

THE LEADING HOLIDAY AND SCHOOL-STORY PAPER!

The GEM 2^D

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OF
SCHOOL AND SPORTING STORIES

EVERY WEDNESDAY.

No. 813.
Vol. XXIV.
September 8th,
1923.



DAMPING THE ARDOUR OF TOM MERRY & CO.!

(A Screamingly Funny Incident from: "TROUBLE ON THE THAMES!" a Magnificent Long Holiday Story by the World-Famous Martin Clifford, contained in this issue.)



Address all letters: The Editor, The "Gem" Library, The Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London E.C.4. Write me, you can be sure of an answer in return.

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,—There is one extra-special feature of the holiday season which we could not do without. I refer to the special holiday series of St. Jim's yarns which can be relied upon each summer. Without any fear of contradiction, I am prepared to back this feature as second to none. This year Mr. Martin Clifford has excelled himself in every respect.

"SEVEN IN A BOAT!"

By Martin Clifford.

You will be convulsed over next week's story, which deals in spirited style with the further adventures of Tom Merry & Co. up-river. They have a great time, the whole party of them, this week, but next Wednesday's exploits beat everything. The members of the expedition encounter rough weather, and have to take refuge at an inn. After that we get a number of extraordinary incidents, and, strangely enough, Horace Coker of Greyfriars comes on the scene. The circumstances are positively amazing. So Gussy thought, anyway, and for once the noble scion of the house of Eastwood was right. I cordially advise all my friends to keep their eyes on Coker next week. St. Jim's has nothing special to learn from Greyfriars, as will be thoroughly well recognised by those who read next week's splendid yarn.

LETTERS TO HAND.

As the weeks fly by I feel some considerable regret that lack of space so often prevents me dealing in my Chat with the many congratulatory letters I receive. There are any number of these cheery communications, and I am right glad to get them. Thank you one and all! I always reply to each one, as you know; but I would like to seize this opportunity to tell you that letters about the stories, and letters containing suggestions, are as welcome as the flowers in May. Please remember that I am here to help. I am speaking now of the requests for advice which flow into my office. Readers who are thinking of launching out in some new calling write to ask my advice. Well, to give the best counsel at my command is what I am for. Just let me know of your difficulties. I will assist you in every way in my power. It is often the case that a fresh view of some problem which is troubling you may be the means of sweeping away the trouble. So don't forget that your Editor is out to lend a hand at any old time.

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"THE SUNKEN RACER!"

This is an all-round powerful story of the romance of the motor-car. There have been yarns in plenty dealing with the hazards to which the driver of a racing car is liable, but the new story can stand by itself. Its interest pulsates along as unerringly as a record racer on a track. Some of us don't always take stock of the peril faced by the man at the wheel at those critical times when his own position and the reputation of the car he is driving are at stake. You get a good notion of what all this means in next week's yarn. This splendid bit of fiction teems with excitement. There is a big smash up, and the car roars into flames, all of which is grandly described.

A PLEASURE TO COME!

You all remember the grand 25,000-word story of St. Jim's which I gave in our topping August Bank Holiday issue. This special treat has had such a tremendous reception that the whole thing has set me thinking. Why should we not repeat the experiment? That's a question with a punch behind it. There is only one answer which would be acceptable, so I have made arrangements for other fine stories of the increased length. Mr. Martin Clifford will be found rising to the occasion in his usual triumphant way. These extra-special yarns of St. Jim's will come along shortly. Look out for them; and, by the way, tell your chums about the step I am taking. You see, it is like this. Over and over again I have found urgent requests in my letter-bag for more about St. Jim's. You need not imagine that I do not give the very closest attention to suggestions of this sort. They hail from supporters who are as deeply interested in the advance of the GEM as I am myself, if that be possible. Just

remember! More extra-long complete tales of Tom Merry & Co. to come!

"A RIVER RESCUE!"

By Roland Spencer.

There will be a second story concerning the doings of plucky Ned Derry in next week's GEM. The youngster acquits himself like the hero he is in a situation full of peril. Ned is just the sort of fellow to win the thoroughgoing admiration of GEM readers, for he tackles a difficulty in proper style. I feel certain that this fresh adventure on board the Estuary Belle will be appreciated by everybody. It teems with sensation, and, what's more, it has got the real atmosphere of the big river with its inexhaustible mystery.

A SIMPLE REQUEST.

I just want to know what you all really think of River-wise Ned. You will admit that as a character he is something quite new. We want to hear of fellows of this brand, and I should much like to hear your opinions regarding Ned. He struck me as being an exceptionally fine type of youngster—smart, modest, and brave.

HAVE YOU WON A PRIZE YET?

If not, why not? The Tuck Hampers are still on offer, and if you have not yet hit on the right idea, you may do so on a second try.

THE "HOLIDAY ANNUAL."

This year's volume of the wonderful book is full of splendid features. You will hear in it about Martin Clifford and heaps of other celebrities. The fact is the fiction list is superb, and the crowning attraction in a unique book is the 50,000 word story of St. Jim's by Martin Clifford. This tale is absolutely, and beyond any possible doubt whatever, the masterpiece of the world-renowned GEM author. The yarn swings along so brilliantly, and is so cleverly worked out, that your admiration for the genius of Mr. Clifford will increase enormously—though that, after all, is saying a good deal, since for story-writing Mr. Martin Clifford is, as always, top dog, with a fame that girdles the earth.

THE POPULARITY OF THE "GEM."

Just one word more about how you can all assist to spread the fame of the GEM. When you have read your copy lend it to a chum. That will turn him into an ardent Gemite, and he will thank you for having done him a good turn.

OUR PROGRAMME.

You may rest assured that the old paper is not going to be satisfied with the laurels it has won. There are magnificent surprises in store; but you, on your side, can assist me by giving me a straight tip as to what kind of tale you want to see in your favourite paper.

NEVER BE SATISFIED.

It seems to me that we can all take a useful hint from the policy of the GEM. Of course, the fact that one is never wholly satisfied with work done, or with how life is going, does not mean that one is to go through the world grumbling about things in general. I prefer the point of view of a correspondent who wrote to me to-day. He told me he had been singularly successful in his job as a shopman; he had earned encomiums from his employer for the smart work he had done as a window-dresser. Then he told me he was not satisfied yet. Of course he is not satisfied! He means to do better yet. And he will, too!

THE EDITOR.



**Don't
Miss
This
Great
Yarn!**

**"THE CHAMPION WHO
WOULDN'T FIGHT"**

A Magnificent New Serial of
Boxing and Real Life Adventure.

See this week's

BOYS' REALM

On Sale Wednesday, Sept. 5.



TROUBLE ON THE THAMES!

The Second of our Great Series of Up-River Yarns, dealing with the exciting adventures, on holiday, of the World-Famous Tom Merry & Co. of St. Jim's.

By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

CHAPTER 1. High Words.

"Hi!"

"Hi, hi!"

"Hi, hi, hi!"

The gentleman who uttered that monosyllable seemed to be getting excited.

He was standing on a puffing steam-launch, and the launch seemed to be in a hurry, and the gentleman who shouted "Hi!" seemed to be in a hurry.

But there was no trace of hurry or excitement about the Old Bus—the roomy old boat in which Tom Merry & Co. were going up the river.

Tom Merry and Manners and Lowther were on the tow-path, sharing the labours of the tow-rope. They were deep in conversation also, all three interested in their topics. Tom Merry was talking about cricket at St. Jim's. Manners was referring to some splendid snaps he had taken between Chertsey and Staines. Monty Lowther was debating whether they were likely to find a picture-palace at Staines. With three talkers going strong on three topics, the chums of the Shell were not likely to heed a war-whoop from the river.

In the boat Arthur Augustus D'Arcy sat at the lines. Blake and Herries and Digby were stretched out in lazy comfort, regarding a cloudless blue sky with satisfaction.

Seven St. Jim's juniors were enjoying their holiday going up the Thames in the Old Bus. They were all taking things easily, as why should they not?

There were plenty of craft on the river that sunny day. White flannels and gorgeous parasols gleamed in the sun. Verdure and woods and meadows looked delightful, and with verdure clad the hills appeared. The delicious "Hi!" from the gentleman in the steam-launch was quite out of place. Hurry and bustle did not really come into the picture at all.

"Hi, hi, hi, hi!"

The gentleman was repeating himself.

"Bai Jove!" Arthur Augustus D'Arcy remarked thoughtfully. "That sounds like somebody shoutin'."

"Hi!"

"Did you heah anybody shoutin', Blake?"

Jack Blake grinned.

"Either that or a steamer's syren," he said. "I'm not sure which."

"Hi!"

"It is wathah wotten for a man with a waucous voice to shout like that. It weally spoils the whole thing," said Arthur Augustus. "Whoevah that man is, I feel suah that he has no sense of poetwy."

"Hi!"

"I weally wish he would put on a new wecord. I wondah whom he is shoutin' at? What are you cacklin' at, Blake?"

"He's shouting at you, ass!"

"Bai Jove, it is wathah cheekay for him to shout at me when I don't know him!"

"Hi!" shrieked the man on the launch in frenzied tones. "Are you deaf, you young idiot?"

"Is it possible, Blake, that a perfect stwangah is chawac-tewisin' me as a young idiot?" asked Arthur Augustus.

"It is—it are!" said Blake. "He can't be a stranger, as he knows you so well."

"Weally, Blake——"

"Hi, hi! Get out of the way! Do you want us to run you down? You born idiot, clear the way, can't you?"

"Bai Jove, I wondah if that is somebody comin' on behind?" said Arthur Augustus, his noble brain grasping the situation at last.

The Terrible Three on the bank were looking round now. The frenzied yells of the launch man had attracted their attention at last.

Arthur Augustus looked round in a leisurely manner. He was not likely to abandon the repose that stamps the caste of Vere de Vere on account of an excited man on a launch.

The launch was quite close behind, and half a dozen people were staring furiously at the towed Bus. They wanted to pass, and the Old Bus and its tow-rope were in the way.

The man who yelled "Hi!" shook an enraged fist at Arthur Augustus from the launch.

"Gerrout of the way!" he roared.

"Are you addwessin' me?" asked Arthur Augustus with dignity and calmness.

"Eh! What? Yes, you dummy——"

"Weally, sir——"

"You young jackanapes, do you want all the river?"

"Not at all, my good man!"

"Sheer off!"

"I have no objection what evah to gettin' out of your way, my good fellow," said the swell of St. Jim's calmly, "but I should like you to undahstand that I object to bein' called names. I object, also, to bein' woared at."

"Do you want to be run down?"

"You can wun us down if you like!" smiled Arthur Augustus. "I wathah think it would cwumple you up!"

The whistle on the steam-launch shrieked shrilly. The man shook his fist and raved. Arthur Augustus' placid calmness was quite in keeping with the placid surroundings. But it seemed to have an irritating effect on the other party.

Three fellows in blazers and panama hats stared at the roomy old boat from the launch, and a voice familiar to the St. Jim's juniors was heard.

"Why, they're St. Jim's fags!"

"Bai Jove, Cutts of the Fifth!" said Arthur Augustus.

"Cutts and St. Leger and Gilmore," said Blake, standing up and looking back at the launch. "Three of the jolly old Fifth! Hallo, Cutts, old man! I didn't know you went in for beanfeasts on the river."

Cutts and Gilmore scowled, and St. Leger grinned.

"Run them down, Raikes!" said Cutts.

"Go it!" chuckled Blake. "We can stand it! You'll burst that dusty old steam-packet if you do!"

"Clear the way, you cheeky fag!"

"I twust, Cutts, that you are not wholly forgettin' your mannahs on vacation," said Arthur Augustus severely.

"There is such a thing as politeness, you know."

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4 Introduce the Ever Adventurous and Most Amusing Tom Merry & Co. to your Chums!

"Let them pass, Gussy, you ass!" shouted Tom Merry, from the bank.

"Weally, Tom Mewwy——"

"Hi!" roared the man Raikes. "Hi, you young jackanapes! Will you get out of the way, or will you not get out of the way?"

"Certainly, my good fellow, but I must remark that you might express yourself in wathah more polished language."

And Arthur Augustus pulled the line—the wrong one, of course—and brought the Old Bus almost broadside on to the nose of the launch.

CHAPTER 2. Trouble.

"GREAT gad!"

"Look out!"

"Oh, holy smoke!"

"Mind what you're at, Gussy!" shrieked Blake.

"There'll be a collision now!" gasped Tom Merry. "Why did we trust Gussy at the tiller?"

Fortunately, there was not a collision. Blake, with great presence of mind, seized Arthur Augustus by the collar, and strewed him along the bottom of the boat. He grasped the lines in a hurry.

"Bai Jove!" gasped Arthur Augustus, as he collapsed into the bottom of the rocking boat. "Wha-a-at——"

"Hi! Look out!"

"You young idiots——"

"We're into them!"

The Old Bus, with Blake steering and the Terrible Three pulling, rocked out of danger. The launch glided by with about an inch to spare.

"You young asses!" roared St. Leger of the Fifth.

"You old asses!" retorted Herries.

"You ought to be playin' in a tub, not on a river!" howled Gilmore.

"Go and eat coke, you Fifth Form ass!" said Digby.

Cutts did not speak; he seemed too enraged to speak. He leaned over with a soda syphon in his hands.

The crew of the Old Bus were not expecting that.

Cutts raked them fore and aft, as it were, as the launch glided by.

The first jet caught Herries under the chin, and then the soda stream landed in Dig's eye. They roared. Then it fizzed upon Arthur Augustus as he sat dazedly in the bottom of the boat. Jack Blake caught it with his ear as he steered, and he gave a wild yell. The syphon gave a last gasp, and Cutts looked inclined to fling it after its contents, but St. Leger caught his arm in time.

Then the launch was past.

Four juniors sat in the rocking boat and roared. They streamed with soda-water.

From the disappearing launch came a shout of laughter. Cutts & Co. seemed satisfied by the way the episode had ended.

Arthur Augustus staggered to his feet.

"Gwoooogh! I am drenched! That uttah wottah has ruined my clothes! Oh ewumbs!"

"Ow! Wow!" mumbled Dig, rubbing his eye in anguish.

"Oh, the rotters! Wow!"

"Mmmmmmm!" came from Herries.

"Ha, ha, ha!" came from the bank. The Terrible Three seemed to find something entertaining in the incident—probably because they had had no share in the soda-water.

"Aftah them!" roared Arthur Augustus.

"Ass!" snorted Blake.

"I insist upon goin' aftah those scoundwels and givin' them a feahful thwashin' all wound!" shouted Arthur Augustus.

"How are you going after a steam-launch in this old tub?" shrieked Blake.

"Bai Jove! I nevah thought of that." Arthur Augustus jammed in his eyeglass, and stared after the launch, which had almost disappeared from sight among the numerous craft on the river. "Howevah, I am not goin' to allow that wuffian Cutts to assault me for nothin' and ruin my clobber!"

"Blow your clobber!"

"I wefuse to blow my clobber, Blake. I wegard those Fifth Form wottahs as havin' insulted us!"

"Brrrrrr!"

"I do not considah that an intelligible remark. Pway do not lose your tempah, Blake."

"It was all your fault!" roared Blake.

"Weally, dear boy——"

"All the same, I hope we shall see Cutts again on the river," said Blake savagely. "I'll give him dousing a chap in the ear with soda-water, the beast!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"You fellows wet?" called out Monty Lowther, from the

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bank. "This was the most unkindest Cutts of all, as Shakespeare very nearly said."

"Oh, blow Shakespeare, and blow you!" growled Blake, dabbing at his ear with his handkerchief. "It's down my neck!"

"It is all ovah me!" groaned Arthur Augustus. "I feel uttably howwid. I shall not be comfy again till I have had a bath. It is a dwawback on a boat that a fellow cannot have a bath."

"Why didn't you have a marble bath put on board?" snorted Blake.

"Weally, deah boy, there is no occasion to be snappish," said Arthur Augustus. "I twust you are not goin' to lose your tempah."

"Who's losing his temper?" bawled Blake.

"Pway do not wear at me, Blake. You are vewy well awah of my objection to bein' woreed at."

Jack Blake did not answer in words. With a disaster narrowly escaped, and soda-water down his neck, he was in a mood rather for actions than for words. He made a dive at Arthur Augustus, and got that noble youth's head in chancery.

"Yawoooooh!" roared Arthur Augustus.

"Look out!" shrieked Herries.

Blake had forgotten the rudder in his excitement. The Terrible Three were pulling steadily at the tow-rope. The rudder swung free, and the inevitable happened. Before Blake had bestowed more than one punch on Gussy's noble nose, the Old Bus was trying to climb the bank.

"Look out!" roared Tom Merry.

"Oh, my hat!" gasped Manners.

Crash!

"Yawooooop! Welcase me, you wuffian!"

"Great pip!"

Blake and Herries, Arthur Augustus and Digby rolled along the boat, entangled in a sail, a couple of boathooks, a spirit-stove, a number of bags, and, in fact, all sorts and conditions of stores and boat furniture.

"Well, they've done it now!" said Monty Lowther.

They had!

From the inextricable heap in the stern of the boat rose a chorus of fiendish yells. The Terrible Three shoved the boat off the bank, and the heap rolled again. Herries and Digby extracted themselves from it in a dazed state, and Herries further made frantic efforts to extract himself from a coil of rope which somehow had wound itself lovingly around him. Digby, in anguish too deep for words, strove to recover the butter from the inside of his collar.

