settle down to make homes for themselves. They won't even stay together in the district that's been given over to them," said Jim. "We got the job from Coutts of trying to keep them interested in things up here. We

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

were to promote all sorts of sports amongst the men, to make them forget the football matches and things they were used to at home, which they can't get here. And we've tried. But most of the men are shouting out to be sent back to England."

"Well," said Nevin, "they'll make a mistake if they go back to England. There's plenty of work here for them on the land, and if they'll only buck to they'll all be pretty well-to-do farmers in a short time. If they go back—well, there are plenty of unemployed at home as it is."

"Most of them have money of their own," said Jim. "Enough to take them back, anyway. They handed that over to Coutts for safe-keeping. And now they're asking for it back, so that they can get home to England."

"And what's upset them exactly?" asked Nevin. "Englishmen, as a rule, are the best of colonists. And these

fellows have had advantages given to them that mighty few others would get."

"There's a gang of fellows up there at the colony," said Jim, "who seem set on making Coutts' men dissatisfied. They're mostly Americans, though I believe there are German-born people amongst them. They're preaching discontent all the time. I've had a word or two with one of them about it. One of them's a sort of moneylender, named Knauss. He's got several of the men in his debt already, though Coutts isn't supposed to know that. And there's another who often gets up on his hind legs and talks all sorts of rubbish to the men to make them discontented with their surroundings."

"Got a motive in it evidently," said Nevin, picking at his toothbrush moustache. He looked about him at the Coutts colonists, who were grouped there in the pool-room, when they might have been far more profitably employed in building houses for themselves on their farms, and tilling the land that had been allotted to them by Coutts. "And there's the train coming." For the hoot of an engine's whistle struck on the ears of those in the pool-room.

"Then we'd best go and meet Coutts," said Jim Raven. "I'm afraid, when he knows the state things have got into, he'll think we Sportsmen aren't earning the wages he's paying us for our special job."

He went outside, followed by his comrades and the corporal of Mounted Police. To be sure, the train from Edmonton was coming into this new station. It had drawn up at the depot by the time Jim Raven and his chums reached there, and almost the first person they saw was Hiram Coutts, a middle-aged man, with a strong face full of character. Coutts was chewing at a cigar. But he grinned when he saw the Sportsmen, and held out his hand to Jim Raven.

"Things pretty good?" he asked.

Jim shook his head. Coutts bit harder on his cigar and frowned. Just then half a dozen of his own colonists, who had also left the pool-room, came on to the platform. And one fellow,

who seemed a bit of a blusterer, approached the colony promoter.

"I represents these men," he said, jerking his thumb at these behind him. "I demand——"

"Say," said Hiram Coutts angrily, "who're you? You aren't one of my Elkhorn Bend colonists!"

"Nope!" said the man. "But I represents 'em. My name's Carker. I demands that these men be assisted back home. They're all sick of bein' out here, with nothin' but work, work, work, an' no relaxation. Ye've got all their money. Ye'll have to pay that up, and see they all gets back to England——"

"Oh!" said Hiram Coutts, taking a look at the sullen-looking immigrants behind Carker, then acted as only men of Coutts' calibre would act. He raised a capable fist, and struck Carker squarely on the jaw. Carker collapsed to the plank platform of the depot, yelling. And, glaring, Coutts addressed the men behind him. His nostrils twitched.

"Does this feller represent you fairly?" he barked. "Are you all sick of being out here, doing honest work? I paid all your passages out to Canada, fixed up farms for you, even arranged for you to have amusements." And he glanced at the Sportsmen of Thunder Creek. "Who's that gink? He's not one of my men. He's a Yankee. An agitator, too! What's your trouble?"

"We—we thought things would be better out here than they seem to be, Mr. Coutts," spoke up a big, broad-shouldered colonist. "We feel disappointed, and——"

"Are there any more up at the colony feeling the same?" barked the philanthropist. "Raven, what have you got to say about it?"

"The men are all dissatisfied," said Jim; "but that is because there's an organised campaign going on to make them so."

Hiram Coutts' brow grew darker. But he did not seem very much surprised at Jim's words.

"So the Goschen Company are trying to get that parcel of land, are they?" he growled. "They said they would. And they are even arranging to make the men so sick of their farms that they'll clear out and leave the land for them to grab up. But they won't."

He turned to the dissatisfied ones, who eyed him rather dubiously. Coutts was not a man to be bullied by any number of people. He was doing good work for the Empire, but he claimed the right to do it in his own way.

"If you men are dissatisfied," he said, "you can all get the money you gave me to put away for you as capital. Want it?"

"Most of us do," said the big colonist. "Eh, mates?"

"Right! But if you get the cash you give up those farms I gave you!" snapped the colony promoter. "And that's that!"

He turned his back on them, walked out of the station, and headed straight for the only bank there was in that little frontier town. His jaw was rather grim then, and his teeth had bitten through his cigar. On the steps of the bank he turned and spoke to the colonists who, rather sheepishly, were following him.

"But I won't give you the money here," he said. "I'll hand it out to you all and the others right there at the colony. Get that?" Then he saw Jim Raven and the others standing there also. He smiled a little harshly. "So your sports didn't manage to make 'em contented?" he said. "Well, then, that finishes your job with me, boys. Sorry!"

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but it ain't much use keeping a crowd of sportsmen busy keeping people interested when there's no people to keep interested. The whole batch is going back if this is the way they're going to behave!"

Jim Raven flushed. It seemed as though Hiram Coutts was blaming him and his fellow-Sportsmen for this state of affairs. To be sure, they had undertaken to keep the Coutts' colonists interested in sports and recreation. But others had made the colonists think they were aggrieved persons. It was not the Sportsmen's fault. Yet Coutts' words rankled in Jim Raven's breast as he turned away.

"We've got to look for another job, boys," he said to his chums—"unless," he added suddenly, "we try to do something to remove the discontent. Seems to me that moneylender, Knauss, has got more to do with it than he ought to have; and Carker there is as thick as thieves with Knauss. Fellow with a name like Knauss oughtn't to be able to upset a scheme like Coutts', especially as we're about. Let's do some thinking."

CHAPTER 2.

Jim Raven Butts In!

"I'LL see you boys up at the colony," said Hiram Coutts, a little while later. "I'm not blaming you, but I'm sick about this colony going wrong. Maybe you'll be able to help me get at the root of the trouble and cut that root out. I've never had a colony fail me yet. This time, though, I can almost understand it. The Goschen Land Company badly want this bit of ground, and, as I wouldn't sell it to them, they're evidently trying to make me. Maybe they think they'll get it at their own price if they can make all the men quit it. But will they?"

"Will giving the men their money and letting them go help you?" asked Jim. "Most of them'll just clear out, and they'll either waste the cash or spend it on return tickets home."

"I won't have men dissatisfied with my colonies!" said Coutts stubbornly. "I've treated them properly. I expect them to buck to and do something besides grousing. If they only knew it, inside of a couple of years they'd all be well settled and on the road to prosperity. They're getting every chance. But if they've asked for their cash, they shall get it!"

And he drummed on the attache-case he was carrying.

They were in the smoke-room of the only hotel at Elkhorn Bend, and there were others present besides the colony promoter, the Sportsmen, and Corporal Nevin. One man sitting there had a little smile on his rather square, fleshy face. Jim Raven knew this man as Knauss, the moneylender, whom he blamed considerably for the discontent that had broken out amongst Coutts' colonists.

But although the Sportsmen suspected that this fellow was at the root of the trouble, they had no proof; and, knowing the nature of old Hiram Coutts, they refrained from pointing out the suspect to him just then. Still, Jim Raven and the others had made up their minds to frustrate this person with the German name by some means.

"I'll be out later. I'll start out after supper in a hired buggy," said Coutts. "I'll see you boys out there at the colony to-morrow morning. Maybe I'll be able to find a similar sports job for you in another of my colonies."

Knauss got up and left the room then, a smile showing on his fleshy face.

"Think we'd better get a job more like work," said Pete Craddock. "The idea of being sports organisers in your colony was attractive at fist, but it seems to me the men want something more than sport to keep them happy." bna

"They want to be left alone," said Jim Raven, "and not to be agitated by a crowd of land-grabbing crooks! Why, that fellow who has just gone out—he's doing all the damage. He's lending money to the men to get them into his power so that they'll listen to anything he says, and——"

"Which? Where is he?" asked Coutts fiercely, jumping to his feet. But Knauss had passed out of the hotel by this time, and so Coutts settled down again.