In the midst of the havoc, Blake was still punching Arthur Augustus' noble nose. In that he seemed to find solace.

"Stop it!" roared Tom Merry, jumping into the boat.

"You thumping asses, chuck it!"

He seized Blake by the neck, and fairly dragged him away from Arthur Augustus.

"He asked for it, didn't he?" gasped Blake.

"Fathead! Look at the boat!"

"Bother the boat!"

"Everything's upset——"

"Blow everything!"

"You silly Fourth Form ass!"

"You blithering Shell cuckoo!"

"Look here——"

"Look here——"

Arthur Augustus staggered up. The repose which stamps the east of Vere de Vere was gone now. Arthur Augustus was wrathful. His wrath, indeed, exceeded that of Achilles of old, to Greece the direful spring of woes unnumbered. His noble nose had been punched—hard! Heedless of all other considerations, Arthur Augustus rushed at Blake of the Fourth, and smote.

"Whooooop!" roared Blake.

Apparently, on the ground that Gussy had asked for it, Blake had expected him to take it with resignation. Instead of which Arthur Augustus smote Blake on the nose with such force that Blake went backwards over the gunwale as if a mule had kicked him.

Splash!

CHAPTER 3. Not Drowned.

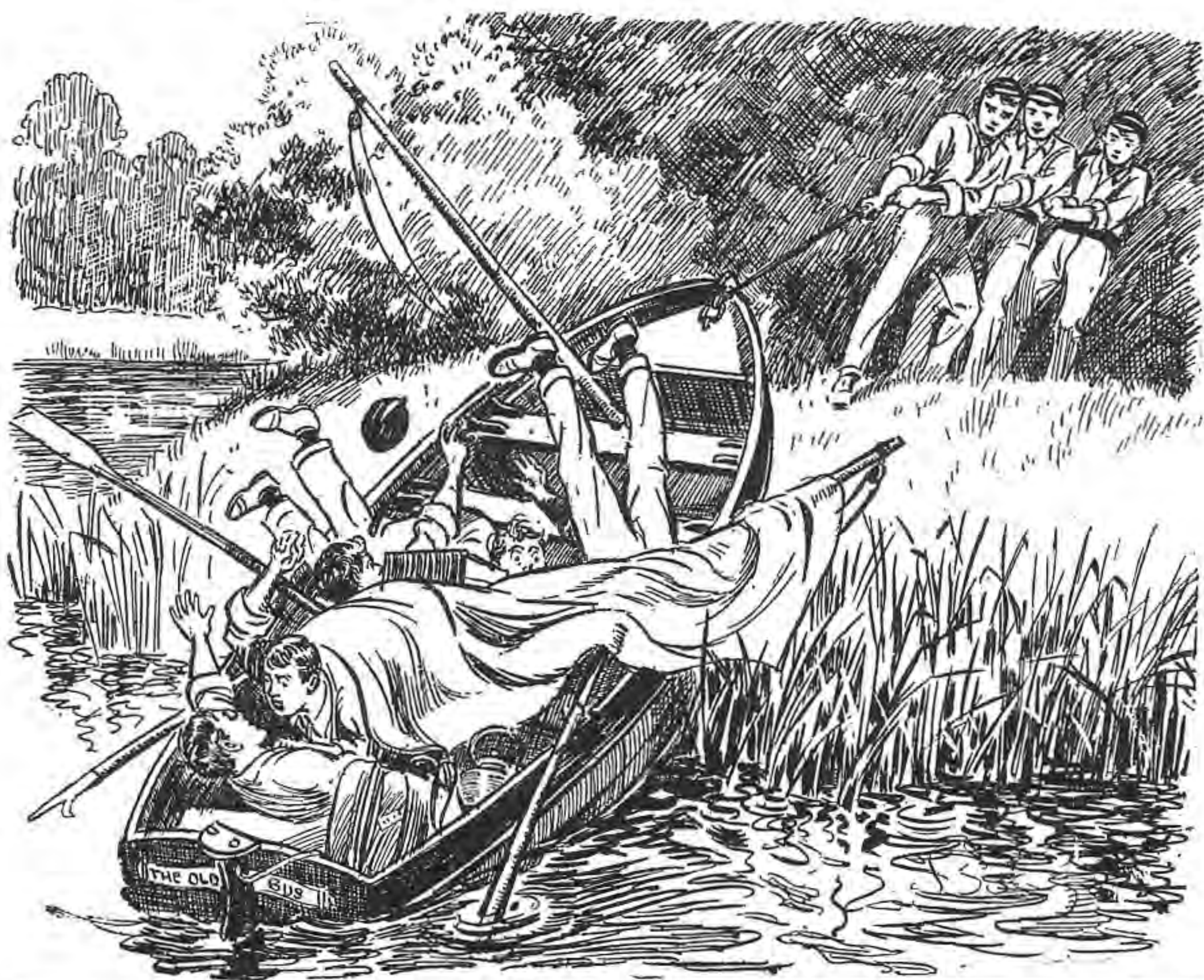
SPLASH!

"Man overboard!" sang out Monty Lowther, from the bank.

"Bai Jove!"

"Well, perhaps a dip will cool his temper," remarked Tom Merry philosophically. "Get the boat to rights."

As Blake of the Fourth was a good swimmer, nobody worried about his taking a dip. Only Arthur Augustus watched for him to reappear, with the warlike intention of punching his nose again as soon as that nose was within reach.



Forgetting for the moment that he was in charge of the rudder, Blake made a dive at Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, and got that noble youth's head in chancery. Before Blake had bestowed more than one punch on Gussy's noble nose, the Old Bus was trying to climb the bank. There was a chorus of fiendish yells as the St. Jim's juniors went sprawling in the bottom of the boat. (See page 4.)

But Blake did not reappear.

He had gone right under when he fell into the Thames, and to Gussy's surprise and alarm his head did not come up to the surface by the boat. The wrath faded out of Gussy's excited face.

"I—I say, where's Blake?" he ejaculated.

"In the water, I suppose," said Tom Merry. "Lend a hand with these things, and don't stand blinking like a moulting owl."

"He hasn't come up!"

"Bew-wow!"

"Bai Jove! He must be ddownin'!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus in great alarm. "He has been undah watah a full minute."

"Give him another," said Monty Lowther. "Why shouldn't a fellow take his time when he's on a holiday?"

Monty Lowther had a full view of Blake at that moment. The current had caught Blake as he rose, and he had come up beyond the stern of the Old Bus. Now he was in the strip of water between the boat and the bank, and for reasons of his own, was keeping below the gunwale. He bestowed a wink on Monty Lowther.

Arthur Augustus, looking for him on the other side of the boat, naturally did not see him, and was alarmed.

"I'm goin' in for him!" he exclaimed.

"Go it!" said Tom Merry. "A wash will do you good." Splash!

Arthur Augustus was in the water, diving deep. It was nearly a minute before he came up, puffing and blowing. He clung on to the boat on the river side.

"I—I can't find him, deah boys!"

"Go hon!"

"He must be ddowned!"

"Impossible!" said Monty Lowther. "You know the proverb—chaps who are born to be hanged can't be drowned."

"Weally, Lowthah, this is not a time for your wotten jokes. Poor old Blake!"

Arthur Augustus almost collapsed into the boat. Deeply he repented him of that hasty blow.

"Oh cwumbs!" groaned Arthur Augustus. "Poor old Blake must be ddowned! He can't possibly have stayed undah the watah all this time without bein' ddowned."

"That's so!" agreed Tom Merry. "But let's get the boat straight."

"What does the boat mattah at such a time as this, Tom Mewwy?" yelled Arthur Augustus.

"Lots! We're not going to chuck our holiday, I suppose?" said the captain of the Shell.

"Bai Jove! Do you still feel inclined for a holiday aftah what has happened, Tom Mewwy?"

"Why not?"

"I wegard you as a heartless beast. I am going to call for help, and have the wivah dwagged."

"Oh, my hat! Better get in, Blake," said Tom Merry.

"What!" yelled Arthur Augustus.

On the landward side of the boat Jack Blake cheerily grasped the gunwale and pulled himself in, dripping. Arthur Augustus stared at him like a fellow in a dream.

"Bai Jove! You're not ddowned, Blake?" he gasped.

"Well, a fellow couldn't say for certain," said Blake thoughtfully. "My impression is that I'm not. What do you think, Dig?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Bai Jove! You got wound the boat on purpose, Blake, to pull my leg!" roared Arthur Augustus with renewed wrath.

"Dear me!" said Blake. "How does Gussy think of these things?"

"You were twickin' me, you wottah!"

"He's got it!" said Blake. "It's really dawned on him! What a brain!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You have caused me to jump into the wivah for nothin', Blake."

"Not for nothing," said Blake cheerily. "You gave me a drenching, and I've given you one. See?"

"Bai Jove! You thought I should go in for you?"

"Knowing what an ass you are, old chap, I hadn't any doubt about it," assented Blake. "Don't you always do the most fatheaded thing you can think of?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Arthur Augustus drew a deep breath.

"I wegard you as an unfeelin' beast, Blake. I have a gweat mind nevah to speak to you again."

"Stick to it," said Blake encouragingly. "I'm afraid that's too good to be true. But try."

"Wats!"

"When you Fourth-Form kids have done wagging your chins, shall we get on?" asked Manners politely.

"Go and eat coke!"

"We had bettah camp pwetty soon," said Arthur Augustus. "I certainly cannot pwocceed till I have changed my clothes."

"There's a backwater a bit farther on where we can camp," said Tom Merry.

"Most likely belongs to some river-hog, with a board up for trespassers," growled Herries.

"We'll chance it."

Fortunately, the little backwater was one of the few spots on the Thames where no notice-board threatened the owner's fellow-countrymen with all the pains and penalties of the law. The Old Bus was tooled into it, and behind a screen of shady trees Arthur Augustus was able to change. In new, dry raiment, looking a thing of beauty and a joy for ever, the swell of St. Jim's fully recovered his good temper and his repose of manner, and, Blake by that time having recovered also, it was quite a jolly tea-party that sat under the trees.

But all the seven juniors agreed that Cutts of the Fifth was the cause of all the trouble, and they agreed that if they came upon Gerald Cutts again, during their voyage of discovery up the Thames, they would make Gerald Cutts thoroughly sorry for himself.

CHAPTER 4.

Too Humorous!

"STAINES is quite a histowic place."

Six juniors groaned in chorus.

Arthur Augustus adjusted his eyeglass with care. The St. Jim's crew were preparing to restart after the interval, so to speak, when the Honourable Arthur Augustus imparted the important information that Staines was a place of historic interest.

"Anythin' the mattah with you fellows?" asked Arthur Augustus, as the groans greeted his noble ears.

"Yes. We've got the same complaint as the Philistines," said Monty Lowther.

"Bai Jove! What was the mattah with the Philistines, Lowthab?"

"I'm referring to the time when Samson went for them," explained Lowther.

"And what did they suffah fwom then?"

"The jawbone of an ass!"

It required a minute of reflection for Arthur Augustus to absorb this. Then he frowned.

"If you are weferrin' to my wemarks as the jawbone of an ass, Lowthab—" he began hotly.

"All the crocks aboard!" asked Blake. "By the way, we've got to look out at Staines—the tow-path changes over, or something."

"You are intewwuptin' me, Blake."

"Dear old man, how can it be helped?" asked Blake. "A chap must either interrupt you or go dumb."

"I wegard that wemark as asinine. I have been weadin' up the topogwaphy of the wivah, in ordah to explain to you fellows as we go along. I twust you do not feel indiffewent to the histowy of this glowious wivah," said Arthur Augustus severely. "As I was wemarkin', Staines is a vewy histowic place."

"We've got to have it," said Tom Merry, laughing. "Go it, Gussy, and get it over."

"Bai Jove! That is a wathah wotten way of weferrin' to the valuable infowmation I have wead up to enlighten you fellows. Staines has existed evah since the what-do-you-call-it centuwy, and there is a famous thingumy there, as well as a vewy intewwestin' what's-the-name. I think we ought to land at Staines and look at those histowic things."

"We ought," agreed Monty Lowther solemnly. "I should never forgive myself if I missed the thungumy, not to mention the thingumbob."

"I am vewy glad to see you so keen, Lowthab. There is also a place near Staines where King What's-his-name signed the What-you-call-it. It is called somethin' or other, you know."

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"Runnymede, by any chance?" inquired Manners blandly.

"That's it, deah boy," assented Arthur Augustus. "And the king's name was, I believe, John."

"I believe it was," grinned Manners.

"The jollay old bawons, you know, faihly cornahed him at Wunnymede, and made him sign the Magna Charta," said Arthur Augustus. "I don't suppose his signature was worth much, as King John was wathah a slippewy customah. But it is vewy histowic. One of my ancestahs was there at the time."

"My hat! Your aunts must be jolly old, then," said Monty Lowther in surprise.

"Eh! I was not weferrin' to my aunts, Lowthab."

"But your aunt's sisters are your aunts, aren't they?"

"Weally, Lowthab, I was not speakin' of my aunt's sisters. I was speakin' of my ancestahs," said Arthur Augustus stiffly. "This is not a subject for wotten jokes. I think we ought to have a look at Wunnymede, you fellows."

"Well, we can look at it," agreed Tom Merry. "Nothing to land for—the fun's over, you know. King John cleared out long ago."

"I am quite awah of that, Tom Mewwy. But considewin' that the great charta was signed there—Magna Charta, you know—"

"Who's towing?"

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—"

"What we really want is a magna carter," said Monty Lowther regretfully. "A great carter could tow us as easily as winking."

"Bai Jove! Is that a wotten pun, Lowthab?"

"Not at all. It is a jolly good one."

"There is also a stone at Staines," said Arthur Augustus, drawing upon his well-stored memory, recently crammed.

"Only one?" asked Blake.

"Only one histowic stone, Blake. It is called London Stone, and it marks the spot where—where—where—" Arthur Augustus rubbed his noble nose. "I am suah that it marks a vewy particulah spot, but I cannot quite wecall what."

"Don't trouble," said Blake kindly. "We can give it a miss in baulk. I suppose I'd better take the rope; you fellows would bung us on the bank again."

The Terrible Three glared at Blake.

"Bung you on the bank! Why, you ass, it was your steering—"

"What Fourth Form kids call steering," said Manners.

"Oh, don't argue," said Blake. "Let's get on. I'd rather tow than hear Gussy on objects of historic interest!"

"Bai Jove!"

Blake and Herries took the tow-rope, and Tom Merry steered. The Old Bus rolled on to Staines.

Arthur Augustus seemed very busy. He was rooting up and down the boat, looking into bags, and among the stores, and seemingly growing a little excited. Monty Lowther, seated in the stern, watched him with interest.

"Looking for anything?" he asked at last.

"Yaas, wathah! Have you seen a book?"

"What sort of book?"

"A wathah big book, deah boy. My 'Guide to the Thames fwom Source to Sea!' " explained Arthur Augustus. "I am goin' to wead up Wunnymede, and tell you fellows all about it."

"I wonder where it is," remarked Lowther thoughtfully, settling himself a little more firmly on the volume in question, which was on his seat.

"I saw it a short time ago," said Arthur Augustus. "I twust it was not left ashore. You fellows are vewy careless."

"I don't think it was left ashore," said Lowthab gravely. "I seem to feel that it's on the boat."

"I twust so. But where can it have got to?" asked the perplexed swell of the Fourth.

"Oh, where and oh, where can it be?" sang Monty Lowther softly.

"Pewwahs you fellows would like to help me look for it?"

"Perhaps!" assented Lowther. "But as that inky chap at Greyfriars would say, the perhapsfulness is terrific!"

"I twust you are not goin' to slack awound while I am huntin' for a book to give you useful information."

"What a trustful nature!" said Lowther. And Tom Merry and Manners and Digby chuckled.

Only Arthur Augustus was unaware that Monty Lowther was sitting on the missing volume. That circumstance did not occur to Gussy's powerful brain. He rooted through the boat from one end to the other, and then from the other end to the one, so to speak. But the volume remained undiscovered. He turned out the lockers, and looked in the bags, and peeped into the folds of the folded sail, growing very warm and exasperated.

He gave it up at last, breathing hard.

"I shall not be able to tell you fellows anythin' more about Wunnymede," he said.

"You don't say so!" ejaculated Lowther.



"Bai Jove!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus D'Arcy in great alarm. "Blake has been undah watah a full minute. He must be dwownin'. I'm goin' in for him." In less than a minute he had divested himself of his jacket and boots and was ready for the plunge. Meanwhile, the supposed drowning Blake was hanging on to the gunwale of the Old Bus, smiling cheerfully. (See page 5.)

"I don't think you'll find it this side of Staines," said Monty Lowther. "But keep on looking. I like watching you."

"Wats!"

There was a stir in the Old Bus at Staines, where the tow-path changes to the Surrey bank. Monty Lowther rose from his seat, and there was a shout from Arthur Augustus.

"Bai Jove! There it is!"

"There what is?" asked Monty.

"My book! You've been sitting on it all the time."

"Great pip! I say, I've been sitting on that book all the time, you fellows!" exclaimed Lowther. "Fancy that!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Bai Jove! You funny ass, I believe you know that you were sittin' on my book, and you nevah told me!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus indignantly.

"I told you I felt it was still on the boat."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You uttah ass—"

"Besides, if I hadn't sat on the book I should have had to sit on you, old bean," said Lowther. "When you get historical you have to be sat on, you know."

Blake bawled from the shore.

"Are you silly chumps going to take us over, or are you silly chumps not going to take us over, or do you think we are going to fly across, or do you want to stay there till next term, or what?"

Monty Lowther looked at him.

"Did you speak, Blake?"

"You—you—" gasped Blake.

"Say it over again."

Tom Merry chuckled, and steered into the bank. The tow-rope was thrown in, and it was just Arthur Augustus' luck to catch it with his neck. He sat down in the boat, coiled up in tow-rope, as Blake and Herries jumped aboard.

"Gwoogh! Wharrah you up to, you thumpin' ass?" he exclaimed.

Blake gave him a stare.

"Is that a conjuring trick, D'Arcy?" he asked. "Do you want us to knot the rope?"

"You uttah ass!" roared Arthur Augustus. "Certainly not!"

"Right-ho!" said Monty Lowther cheerily, and he ran the rope a little more round Gussy, and began to knot it.

"What are you doin', you sillay ass?" shrieked Arthur Augustus.

"Knotting the rope."

"Welease me at once! Do you think I want to be knotted up in a beastly tow-rope?" shrieked Arthur Augustus.

"But you said you wanted to," said Lowther in surprise.

"I appeal to you fellows. Didn't he say, certainly knot?"

"Ha, ha, ha! He did!"

"I did not!" raved Arthur Augustus.

"I did knot," corrected Lowther gently. "You were knotted—but I did knot."

"You uttah ass! I said certainly not—and when I say certainly not I mean certainly not, not certainly knot."

"Lucid, I must say," assented Lowther. "But you are certainly knotted now, if that's what you want."

"It is not!" yelled Arthur Augustus.

"It is three or four knots by this time!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Bai Jove!" Arthur Augustus wriggled wildly out of the tow-rope. "I believe you are playin' wotten twicks for the sake of makin' wotten puns, Lowthah! I have a gweat mind to punch your sillay nose!"

"Better not!" suggested Lowther.

"Wats! Pway dwy up! We've got to Staines now, you fellows—"

"You've got more than two stains," said Lowther, who was quite irrepressible when the punning humour seized him.

"That tow-rope wasn't very clean. You've got half a dozen stains."

"I wofuse to wecognise your wotten puns, Lowthah. A fellow who keeps on makin' puns ought to be—"

"Punished?" asked Lowther.

"By Jove, is that another wotten pun?"

"On the theory of making the punishment fit the crime," said Lowther, "a fellow whose job is punning ought to be sent to the Punjaub."

"Oh, chuck it!" implored Blake.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Certainly!" said Lowther, who had picked up the tow-rope, and he chucked it—the tow-rope.

Blake caught it—with his features.

"You frabjous chump!" he roared. "What are you pitching that blessed rope about for?"

"You asked me to chuck it," said Lowther, in a tone of injured patience.

Blake did not answer, but he collared the humorist of St. Jim's, and, with the help of Herries and Digby, up-ended him, and rubbed his nose on the floor-boards.

"Now will you chuck it?" he demanded.

"Yow-ow-ow!" roared Lowther.

"Ha, ha, ha!" chortled Arthur Augustus. "Wub his nose hard, deah boys. Can't you think of anothah pun about wubbin' a nose on the floor, Lowthah?"

"Leggo, you silly ass! I'll scalp you!"

But the Fourth-Formers sat on Lowther, while Tom Merry and Manners and D'Arcy toolled the boat across to the Surrey side. Then the too-humorous humorist was allowed to get up. But he was not so exasperated as might have been expected.

"The floor bored me," he explained.

"Wha-a-at!"

"Bai Jove! Floor-board—floor bored—that is another wotten pun!" said Arthur Augustus. "Give him some more."

Monty Lowther jumped ashore with the tow-rope.

CHAPTER 5.

Algy and Bertram get Wet.

ARTHUR AUGUSTUS D'ARCY was not allowed to land at Rannymede. Probably his comrades feared an historical disquisition. They knew, perhaps, as much as they wanted to know about King John, and the barons and Magna Charta. Monty Lowther, indeed, remarked that it was a barren subject, and sighed like an unappreciated genius when the wretched pun passed undetected.

The Old Bus rolled on to Datchet, and passed Old Windsor, and then Arthur Augustus had to be restrained by deady threats from giving a resume of the history of Eton College from its foundation to the present day.

In the pleasant summer evening the St. Jim's voyagers came along by Maidenhead, where, as Blake remarked, they felt like sardines in a tin, the river being crowded. Monty Lowther was steering just then. Arthur Augustus offered to take the lines, but as there was no desire to ram any of the light pleasure craft round about, his offer was declined.

"Look out, bargee!"

The juniors glanced round. Two extremely elegant young gentlemen in a light skiff, in spotless flannels, and expensive Panamas, were regarding the Old Bus with amused smiles as they hailed Lowther.

Arthur Augustus turned his eyeglass on them.

"You are undah a misappwehension," he said, with dignity. "this is not a barge."

"Not a barge?" asked one of the elegant youths. "My mistake! This is what comes of judgin' by appearances!"

"It isn't a barge," said the other young gentleman. "It's the original Noah's Ark. Can't you see the animals on board?"

"Bai Jove!"

"Well, barge, or Noah's Ark, take it out of sight," said the first young gentleman. "Keep clear, bargee, or Noah, or whatever you are!"

"Bai Jove! I wegard those fellows as two uttah boundahs!" said Arthur Augustus indignantly. "There's a feahful lot of bad mannahs on this wivah!"

"No, it's not a Noah's Ark," said the second young gentleman, regarding the roomy old boat with keen interest. "I was wrong, Algy. It's a London General Omnibus that's fallen into the dashed river!"

"Weally, you boundah—"

"I think you're right, Bertram," said Algy, with a nod. "Or do you think it's a pantechnicon?"

"I wegard you as insultin' wottahs!" roared Arthur Augustus. "I have a gveat mind to jump into your boat and thwash you!"

"Don't annoy the bargees, Algy," said Bertram.

"We are not bargees!" shrieked Arthur Augustus.

"Here, look out, you!" shouted Algy suddenly, his playful humour deserting him as Monty Lowther, with a gleam in his eye, pulled at the lines.

The Old Bus swung round.

Crash!

The little cockleshell containing Algy and Bertram danced on the heaving water, and there was a sudden collapse of Algy and Bertram. They sat down in their skiff, and it rocked the more. Quite a large wave invaded them, and there were dismal howls from the two young gentlemen as they were soaked to the skin.

Lowther glanced round.

"Dear me! Did we bump on anything?" he asked.

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"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Ow! I'm wet!" howled Algy. "Ow, ow!"

"Grooogh!" moaned Bertram.

The Old Bus rolled on, with a chuckling crew, leaving the skiff dancing like a cork, with at least a dozen gallons of the Thames on board. Algy and Bertram regained their feet, and shook furious fists after the boat. Then they seized their sculls, and sculled in pursuit, apparently bent on vengeance.

"Bai Jove! Was that an accident, Lowthah?" asked Arthur Augustus.

"More or less," smiled the steersman. "Rather less than more, perhaps. Accidents will happen when bounders are cheeky on the river."

"Yaas, wathah!" chuckled Arthur Augustus.

"They're after us!" grinned Blake.

"Let 'em come!"

The skiff pulled about three lengths to the Old Bus' one, so Algy and Bertram were soon close at hand. The St. Jim's juniors were quite ready for trouble. An empty sardine-tin sailed out of the Old Bus, and landed on Algy's chin, and he sat down once more, with a concussion that almost up-ended the skiff. Bertram lost his legs as it rocked, and sat down also.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The skiff lost way, and whirled round, and got in the way of two other craft coming along. Furious voices hailed Algy and Bertram, and ordered them to get clear, and asked them if they wanted all the river, and demanded to know whether they thought they were sailing a toy boat in a bath. The Old Bus rolled on cheerily, and the juniors left Algy and Bertram to it.

"I wathah think those two boundahs got more than they bargained for, you know," grinned Arthur Augustus. "It does not weally pay to have wotten bad mannahs, you know. Are we goin' thwough Boulta's Lock befoah we camp this evenin', deah boys?"

"We are," said Blake. "We'll hang up somewhere near Cookham."

"We've got new-laid eggs for supper—" began Monty Lowther.

Blake seized a boathook.

"If you say a word about the way to cook 'em, I'll brain you!" he said.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

And Monty Lowther, as his hands were busy with the lines, didn't.

Boulter's Lock was swarming, and the Old Bus was some time getting through. Amid the crowd of craft the juniors caught sight of Algy and Bertram, in their skiff, at a distance. Algy and Bertram got away far ahead of the Old Bus, and vanished up Cliveden Reach—too far off all the time for another sardine-tin to be sent to their address. Which was a matter of regret to the St. Jim's crowd, who were as annoyed with Algy and Bertram as with Cutts & Co. earlier in the day. Personal remarks on the subject of the Old Bus did not please Tom Merry & Co. It was true that their boat was not a thing of beauty, but it was a joy for ever; and, anyhow, it was theirs. So several of the juniors hoped that circumstances would land them, some time, within punching distance of the noses of Algy and Bertram.

The shades of night were falling fast, as a well-known poet has already remarked, when the juniors were through Cookham Lock. The scenery, in the summer sunset, was magnificent, and the St. Jim's fellows almost forgot supper in looking at it with keen enjoyment. But not quite. The claims of the inner man could not be disregarded.

"It's been a jolly day," remarked Blake, "and I'm fearfully hungry. Shall we tie up the boat and camp on board?"

"Bai Jove! I should like to stwetch my legs a little," said Arthur Augustus. "I would wathah camp in some nice meadow."

"There's a nobby little bung, with a nice garden," said Monty Lowther. "Let's try that."

Tom Merry looked doubtful.

"There isn't a board up, for a wonder," said Monty. "The Thames valley is chiefly populated by notice-boards; but somehow they've forgotten to put one up just there. How can trespassers know they are going to be prosecuted, if there isn't a notice-board to tell them so?"

"We might ask permission to camp, same as we used to when we were caravanning," remarked Manners.

"That's so," said Tom. "There's a little paddock next to the bungalow, and it's just the place, if they'd let us. We shouldn't damage their old paddock."

"Wathah not!"

"And we could back the Old Bus into that little back-water," said Blake. "It would just about fit."

Tom Merry considered the point. It was an ideal anchorage, and an ideal camping-place, if the owners of the bungalow could only see it. And why shouldn't they be hospitable? Hospitality is not entirely unknown, even among the owners of riverside property.

Certainly the spot was very pretty. It was quite a handsome little bungalow, with a green, trim lawn coming down to the waterside, and well-kept hedges and flower-beds. There was a little boathouse on the edge of a tiny back-water, and a grassy little paddock in which a well-fed pony grazed. The juniors regarded that grassy enclosure with anxious eyes. They liked the Old Bus, but they were eager to be ashore for the night after a day in the boat. Even in the roomy Old Bus, there was not too much room for seven fellows and their belongings.

“We'll ask,” said Tom Merry.

“Yaas, wathah! Better leave it to me,” suggested Arthur Augustus. “I will go up to the bung and ask permission.”

“You'll put your foot in it.”

“Weally, Blake”—Arthur Augustus carefully adjusted his eyeglass in his eye—“it is wisah to make a good impression on the people, if we are goin' to ask a favah. You can see that. As the only respectable membah of the partay—”

“What!”

“And as a fellow of tact and judgment, I think it had bettah be left to me.”

“Oh, go ahead!” said Tom Merry, laughing. “Jump!”

And Arthur Augustus jumped ashore, and went forward to act as ambassador.

CHAPTER 6.

“Timeo Danaos!”

TOM MERRY & Co., from the boat, watched Arthur Augustus as he proceeded on his mission. No doubt Arthur Augustus was fittest to act as ambassador. All the other fellows showed traces of a day's navigation; but somehow the swell of St. Jim's still looked as if he had just stepped out of a bandbox.

Arthur Augustus opened a little gate, and trod gracefully up a gravel path towards the bungalow. A gardener, with a hose, was attending to the flower-beds. He glanced at Arthur Augustus, but did not speak.

The swell of St. Jim's walked on towards the house, preparing his most gracious smile and insinuating manners for the bungalow-dwellers.

He had almost reached the house when the french windows opened and two or three fellows stepped out into the garden.

Tom Merry uttered a startled exclamation.

“Cutts, by Jove!”

“Oh, my hat!” said Blake.

“What rotten luck!” growled Herries. “No camping here for us!”

Cutts, St. Leger, and Gilmore, of the St. Jim's Fifth Form, were the fellows who emerged from the french windows. All three of them were smoking cigarettes—evidently allowing themselves, in vacation, a little freedom that was barred at St. Jim's. Two more elegant figures could be dimly seen at the open windows.

Arthur Augustus stopped.

The juniors had not the faintest idea as to who might be the dweller in that riverside bungalow. Certainly it had never crossed their minds that Cutts & Co. were there. There was nothing surprising in it, of course; but, naturally, it had not occurred to them.

Any other ambassador than Arthur Augustus would have scudded back to the boat at once, knowing what to expect from the Fifth-Formers. But Arthur Augustus had his own manners and customs.

Cutts & Co. stared at him, evidently surprised to see him there. The swell of the Fourth crossed over towards them, and raised his hat politely.

“Fancy meetin' you heah, Cutts!” he said.

“What the thump are you after?” demanded Cutts.

“Lookin' for a camp.”

“What!” ejaculated St. Leger.

“Of course, we were not awah that you fellows were heah,” explained Arthur Augustus. “But it does not make any difference, of course.”

“Doesn't it make any difference?” said Cutts.

“Not at all. You acted like a beast on the wivah, in that disgustin' launch, but in the cires we are pwepared to ovah-look your wotten conduct!” said Arthur Augustus graciously.

“Oh gad!” said Gilmore.

“Come back, Gussy!” bawled Blake.

At every moment Tom Merry & Co. expected to see Cutts & Co. collar the ambassador, and hurl him into the river. At school the juniors were on the worst of terms with Cutts & Co., and the meeting on the river that day had not increased their mutual esteem.

But Gussy did not come back.

It was one of Gussy's little ways to attribute to others his own—lofty nobility of mind—a little way that often landed him into trouble. He smiled cheerily at Cutts & Co.

“Pway let bygones be bygones, deah boys!” he said. “We ovahlook the whole thing!”

“Come back, Gussy, you ass!”

Gussy did not heed.

“As a St. Jim's fellow, Cutts, natuwallly you will be willin' to let a St. Jim's partay camp heah in the paddock,” he said.

Cutts of the Fifth seemed to be thinking. There was a smile on his face, but it was not a pleasant smile.

“So you're lookin' for a camp?” he said.

“Yaas, wathah!”

“You'd like to hang up here for the night?”

“Yaas.”

“Well,” said Cutts gravely, “we're only guests here. We must

arrange it with the proprietor. But, of course, as a St. Jim's fellow, you can rely upon my doin' my best for you!”

St. Leger and Gilmore stared blankly at Cutts. They were astonished, and they looked it. But Arthur Augustus was not in the least astonished. This was the reply he would have made himself, in Cutts' place, so what was there to be astonished at?

“You're vewy good, deah boy!” he said.

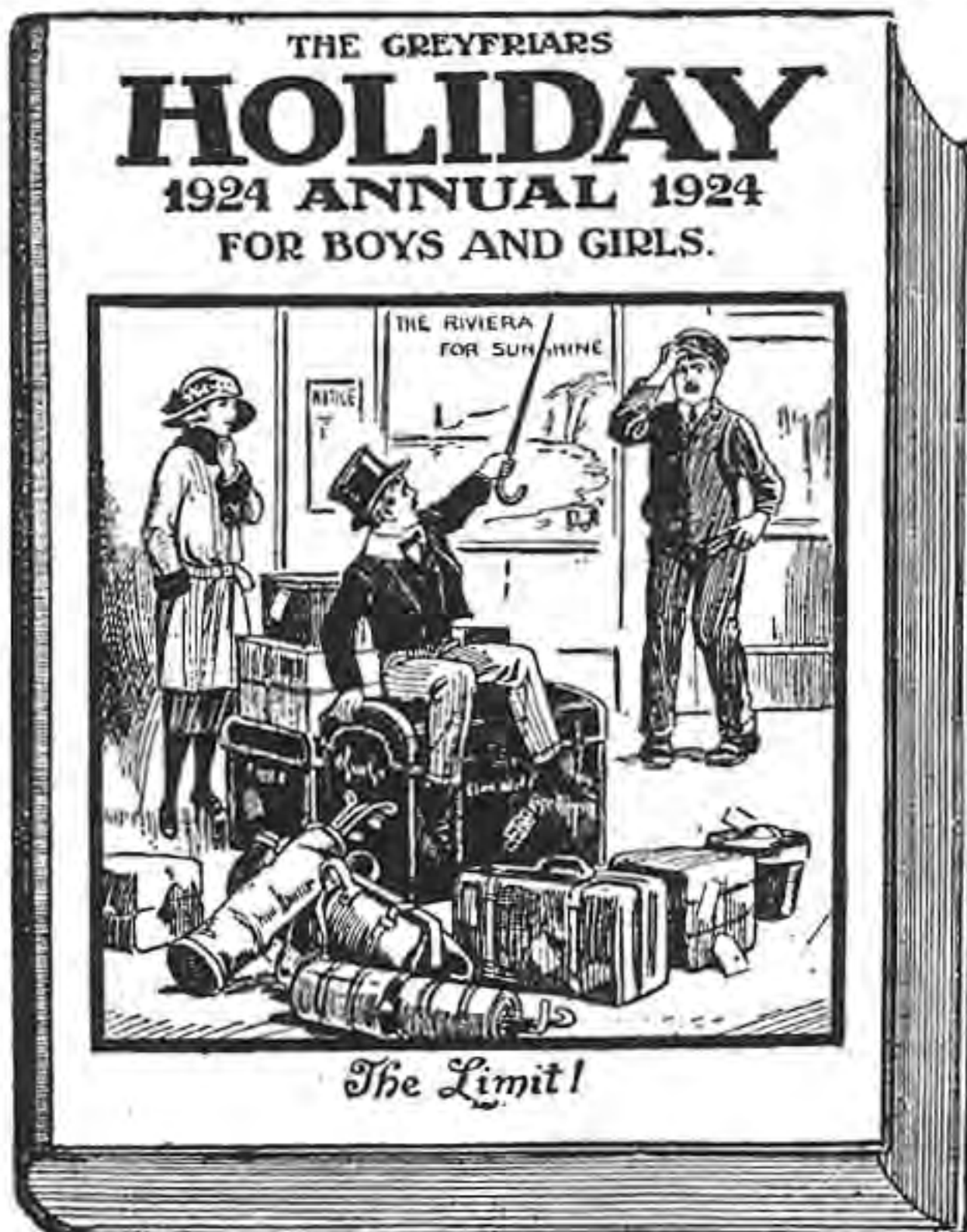
“Not at all. Just hang on a minute, while I speak to De Jones,” said Cutts.