"It's like pulling hen's teeth," growled the colony promoter, "trying to do a bit of good in this world nowadays! But that darned Goschen Company sha'n't beat me, you take it from me!"

The Sportsmen of Thunder Creek left him a little later and sought their horses. They had ridden in from the colony—a matter of fifteen miles—on purpose to meet Hiram Coutts and inform him of what they had observed in the few weeks they had been up there amongst the colonists. Coutts had taken it badly, which was only natural, for if ever a man was interested in Empire building, this man was; and the Sportsmen were as sorry for him as they were for themselves as they set off on their evening ride back to the tents they had pitched for themselves amongst the Coutts' colonists.

"Looks like finding another job, or Syd Patterson will be feeling a draught mighty soon!" said Digger Harrison, the Australian Sportsman. "We thought we were in clover when we got this job, but it turned out to be too good to last. But the supply of cash for young Syd has got to be kept up. So——"

Jim Raven drew rein on his cantering horse and looked Digger Harrison straight in the eye.

"Just you fellows get this," he said. "We're sportsmen, aren't we? And we don't throw our hand in at sport quite so easily as this. We aren't going to quit this job yet, because we're going to try and remove the cause of these men's discontent. Once we've got Knauss and Carker out of the road, maybe we can make these men forget they've got a grievance, and——"

"But old Coutts is going to pay them their money and tell them to get out," said Smiler Dickinson. "He's got the money out of the bank for that purpose, and he's coming along to-night."

"Then we'll see the old chap, and we'll try to talk him round into waiting a while," said Jim Raven. "We'll do a bit of talking ourselves—about Knauss and Carker. We'll get those two bounded out of this district, and then we'll buck to with the colonists and show 'em so much sport that they'll think they've never struck such a place as Canada."

"Too late now, I'm thinkin'," said Sandy Graham. "The men are fed-up with the colony. Most of them are in debt to von Knauss mon, and most are full of Carker's rotten ideas about the hardships of this country in the winter and the constant failure of crops."

"We'll change their ideas," said Jim cheerfully. "We'll ask Coutts to give us a chance to change 'em. Once we've got those two beauties so they daren't show their noses within fifty miles of here, our job'll be easy."

The others, perhaps, did not agree with him, though they did not say as much. But then Jim Raven was their accepted

leader, and they were always behind him whether they agreed or not. So they rode on comfortably until they reached the scattered collection of tents and partly-built huts that were the beginning of Coutts' latest colony.

Coutts had picked an ideal stretch of land upon which to settle the forty or fifty bachelor Englishmen. Each had had a quarter-section of land allotted to him on the distinct understanding that as soon as he had cultivated forty acres of it it should be his own land. A rich man, Coutts had worked out an unselfish scheme for his colonists; and perhaps many a rich man spends his money to worse purpose. Yet, in spite of all he had done in the interests of Empire, his proteges were not satisfied, and that the Sportsmen of Thunder Creek knew was entirely due to the poisonous words and actions of a few men who, for their own ends, wanted to make this scheme of the philanthropist's a failure. Another concern of doubtful methods had set greedy eyes on that piece of perfect land, and by fair means or foul were determined to get it.

A store had been built by Coutts in a central position, so that no colonist had to go far to make his purchases. And this store, set on the edge of a river, had come to be a meeting-place for Coutts' settlers. As the Sportsmen knew, outside this store there had been held many meetings, in which Carker and others of his ilk—all paid by the Goschen Land Company—had said much to disgruntle the immigrants. As Canada is a land of free speech, the Sportsmen had not tried to interfere, although they had not agreed with the inflammatory speeches they had heard delivered from the top of the packing-case that had come to be the established platform of the agitators.

But when the Sportsmen rode up to this store they saw something going on that, as decent, clean citizens, they considered they had all the right to interfere in.

Down the river, in the growing dusk, they saw a canoe approaching; and there were several colonists standing on the bank watching it. As the Sportsmen drew rein on their horses, this canoe drove in to the bank, and Jim Raven and his chums could see that the forward end of the frail craft was loaded with a rather large barrel or keg. And at once the Sportsmen suspected what the contents of this keg were.

Alberta is Prohibition these days, whatever it is going to be in the near future. That keg, Jim Raven and the others were sure, contained something that it was entirely against all Prohibition laws to sell. And when they saw this keg landed, by men who were obviously half-breeds, the clean-living Sportsmen at once felt this was their business.

The colonists, though, seemed to hail the arrival of the keg with delight.

"I'm butting in here," said Jim Raven at once. "Old Coutts would never get over this if he knew." He spurred his horse forward recklessly.

The colonists looked up when they saw him approaching. Most of them gave way before him, and as soon as he was close up to the keg, which was standing on the very edge of the river, he wheeled his horse and made it back.

The hocks of the horse caught the keg. It was tipped over at once. Its contents gushed out like a small cascade, and mingled with the pure waters of the river. Then the horse, angered at the contact of the keg with its hocks, lashed out viciously, and the keg also went into the stream, and began to float merrily away.

The colonists began to look ugly, and quickly Jim Raven threw himself from the saddle. He gave his horse a slap, and stood ready to meet those who seemed likely to resent his bold action.

"Well, mister—" began a colonist.

Then came a shout to the ears of all. It was the voice of Smiler Dickinson that shouted. And at the same time there

was the rattle of buggy wheels, the thrumming of a horse's hoofs on sun-baked ground, then a buggy and team dashed into sight, Smiler Dickinson riding alongside the horses, attempting to stay their flight.

There was no driver in the buggy seat, and the reins of the horses were flying wildly. But as soon as the pair got level with Jim Raven and the angry crowd they stopped, and Jim seized their heads, examining them carefully.

"This is Slattery's livery pair," he said. "I know the horses. And Coutts had hired them to drive out here with the money he'd drawn from the bank to return to the men who owned it."

"Then where's Coutts?" asked a colonist, he who had shown fight with Jim when the Sportsmen's leader had put the keg into the river.

"Don't know that," said Jim. Then his gaze fell upon one of the buggy cushions, where a dark, damp stain showed. "That's blood," he cried.

He looked inside the buggy. There was nothing in there to tell him anything of what had happened. Yet he was sure something serious had taken place.

"He had all the money, in an attache case," said Digger Harrison quickly. "Coutts, I mean. I say, does it mean he's been held up on the road? He said—"

"Talking about Coutts?" asked a colonist, thrusting himself forward. "Mean to say he—"

But just then Jim Raven saw the two half-breeds who had brought the keg along with them in the canoe making to get into their craft again, and an impulse prompted the quick-thinking Jim to act promptly. He made a jump at these men. One of them, who had a paddle in his hand, turned to meet the advance of the Thunder Creek Sportsmen's leader, and aimed a blow at Jim's head with his weapon; but Jim warded it off with his right hand. A moment later the breed



Turning the man over, the Sportsmen of Thunder Creek saw it was the form of Hiram Coutts, the colony promoter. "He's been shot!" exclaimed Jim Raven. "I wonder who has done this?"

was lying on the ground, sent there by a blow from Jim's left, which was equally as good as the right.

"That's what you get from me for trying to upset the morals of good Englishmen," shouted Jim. He stooped, and dragged the man to his feet. "And the police corporal's going to know about this, too," he added. "What's your name?"

The breed's mouth was bleeding now, and he was pretty considerably frightened. He stared stupidly into Jim Raven's eyes.

"Gaston, n'sieu," he said. "Me not to blame, non. Bet was ze white man—Carker. 'E tol' me to bring ze eau-de-vie. Yes!"

"Just the same," growled Jim. "you'll be for it when Corporal Nevin gets to know about it, Gaston." He turned to his comrades, ignoring the angry faces of the disappointed colonists, who certainly had been rather brazenly deprived of their illicit liquor. "Now, we'll go back along the trail, and try to find out what's happened to Hiram Coutts."

CHAPTER 3.

The Passing of the Clouds.

THE colonists watched the Sportsmen going surlily. But none of them offered to accompany them on their return journey towards Elkhorn Bend. It did not enter their minds then that these happy-go-

lucky young stalwarts of Thunder Creek were really working hard in their interests. They knew the Sportsmen pretty well by this time, but that they wanted to make them feel more happy and settled down in this beautiful, if new, country had not as yet occurred to them.

So the Sportsmen galloped as hard as their excellent horses could take them back along the trail, and galloped five miles at least before Jim Raven, leading them, drew rein suddenly, and pointed to something that was lying beside the trail. It was the body of a man, and, when they dismounted and turned this on its back, they saw it was the form of Hiram Coutts.

"He's been shot!" Jim Raven exclaimed, when he had examined his and his fellow Sportsmen's patron more closely. "Now, who's done this?"

"Been held up on the trail," said Pete Craddock. "And I'll bet a hen that the feller who did it has got the attache case and all that cash by this time. Four thousand dollars altogether Coutts drew out of the bank this afternoon. I know."

Just then Coutts stirred and opened his eyes. He had lost a great deal of blood from the shoulder wound he had received, but his spirit was still alive. As soon as he recognised the young fellows bending over him he smiled rather harshly.

"Held up, right here, when I was driving out to the colony," he said faintly. "Feller with a mask; and he shot me even as I was handing the cash over to him without argument. I don't argue with gun-armed men. Waal, boys, I'm glad you've found me."

"Any idea who did this, sir?" asked Jim Raven.

"Ain't got any idea who did it," said Hiram Coutts; "but I've got more than a notion who started it. It was the Goschen Company set some footpad after me, to do anything to hinder my colony, and make the men more sick of things. Let 'em hear that their money's all been taken, and see how they take it."

Jim Raven wrinkled his brows. Then he turned to his chums.

"Two of us are going to stay here and look after Mr. Coutts," he said; "the other four are going along to get that cash back somehow. Now, let's draw lots." He plucked six blades of prairie grass of uneven lengths, and made them at one end all even. "Two

shortest stay here with Mr. Coutts," he went on.

Jim was their accepted leader, and they did not dispute his order. They drew lots, and it fell to Smiler Dickinson and Sandy Graham to stay and tend the unfortunate coloniser.

"Now we're going back to Elkhorn Bend," said Jim, to the three who were going to accompany him. "So mount, and ride like fun! I've got a hunch I know where to make for to get that attache-case and the man who stole it!"

They galloped off, leaving Coutts and his two Sportsmen attendants almost gasping at the "swiftness" of Jim Raven. And in less than an hour, when it had been dark just about so long, they thundered into the single street of that little frontier town. There they tied their horses to a hitching-rail outside a store, and then they all looked to Jim for his next order.

"Who're we after?" asked Digger Harrison.

"Knauss!" said Jim curtly.

Just then, silhouetted against the light that shone through the window of the hotel smoking-room, they saw the form of their friend, Corporal Nevin. Jim led the way into the hotel, and they were met by the bemonocled redcoat, who eyed them with uplifted brows, so determined and purposeful did they look.

"Where does Knauss hang out this time of night, Nevin?" Jim Raven asked.

"Stays at the hotel here," answered the corporal. "I saw him come in not an hour ago, riding a horse that was lathering pretty badly. He afterwards met Carker in the street, and they both went into Knauss' own office, across the street there. Why?"

"Come along with us, old chap," said Jim. "Mind you, I'm going to do something that you, as a policeman, mightn't approve of; and if I make a mistake I'll have to stand the racket. If I don't, though, there'll be a nice little case for you. Care to come?"

"The Sportsmen of Thunder Creek can be banked on to produce a thrill or two, whether right or wrong!" drawled Nevin. "Lead on, my bonny boys!"

Resolutely, Jim Raven marched across the now deserted street of the little frontier town. Arriving at the front of the building that contained the money-lender's office, Jim passed up an alleyway between that building and the next. At

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Jim Raven picked up the heavy inkstand from the desk, and hurled it with unerring aim full at the square and flashy face of the moneylender. The gun barked, but its bullet went harmlessly through the ceiling of the office. Knauss slid to the floor with a gasp and a cry.

the back of the building he saw a light showing through one of the windows.

Without ceremony he stepped up to this window. A blind had been drawn down, but it did not come low enough to prevent that purposeful youngster from seeing what was going on inside the room.

He tried the back door. It was locked. He growled something; then, while his comrades almost gasped at his boldness, he picked up two bricks from a pile standing near the building, and sent them hurtling, one after the other, through the glass of the window. Then the impulsive youngster placed his hands on the window-sill, and hauled himself upwards, shoving his head and shoulders under the blind. The two men sitting at the table of this office looked up with scared faces, and stared into the grim eyes of Jim.

Undaunted, Jim next slid forward on to the floor on hands and knees, then, with the speed of light, came to his feet. But just then Knauss came to his feet also, and slammed open a drawer of the desk at which he had been sitting. From there he produced a revolver.

But that did not deter Jim. There was a heavy inkstand on the desk, and Jim grabbed for that. He picked it up in his hand, and hurled it with all his force at the square and fleshy face of the moneylender. The gun barked, but its bullet went harmlessly through the ceiling of the office. And Knauss slid to the floor with a gasp and a cry.

Carker, who had been closeted with Knauss, tried to make his exit through the door, and he held in his hand a leather attache-case that he had grabbed up from the desk. But Jim seized him even as he strove to turn the knob. And just then the other Sportsmen and

Corporal Nevin came in through the smashed window.

A moment later Carker was quiet and unable to do any damage, and Jim examined the attache-case he had torn from the man's grasp.

The attache-case had upon it the initials "H. C.," and it contained, Jim found, a goodly quantity of Canadian currency. It was all new money—ten-dollar bills—which, Jim fancied, the manager of the local bank would easily be able to identify.

"And now this is all over," drawled Corporal Nevin, "might I be permitted to know what the dickens it's all about?"

"One of these two ginks," said Jim, "held up Hiram Coutts to-night, wounded him, and robbed him. That's Coutts' grip, and he had drawn out about that amount of cash. It's not so much the recovery of the cash that I'm bucked about, though, as the fact that we've got the two fellows who've been doing so much to unsettle Coutts' settlers. Once we've got these two out of the way, I've a notion we might get the colonists to buck to again and make Coutts' new colony the success it deserves to be."

"Well," said Nevin, "your methods are as bold as usual, but they seem also to have been effective, as usual. Let's hope you're right—about the colonists, I mean."

Corporal Nevin attended to the two prisoners—dejected-looking beings they were, too. When he had them safely disposed of he grinned at his Sportsmen friends.

"And, if you can keep those colonists satisfied with their lot up there," he said, "you'll incidentally keep your own job, won't you?"

"Our job was to try and keep 'em satisfied, and we've just been trying to

do our job," said Jim. "Now, if Coutts can just be prevailed on to be patient with the colonists a little longer, I think we'll have quite a decent settlement up there before long. It all depends on Coutts, though."

It may have depended on Coutts, but it could not be denied that, even though Coutts decided to try a while longer to keep his colony going, the efforts of the Sportsmen of Thunder Creek had a large amount to do with it. But when the colonists knew what the Sportsmen had done for them—how they had, for one thing, saved their money from the hold-up man; how they had put behind the bars that moneylender who was bleeding them white—they came to the conclusion that, though their life out here was different, it had been made easier for them by the pluck and resource of Jim Raven and his doughty pals.

So they did not return to England to swell the ranks of the unemployed. The root of their discontent having been cut out—namely, Carker being under arrest as well as Knauss—they decided to buckle to again and try to make useful homes and farms for themselves out of the beautiful wilderness that Hiram Coutts' philanthropy had set them in.

And, in their spare time, they still had the Sportsmen of Thunder Creek near them to keep them from getting bored. Perhaps nobody could be bored for long with fellows like Jim Raven and his pals to keep things lively.

So the Sportsmen's job was kept; and well they did the work expected of them.

THE END.

(Here's something for you to look forward to next week, boys: "RIVER-WISE NED!" A story of thrills and breathless situations. Don't miss it!)

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No 812.



Reg o' the Railroad!

A Thrilling Yarn, telling how Reg Dickson and his staunch chum, Crackers, solve a strange railway mystery.

By VINCENT OWEN.

CHAPTER 1.

The Railway Accident!

THE midnight express from Peghaven to the London terminus of the London and North British Railway drew out of Netherdale Junction, the monster locomotive snorting as if in disgust at the delay it had suffered, the light from its furnace stabling the night blackness with a lurid crimson glare.

Netherdale was in Derbyshire, in a valley between the hills. The midnight express usually thundered through there at a reduced speed of about forty miles an hour, to gather up to the seventy-an-hour mark again on the ten-mile "flying straight" through the valley outside Netherdale.

Reg Dickson drew his head back from the window of his compartment, and turned to the little red-haired, freckled boy who was lying in an attitude of serene repose on the cushioned seat.