“Yaas, wathah!”

“You see, our friends De Jones and Smythe-Percy have taken this bung for the season, and we're only guests,” said Cutts. “I'm sure they'll be glad of such an addition to the party.”

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"I shall be delighted to make their acquaintance, deah boy!" said Arthur Augustus unsuspiciously.

Cutts looked back at the open french window, and called: "Come here, will you, you fellows?"

"Anythin' goin' on?" came a yawning voice from within, and Arthur Augustus started slightly.

He was aware that he had heard that voice before.

An elegant youth stepped out. It was Algy—the superb Algy who had criticised the Old Bus on the river at Maidenhead, and whose gorgeous summer raiment had been soaked by Thames water. Even Arthur Augustus realised that this encounter was unfortunate.

Algy stared at the swell of St. Jim's.

"You!" he howled.

"You've seen the kid before, De Jones?" asked Cutts, in surprise.

"Seen him?" said Algy de Jones. "I should say so! It's one of that bargee gang that swamped us, that I told you about."

Bertram stepped out into view. Bertram Smythe-Percy stared at Arthur Augustus as offensively as Algernon de Jones.

"One of that low gang!" he exclaimed.

"Weally, you fellows——"

"Oh, my hat!" groaned Blake, staring from the boat. "We've woke up a regular hornets' nest, and no mistake! Why doesn't that born idiot cut and run while he's got time?"

But it did not seem to occur to Arthur Augustus to go while the going was good. No doubt he was relying upon Gerald Cutts' patriotism as a St. Jim's fellow. That was a rotten reed for anybody to rely upon.

"What's the tramp doin' here?" demanded Algy.

"Tell the gardener to kick him out!" said Bertram.

"Bai Jove!"

"Hold on!" said Cutts, with a wink at his friends, unseen by Arthur Augustus. "This kid belongs to our school, De Jones. He's a fag in the Fourth Form, and he naturally thinks that Fifth-Form chaps are pleased to see him on vacation."

St. Leger grinned, and Gilmore chuckled.

"But——" began Algy.

Cutts drew his friends aside, and spoke in a low voice. He had spoken only a few words when De Jones and Smythe-Percy broke into a chortle.

"Oh, good!" said De Jones.

"Top-hole!" said Smythe-Percy.

Gerald Cutts came over to Arthur Augustus, who was waiting dubiously for the outcome of the whispered conference.

"It's all serene," he said. "My friends were a bit annoyed about somethin' that happened on the river, but it's all right. As friends of mine, they're keen—in fact, eager—to be hospitable to St. Jim's fags."

"We are not exactly fags, Cutts——"

"My mistake—I mean St. Jim's fellows," said Cutts gracefully. "It's all right, I tell you. The paddock is at your service. Camp there as long as you like, and we'll do anythin' we can to help."

"Stay as long as you jolly well please!" said Algy de Jones. "The only thing I'm afraid of is that you won't stop so long as I'd like!"

"Bai Jove, that is vewy kind of you!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus. "I feel bound to expvess my wegwet for that little disagreement on the wivah this aftahnoon."

"My dear fellow, we've forgotten all about it already," said Smythe-Percy, with a wave of the hand. "We shall be simply delighted to see you campin' in our paddock!"

"Thank you vewy much!"

"Not at all. Fetch your friends ashore. There's a gate to the paddock next the boathouse. I'll go and get it open for you."

"This is weally wippin' of you, deah boys!" said Arthur Augustus gratefully, and he walked back to the boat in high feather.

"Jump on, you ass!" said Blake. "I wonder they let you get away without scalping you. We've got to look for a camp before dark——"

"We are goin' to camp heah, Blake."

"Fathead!"

"Weally, Blake——"

"You don't mean to say that those fellows have given us permission to camp in the paddock?" exclaimed Tom Merry, in astonishment.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Well, my hat!" ejaculated Tom.

"It's all wight, deah boys. I put it to Cutts, as a St. Jim's fellow, and he played up like a little man!" said Arthur Augustus reassuringly. "The bung belongs to those two

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chaps, De Jones and Smythe-Percy, and they assure me that we are vewy welcome. Cutts talked them ovah, I think. Smythe-Percy has gone to open the gate of the paddock for us."

Tom Merry glanced ashore, and saw Bertram Smythe-Percy at the gate. He was opening it wide for the newcomers, and he waved a gracious hand at Tom as he caught his glance.

"Well, this beats it!" said Dig.

"It do—it does!" said Herries. "I—I suppose it's all square. I don't trust Cutts!"

"Weally, Hewwies——"

"Well, I suppose even Cutts can be decent at times," said Tom Merry, rather perplexed. "We're not on good terms with him at St. Jim's; but in his place we'd play up."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Anyhow, they can't eat us!" said Monty Lowther. "Let's get the jolly old barge moored."

"What do you think, Manners?" asked Tom.

Manners shook his head.

"Timeo Danaos et dona ferentes," he answered. "As the jolly old Trojan remarked in Virgil, I fear the Greeks when they bring gifts."

"Oh, don't spout Latin tags now, when we're all hungry!" said Blake. "Let's get moving!"

Manners had his doubts; but even Manners did not suggest rejecting the proffered hospitality of Cutts & Co. Indeed, all the juniors were feeling a little shamefaced with regard to Cutts. They had hoped for another meeting, to punch him; and when the meeting came about, here he was offering hospitality! It was a case of coals of fire being heaped on their heads, and it made them feel rather remorseful.

They determined to be very civil indeed to Cutts, and even to put up with any amount of "Fifth-Form swank" without demur.

The Old Bus was backed into the little stream, and hooked on to the boathouse landing-stage. Tom Merry & Co. jumped ashore, and entered the paddock by the gate.

Smythe-Percy had gone back to the house, and was standing on the lawn in front of the bungalow with the other fellows, all of them smiling. Cutts came down to the party in the field, however.

"Make yourselves at home, you fellows," he said. "Anythin' we can do?"

"You're awfully good!" said Tom Merry. "Could you let us have a supply of fresh water? We'll fetch it, of course."

"Don't trouble; I'll tell the gardener to give you all the fresh water you want. Get your things ashore, and make yourselves comfortable."

"We're no end obliged——"

"Oh, don't mench!"

And Cutts, with a cheery nod, walked back to his friends, stopping to speak to the gardener on the way. The gardener gave quite a jump as Cutts spoke to him, and then he nodded and grinned. Meanwhile, Tom Merry & Co. were busy preparing their camp.

CHAPTER 7.

A Wash-Out!

TOM MERRY & CO. lost no time.

The sunset was dying away in the west, and there was not much daylight left. Oil-stove and spirit-stove, stores and cooking utensils were taken ashore. Blankets and rugs and other articles were landed. From the lawn, a dozen yards away, an interested group watched them, and the juniors could not help noticing that Cutts & Co. were in a state of considerable barely-suppressed merriment. There was nothing amusing, so far as the juniors could see, in their preparations for camping, but undoubtedly Algy and Bertram and the three Fifth-Formers of St. Jim's were greatly entertained. Blake gave a suspicious glance towards the merry group.

"Think those fellows are up to something?" he asked.

"What could they be up to?" asked Tom.

"Blessed if I know! I don't like their looks."

"Weally, Blake, isn't that wathah distwustful?" asked Arthur Augustus D'Arcy chidingly. "It appeahs to me that they have been vewy kind indeed, especially aftah the twouble we had with them on the wivah!"

"Well, I suppose it's all right," said Blake.

"The gardener hasn't brought the water supply along," said Dig.

"Here he comes."

The gardener, with quite a curious expression on his weather-beaten face, was coming from the garden into the paddock. He did not carry a bucket of water, as the juniors expected. Instead of that, he was trailing the garden-hose, with his thumb on the nozzle.

"The duffer can't be going to give us the water from the hose, can he?" said Manners.



Swish! Swoooosh! Sizzle! The hose, held by the grinning gardener, and turned on at full force, hurled a stunning stream of water on the helpless group of campers. It swept over them in a torrent. In a moment every member of the St. Jim's party was drenched to the skin, and staggering under the powerful sweep of the water. A chorus of wild howls arose. (See this page.)

Tom Merry started.

Behind the gardener, as he advanced with the lengthening hose, came Cutts & Co. and Bertram and Algy. They were no longer grinning—they were laughing loud.

"My hat!" exclaimed Tom. "Is it possible——"

He broke off. Even now that the truth was beginning to be clear, he hesitated to believe Cutts guilty of such treachery.

"Bai Jove! I——"

"You fellows waitin' for the water?" called out Cutts.

"Yes."

"Here it comes. Go it, Perkins!"

The gardener, grinning, went it.

Swish! Swoooosh! Sizzle!

The hose, turned on at full force, hurled a stunning stream of water on the hapless group of campers.

It swept over them in a torrent.

In a moment, every member of the St. Jim's party was drenched to the skin, and staggering under the powerful sweep of the water. A chorus of wild howls arose.

"Yawwooh! You tweachewous villain, Cutts——"

"Wow, wow!"

"Grooogh!"

"Oh, my hat!"

"Yow-ow-ow! Grrrrrrrrr!"

Swish, swish! Swoooooosh!

"Go for the beasts!" yelled Blake desperately.

He caught up a saucepan, and made a furious rush towards the enemy. Cutts grabbed the hose from Perkins, and played it with deadly accuracy. The torrent caught Blake under the chin, and swept him backwards.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Algy. "Go it, Gerald!"

"Give it to the cads!" shrieked Bertram, in huge delight.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Hook it!" gasped Tom Merry. "We can't stand this!"

"Oh cwumbs!"

"Ow! I—I—I'll——"

It was impossible to stand against the torrent. It drenched and blinded the hapless juniors when they attempted to rush on the enemy. It swept them off their feet, dazed and dizzy.

There was nothing for it but retreat.

Drenched and dripping, and followed up by the searching jet of water, the juniors broke into a run for their boat.

They scrambled out of the paddock, with the water still playing on them at full force.

Gasping and spluttering, the hapless campers scrambled back on board the Old Bus, which fortunately was out of reach of the hose.

"Oh, cwumbs!" gasped Arthur Augustus, as he rolled into the boat. "Jevvah heah of such howwid tweachewy, you fellows?"

"Ow, ow! I'm wet!"

"Let's get off!" panted Tom Merry. "They'll get that dashed hose along here in a few minutes!"

"We've left our things ashore!" panted Blake.

"Can't be helped! We can't go back for them. I've had enough water!"

"Same here!"

Blake brandished clenched fists.

"We'll make those cads sit up for this! We—we'll——"

"Don't waste time, old chap. If they get the hose on us here, we shall have the boat swamped."

"Yaas, wathah! Get goin'! Ow!"

No time was lost. The moorings were cast off, and the Old Bus punted out of the little backwater into the river. It was only just in time. Cutts of the Fifth was coming round the boathouse, and a spray of water caught the juniors as the boat glided out. Fortunately, a tin of peaches, hurled by Blake, caught Cutts under the chin, and he sat down suddenly on the hose. It was a waste of canned fruit, but the juniors did not regret it.

"Throw their rubbish after them!" shouted Algy de Jones.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The Old Bus, out in the river, floated past the trim garden and lawn of the bungalow. Cutts & Co. lined up on the bank, to pelt the passing boat with the camping materials. Spirit stove, and oil stove, blankets and rugs, and pots and pans rained into the boat. Some of them dropped into the river, and were irretrievably lost. But most of the bullets found billets; and the juniors yelled furiously under the volleying.

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They were glad to get back their property, but not in this way.

The Old Bus floated out of range, followed by yells of laughter from the enemy.

CHAPTER 8.

Seven on the Warpath.

"THE fweightful wottahs!"

"The cads!"

"Oh dear!"

"Grooogh!"

"Oh, my hat! What a life!" groaned Tom Merry.

There was a chorus of groans and lamentations in the Old Bus, moored under the willow-trees on the bank half a mile from the bungalow below Cookham. Not since they had started on their river voyage, had Tom Merry & Co. met with anything like such a disaster.

It really was overwhelming.

Darkness had fallen, and the juniors were wet, weary, supperless, and enraged. Wrath was the strongest feeling they had just then. It was not only that Cutts & Co. had defeated them and downed them. It was the black treachery of Cutts that rankled most; and their own simplicity in being taken in by it. As Blake groaned dolorously, they might have known better than to trust Gerald Cutts half an inch. They might have guessed that when the blackguard of St. Jim's invited them ashore, it was wisest to stay in the boat. But wisdom came too late.

"As a matter of fact, deah boys, we cannot blame ourselves," said Arthur Augustus. "I should weally be ashamed to suspect a St. Jim's fellow of such howwid twickewy."

"I don't own those cads as St. Jim's fellows," growled Manners. "I wish the Head knew as much about them as we do—they wouldn't get back to St. Jim's next term. Cutts ought to have been sacked long ago. I'll bet they're at that bung for some of their shady blackguardism—card-playing and smoking, and so on."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"They've beaten us to the wide," said Tom Merry. "It really isn't our fault—we couldn't have looked for such a dirty trick. But, my hat! I feel awfully wet and rotten!"

"I'm hungry!" mumbled Herries.

"We are all hungry, I think," said Arthur Augustus. "We had bettah get some suppah on the boat. I shall have to change my clobbah befoah I can lend a hand."

"Bless your clobbah!" granted Herries.

"Weally, Hewwies—"

"And Cutts & Co. are grinning and chortling over this, as well as those two tailor's dummies they're staying with!" said

Blake, between his teeth. "They fancy they've seen the last of us. They haven't."

"No fear!" said Tom. "We're not going any further up the river till we've handled Cutts."

"Good egg!"

"Supper first," said Tom. "Cutts will keep, and supper won't. We can't go scrambling ashore in the dark looking for a camp—let's manage it in the boat."

"It is wathah wotten—" began Arthur Augustus.

"Can't be helped. We'll make them sit up for it."

"I mean, it is wathah wotten that a lot of my baggage was left behind. What am I to change into?"

"You can't change into an ass," remarked Monty Lowther. "You're one already."

"Weally, Lowthah, you know vewy well that I mean, what clobbah can I change into. My othah flannels are in need of a wash, as I have changed once-to-day, and I do not think I had bettah put on my evenin' clothes on this old boat. But—"

"Let's all sit round and discuss Gussy's clothes!" suggested Dig, with deep sarcasm.

But sarcasm was wasted on the Honourable Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

"That's vewy kind of you, Dig," he said. "I shall be glad for you fellows to advise me. It is wathah a pwoblem, isn't it?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Weally, you fellows—"

No doubt it was a problem, but Arthur Augustus was left to solve it on his own. The other fellows seemed to think that there were more pressing matters on hand.

They stripped off their drenched clothing, and rubbed down with towels, and donned the first clothes that came to hand in the dark, with the doubtful assistance of a dim lantern. Then they prepared supper in the boat. Eggs were boiled on the spirit-stove, which fortunately had landed on board when hurled by Gerald Cutts. Blake filled the kettle from the water-keg; and the water ran over him, by which means he discovered that a hole had been knocked in the kettle. Blake breathed deeply, and changed the kettle for a saucepan.

Supper was ready at last, such as it was. But the juniors could have eaten anything by that time, and they devoured eggs, some of them underdone and some of them overdone, and bread-and-butter, and cheese, and biscuits, and washed down the scrappy meal with cocoa. After which they felt better, though still in a ferocious humour towards Cutts & Co.

"We've lost a good many things," Tom Merry remarked. "We shall have to do some shopping at Marlow to-morrow. A lot of the crocks went into the water. Now, do you fellows feel inclined to turn in, or to scalp Cutts & Co.?"

"Scalp Cutts!" was the unanimous reply.

"The blankets and rugs are soaked, too," said Blake. "They won't be dry to-night. We can dry them in the sun to-morrow, but that won't help us now. My idea is to deal with Cutts, and then get on up the river; there'll be a good moon a bit later on."

"That's a good wheeze," assented Tom Merry. "We can put in a snooze to-morrow if we want to. Now about Cutts!"

The seven St. Jim's fellows constituted themselves a council of war. Not one of the seven dreamed of leaving the locality before having dealt with the enemy. Undoubtedly Cutts & Co. supposed that they were gone for good; the Fifth-Formers were not at all likely to be expecting a visit. But a visit they were going to receive; Tom Merry & Co. were determined on that.

"There's seven of us," said Tom Merry, "and we can all put up a scrap—"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"There's five of that gang, and Cutts is pretty hefty, and St. Leger is plucky, but Gilmore isn't much of a fighting-man. And those two yawning cads, Algy and Bertram, don't look as if they could fight a tom-cat."

"We can handle them all right, if we get at them," said Blake.

"How about the servants in the house?" asked Dig. "Think they're likely to chip in?"

"Well, if they do, so much the worse for them," said Tom. "There can't be many in a little place like that; very likely only one man beside the gardener. But Cutts & Co. will cut up rusty, so we'd better take something along with us beside bare knuckles."

"That's so," said Lowther. "A boathook or two will help Cutts to see reason."

"We've got some sticks aboard," said Manners. "But I say, it's getting late. We don't want to rouse them out of bed."

"They're not early birds," said Tom. "If I know anything of Cutts, he will be sitting up past midnight with cards and cigarettes. We've seen him on a holiday before."

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"Yaas, wathah!"

"Still, we won't lose time; we've got about half a mile to go," said Tom Merry, rising from his seat. "Let's get off!"

The hour was growing late; a crescent of moon peeped out from behind clouds. The river was almost deserted, though every now and then a boat went along, and occasionally the sound of singing came through the shadows on the water, and once or twice the howl of a gramophone afloat in some merry craft.

The Old Bus was released from its moorings, and the juniors dropped down with the current towards Cookham. And when they drew near the De Jones bungalow, the lighted windows showed that, late as the hour was, Cutts & Co. were not thinking of bed yet.

"They're going it!" grinned Blake.

"And not expecting little us!" said Tom Merry. "It will be quite a pleasant surprise for them."

"Yaas, wathah!" chuckled Arthur Augustus.

The Old Bus was steered in to the bank, a score of yards above the bungalow. There it was made fast. Tom Merry

THE BIGGEST

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ON RECORD!

& Co. stepped ashore, each with a stick or a boathook in his hand.

"Quiet, now," murmured Tom Merry, as the party drew near the gate.

"Yaas, wathah! Don't you fellows begin talkin' now," said Arthur Augustus. "We don't want those wottahs to heah us and get on the alert, you know. Do you think I had bettah go ahead, Tom Mewwy?"

"I think you had better shut up."

"Weally, deah boy—"

"Quiet, ass!" growled Blake.

"Weally, Blake—"

"Is that image going to shut up?" asked Monty Lowther, in suppressed tones.

"I stwongly object to bein' called an image, Lowthah. And I have already cautioned you about talkin' Pway do not uttah anothah word."

"Will you be quiet, or do you want this boathook in the back of your silly neck?" hissed Blake.

"Bai Jove!"

Tom Merry opened the gate softly. From the french windows at the front of the bungalow, a light streamed out over the lawn. The windows stood wide open, the summer evening being very warm, but a light curtain screened the interior of the room from view. The seven juniors stole on tiptoe across the lawn, and across the flower-beds, too; they had no time to be particular. Fortunately, it did not matter what happened to the De Jones' flower-beds.

A sound of voices reached their ears as they drew closer to the open french windows.

"I can heah Cutts—" began Arthur Augustus, and then he stopped suddenly as Blake clapped a hand over his noble mouth.

"Silence!" hissed Blake.

"Gwoooooogh!"

Arthur Augustus was silent and indignant. And the seven juniors stepped closer to the open windows, Tom Merry in the lead. The hour was at hand!

CHAPTER 9.

Unexpected Visitors.

"YOUR deal, St. Leger!"

It was Gerald Cutts who spoke.

There was quite a festive scene in the room with the french windows. Five young rascals were there, enjoying themselves—more or less—in their own shady way.

Algy de Jones and Bertram Smythe-Percy belonged to that hapless species that is provided with more money than brains. Their papas, doubtless, had had enough brains to extract profits from a war that was so unprofitable to better men; and Algy and Bertram had money "to burn," and to pay their footing among people they would never have met had there been no war. They were quite pleased to have the distinguished Cutts, and the well-connected St. Leger, as guests "up the river"; and Gerald Cutts was making the hapless snobs pay for the pleasure. The blackguard of the St. Jim's Fifth was young in years, but old in rascality and unscrupulousness. His only feeling towards his two "friends" of the bungalow was one of derisive scorn; but he was very careful to keep that fact from their knowledge.

The five were playing poker, and Gerald Cutts was having a run of amazing luck. Perhaps he was helped by the long practice he had had in dealing from the bottom of the pack, and keeping a valuable card or two pinned between his knee and the table till wanted. Perhaps he was also helped by the circumstance that Gilmore generally "passed" very soon, and would then stroll round the room with a cigarette, with one eye open for Algy's and Bertram's cards; but if Gilmore made signals, Algy and Bertram did not observe them. St. Leger, who was not in the secret, looked once or twice uneasily at Cutts, but he was quite under that determined youth's domination, and he affected to suspect nothing.

St. Leger shuffled the cards, and handed them to Bertram to be cut, and proceeded to deal. Algy rose, and went to the sideboard, and knocked off the neck of a bottle of champagne.

"Good man! Put it this way!" said Bertram.

"You fellows are giddy sportsmen, and no mistake," said Cutts admiringly.

"Dear man, let me fill up your glass!" said Algy.

Cutts shook his head.

"I can't stand it like you fellows do," he said.

And Algy and Bertram gave one another admiring looks, and felt very complimented and happy and wicked.

St. Leger bit his lip. He had an idea as to why Cutts did not choose to befog his mind with drink. Cutts was not playing poker for pleasure; it was business with him.

Algy sat down again unsteadily, and took up his "hand." The stakes dropped into the pool. The smallest counter used by the young rascals was for ten shillings. Gilmore went round twice, and then announced that he "passed," throwing his cards on the table with a discontented gesture.

"I get rotten cards every time!" he said.

"Take a drink, dear boy, and cheer up!" smiled Algy.

"I think I'll have a smoke."

Gilmore left the table, and lighted another cigarette. He strolled round the room smoking it. He paused a moment behind Algy's chair and closed his right eye, and Cutts knew that Algy had a "full hand." A minute later he had a glance at Bertram's cards, and scratched his ear. Then Cutts knew that Bertram had "four of a kind." And as Cutts also had "four of kind," he was in need of further information, which fact he signalled by dropping his cigarette into an ash-tray. And then Gilmore, who had strolled to the mantelpiece, yawned three times. One yawn would have meant knaves, two yawns queens, so three indicated that Bertram had four kings in his hand. And as Cutts had only four tens, it was not worth his while to go on throwing counters into the pool, and he promptly passed out.

He was not looking for losses.

St. Leger gave him a sharp look, but went on playing quietly. Bertram won the game, but the winnings were not large. St. Leger rose from the table.

"Not chuckin' it?" asked Cutts, with a quick look at his friend.

"Yes. Fed up with poker!" said St. Leger.

Cutts' brows contracted. St. Leger went to an armchair,

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and sat down and lighted a cigarette. Gilmore rejoined the card-players. Once or twice Cutts gave St. Leger a dark look from under his brows as the poker game proceeded. With all his cunning, and his influence over the weak-natured Fifth-Former, Cutts had never been able to bring St. Leger down to his own level.

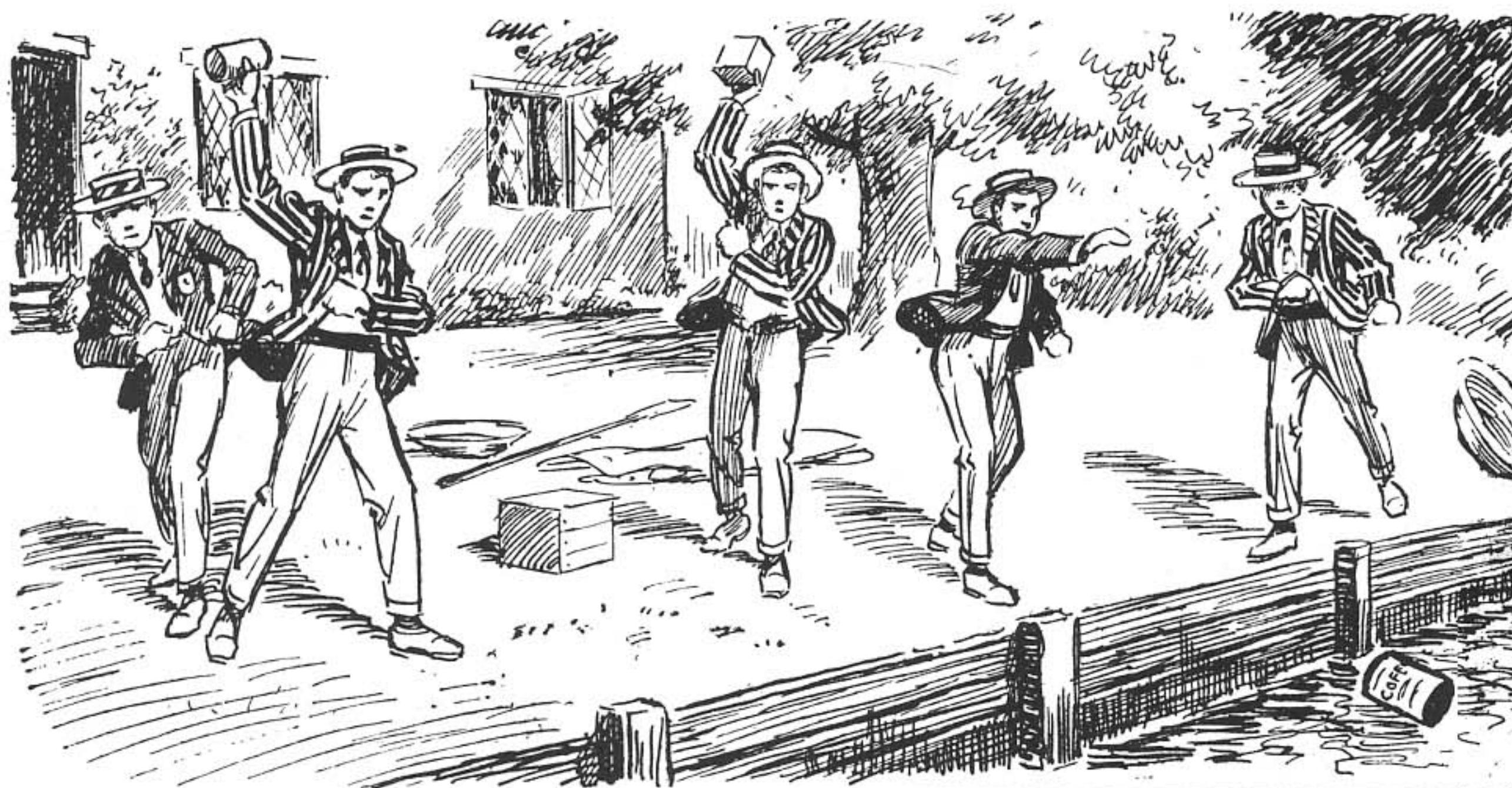
Another little success came Bertram's way, and then it was Cutts' deal. And then the counters rained into the pool. Algy and Bertram found themselves each with "four of a kind," and they plunged recklessly on those strong hands; and Cutts, who had provided himself with a "royal flush," was quite pleased to see them do it. At a sign from him Gilmore remained in the game, and staked recklessly. It did not matter how much Gilmore lost to his partner in iniquity.

St. Leger looked at them and rose, and walked to the door.

"I fancy I'll get off to bed," he remarked. "Good-night, you fellows!"

"Hold on!" said Cutts quickly.

Without appearing to hear that injunction, St. Leger left the room and closed the door. Gilmore looked at Cutts, and shrugged his shoulders. For a moment Cutts' hard lips came together grimly; but the next moment he was smiling.



As the Old Bus floated past the trim garden and lawn of the bungalow, Cutts & Co. lined up on the bank and pelted it with camping materials. Spirit stove and oil stove, blankets and rugs, and pots and pans rained upon the heads of Tom Merry & Co. (See page 11.)

cheerily at Algy and Bertram. Algy flicked a five-pound note into the pool.

There was quite a stack of money at stake now, and Cutts' eyes were gleaming. But something was destined to happen before Cutts raked in that handsome "pot."

The curtains over the open french windows were jerked aside by a hand from without.

Cutts looked round in surprise.

"What—" he began.

He broke off, startled, at the sight of Tom Merry looking into the room.

Behind Tom were six other fellows crowding for entrance. Cutts leaped to his feet.

"You cheeky young hound!" he roared.

"By gad!" gasped Algy, staggering to his feet, and blinking across the table at the intruders. "What—what the—"

"That gang again!" ejaculated Bertram.

"Get out!" shouted Gilmore.

Tom Merry stepped in quickly. A moment more, and the whole party of juniors were in the room.

Cutts strode towards them.

"What do you mean by comin' here, you young cubs? Get out, or—"

"Bai Jove, the wascals are gamblin'!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "I wondah what the Head would say to this?"

"The jolly old sack for Cutts!" said Blake.

"Get out!" roared Cutts furiously.

"Yes, outside, you cads!" said Algy.

Cutts made a savage grasp at Tom Merry. The business end of a boathook, wielded by Jack Blake, jammed on his evening waistcoat, and Cutts staggered back with a howl.

Tom Merry ran across to the door.

Algy intercepted him, and clutched at him, and received Tom's knuckles on his weak chin. Algy gave a wild howl, and rolled along by the table.

Tom reached the door, and turned the key in the lock. They were safe from interruption now, for a time at least.

"Go for the cads!" shouted Blake.

"Yaas, wathah! Give 'em socks, deah boys!"

And then there was a rush.

CHAPTER 10. A Roland for an Oliver.

SOMETHING like pandemonium seemed to break out all of a sudden. The uproar was terrific.

Gilmore rolled on the floor in the grasp of Herries and Digby. Algy sat nursing his chin, hors de combat. Bertram backed up to the wall, yelling for mercy as Manners and Lowther tackled him.

Only Gerald Cutts gave real trouble.

He darted to the grate and grasped the poker. With that THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 813.

dangerous weapon in his hand, he rushed at the juniors, hitting out recklessly, apparently indifferent to what damage he did.

It was fortunate for Tom Merry & Co. that they had come provided with weapons. A boathook and two or three heavy sticks opposed Cutts' poker, and it was dashed out of his hand.

Then, dropping their weapons, the juniors rushed at him.

Cutts was much more than a match for any single junior—perhaps for two. But Tom Merry and D'Arcy and Blake rushed him down, and he rolled on the floor in their grasp.

Blake planted himself on Cutts' chest as he crashed on his back, and Arthur Augustus trampled recklessly on his thrashing legs.

"Give him jip, deah boys!" roared Arthur Augustus.

"Got the cads!" shouted Herries, as Bertram went to the floor, howling, and Manners sat on him.

"Ow, ow, ow! My chin! Ow!" Algy was mumbling, and then he yelled instead of mumbling as Monty Lowther rolled him over and sat on his neck.

"Our win!" chuckled Monty breathlessly.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

There was a knock on the door, and St. Leger's voice was heard.

"What's the row? You fellows scrappin'?"

"It's those fags!" bawled Cutts. "The door's locked. Come round to the window, and bring Perkins and Morrison."

"Oh gad!" ejaculated St. Leger.

"Hurry up!" roared Cutts. "Oh! Ow! Groooogh! Hoogh! Mooooh!" He spluttered wildly as Blake crammed a handful of crumpled cigarettes into his mouth.

"You like baccy—what?" grinned Blake.

"Gug-gug-gug!"

"Hold the cads!" said Tom Merry. "They're going to have as much as they gave us, and a little over for luck!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

Tom Merry ran to the french windows, closed them, and bolted them. A minute later St. Leger and the gardener and a manservant were looking in through the glass with staring, amazed eyes.

Crash!

Tom Merry up-ended the card-table, and cards and counters and cash, cigarettes and ashtrays and glasses came to the floor in a terrific shower.

Cutts opened his mouth to yell to St. Leger to break through the glass. Blake promptly crammed a fistful of crumpled cigarettes into it again, and Cutts, instead of yelling, was reduced to wild and whirling splutters.

"Now we are goin' to dwench them!" shouted Arthur Augustus. "They dwenched us, you know!"

"Groooogh!"

"Gug-gug-gug!"

"Help!"

"Yaroooooh!"

There were water carafes on the sideboard. They were promptly emptied over Cutts and Gilmore, who squirmed and gurgled frantically. But that supply was not sufficient for vengeance. Fortunately, there were several decanters containing liquor much stronger than water, and they were emptied impartially over Cutts, Gilmore, Algy, and Bertram.

They moaned and groaned and wriggled under the drenching with spirituous liquors. It was not agreeable, but undoubtedly those liquors were less harmful outside than

Tom Merry looked round. The room was in a state of havoc, and looked as if the Huns had been there.