"We're under way again, then, Crackers!" said Reg. "Hemsley's on the footplate to-night, and he'll soon make up for lost time. The express leaves the main line at the end of the flying straight—we're being diverted along a loop-line through the hills. Goods train jumped the points at Welby Halt, and the main's blocked this side of Matlow."

Crackers gave a sleepy grunt and rolled over on the seat. Next minute a snore sounded above the clatter of the train. Crackers was asleep.

Reg gave a grin, and sat down on the seat opposite.

The chums were on their way to London to enter upon a new phase of their railroad career at the big head offices of the L.N.B.R. Reg and Crackers had been working till now in the sheds at Peghaven, at the bottom rung of the ladder, where all young railwaymen start. Some climb to the top by hard work and resource; others remain on the lower rungs all their lives. Reg Dickson could be counted among the former. Popular alike with his mates and the foremen at the railway-sheds, Reg had already made good headway when, a month ago, he had saved the directors' night special from certain disaster on the main line where a tree-trunk, struck by lightning, had fallen across the metals. For his pluck and daring that night, in the teeth of a raging thunderstorm, Sir Clifford Brandish, traffic manager of the L.N.B.R., had taken a special interest in Reg, and offered him a better post at London. Now, London is the Mecca of all young railway workers in the provinces, and Reg had accepted this new chance with alacrity. And Crackers, his

chum, who was inseparable from him, had come, too—Sir Clifford had agreed to that. So the pair had taken leave of their mates at Peghaven, and boarded the midnight express for London, where they would see the traffic manager in the morning, and be introduced to their new duties.

The express slowed at the end of the straight before turning off on the loop-line. This was a little-used line, connecting a few small places in the hills. It had been owned by a private company before the L.N.B.R. had absorbed it in the big railway amalgamations a short while ago.

The express, after a stiff climb up a hill gradient, gathered speed and thundered along the loop at a good pace.

Reg settled down on the seat opposite to Crackers, and, taking example from his young chum, closed his eyes for a nap.

Suddenly there was a great crash, the train reeled and tottered, and both lads were flung off their seats on top of each other by a terrific impact.

Next minute the whole side of the compartment seemed to cave in with a hideous, splintering noise, and Reg and Crackers, sprawling on the floor, were buried underneath a mass of debris.

Shouts and screams of terror sounded through the darkness above the shrill hissing of the express locomotive.

Reg, exerting all his strength, raised the mass of woodwork that imprisoned him, and tore himself out. He looked round in the darkness—the carriage lights having gone out.

"Crackers!" he cried hoarsely. "Are you all right?"

"I'm all right, Reg, except for a nasty bump on the head!" came his chum's cheery voice from below, and next minute Crackers struggled out of the ruin of the compartment.

"No need to ask what's the matter. The train's hit something!" muttered Reg, as he swung himself upwards out of the overturned carriage door. "This way, Crackers! Jove! I hope there's nothing serious happened."

The two chums scrambled out on the line and mingled with the throng of scared passengers and shouting men. A short distance forward they saw the locomotive lying on its side, and the whole train was off the rails, the front coaches, including the one Reg and Crackers had been riding in, having turned over and sustained considerable damage.

There was the usual wild scene of terror and excitement attendant upon a railway accident. Reg and Crackers ran forward to where men were lifting the unconscious Hemsley from the overturned locomotive.

"What happened?" demanded Reg of the guard. "What derailed the express?"

"There was something else on the line round the bend here," rapped the guard grimly. "The driver ran full tilt into it. He couldn't avoid a smash. There's the cause of the accident—down the bank there!"

Looking down the railway embankment they saw the form of a wrecked goods truck, dimly discernible in the darkness.

"So there was a stray truck on the line!" exclaimed Reg. "Jove, somebody will get into hot water for this! Let's have a look at it, Crackers!"

The boys scrambled down the bank and came to the railway-truck that had been knocked from the line by the careering express. It was now reduced to a battered wreck of woodwork and twisted iron. Reg flashed on the light of his pocket-torch and examined the truck curiously.

A sudden low whistle of amazement escaped his lips.

"Crackers, this isn't one of our trucks at all!" he exclaimed. "It certainly is a railway-truck, but—but it's not a London and North British truck! It doesn't belong to any other railway, either, or if it did, all the lettering has been removed. There isn't a single identification mark on it at all!"

"You're right, Reg!" gasped Crackers, blinking at the wrecked truck. "P'raps it belongs to some private company what owns railway-trucks on our line."

"But there's no name on it—not even a tare mark!" said Reg swiftly. "Crackers, I can't make this out. All railway-trucks must bear some identification mark, whether owned by a private company or by the railway. Who on earth does this truck belong to, and how did it get on our line?"

Crackers scratched his head and ventured no reply. The matter completely "licked" him, as he might have said.

Reg was on his hands and knees now, examining every detail of the wrecked truck minutely in the light of his pocket-torch.

"Crackers, come and look here!" Reg called suddenly, his voice vibrant with excitement. "Did you ever see a railway-truck built like this before? Look at the large-sized spring the chassis is fitted with! See how carefully the springs are bound! The chassis is fitted with rubber shock-absorbers, too, and sound dampers. Here they are, Crackers—see 'em?"

"Crumbs!" gasped Crackers, blinking at the truck chassis shown up by the light from Reg's torch.

"No railway-truck I have ever seen—and I've worked among 'em since I left

school—was fitted with sound dampers!" said Reg between his teeth. "And look at the couplings! The bearings are fibre-bushed. That would make them practically silent. Crackers, this truck was built to be 'silent-running'! It's a specially built affair, and it had no right to be on the line. There's a mystery here somewhere, and— Oh!"

He broke off and ducked suddenly. An instant later something whirled through the darkness, past the spot where Reg's head had been, and hit the wrecked truck with a sickening crash. Reg picked it up. It was a bar of iron.

"Somebody threw that at me. I saw it coming just in time!" he jerked; and next minute dashed through the grass at the bottom of the railway bank towards the spot where his quick eyes had detected a dark, skulking figure.

He had not gone many steps when two long arms reached out of a hidden gully-hole, and took hold of his legs, bringing him over with a crash. He whirled over the next instant, however, quick as a flash, and grappled with his powerful assailant.

They rolled together down the dry gully-hole, fighting desperately. A hairy, sinewy hand clutched at Reg's throat, and his assailant leaned over him, his fetid breath hissing hotly against the lad's face. Reg's lungs seemed to be bursting under the pressure on his wind-pipe, and then out of the swirling mist he heard Crackers' voice:

"Take that!"

There was a thud, and the pressure on Reg's throat relaxed. His assailant fell back with a groan, evidently stunned.

"I landed the rotter a beauty that time, Reg!" chuckled Crackers out of the darkness. "I gave 'im a swipe on the head with that lump of iron he chucked at you!"

"Bravo, Crackers!" muttered Reg. "Let's get him out of this."

They dragged the stunned wretch from the gully-hole. But the fresh night air seemed to revive the prisoner, or else he had been "playing possum," for no sooner had they reached the railway embankment again than he wrenched himself free from the two lads' grip, and disappeared into the blackness of some fields beyond.

"He's gone, Crackers!" said Reg ruefully. "I suppose it's no use trying to chase him? Let's get back to the scene of the wreck. Hallo!"

He bent down suddenly and picked up a small lamp that had been lying half-hidden in the tangle of a bush. It was a curiously designed lamp with a red and green slide, and was worked by magnesium flash-tape.

"I'm blessed if I've seen anything like this before!" said Reg, knitting his brows. "It doesn't belong to the railway, I know that."

Railway officials and passengers were gathered round the wrecked truck, looking at it in mystification. It was an unknown truck, and its presence on the L.N.B.R. could not be accounted for. How had it got on the line? Who had put it there, and for what purpose?

Those were the questions that were telegraphed immediately to London that night, and which fetched the Traffic Manager, a number of directors, a man from Scotland Yard, and the railway company's private detectives to the scene in a special train early in the morning.

CHAPTER 2.

A Leap from Death!

REG and Crackers snatched some sleep at a farmhouse near the scene of the railway wreck, and were up and doing early the next morning. They made tracks for the

railway embankment where the mysterious truck still lay in ruins.

"Crackers, we'll do a little amateur detective work to-day, old son!" said the young railwayman cheerfully. "That chap who attacked me on the embankment here last night has something to do with this affair. We've got to trail him. If we don't find some footprints around here, or in the gully-hole, I shall be surprised."

Reg and Crackers were fortunate in finding the footprints of their mysterious aggressor of the night previous. Reg, who was extremely sharp-witted, immediately recognised, from the imprints of his assailant's boots, that they were shod with a well-known brand of rubber sole.

Reg, who had received excellent training as a boy scout, managed to follow the trail until it again picked up the railway line. He and Crackers followed the line for some distance, until, crossing the iron bridge that spanned a canal, they came to the large sidings of the Arkwright Iron and Steel Works.

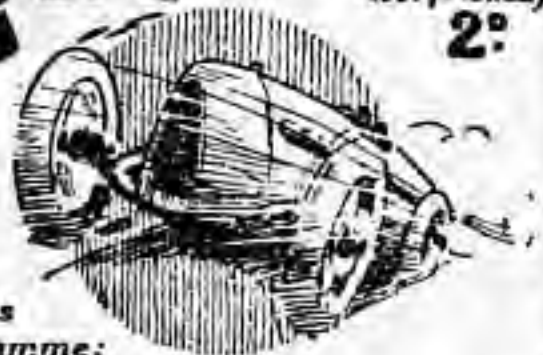
Work was in full swing at the yards. Giant cranes and slings were clacking noisily with the clatter of the locomotives that were drawing their lines of trucks about the yards. The canal ran alongside the works, and the railway line connecting the loop line to the Arkwright sidings crossed another iron bridge over the water. Barges laden with coal were drawn alongside the wharf, and three towering cranes, bearing mechanical coal scoops, were at work transferring coal from the barges to the coal dumps in the yard. The great jaws of the coal scoops gathered up the coal in hundredweights, the cranes then raised the scoops, swung them high over the yard to the coal dump, when the jaws opened again and dropped the coal in a clattering mass.

Crackers watched these operations whilst Reg bent down on the little iron bridge. His quick eyes had noted a strange iron bracket riveted to one of the bridge uprights. He had with him the lamp he had found at the bottom of the railway embankment, and trying it on the bracket, found that it fitted.

"We're getting warm!" he muttered. "The bracket was made for this lamp. I wonder what it's doing here on Arkwright's bridge? I wonder if Messrs. Arkwright have anything to do with that mysterious truck? All their trucks have their name painted on them, of course. But—well, it might pay to have a look round."

THE CHAMPION

Every Monday
2s



This
Week's
Programme:

"Harvester Hal."

"The Menagerie Express."

"Phantom Isle."

"Bob o' the Big Tent."

"The Scarlet Scorpion."

etc., etc.

**BREAKS ALL RECORDS
FOR EXCITING STORIES**

He and Crackers slithered over the bridge and crouched behind a small fence in the yard, out of sight from the workmen.

Reg suddenly glanced upwards, and, with a quick intake of his breath, saw that one of the giant coal scoops, swinging a full load from the barge yonder, had stopped before reaching the coal dump, and was, in fact, hovering directly over the spot where he and Crackers were crouching.

An evil, malicious face was looking out of the crane box at them.

Reg gave a warning cry and dragged at Crackers' arm. Even as he did so the great jaws of the scoop opened slowly and the mass of coal came tumbling out.

"Into the canal—quick, Crackers!" hoarsed Reg. And took a flying leap over the bridge parapet close at hand. Crackers followed him. And the lads were not a second too soon, for even as they hurtled down to the water a great tumbling mass of coal crashed upon the spot they had just vacated.

They would have been crushed to instant death had they not jumped in time.

Reg and Crackers struck the murky canal waters and swam steadily for the opposite bank, which was railway property. Men's hoarse shouts rang out from the Arkwright yards. But the two lads paid no heed.

They scrambled out of the water and dashed along the railway line out of sight.

"Ugh, ugh! A close shave that, Reg!" gasped Crackers, shaking himself like a terrier after a bath. "Do you think that coal was dropped on us on purpose?"

"I'm sure of it!" said Reg grimly, between clenched teeth. "The man in the crane must have seen us prowling there. And he must have had a pretty urgent reason for wanting us out of the way, or he wouldn't have resorted to attempted murder!"

"Ugh! Stow it, Reg! I'm shivering enough already!" gasped Crackers. "Let's return to the 'otel."

They returned to the farmhouse that had given them shelter during the night, and waited until their clothes were dried and ready to put on again.

"What now, captain?" inquired Crackers, as they made their way across the fields. "Goin' to report to Sir Clifford Brandish at Netherdale? I reckon 'e'll think we're among the dead or dyin'."

"Fortunately there are no dead or dying," said Reg. "I don't think we'll go there yet, old chap. I want to clear up this railway truck mystery. And I want to find out just what the Arkwright Works have got to do with it. Let's get down there and see if we can discover anything."

Reg hit on a bold plan when they did arrive at the large iron and steel works. They walked together into the yard and applied at the foreman's office for work.

"There ain't no jobs goin'. Can't you read the notice?" snapped the foreman.

"Yes," grinned Reg. "But we thought that when you saw two intelligent, energetic, highly-skilled chaps like us—"

"Get hout!" growled the foreman.

Reg and Crackers got out, but they purposely lost their way in going, and wandered round the Arkwright works for some time, having a good look round before the surly foreman spotted them again and had them turned out by the scruff of their necks.

"Anyhow," grinned Reg, as they strolled into a shop for a bite of dinner, "we've got to know the lay of the land in there. Crackers, to-night I'm going

to enter the Arkwright Works and have a good nose into things. I saw a fine way in and out during our wanderings there just now."

That afternoon they went to Netherdale and saw Sir Clifford. The Traffic Manager of the L.N.B.R. listened with rapt attention to Reg's story.

"You have done splendidly, Dickson!" he exclaimed warmly. "You show more promise of solving this mystery than the detectives at present. By all means do as you think fit. I have complete confidence in you, my lad."

CHAPTER 3.

The Secret of the Steel Works!

THAT night two stealthy figures crept over a fence by the store-rooms of the Arkwright Iron and Steel Works. The night was pitch-black, and dense masses of cloud obscured the moon. The large factories were aglow with light, however, and the monotonous drone of the great machinery was like the breathing of a sleeping giant.

The numerous workshops were closed and in darkness. Reg and Crackers prowled among these, moving silently and stealthily, like wraiths. An hour passed, then suddenly Reg drew Crackers into the shadows of one of the workshops.

"Quiet!" he hissed. "There's somebody coming! It's a watchman doing his rounds!"

Crouching in the darkness, scarcely daring to breathe, they saw the watchman pass them and go up to the wall of one of the main buildings just ahead. He had to step over the rails of the yard sidings to get to the wall. The siding lines ended there, flush with the wall. There were no buffers. Reg and Crackers were shortly to discover the reason for this.

The watchman bent down and removed a brick near the bottom of the wall. The two lads hiding in the shadows behind watched him eagerly, tensely.

Reaching into the aperture left by the brick, the watchman fumbled about until a click sounded, and, to the amazement of the two hidden watchers, half the wall began to slowly and silently move downwards into the ground.

The watchman then walked into the large, gaping hole in the wall, and Reg and Crackers saw him flashing his torch-light about inside. A few minutes later he came out, bent down, and inserted his hand in the hole where the brick had been, and then the moving panel of the brick wall moved up again and went back into position.

The watchman replaced the brick and shuffled away.

"Crums!" gasped Crackers, drawing a deep breath. "I 'aven't been seein' things, 'ave I, Reg?"

Reg snapped his teeth down hard.

"You have!" he said grimly. "And I'm going to find out more about them. Crackers, keep watch here for that fellow, in case he returns."

Reg moved out of his hiding-place and went over to the wall. When he felt confident that the watchman was well out of the way, he bent down and grasped the brick he had seen the watchman remove. It came away easily in his hand. Reaching into the hole, Reg's hand encountered a small switch. He turned it, and, to his gratification, saw the moving panel of the wall begin to slowly sink.

When the aperture in front of the railway-line was fully open, Reg crept in and switched on his lamp.

He found himself in a steel-walled compartment, narrow and long. It was, in fact, a secret train-shed, for along the

floor was a stretch of railway-line leading from the line outside. And on the hidden line stood an electric locomotive and a line of five trucks.