"Is that enough, do you think?" asked Tom.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Yaas, wathah! I fancy that will do," said Arthur Augustus. "If Cutts is willin' to apologise, I think we can let him off with that. Are you willin' to apologise, Cutts?"

"Groooogh! You young cub—oooooh!"

"Take hold of his yabs, Blake, and jam his sillay head on the floor. We shall bwing him to weason in time."

Bang!



inside. From that undoubted fact, however, the victims seemed to derive no comfort.

"Oh gad!" said St. Leger, outside the window. "They're gettin' it! I told Cutts it was too thick what he did, and those dashed fags seem to think the same."

"Bai Jove, those wottahs look wathah wet," chuckled Arthur Augustus. "There's some soda-water heah, deah boys. Don't let them have the whisky without the soda—besides, Cutts handed out soda to us, you know."

Arthur Augustus seized a syphon.

Fizzzzzzzz!

"Gr-r-r-r-r-r-r!" spluttered Cutts wildly, as the stream of soda played on him.

"Like your own medicine, deah boy?"

"Ugh! Groogh! Grrr!"

There were several soda syphons which were emptied upon Cutts and Gilmore and Algy and Bertram, as those unhappy youths wriggled on the floor, pinned down there by the victorious juniors.

Crash!

The glass came out of the window, and St. Leger put a hand through to unfasten the bolt. He withdrew it with a fiendish yell as Tom Merry rapped his wrist.

"Yow-ow! Yooop! Ow!" roared St. Leger, sucking his wrist. "You young rotter—yoooop!"

Squish!

The last soda syphon was turned on St. Leger through the gap in the glass. St. Leger caught the stream with his features, and staggered away, spluttering hysterically.

"Yaroooooop!"

"Are you sowwy, Cutts?"

"Ow! Wow! Yow! Yes!" howled Cutts of the Fifth.

"Are you awfully sowwy?"

"You young villain—"

Bang!

"Oh! Ow! Yes! Anything! Leave off! Gerraway! I'm sorry!" roared Cutts.

"Are you awfully, fearfully sowwy?" persisted Arthur Augustus.

"Yes, yes, yes!" roared Cutts.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I wathah think we can let Cutts off, as he has apologised," said Arthur Augustus. "He looks wathah a w'eck, as a mattah of fact. I am vewy pleased to weceive your apology, Cutts, and pardon is gwanted. Come on, you fellows, we do not want to lingah in this disreputable place."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Leaving their drenched and dizzy victims writhing on the floor, Tom Merry & Co. prepared to retreat. Tom opened the french window, and the seven juniors issued forth in a body. St. Leger and the gardener and the manservant retreated before them promptly. They did not, apparently, want to argue with the sticks and the boat-hook at close quarters.

"I fancy Cutts is sorry for himself by this time!" chuckled Tom Merry. "Come on!"

The juniors hurried through the garden towards the river.

(Continued on page 28.)

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My Readers' Own Corner!

Let Me Hear Your Latest Joke!

ONES

Tuck Hampers and Money Prizes Awarded for Interesting Paragraphs.

(If You Do Not Win a Prize This Week You May Next.)

All Efforts in this Competition should be Addressed to: The GEM, "My Readers' Own Corner," Gough House, Gough Square, London, E.C. 4.

THIS WINS OUR TUCK HAMPER

SURE IT IS!

A man and a woman were discussing the English language. "Oh, Mr. Green," gushed the woman, "don't you think it strange that 'sugar' is the only word in the English language where an 's' and a 'u' coming together are pronounced 'sh'?" "Sure," answered Mr. Green, with a broad grin.—A Tuck-hamper filled with delicious tuck has been awarded to Miss J. Drover, Brightstone, Mill Hill, Cowes, Isle of Wight.

THAT ENDED IT.

Two young men were having a very heated argument over a problem which needed a great deal of mental calculation. "I tell you," said one, "that you are entirely wrong." "But I am not," replied the other. "Didn't I go to school, stupid?" almost roared his opponent. "Yes," was the calm reply. "And came back stupid!"—Half-a-crown has been awarded to Ernest Flinn, 76, Palmerston Road, Wealdstone.

NOT SO DAFT.

Two bricklayers had a job in an asylum to put up a wall. The inmates, of course, poked fun at them. At last one of them said to one of the inmates: "Say, Jim, go and get us a couple of cock's eggs." The man hurried off, but was not long before returning. "Our cocks don't lay eggs," he said, "but we've got a couple of silly fools laying bricks!"—Half-a-crown has been awarded to R. A. Evaness, 41, Ipswich Street, Swindon, Wilts.

AWKWARD!

"Put out you tongue, Tommy," said the doctor to the little lad before him. Tommy showed the tip of his tongue. "Come, come, laddie," said the doctor kindly, "put it right out." "I can't," said Tommy tearfully. "It's joined at the back!"—Half-a-crown has been awarded to H. Shaw, 132, Low Fold, Fernley, near Leeds.

EXPLAINED.

"Really," said the householder with some heat, "the situation is most trying. Did I, or did I not, ask you to send a man to mend my doorbell?" "Certainly you did, madam," replied the electrician, "and I sent a mechanic, who tells me he rang three times and received no answer, so, naturally, he came back!"—Half-a-crown has been awarded to Eric Hazzard, 6, Holmes Street, Beech Street, Hull.

ALTERATIONS FREE.

The dapper little man bustled into the tailor's and asked to see some ready-made suits. He was given a choice. "I'll take that one," he said, "if you'll make any alterations I require?" "Certainly, sir," beamed the tailor. "All alterations free, sir." "Good!" said the little man. "Just alter the price, then, from five guineas to two pounds ten shillings and I will take the suit with me!"—Half-a-crown has been awarded to Arthur Worby, 10, Culworth Street, St. John's Wood, London, N.W. 8.

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AMAZING!

Tom Merry (to Trimble): "Have you seen that new fellow in the Second, Baggy? He's got wireless eyes."

Trimble (incredulously): "Wireless eyes?"

Tom Merry: "Yes. There's a 'broad cast' in both of them. See?"—Half-a-crown has been awarded to Arthur Davis, 5, Gower Street, Reading.

THAT'S THE POINT!

A Frenchman, on his way to visit his English friend, had to pass a rather fearsome dog. As he passed, the dog started to bark. The Frenchman stepped back, afraid to pass. His friend came out, escorted him to the house, and then said: "Don't you know the proverb 'Barking dogs don't bite'?" "Oui," said the Frenchman. "I know zee proverb, you know zee proverb, but zee dog, does 'ee know zee proverb?"—Half-a-crown has been awarded to A. E. Birch, 647, Yoker Road, Scotstoun West, Glasgow.

TOMMY'S PHILOSOPHY!

A certain teacher of a class of boys asked her pupils the other day to write a short composition on what they would do with a thousand pounds. When the time came for the papers to be collected, the teacher noticed, with some surprise, that Tommy Brown's was blank. "Why, Tommy," exclaimed the teacher, as she turned over the paper to make sure that he hadn't written his composition on the other side, "you haven't done anything!" "Of course, I haven't, miss," grinned Tommy. "And neither would you if you had a thousand pounds!"—Half-a-crown has been awarded to James Wight, 11, Inchaffray Street, Perth.

DISTRIBUTING HIS FAVOURS!

"Yell, Jimmy, yer won?" demanded a loyal supporter of the Backstreet Swifts, who had been unable to attend the football match. "O' course we won," replied the somewhat damaged Jimmy. "Wot form was yer in yerself?" "Fust class!" "Kick a goal?" "Well," admitted Jimmy reluctantly, "I can't say I exactly kicked a goal, but"—brightening up perceptibly—"I kicked three forwards, a 'arf-back, the goalkeeper, and the referee! So I reckon I done my best—don't you?"—Half-a-crown has been awarded to James Taber, 34, Woodlands Park Road, Greenwich, S.E. 10.

MOST CORRECT!

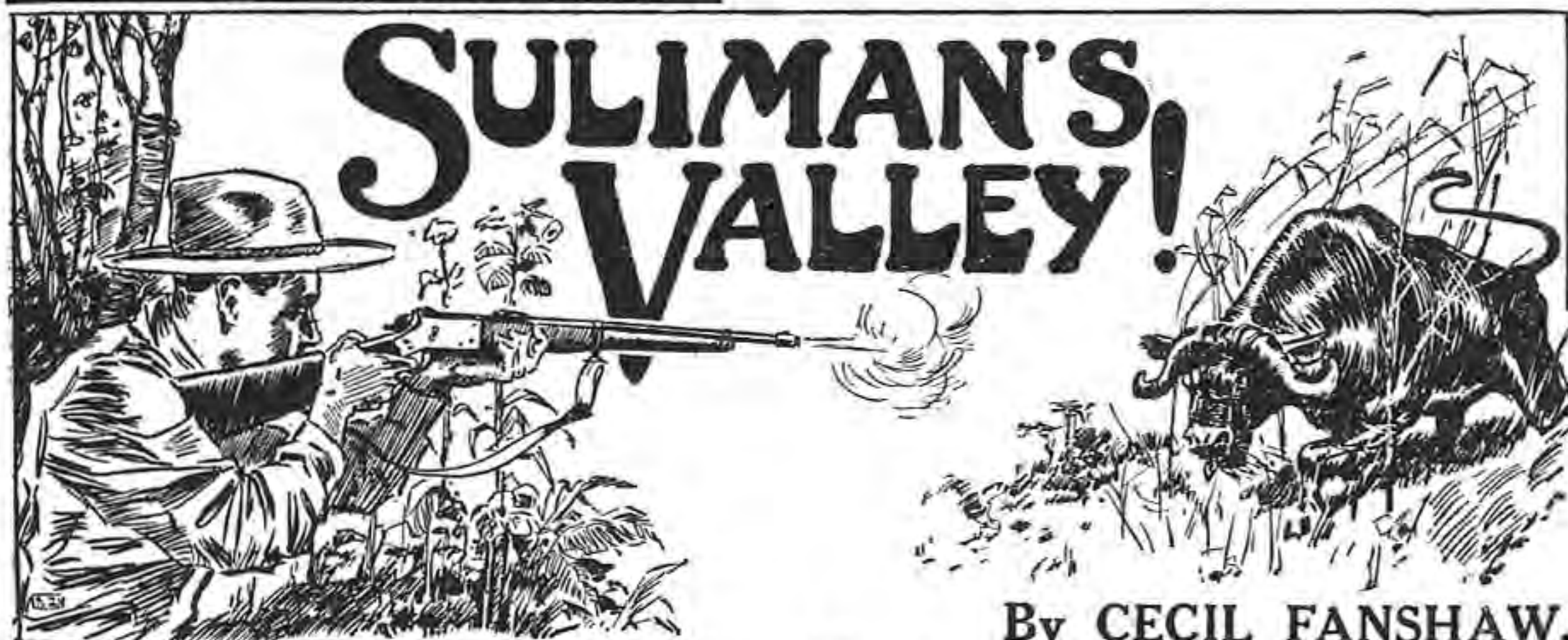
Mr. Brown: "Good-morning, Mr. White! Have you seen my wife?" Mr. White: "Yes. I saw her by the post-office, boxing with another woman." Mr. Brown: "Good gracious, man! Why didn't you stop her?" Mr. White: "Well, it said 'Letter-box,' so I let her box!"—Miss Winnie Shallcross, 29, Hartford Road, Davenham, near Northwich, Cheshire.

TUCK HAMPER COUPON.

The GEM LIBRARY,

No attempt will be considered unless accompanied by one of these Coupons,

HERE'S A YARN YOU'LL ENJOY, BOYS!



By CECIL FANSHAW.

A Magnificent Story of Thrilling Adventure in an African Jungle.

CHAPTER 1.

A Lust for Destruction.

THE corrugated iron roof of the sparsely furnished bunkhouse creaked and groaned. The grilling heat of the African sun, beating down all day, had caused the metal to expand, and now, in the cool of the evening, it contracted, giving off pistol-like reports.

From outside came the distant sounds of lowing cattle and barking dogs, mingled with the shrill yells of native boys. But within the darkening shanty two white youths, who had just finished a meal, sat for the moment in silence, each busy with his own thoughts.

Suddenly the elder, a sunburnt, well-built young fellow, pushed his chair back in disgust, and the legs scraped harshly over the bare, wooden floor. Usually, his face was crinkled with ready laughter, but now it was set and stern.

"Tell you what it is, Clifford!" he cried. "I'm fair beat over this sheep-stealin'; it's so mighty reg'lar, an' I can't get to the bottom of it. Reckon it's only Kikuyus; if it was Masai, they'd be after bigger stuff."

Clifford Waring glanced up at the manager of Elementeita Ranch, who was also his chum, but he only nodded. Indeed, there was nothing for Clifford to say, for Ted Clarke, the manager, had been saying the same thing daily for the last week; but the sheep stealing had gone on with alarming regularity.

Clifford was only a farm pupil, but a handy, husky fellow for all that. In spite of an easy-going look in his brown eyes, he had the face of a lad who is well able to take care of himself, and he had picked up a good deal during his six months' sojourn at Elementeita Ranch, an estate of several thousand acres in the Highlands of British East Africa.

The owner of the ranch, an old friend of Clifford's family, was in England and had sent Clifford out to learn farming on his place, which was well and capably managed by Ted Clarke, a South African by birth.

But even Ted had not been able to discover the sheep lifters, and was consequently mighty angry. Clifford realised his inexperience of Africa and made no comment on Ted's outburst, and the latter again relapsed into silence.

But suddenly Ted made a move. "Come on, Cliff!" he cried, reaching for his hippo hide whip. "Guess we'd

better git over to the boma (cattle yard); the cattle are just comin' in."

They both rose to their feet, but as they did so there came a knock on the rough door of the shanty.

"Come in!" yelled Ted. "There ain't no charge for admittance!"

The door was pushed open, and a big Lumbwa herd-boy entered, a long-bladed spear grasped tightly in his right hand. His face and body were daubed all over with red clay, and he smelt pretty strong.

"What's up, Malungu?" asked Ted. "No, don't come too close!" he added hastily. "I've got a cold, an' you might catch it!"

"Three more sheep gone, bwana (master)," said the head Lumbwa, in a gloomy voice, "and—"

"Blazes take it!" roared Ted, fairly exploding. "This is sure the purple limit! Sheep stolen every night, an' now by day! You'll be losin' cattle next!"

"Hyenas or Kikuyus are the sheep stealers, bwana!" exclaimed Malungu. He was proud of his race, and rated Kikuyus with the lowest animals. "But," he went on, "there is worse news than the loss of a few sheep—Suliman Rehan, the one-armed Somali, has been seen not a day's journey hence, near the far end of the ranch. He has many Masai with him."

For a moment Ted was staggered. "Suliman, the One-armed," was a perfect scourge—not only to the white settlers, but also to the natives. When he was not engaged in cattle lifting, he was busy slave raiding in the native villages. On one such raid he had lost his left arm, hence his name—a name that had become notorious throughout East Africa, coupled always with bloodshed and plunder.

Ted set his jaw grimly.

"I reckon," he said, "Suliman won't come messin' aroun' on this ranch if he knows what's good for him an' doesn't wish to lose his other arm. Come along, Cliff, let's git movin'. We'll sure see this boma is Somali proof!"

As Ted and Cliff with Malungu in their rear, emerged from the cedar-log bunkhouse, the sun was setting behind the rocky escarpment that bounded the estate on the west. They passed the fine bungalow of the ranch owner, which was empty and locked up, and made for the

cattle boma. This was a big enclosure with walls of solid granite, six feet high, and topped with strands of barbed wire.

They neared the gates as the leading cattle, surrounded in a haze of dust, were about to enter. The two lads took up position, one on each side of the entrance, and proceeded to count the muster.

"How many d'you make it?" called out Ted, when the last beast had scampered into the big yard.

"Two hundred and fifty," replied Clifford.

"Right! We'd best git over to the other bomas to-morrow, an' hev a round-up, an' tell the boys to watch out for that one-armed gink, since he's been seen that way. I reckon he'd think twice before he came down this end. Anyway, this boma is all right, except for that wire. Malungu, git that wire fixed up; it sure looks as tho' monkeys had been swingin' on it whiles you fellers was all asleep."

The muster complete, and the evening rations handed out to the Lumbwa herd-boys, Ted and Clifford strolled back to their quarters. They had both had a hard day, and had a harder one coming; for there were three bomas to be visited, all some miles apart, and each with their quota of cattle.

So it was not long before Ted extinguished the smoky oil-lamp and silence reigned in the little log bunkhouse.

They started with the following dawn, each mounted on a mule and carrying a rifle. All the herds had to be inspected and counted at regular intervals; but Ted was uneasy at the reported proximity of Suliman, and was putting in an extra tour of inspection.

The sun shone radiantly, and the wind blew strongly over the green Highland downs, but Ted wore an anxious expression. Had he scanned the hills with a pair of field-glasses before departure, he would not have set out at all.

High up on the escarpment, well hidden amongst the moss-covered boulders, sat a group of savages—just where they were least expected. The group consisted of about twenty half-naked Masai and two Somalis, and the taller of the latter was short of one arm.