One glance at these trucks was sufficient to satisfy the young railwayman that they were the exact replicas of the mysterious truck that had caused the accident to the express on the L.N.B.R. loop line the night previous. Each truck was fitted with sound-dampers and bushed couplings. There were five of them, and there remained a space at the end of the shed for a sixth. Reg guessed that the sixth truck was the one now lying in pieces at the bottom of the railway embankment a mile away.

The trucks were empty. There was nothing in them to indicate what their loads might have consisted of. Beside the line he found two lengths of steel rail, each of which was fitted at the ends with an ingenious device that enabled it, when the panel of wall was down, to be fastened at one end to the line outside, and the other end to the hidden rail inside.

A step sounded outside, and Reg wheeled round quickly. It was only Crackers.

"We'd better slope, captain," grinned the boy. "The old watchy's comin' this way. Shall I crack him one, or—"

"No; I'm coming out," said Reg hastily. "I have discovered the secret of the Arkwright Works, anyway!"

He hurried out, and, bending down, operated the concealed switch that brought up the panel of the wall noiselessly back into position. He replaced the brick, and he and Crackers slithered away in the darkness.

Reg had a long talk with Sir Clifford Brandish next morning. The traffic manager was pleased with the result of Reg's smart work, and willingly agreed to the young railwayman's suggestion that he and Crackers should remain in the neighbourhood to keep a rigid watch on the Arkwright Works.

Unbeknown to anybody except Sir Clifford, Reg and Crackers alternately kept watch on the secret train-shed every night.

Nothing happened for three nights. On the fourth day Reg left the farmhouse early and did not return. Crackers felt anxious as to his chum's whereabouts, but he did not lose his faith in Reg's ability to look after himself. It was Crackers' turn to do vigil on the secret shed that night, and as Reg had not returned by evening, Crackers set off, leaving a note for his chum.

He crept into the Arkwright Works and settled down in the usual hiding-place to keep his watch throughout the night on the hidden train shed.

The hours wore by, Crackers, always watchful, ears as well as eyes on the alert. The vast yards were in pitch blackness and deserted, and the night silence was disturbed only by the continual hum of the works' turbines.

Suddenly Crackers stiffened. Men were approaching through the darkness, talking in low tones. At length six forms loomed up—all men. One removed the brick and operated the secret switch that opened the sliding panel in the brick wall, and the men walked into the secret train shed.

Crackers, venturing out, saw them connect the two loose rails from the line in the shed to the siding line outside. Then, almost without noise, the electric

locomotive came out, drawing behind it the line of silent-moving trucks. In the darkness ahead Crackers saw a green light flash, and he remembered the mysterious lamp that Reg had found by the railway-embankment. He judged the light to be coming from the head of the iron bridge over the canal. The train of trucks moved slowly, noiselessly along the siding towards the loop line of the L.N.B.R.

Where was it going, so silently and secretly in the night? Crackers, crouching in the shadows, decided on a bold plan. Reg, had he been there, would assuredly have decided on the same. As the silent-running trucks moved by, Crackers ran out and leaped on to one of them, unseen by the men aboard.

He crouched on the coupling-irons between two trucks, and held on grimly, his heart beating fast. The trucks were drawn by the electric locomotive across the bridge, and out on to the permanent-way of the L.N.B.R. loop line.

Half-past twelve chimed from the clock at the Arkwright Works. Crackers knew that no train was due now until about six o'clock in the morning.

The train of mysterious trucks moved swiftly, with hardly any noise, along the loop line, past the scene of the express wreck, through a tunnel, and then up a stiff gradient into the hills.

Crackers, hanging on tenaciously between the two trucks, wondered what this eerie midnight adventure meant, and how it would end.

CHAPTER 4.

Reg's Coup!

THE train's speed slackened as it drew along a deep cutting in the hills. High above, on either side of the permanent-way, towered the walls of the railway-cutting. The line of trucks at length drew to a halt in the middle of the cutting.

Crackers was now quivering with excitement. What was going to happen? The men were getting down on to the flints at the side of the rails. Crackers, feeling his position to be too precarious at this juncture, clambered down on to the line, and, crawling underneath a truck, slithered across the metals into the shadows, and hid behind a number of boulders.

The men standing beside the train of trucks were looking upwards. A light flashed, and it was answered by another light up above. Crackers looked up, too, and he gave a low cry of amazement.

High above, out of the very rock, it seemed, the long arm of a crane swung out, a bulky object hanging on the hook. The crane was centred over the front truck, and then its load was lowered, slowly, with no noise, until it lay in the truck. It was unhooked by the men waiting there, and the cable then wound upwards to the crane-arm, which swung in again to bring out another load, which was dumped in the truck in a similar manner.

The operation was repeated several times. Crackers, watching in amazement from the boulder behind which he was crouching, saw three of the five trucks loaded with those mysterious bales that were swung down from the hillside by the crane. What did those bales contain? Where did they come from, and what did this amazing business mean?

Crackers, in his excitement engendered by these thoughts, crept too far out of his hiding-place and a sudden shout from one of the men on the line warned him that he had been seen.

"Crums!" gasped Crackers, in dismay. "I'm spotted! If they lay hold of me—"



Reg Dickson gave a warning cry and dragged at Crackers' arm. Even as he did so, the great jaws of the scoop opened slowly and the great mass of coal came tumbling out. "Into the canal—quick, Crackers!" cried Reg.

Sput!

A bullet whined out, and flattened itself against the rock of the cutting wall behind Crackers. Three more shots zipped through the darkness, and the men came tearing furiously along the line towards Crackers. The lad saw that his only way of escape lay up the wall of the cutting, which at that part was formed by the natural rock. He commenced to clamber upwards swiftly, clinging to the perilous ledges of rock, scrambling over loose boulders. The men shouted savagely to him from below, and several more bullets winged past him.

Crackers kept on grimly, and he slowly got higher up the steep, rocky wall of the railway cutting. Looking down, he saw that two of the men were climbing up after him. Crackers then paused, and kicked down a lump of loose rock, which, striking one of his pursuers on the shoulder, pitched him headlong back on to the railway-line below.

Crackers climbed higher until he was almost at the top. Then, all of a sudden, he heard somebody scrambling down towards him, and he gave a gasp of dismay. Crackers reached for a piece of rock, and, sitting on a protruding boulder, waited with his weapon ready to strike. A light from a pocket-torch flashed down on him, and a quiet, well-known voice came to his ears:

"Hold on, Crackers—it's only me!"

"Reg!" gasped Crackers joyfully, and he hurled the piece of rock at the men

far below. "Golly! Fancy meetin' you up 'ere! Where the dickens——"

"You're just the chap I wanted to see!" exclaimed Reg quickly, as he reached his young chum's side. "Can't explain all now, Crackers, but take this revolver—I managed to get hold of a couple without being seen. See this crevice in the rock that I've just come out of? It's a sort of emergency exit from the gang's place in the hill, and I want you to watch it and see that nobody comes out. The gun's loaded, and you ought to be able to hold your own with it."

"Trust me, captain!" grinned Crackers. "This reminds me of the thrillin' doin's we see on the pictures. I s'pose you're goin' up to turn hell loose now?"

"Something like that," responded Reg, and he scrambled through the opening in the rock, next minute being lost to view.

The plucky young railwayman found himself in a tunnel bored through the hillside. He traversed it quickly, and came out into a large cave, one side of which was open to the railway-cutting below. The crane arm was still protruding out of the opening. The walls of the cave were stacked with bales and boxes, and the floor littered with heaps of sundry goods. A white-haired, evil-faced old man was crouching beside the crane, looking out into the night with a look of demoniacal fury. Five men stood round him, looking savage. A

chorus of angry yells arose when Reg calmly presented himself.

"Hands up!" rapped the young railwayman, flashing out his revolver. "Put your hand away from your hip-pocket, Arkwright, and raise it above your head, like your men are doing so obediently. If you don't—Ah, I thought you'd prefer to obey! Now, you men, get down that passage, quick! One after the other!"

Threatened by Reg's revolver, the men complied. When the last had disappeared into the tunnel, Reg put his revolver back in his pocket and stepped quickly over to the door of the cave and shot the bolt home.

"Crackers will keep them bottled up at the other end!" he chuckled. "Now, Arkwright——"

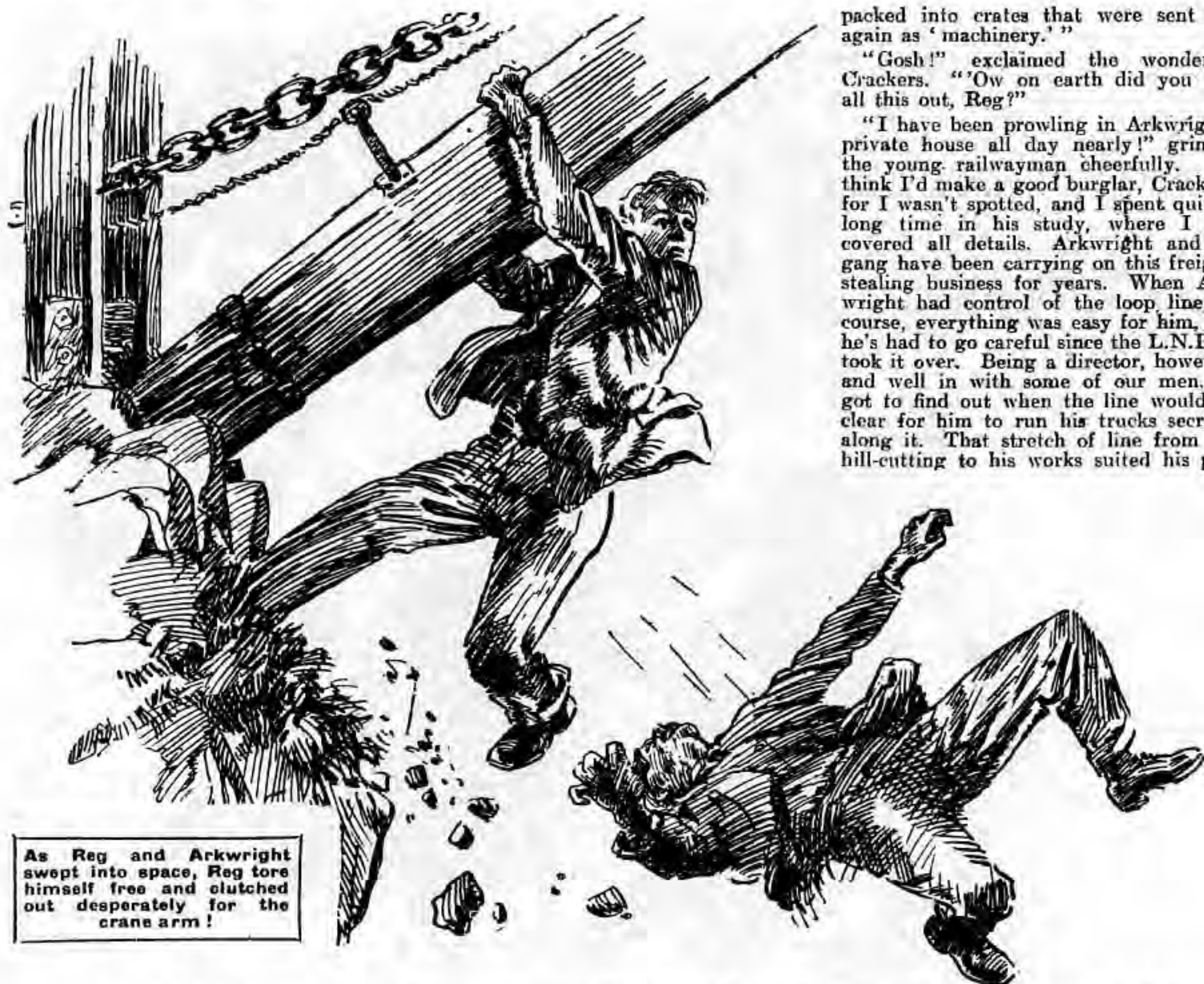
He broke off. Arkwright, with a snarl like a vicious fox, darted at him, his long, sinewy hands clutching towards the boy. Reg grappled with him, and together the pair rolled to the opening in the hillside.

"Keep away, you fool!" hoarsed Reg, feeling that the man was doing his utmost to get to the brink. "It's death if you fall down there——"

"We'll go down together!" cackled Arkwright shrilly. "You interfering young cub——"

They fought fiercely, Reg for his life, the other with the maniacal purpose of sending himself and the young railwayman to death on the line far below.

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As Reg and Arkwright swept into space, Reg tore himself free and clutched out desperately for the crane arm!

packed into crates that were sent out again as 'machinery.'

"Gosh!" exclaimed the wondering Crackers. "'Ow on earth did you find all this out, Reg?"

"I have been prowling in Arkwright's private house all day nearly!" grinned the young railwayman cheerfully. "I think I'd make a good burglar, Crackers, for I wasn't spotted, and I spent quite a long time in his study, where I discovered all details. Arkwright and his gang have been carrying on this freight-stealing business for years. When Arkwright had control of the loop line, of course, everything was easy for him, but he's had to go careful since the L.N.B.R. took it over. Being a director, however, and well in with some of our men, he got to find out when the line would be clear for him to run his trucks secretly along it. That stretch of line from the hill-cutting to his works suited his pur-

"Now!" hissed Arkwright.

With Reg held tight to him, he leapt out of the opening into the blackness beyond, taking the boy with him.

As their feet swept into space, Reg tore himself free from the man's grasp and clutched out desperately for the crane arm. He grasped it with one arm and flung the other swiftly over. By a miraculous stroke of luck he managed to hold on.

The crane arm had saved him!

A shriek, scarcely human, sounded below, and then all was silent.

Reg clambered along the crane arm back to the cave. He grasped several lengths of rope, and then climbed out of the opening, and down the jagged hill-side.

After a tortuous climb down, he reached the ledge where Crackers was cheerfully holding the men in the tunnel at bay.

Reg ordered the men out one by one. Each man, as he came out, was covered by Crackers, and forced to submit to being tied up by Reg.

In this manner the two enterprising lads soon had all five of the rascals tied up, helpless.

"A good capture—what?" grinned Crackers. "This would do for a cinema story, wouldn't it, Reg? But what does it all mean? Who are these rascals.

"This secret place in the hill used to be called Garth's Folly," said Reg quietly. "It was built by an old hermit

many years ago. Since then it has fallen into disuse and been forgotten. Arkwright got to know of its existence, however, and has for some time been using it as a secret warehouse for stolen freight. Arkwright is—or was—the head of a big organisation of railway thieves.

"You know, Crackers, that freight thieves have been giving the railway companies of England a good deal of trouble lately, and the London & North British has been one of the worst sufferers. In spite of the vigilance of railway detectives, vast quantities of goods have frequently been stolen from railway sidings and store yards. It has been a matter of common knowledge that a powerful organisation has been at work.

"Arkwright, a director of the London & North British, head of the big steel works bearing his name and ex-private owner of this loop line, controlled the gang of freight thieves. The raided stuff was brought here secretly in lorries, and kept in this hidden warehouse in the hills. When the stuff had accumulated to big proportions, Arkwright sent out his train of silent-running trucks at night, which stopped in the cutting below. A portion of the hillside was then slid back—Arkwright is a clever engineer, you know, and such mechanisms were simple for him to carry out—and the crane came out, which loaded the stolen freight on to the trucks. These were then taken back to the Arkwright works, the stuff unloaded, and later

pose very well. I forced one of his men to tell me all about it.

"The other night, Crackers, when we were on our way to London, and the express was suddenly diverted along the loop line, Arkwright's secret train was out. As soon as he got wind that the express was coming, he had to get his trucks off the permanent way and back to the secret shed in rather a hurry. As luck would have it, the rear truck broke its couplings en route, and became detached from the rest of the secret train. And the express was coming! There was no time for the men to effect a repair, or push it, so they hastily unloaded the stuff it contained on to the other trucks and had to leave it there.

"The rest you know, Crackers. The express came along at about sixty, and hit the truck, which was smashed. Arkwright decided to hold on tight, and he hoped that his secret wouldn't be discovered."

"By gum! But we've fetched it out!" chuckled Crackers. "Won't Sir Clifford be surprised! Reg, we'll get promotion for this!"

Crackers was right. They had, by exposing the freight-thieving organisation, rendered the railway a great service, which Sir Clifford Brandish was not slow to recognise.

THE END.

(Be sure you read: "SULIMAN'S VALLEY!" A Thrilling story of daring adventure in a jungle written specially for next week's GEM.

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OUR COMPANION PAPERS.