The appearance of Suliman, the One-armed, fully bore out his evil reputation. His cruel face was heavily pock-marked and bore two deep scars. Ho

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affected the garb of an English sportsman—khaki shirt, shorts, and putties—but on his head was a dirty blue turban. A diabolical smile lit up his black but well-chiselled features, as he saw Ted and Clifford depart. With great cunning, he had appeared at the far end of the ranch the previous day, and had hastened right round during the night. Ted had not expected him to have the audacity to make a raid close to white men's houses.

Suliman, well pleased with the success of his ruse, turned to his lieutenant.

"Good, Sadalla!" he said. "The white youths have departed, and left us cattle in plenty. Moreover, here there is the Englishman's house to be raided. Wait till the cattle leave the boma. There will be rich loot for all of us. If the Lumbwa dogs resist, kill them all!"

A chorus of approving grunts greeted the scoundrel's speech. Suliman was embarking on the most daring raid he had ever undertaken.

Shortly after Ted and Clifford had disappeared over a neighbouring rise, the Lumbwa herd-boys began to drive the cattle out of the grazing-grounds. They had gone about a mile, when Malungu, the head-man, caught sight of brown figures dropping swiftly down the face of the escarpment. His keen eyes picked out the leader with the empty sleeve.

Quickly Malungu gave the alarm.

"Back to the boma!" he yelled. "Suliman, the One-armed, is on us!"

With shrill cries the Lumbwas proceeded to round up the cattle, and started back for the boma at a hand-gallop.

With shouts of terror, surrounded by a huge dust-cloud, the plunging, maddened beasts thundered up the hill down which they had just been slowly driven. On their flanks hung the Lumbwas, urging them forward with their spears.

But the raiders saw their purpose. Half a dozen raced for the gates of the boma, with the intention of heading off the frantic mob; the remainder fell upon the herd-boys from the rear.

The latter, with Malungu at their head, turned on their aggressors and closed.

Away went the cattle in a mad stampede, a sea of tossing horns and rolling eyes, a long curtain of dust hanging across their trail. The raiders up by the gates swooped down on them, and turned the tearing mass in the direction of the open downs. In a few moments the whole mob disappeared in a swirl of dust.

Meanwhile, the Lumbwas were putting up a stubborn fight. But the raiders had the advantage of numbers, and Suliman carried a short Mauser pistol, which he knew how to use.

Spears rose and fell, the Masai shouting in triumph. Screeches followed a straight thrust; knob-kerries thudded down on thick skulls. In the forefront was the one-armed Somali, his Mauser spitting death.

But the struggle did not last long. Overwhelmed, the Lumbwas broke and fled for a neighbouring forest, leaving three of their number dead.

The raiders, who had suffered few casualties, did not trouble to pursue; but, after a careless glance round the scene of that short, fierce fight, they made for the homestead.

Ted's wooden shack offered little prospect of loot; the ranch-owner's house was their objective. With fierce yells they stormed on to the veranda. Suliman, his empty sleeve waving, arrived first. With his pistol he blew out the lock of the front door, and his howling Masai swarmed in.

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"Ransack the house!" he yelled. "Leave nothing of value!"

His followers were not slow to carry out the orders. Cupboards were smashed, boxes were broken open, and even beds overturned, in the frenzied hunt for hidden gold or valuables. But, to their wrath, the marauding savages found little of use to them.

Enraged at the absence of loot, Suliman cried out to burn the place, starting the conflagration himself.

In a moment curling tongues of flame licked up the wooden walls, and sprang to the roof with a devouring roar. The roof, unhappily of thatch, quickly became a red-hot, blazing furnace. But the lust for destruction was not satisfied.

While the house went up in flames, sending a thick pall of yellow smoke billowing into the sky, the invaders turned on the fruit orchard, and soon not a tree was left standing. One hour of insensate savagery destroyed the work of years.

Before the sun was high the raiders made off along the trail of the stolen cattle. Suliman intended to drive them to a fertile valley, known only to himself. All that was left of the homestead and farm-buildings was a blazing ruin.

Unconscious of the tragedy that was being enacted at the headquarters of the ranch, Ted and Clifford toiled on from boma to boma, counting the cattle and putting them through the dip-tank, a precaution against cattle disease.

"These places look strong enough," said Ted, when, tired and hot, they left the third boma; "but you sure can't guess where that backguard will turn up—probably when you least expect him. There's many sorts of Somalis," he added, "but only one good one."

"Which is that?" asked Clifford.

"A dead 'un!" replied Ted grimly. "An' I tell you I don't feel easy, so we'll hike straight back, quick!"

Ted's uneasiness communicated itself to Clifford, and for some distance the two lads rode in silence.

They were moving up the slope of a ridge, when Ted suddenly pulled up.

"See there!" he cried, pointing with a trembling finger. "Jest switch yer gaze on that smoke!"

Clifford leaned forward, staring in the direction indicated. He could just see a thin, drifting wisp of smoke that swung high up on the horizon.

"Jove!" he muttered. "It's bang over the home farm!"

"It sure is!" exclaimed Ted, giving his mule a cut that made it bound forward.

Clifford followed suit, and together they raced over the swelling downs, urging their beasts to the uttermost.

The sun was sinking as they mounted the last ridge and came in view of the home farm. The sight they beheld struck a cold chill of dismay to their hearts.

Gone was the best herd of cattle that had taken years to rear. A tangled mass was all that remained of the fruit-orchard. The beautiful homestead, of which every wall had been panelled with cedar, was now a blackened, smoking ruin.

Horror-stricken, the two white lads paused for an instant; then, tapping up their mounts, they galloped down to the scene of desolation.

As Ted swung himself off his mule, and darted up the steps of the veranda, a shower of sparks went up from the charred timber; wreaths of smoke still curled heavenwards.

In vain Clifford shouted "Malungu! Malungu!" But no one answered him.

CHAPTER 2.

In Dire Peril!

SILENCE reigned, while Ted and Clifford stared blankly at each other.

"So Suliman's done us!" the former exclaimed. "That all-fired murderin' Somali cleaned this place up while we were preparin' for him over yonder. It's the worst job even he's ever done. I never reckoned on his attackin' a white man's home."

Ted's voice tailed off to a whisper, but his lips were set in a hard, straight line that boded ill for the one-armed raider. But it was no use wasting time in speculation, so the two boys went down to the boma. It was empty, and the big gates swung idly in the wind while the chains rattled drearily.

For some time Ted and Clifford searched and called in vain amongst the ruins of the boys' huts, for even these had not escaped the wanton savagery of the raiders. But at last, from the remains of a burnt stable, came an answering cry, and Malungu and two other Lumbwas crept forth. All three bore wounds, and Malungu was lame.

"Was it Suliman himself, Malungu?" cried Ted, directly he saw the head Lumbwa. "When did it happen?"

"Bwana," replied Malungu, as he limped forward. "You had not gone an hour when Suliman, the One-armed, came down on us. He had many Masai warriors. We Lumbwas fought, but what could six do against so many? Moreover, Suliman had a pistol. Three of us were slain. We other three, all wounded, hid in the forest until the devils had gone. It was Suliman himself who fired the house of the master, who is in England. All the cattle have gone."

"Suliman's got a lot to pay for!" breathed Ted, his fists clenched.

But the dusk was falling, and it would have been useless to attempt to follow up at once. The avengers would have to wait for the following dawn.

With the first break of light the pursuers were on the trail. Malungu limped in front. He had the eyes of a hawk, and was a born tracker. And he and the other two Lumbwas had insisted on coming.

For some time the hoof-prints of the driven cattle were not hard to follow, for the trail led across open downs. But towards midday Malungu, to whom tracks were an open book, pulled up with a grunt of disgust.

"The tracks divide, bwana!" he exclaimed, pointing to the ground with his spear.

Ted and Clifford hurried forward together. It was plain that the raiders had split up into two parties, in order to get along quicker. The problem was which to follow.

There ensued a heated discussion, Malungu being for one trail and a Lumbwa called Karia for another. Suddenly Clifford, who had been studying the ground, rose to his feet.

"Malungu's right, Ted!" he cried, pointing. "Look here! Most of the cattle have gone on the right-hand trail. Suliman will be with 'em. That's our line."

Ted agreed with his chum, so they pushed on. They did not know of Suliman's hidden valley, the fertile place to which he always took the plunder gained in raids. The cattle-raiders had split up into two parties, but both would meet at the valley.

Shortly after the check the pursuers came to a flat, arid plain. The long, green grass of the uplands was replaced by sand and rocks, and the cedar forests



Suddenly, from close at hand, came an unearthly moan, rising to a ghastly pitch, then followed grim chuckling, and a burst of diabolical laughter. Clifford, craning his head round, became aware of eyes in the jungle—eyes like coals of fire. It was hyenas, the ghouls of Africa, hungering for him.

by scattered clumps of thorn-trees. Even to Malungu the tracks became difficult to follow, and progress grew slower.

After some miles of this they found themselves approaching thick country. Everywhere grew dense thorn-scrub, mimosa-trees, and high, yellow, sun-burnt grass that would make tracking a laborious business. But the nature of the trail, frail and criss-crossed though it was, showed that the stolen cattle could not be far ahead.

With Ted now leading, and Clifford and Malungu close up behind, the party plunged into the thick jungle. They were all tense with excitement, for at any moment they might come on the raiders.

About a hundred yards they went, and then the trail led out into a little glade. Down went Ted on his hands and knees, and Clifford and the three Lumbwa boys followed suit. Ted peered through the tall grass, but could see nothing. So, on all fours, they crept forward.

Suddenly they became aware of beasts all round them. On one side could be heard the sound of horns being rubbed against a tree, from another came a low, sighing grunt.

Very cautiously, inch by inch, Ted raised himself up, while the others held their breath.

What Ted saw, when he could see over the top of the grass screen, caused him to drop quietly down again.

Turning slowly, he placed his lips close to Clifford's ear, and whispered:

"Buffalo! We're surrounded by 'em. It's not the blamed cattle at all. A herd o' buffalo must ha' crossed the tracks, an' we've walked into 'em!"

This was pretty serious news, as well as keenly disappointing. To be surrounded by a herd of buffalo in thick country was as unexpected as it was dangerous. If anything should stampede the herd, the whole party would be crushed to death.

Carefully Clifford took a look.

"Yes," he whispered, as he got down again, "on all sides. Can just see the black backs and horns. What's to be done?"

"Creep forward and follow me!" Ted whispered back.

With the utmost caution, foot by foot, Clifford and the Lumbwa boys crawled along behind Ted. To shoot a buffalo was the last thing Ted wished to do, for if the raiders were anywhere near they would hear the firing, and be prepared for an attack. So he concentrated on getting clear of their unwelcome neighbours without disturbing them.

For about five minutes all went well. Then Clifford touched Ted on the leg. Ted raised his head, and peeped in the direction Clifford was pointing. Then he drew in his breath with a sharp hiss.

Not twenty paces in front of him he could make out the horns and neck of a huge bull buffalo. Here was a desperate

situation. On all sides they could hear others of the herd chewing the cud or rustling the undergrowth. To leave the narrow trail might only precipitate a stampede, to shoot would probably have the same result, in addition, possibly, to informing the raiders of their whereabouts. Fortunately, the wind was blowing directly from the bull towards Ted and his party, and the brute had not yet got their scent.

But Ted absolutely refused to go back. He was certain he was on the cattle trail, although the buffalo had fouled the tracks. So he pushed out his rifle in front of him, and prepared to await developments.

They were not long in coming, however.

The wind, which had been blowing in puffs and eddies, now suddenly veered right round. Then things happened quickly.

Immediately the buffalo caught the foreign taint in the air he raised his head. The next instant he charged, bellowing and snorting as only a mad bull can. Straight as an arrow he came, heading for the creatures he could smell but not see, his nose stretched out in front, his massive horns lying back on his neck.

Ted was kneeling down, his gun poised in readiness as the brute thundered down on him, and crashed into view.

Bang! The report of Ted's rifle
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sounded like a cannon in the dense bush, and, on the instant, the jungle around exploded into violent life. From all sides came bellowing, snorts, and crashes as the whole herd stampeded.

Ted had heard his heavy bullet thud home, but the great beast came on. Clifford, firing over Ted's shoulder, pumped in a couple of quick shots, then flung himself into the undergrowth. Ted dived in after him, and the Lumbwa boys scattered in all directions.

They were not an instant too soon. The roaring bull thundered down the trail, and the remainder of the herd burst past, some of the flying bodies missing the boys by inches.

When the danger was over Ted got back on to the trail.

"Phew!" he exclaimed, mopping his forehead. "That was a close call, sure thing! Don't want another like it, anyhow!"

A moment later Malungu came limping up. Behind him were the other two Lumbwas. All three were busy plucking out thorns, with which they fairly bristled, but they were more frightened than hurt.

"I reckon we'd best push on quick, an' keep a smart look-out, too!" said Ted, when calm was once more restored. "If that one-armed ruffian is anywhere around, and has heard the racket, he'll beat it quick or lie in wait for us."

"I hope he decides to wait for us," observed Clifford, as they got under way again. "A scoundrel like that isn't fit to live!"

Clifford did not know what Fate had in store for him, however.

Malungu, his eyes glued to the trail, limped along in front. Where the sapless grass gave way to jagged boulders, it was no easy matter to pick out the tracks. But the head Lumbwa was seldom at fault.

The dusk was falling when they came to an ancient, dry river-bed. Clifford was for halting and making camp, but Ted urged the party onwards.

"Best go all we can, while it's light," he said. "We've another hour yet."

Scrambling and falling, they slid down the precipitous bank, and dropped, one by one, into the narrow ravine; after which they made for the opposite side.

Clifford had just got a grip on a projecting rock, and was about to haul himself up the slope, when the air was suddenly rent with savage yells. As he glanced upwards, he saw naked forms leaping down from boulder to boulder, brandishing heavy spears. In the centre was one who wore clothes, but his left sleeve was empty. Clifford just heard the report of Ted's rifle, then everything was blotted out as a knoberry thudded down on his skull.

When he recovered consciousness some time afterwards he felt stiff and cold, and his head ached abominably. Raising a hand to ease the pain, he realised that he was bound. If he was a prisoner, what had happened to the others? Involuntarily he muttered a groan.

Hearing the sound, someone came over to him. By the pale, cold light of the stars, Clifford could make out the man's figure; and he did not need a second glance to tell him who the man was, for there were not two Somalis with one arm going about; Suliman Rehan was the only one Clifford knew of.

"Ugh! White dog!" growled the Somali, as he glowered down at his captive. "Shortly you will regret following Suliman. I shall treat you as the Kikuyus treat their dead! Shout as much as you please—all your friends are killed!"

"You lie, Suliman!" replied Clifford.

summoning up all his courage; but he knew well enough the fate in store for him. The Kikuyus never buried their dead, but put them out in the bush, to be devoured by hyenas or jackals.

But Clifford's heart sank as he thought of Ted killed and possibly mutilated. Perhaps the Lumbwas had run! Nevertheless, Clifford was not going to show the white feather before a Somali.

"You lie, Suliman!" he repeated.

"You will soon know whether I lie or not," laughed the Somali. "Shout! If your friends are still alive, they will come and rescue you."

With a final jeer at the helpless boy, the scoundrel moved off. From behind a large clump of prickly cacti came the sound of guttural voices, Suliman's amongst them, then came the shuffling of footsteps fading away. Followed a silence that could be felt.

For a few moments Clifford lay still. Then, when the horror of his situation became clear to him, he struggled and yelled. But in vain, the raw-hide bonds held too well, and nothing answered him but the echo.

Now he realised he was lying in a wide gully, the rocks of which threw back his voice in mockery—veritable ghost-voices coming out of the darkness. Then he fell to struggling in silence, till he became exhausted.

Suddenly, from close at hand, came an unearthly moan, rising to a ghastly pitch, breaking off sharp on the top note. Clifford's hair rose on his head, as there followed a grim chuckling and a burst of diabolical laughter.

Now the wretched boy, craning his head round, became aware of eyes in the jungle—eyes like coals of fire. Again a wild discord of appalling laughter—the hyenas, the ghouls of Africa, were gathering for the feast.

CHAPTER 3.

An Eleventh-Hour Rescue.

THE unearthly noise ceased, and Clifford redoubled his efforts to escape, shouting loudly for help the while.

"Ted! Ted!" he screamed. "Help! Quickly!"

But only the rocks of the gully answered him: "Help! Quickly—ickly!"

As the echo rang out, the hyenas drew back, snarling; and Clifford fought at his bonds, writhing on the ground. But he knew the end could not be far off.

Cowardly brutes, devourers of carrion, though the hyenas might be, soon they must discover that he was helpless. Then they would draw in closer and closer—one of the boldest would make a rush, followed by his fearful comrades.

Clifford shuddered; the contemplation of his approaching doom was driving him mad.

Already the circling fiends were nearer. Again the awful, dirge-like moans and laughter bubbled up, intensified by the echo, answered by kindred demons who had heard the summons. A foul reek assailed the boy's nostrils, and he prayed fervently for unconsciousness.

But suddenly, just as the biggest brute, with salvering jaws, was about to dash in something checked him. He stopped, raised his head in a listening attitude, then wheeled round and loped off. In a flash, the others were after their leader, melting silently away into the Stygian bush.

For a moment Clifford lay still,

scarcely daring to breathe, wondering what miracle had effected his eleventh-hour rescue. Then, through the rustling undergrowth, came a halting, shuffling footstep—the tread of a lame man—and Clifford recognised it.

"Malungu! Malungu!" he yelled. "This way! Hurry!"