"THE BOYS' FRIEND" Every Monday
 "THE MAGNET" Every Monday
 "THE POPULAR" Every Tuesday
 "CHUCKLES" Every Thursday
 "THE HOLIDAY ANNUAL" Published Yearly

MY DEAR CHUMS.—It is good news about the "Holiday Annual." This year's issue of the famous book is brighter, and contains a better all-round budget of contents than ever. Look out for the weighty words spoken by Martin Clifford during his visit to Greyfriars. In every respect this season's "Annual" is noteworthy. It is crammed full of stories of school, adventure, and sport, while its articles and pictures are top-hole.

A CHANGE WANTED!

Looking through my postbag, I find a couple of letters from "Gem" readers who both put the same question. What is the question? Just this: Why not have a change in the captaincy of the Shell at St. Jim's? One of these correspondents is Tom Masters, of Stalybridge. "I should like to see Cardew made captain," he writes.

WOULD IT BE POPULAR?

Candidly, I do not think such a move would be generally appreciated. Cardew is a topping chap, but he is not cut out for the position. Besides, what's wrong with Tom Merry? What do other readers think? Just let me know, will you? There is nothing against Cardew, but he is a bit uncertain. Heaps of the St. Jim's fellows do not understand him a bit.

"TROUBLE ON THE THAMES!"

By Martin Clifford.

This is the title of next week's St. Jim's story. Critics may say what they like, but in this coming yarn Tom Merry shows himself a first-rate leader. Nothing fresh about that. It is a splendid romance of a river jaunt, full of fun, and with a cheery dash of adventure, and just that peppering in of trouble to give seasoning. The famous characters show up well. So does the river. There is nothing much better than a boating trip. I wonder which kind of holiday the majority of "Gem" readers prefer—a boating jaunt, a biking trip, walking, or plain camping out?

THE FOOTBALL SEASON.

It might be just mentioned here that Tom Merry is hard at it planning his programme for the football season. Teams want some picking when the choice lies with all the champions of St. Jim's.

"SULIMAN'S VALLEY."

By Cecil Fanshaw.

Here is a treat for next Wednesday. It is a particularly clever story with a deal of hard thinking in it. Suliman is a one-armed slave-raider. Several forays on the cattle and sheep of the distant part of the world have caused growers to be up in arms about the ruinous depredations. Suliman's Valley is no other than a hotbed of plotting. Tracking the rogues down through the impenetrable jungle affords a chance for such excitement as one has never before had in a real jungle like this. The encounter with a herd of buffaloes makes grand reading.

THE BEST STORY.

Somebody asked me the other day which

kind of story readers preferred. Was it school, detective, or sport that was most appreciated? That question is hard to answer. All types of tales are asked for by my chums, and for first-class fiction in each department of interest the "Gem" fills the bill.

"RIVER-WISE NED!"

By Roland Spencer.

This is a winner for next Wednesday—just the sort of thing to which readers of the "Gem" are specially partial. It shows how Ned comes into control of a Thames barge. His skipper saw fresh blood was required, and surrendered his position to his mate. Ned acts in the right way. A gang of pirates are busy, and River-Wise Ned finds himself in a very dangerous position.

OUR TUCK HAMPER COMPETITION.

Whatever you do, mind you keep an eye on this smart little feature. It will be better than ever next week.

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WHICH REMINDS ME!

The "Gem" has some remarkable surprises in store in the way of thumping big prizes in fascinating competitions. Verb. sap.

PHOTOGRAPHIC IMPROVEMENTS.

Time and again I receive specimen "snaps" from friends who have been taking their holidays with a trusty camera as companion. I will admit at once that as a rule it is refreshing to note the much greater clearness of these pictures. Developing and general production have made big strides in the last few seasons. You remember some of the old photos. A fellow was told that he figured in a group! Well, so far as that goes, he might be there. The sad-looking smudge in the far corner wearing a hat that looked like a cabbage run to seed, might be himself, but the effect was not so very satisfactory. A photo which is merely an impressionistic blur may have a few rags of sentiment hanging to it, but it litters up an album. It is no use storing up foggy photos. Besides, they get worse as time goes on.

THAT AWFUL SMUDGE!

A correspondent asks me what I think of script handwriting. Well, I consider it admirable. For plain handwriting is the thing that oils the machinery of life. You cannot, perhaps, blame people if they write badly with some of the queer pens you find on the counters of post-offices nowadays. You know the sort of nib I mean. The points have had a sharp dispute, and have parted company for ever. The ink flies back in your face, and you make blots all over the paper. This is what wrecks the best temper that ever existed. But when the pen sits up and behaves nicely, then individuals ought to write plainly. Somebody has got to read what has been written down, and who can decipher a nightmare, or a mess of illegibility, which suggests that a bright company of flies had dipped their legs in the inkwell, and then performed a fox-trot? Write plainly—then everybody will love you.

A GROUSE!

One of my correspondents sends me a grumble. He dislikes the nickname which has been fastened on to him by his pals at the warehouse where he works. He is in the wrong here. There is nothing amiss with a nickname, certainly not with his special variety. Often enough the nickname is a real compliment. You seldom find a fellow who is not really popular linked up with a fancy name. Fellows do not trouble to call an individual they despise by a name which is coined specially for him, more often than not to indicate some characteristic. They willingly hook on an "o" at the end of the name of a chum. Or they call him "old" something or another.

FAR TOO TOUCHY!

It is not straining at anything to style a fellow who is called out of his name as really lucky. It shows that he is appreciated. It proves that he has personality, and has attracted attention. I call it sheer madness to resent this kind of delicate attention. You see some fellows start work at an office or a factory, and they slip right away into popularity; they are dubbed some quaint name. It is really a big mistake to take umbrage at this fact. The sensible chap would no more dream of doing so than he would think of bobbing down the High Street of his native town on his head. I am inclined to think the chum who wrote to me is just a touch too sensitive. One of these fine days he will thank his lucky stars he was thought worthy of being presented with a nickname; he will see what it really means. That's all there is to it. It simply proves he is liked. And, I ask you, what better thing in the world is there than to be appreciated? It puts anybody on his mettle to be less unworthy of his comrades' esteem.

WHAT NAMES MEAN.

There is no obvious reason why a chap should be styled an "egg" or a "fruit," but so it is! Some of the new terms have no precise meaning at all. They are unlike "juggins," for instance. That word was brought in to mark the contempt of thieves for one of their number who had been landed in the "jug," otherwise prison. Pal is Romany for brother. George Borrow, who passed much of his life with the gipsies, knew all about that. Names used to designate a man's trade. In the very old days—and it is the same in Africa to these times—it was felt that once you knew a man's name you had a certain power over him. But that's a superstition we can afford to pass over.

PERSONALITY.

Just a word concerning personality. I notice a sort of puzzlement in some of the letters from my chums. A notion seems to be going round that a fellow ought to try and model himself and his actions on somebody else who has done well in life. Now, that kind of thing is all very well up to a point, but it must not be carried too far. It is up to everybody to be true to himself. He has his own individuality to think about. He must be true to it. It is no use being a mere copy when you can be an original, as it were—your real, original self. It is personality that pays. The men who have done great things in the past did not bother about imitating other folks. They were just themselves all the time. Be yourself. It pays and it pays in a much more important currency than money.

Your Editor.

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"CHUMS OF THE RIVER!"

(Continued from page 15.)

"Tommy, you've got the boat-hook! Jab him!"

"Certainly!" said Tom Merry, laughing. "Where will you have it, Mr. Jones?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I—I—I—" gasped Mr. Jones, as Tom Merry brandished the boat-hook. "I—I refuse—I—I will not—Yaroooh—"

He jumped for it.

Tom shoved the boat off again, and the St. Jim's crew pulled away up the river. Mr. Jones was left on the bank,

standing under a big board which warned him that he was liable to prosecution for being there, and shaking an infuriated fist after the schoolboys. His voice, raised and wrathful, followed the Old Bus, and did not die away till Tom Merry & Co. were at quite a distance.

"I twust," said Arthur Augustus seriously—"I sincerely twust that we shall not see that objectionable person again! Did you fellows notice how uttably lackin' in wepose his manna's were?"

Tom Merry & Co. chuckled, and the Old Bus floated on in the golden sunset on the flowing Thames, and Mr. Jones was left far behind and soon forgotten. Much more interesting things than Mr. Jones awaited Tom Merry & Co. on their voyage up the river.

THE END.

(NEXT WEEK! "TROUBLE ON THE THAMES!" By Martin Clifford. You cannot afford to miss any of these grand holiday yarns, boys. They comprise the finest series of stories your favourite author has yet written. Let your chums read this yarn, and then ask them what they think of it.)

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