"Coming, bwana! Coming!" cried a voice.

The next instant, amidst scraping stones and rustling grass, the head Lumbwa limped up to where Clifford lay. Kneeling, he slashed through the boy's bonds and helped him to his feet.

"Only just in time, Malungu!" gasped Clifford, as he straightened himself up and rubbed his stiffened limbs. "Those laughing devils nearly had me. But how did you find me—and where are the others? Not dead? That lying Suliman told me you had all been killed. Where is Bwana Ted?"

To the volley of questions, Malungu replied:

"The Somali lied, bwana! Doubtless he heard the buffalo shooting, and set a trap for us in a good place. Directly we were attacked, you were knocked down. But Bwana Ted killed several Masai with his rifle, and the raiders fled. We all pursued, but I could not keep up, being lame. I returned to look for you, but you had been removed; I could see the track of one man in boots, the Somali, and two men barefooted. I followed the trail till dark, when I found myself in this gully, some distance back. But then I heard the voices of many hyenas, and, knowing the black heart of a Somali, I kept straight on for the sound. Then, too, I heard your voice, therefore I hurried. That is all."

"All!" repeated Clifford. "It's mighty lucky for me you followed up and hurried! I don't know how I'll ever repay you. I can see what happened. Suliman saw me dropped, determined to be revenged for being followed, and so hid in the bush and came back for me. Bwana Ted and you Lumbwas, pursuing, missed him—eh?"

"Even so, bwana," replied Malungu gravely, "it is not a difficult matter for one Somali and two Masai to hide in this thick bush."

Nothing but his natural, wanton cruelty could have induced Suliman, the One-armed, to come back for the boy; but Clifford did not want to waste time speculating over the Somali's reasons.

"How shall we rejoin the others, Malungu?" he said.

"Follow me, bwana," replied the Lumbwa. "I can guide you back to the place where we were surprised, then we will pick up the trail afresh."

In spite of the darkness, it did not take long to get back to the scene of the fight, for Malungu had an uncanny sense of direction; and Clifford had not been carried a great distance. However, in African bush one mile is as good as twenty. The chances of Clifford being found were very slender, as Suliman knew; but he had reckoned without Malungu.

Clifford and the head Lumbwa had almost reached their destination, for Malungu limped along through the darkness at a surprising rate, when there came a sudden shout:

"Halt, or I fire!"

Both pulled up with a jerk, but Clifford recognised the voice.

"Ted!" he cried. "Ted! Where the mischief are you?"

There came an answering shout, a scrambling under some thorn-trees, and Ted dashed forward out of the darkness.

"Clifford!" he cried, as he wrung the



Malungu ducked and, wielding his heavy spear as the Somali's knife whizzed over his head, thrust with all his force. Suliman gave one scream and, throwing up his hands, fell to the ground.

other's hand. "Good heavens! I'd given you up, and couldn't think what had happened to Malungu!"

Clifford swiftly related all that had happened, and Ted gritted his teeth.

"More for Suliman to pay for," he muttered, then continued: "I followed up those scoundrels too far, with the other Lumbwas. We soon found we'd been played a trick. While Suliman was waitin' for us with some of his ruffians, the remainder hiked on with the cattle—what's more, they've been an' split up into about a dozen more parties—didn't know which to follow, so worked back here. Found you gone, and Malungu missin'. It's darned lucky that one-armed swab didn't know how many there were of us; he could have eaten us up if he hadn't chosen to run, thinkin' we'd got a crowd behind us."

"There must be a powerful lot of them," put in Clifford, "but they don't seem to have much heart. Still, how are you going to track 'em now?"

"I've thought of that," replied Ted, "an' I reckon all them tracks have sure got to meet somewhere. Mos' likely the cattle are bein' driven to some valley that only One-arm knows of. Whichever track we follow we're boun' to git there."

Ted's argument seemed pretty sound, so they lost no time in dossing down under the thorn-trees. The first light of dawn would see the pursuit resumed.

CHAPTER 4. A Valley of Death.

JUST before sunrise, Ted and Clifford scrambled out of the brake that had sheltered them. The pale light of early morning showed the bodies of five Masai still lying where they had fallen at the bottom of the ravine. Three had fallen to bullets from Ted's rifle, while the spears of the Lumbwas had accounted for two more. The presence of men had kept off the hyenas during the night, but in another twenty-four hours nothing would remain of the corpses that now lay stretched out in all sorts of attitudes—sightless eyes staring up at the sky.

Clifford shuddered as he looked at the bodies, reflecting how nearly he had been torn to pieces while yet living.

After a brief survey of the divergent trails, Malungu picked out the clearest—that of the greatest number of cattle—and the chase was resumed.

As the sun got higher it gained in power, and its relentless rays scorched the pursuers. The bush thinned out on to a bare, sandy plain, and the intense glare became intolerable to unaccustomed eyes. Little dust devils swirled and danced along, suddenly collapsing into nothingness. Ted and Clifford groaned at the dreary expanse, broken only by distant sand hills—no form of life showed. It seemed little short of marvellous

that the cattle had been driven over such a country, but they were African bred, and could do extraordinary things when put to it.

Here and there, in depressions, were water-holes, and a certain amount of vegetation, sufficient for a few cattle. The whole mob could never have traversed the region, but, split up into small bands the feat was not impossible.

For a week the hunt was maintained, through more or less inhospitable country; then Ted began to get nervous. Several times, in drifting sand, they had lost the tracks for hours together, finally picking it up again when it was too dark to proceed. The provisions they had been able to carry were almost exhausted, and game was scarce.

More than once dead cattle were passed, showing that they were on the right trail, but also inflaming their anger and spurring them on to further efforts.

About noon on the tenth day since they had started the chase, Malungu suddenly stopped short, shading his eyes with his hand, and peering at something in the distance.

"What's up?" asked Ted wearily, staring into the horizon till his eyes ached. The hard, cobalt sky-line revealed nothing.

But Malungu could see.

"Vultures, bwana," he said.

"Well, an' what o' that?" said Ted.

"Ain't we seen a few vultures before now?"

"Yes, bwana," was the calm reply. "But those are not a few vultures—there are many, and more gather every second. Never have I seen so many vultures!"

"Git a move on, then," muttered Ted. "No use starin'."

But a sudden fear clutched at his heart. A dread lurked in his mind of what calamity might have overtaken the cattle; but he did not voice his fears. For what could a multitude of vultures be gathering, except for a feast on a gigantic scale?

If they were nearing the raiders' valley, then all the cattle—some two hundred probably—that had survived the journey would be assembled there.

What disaster had overtaken so many beasts at once? The raiders would certainly not have killed them.

But the only way to solve the problem was to push on and see.

The pace was increased, and soon the gigantic birds of ill omen were plainly visible to the two white youths as well as the Lumbwas. From every point of the compass they seemed to be hurrying, black dots in the brazen vaults of the sky that grew in size with astounding rapidity. All were flying in one direction, hovering over one point, then swiftly dropping down.

In grim silence the pursuers made for what would surely prove to be a valley of death on an unprecedented scale. A hot wind which was blowing directly into their faces was now laden with an appalling stench that grew more overpowering every moment.

Knowing that they were at the end of the trail, yet dreading what they might find, the pursuing party scrambled up a last ridge and then looked down into Suliman's secret valley.

It was a nightmare. Strewed across the green, verdant floor that looked a paradise after the desert, were all the stolen cattle—dead! The air was mouldy and heavy with decay, hastened by the fierce heat of tropical Africa. The great thigh bones and ribs of beasts that had already been picked clean, stood up white and stark under the grilling, scorching sun. On other bodies, as yet half consumed, were great birds—birds that fought and tore. Here and there, on lonely thorn

trees, sat the gorged vultures that had had their fill, now too heavy to flap more than a few yards.

Yet more and more, in battalions and legions, the cannibals of the air came flocking to join in the grisly orgy. The whole valley was one vast charnel-house.

For a few moments, Ted and Clifford stood spellbound by the gruesome spectacle. The Lumbwas clucked audibly in dismay.

Then Ted spoke, his voice full of bitterness and disappointment.

"Rinderpest!" he exclaimed. "The scourge of African cattle. I might have guessed it. These cattle crossed ground fouled by the buffalo, and picked up the infection—buffalo always spread it. And so Suliman just got to his precious valley and then lost all his loot! Reckon his Masai skipped out when they saw what was happenin', and he's gone with 'em. Gee! I never did see such a wunnerful grazin' ground—tucked right away in a desert—but now it's a bloomin' death-trap!"

Indeed, it also seemed as if the arduous pursuit had ended in complete failure; and they had only arrived at the hidden valley to see the end of the herd. Although the whole affair had been no fault of either Ted's or Clifford's, it would be a sorry business reporting to the owner of the ranch that his house had been burnt to the ground, and two hundred and fifty of his best cattle irretrievably lost.

Sadly, the boys turned their backs on the stricken valley and started back down the steep slopes of the ridge.

Crack! Crack!

Ted wheeled round sharply as a couple of pistol-shots whizzed past his head. One bullet flattened out on a rock with a loud smack—but the other found a billet. A Lumbwa threw up his hands and crashed on his face.

"Down!" yelled Ted, as he spun round and cast himself full length.

Clifford was not a second slower, and Malungu and the other Lumbwa took refuge behind a boulder. But there was nothing to be seen!

Then, very slowly, from behind a sand-rift, emerged a blue turban. Clifford caught sight of it, and let drive, scoring a clean miss.

The next instant, his Mauser crackling, the one-armed Suliman charged out from

behind his cover. At his heels came his lieutenant, Sadalla—all the Masai had deserted.

Before either Ted or Clifford could fire, Malungu and Karia, the remaining Lumbwas, leapt forward to meet the two Somalis—they had four comrades to avenge, and were filled with the blood lust.

Suliman's bullets went wide. Casting aside his empty pistol, the one-armed raider snatched forth his heavy "machete." With clenched teeth he swung a murderous blow at Malungu's head. The latter ducked and, wielding his heavy spear like a mediæval pike as the Somali's knife whizzed over his head, thrust with all his force.

Suliman gave one awful scream, and, throwing up his hands, fell back dead—the spear, buried in his heart, was twisted out of Malungu's grasp.

Meanwhile, Sadalla had tripped Karia and was kneeling on him, his two-edged sword raised above his head for a sweeping blow. But Clifford saw the opportunity—a shot rang out, well-aimed this time, and Sadalla collapsed on his would-be victim, a bullet in his head.

"So that's the end of as blackguardly a pair o' scoundrels as ever haunted East Africa!" said Ted as, ten minutes later, they again commenced the descent of the ridge. "I reckon I envy Malungu for havin' actually done the brute in! Well, I guess they've sure got a suitable cemetery in that secret valley—it's a valley o' death!"

It was evident what had happened. The two Somalis, deserted by all their followers, stripped of the plunder gained in the most audacious raid that even Suliman had ever undertaken, had elected to await death at the hands of the pursuers, whom they felt certain would follow up. They had determined that someone should share their doom.

The sudden development of rinderpest, the most virulent of all cattle diseases, had turned Suliman's perfect refuge into a cemetery.

The two white boys, with Malungu and Karia, halted that night in a ravine they had hastened through earlier in the day. Both Ted and Clifford felt in low spirits, for they had failed to achieve their principal object—the recovery of the cattle.

The grey light of dawn found them about to break camp, when a startled cry from Ted brought Clifford breathless to his side.

"Look!" exclaimed Ted, holding up a piece of rough quartz. "Gold!"

Clifford could hardly believe his eyes, but he knew that Ted had done his share of prospecting, and was not likely to be deceived.

The streak proved to be no isolated patch, for a frantic search revealed a rich vein.

"I reckon this squares things some!" observed Ted. "Though Suliman deserves no thanks for leadin' us here. There'll be enough o' that stuff to pay for a new house for the boss and replace all them cattle, let alone a tidy bit over for ourselves and somethin' for Malungu and Karia."

The Lumbwas were not slow to express their appreciation of the change of fortune; but chiefly they rejoiced that never again would slaves or stolen cattle be driven to the one-armed Somali's secret valley. For Suliman and his lieutenant would lie there themselves till the crack of doom.

THE END.

(There will be a stunning racing story next Wednesday, entitled "The Sunken Racer!" Don't miss this—it's something extra good!)



CONKEY'S PLIGHT! The united efforts of the whole of the engine-room staff were unable to get the iron pot off Conkey's head. "Ah'm thinking that the easiest thing to do is to cut off the boy's head!" said the chief engineer at last. (An amusing incident from "The Bullies of the Bombay Castle," the great new story contained in this week's issue of the "Boys' Friend," which is now on sale everywhere. Get it to-day!)

A BRIGHT AND BREEZY YARN YOU WILL LIKE!

The First of a New Series

When Ned Derry succeeded to the ownership of the sailing-barge *Estuary Belle*, he found himself up against the boldest gang of river-pirates on the River Thames. But it was not for nothing that he had earned the nickname of River-wise Ned!

By ROLAND SPENCER.

CHAPTER 1.

Sharkey Mason's Murderous Trick.

THE *Estuary Belle*, London sailing barge, was crashing along madly in Fiddler's Reach. She was making for Greenhithe, now close at hand, and she was being helped along by a three-knot flood tide, as well as by a leading wind.

Old Edgar Brunt, the skipper, was at the wheel, and the old man's smart young mate—sometimes called a barge-boy—was standing on the weather side of the barge, near the rigging.

This young fellow was seventeen years old, fair-haired, bronzed, and stalwart. He was considered one of the smartest mates on any topsail barge in the London river.

Bearing down wind and tide towards the barge was a big, lumbering, rusty iron motor-coaster, heavily laden right down to her Plimsoll mark. This vessel, as Ned and old Brunt well knew, was called the *Good Resolution*, for they had recently surprised the boat in a robbery, called, in the river, pirating. Old Brunt and Ned had on that occasion narrowly escaped with their lives.

Suddenly, without warning, the motor-coaster altered its course, and came plunging and crashing dead for the mid-ship section of the *Belle*.

"Sharkey Mason means mischief again," yelled Ned, suddenly alert and strung up for action. "He's going to run us down. Luff, quick!"

Ned watched intently, but old Brunt seemed turned to stone.

"Hellum down, Edgar!" the youngster yelled. "What on earth are you up to?"

Ned Derry was aft like a streak of greased lightning; for, for the first time in his life, Edgar Brunt had lost his head.

Dashing the skipper's hands from the wheel, Ned spun round the iron circle as quick as lightning. The *Estuary Belle* seemed to shake herself, and into the wind she nosed, spinning round on her leeboard, her stern swinging away from the course of the coaster.

The big, heavy, iron motor-ship's stem was towering above them, but she just missed, through no fault of her helmsman—Sharkey Mason himself. With her canvas lashing furiously, the *Belle* hung up in the wind.

From the bridge of the coaster, as the heavy craft crashed by, missing the *Belle* by only a couple of feet, and swamping her decks and hatch-covers with her wash, Mason shook his fist at the barge, shouting loudly. Then the coaster was past.

"Whow! You and I very nearly set off on the long cruise that time, Edgar!" cried Ned. "Mason meant to sink us. He's afraid we'll tell about seeing him rob that coasting ketch."

"Ay, lad, he meant it for sartin," replied Brunt. "It's shook me all up. Crumbs, e'd 'ave cut us in two!"

"We should have sunk like a stone with this freight," remarked Ned easily. The youngster was as cool as a cucumber. "Better bear up, Edgar, or we shall overshoot our mark."

Ned had again handed over the wheel to his skipper, who had taken it mechanically. At Ned's words the old man roused himself.

"By gum, yes!" he said. "Bear up it is. I'm all shook up, Ned. 'Tain't like me to get nervous. You take the hellum again, lad, will 'e?"

While Ned steered the barge in past the four-deep rows of clanking and grinding lighters—no mean task in itself—and coolly luffed to a suitable berth, old Edgar mopped his brow.

Then the skipper, the tricky passage between the lighters accomplished, looking white about the neck where the tan was not so strong, steadied the wheel while Ned nipped forrard and let go the anchor.

"I think she's safe enough now, Edgar," said Ned, taking a look round. "Come down below. You'll feel all right after a bit."

The two bargemen adjourned below.

"Ned," said the old man, when they were both seated in the little cabin in the stern of the barge, "you've saved the *Belle* to-day. I reckon the way you swung yon wheel was smart. I failed entirely. Young blood's wanted to sail a sailing barge, so I'm a-goin' to make over the *Belle* to you—a present, me lad. I know right well the old barge will be in good hands; but you'll 'ave to watch Sharkey Mason, o' the *Resolution*, and await your chance to bring the rascally pirate to justice."

Ned staggered at the startling news the old man had given him. A hundred

and twenty tons sailing barge, out of which old Edgar Brunt had made a small fortune, to be his alone, to skipper her and trade with her in this wonderful old London river! As spice and savour in the enterprise, too, a job to upset the plans of the notorious London river pirate, Sharkey Mason. It was stunning news!

"Yes," continued the skipper, "the *Belle*'s yours from to-day, an' we'll go to a lawyer chap, and get it drawed up right an' proper. We can't say anything about Mason, 'cos we's got no proof as yet. But you're to down him is a condition we make atween ourselves. Do ye agree?"

Ned did; and a week later he found himself owner of one of the best topsail barges in the river.

Still dazed at the turn of events, Ned Derry wrote to two of his pals, who, he knew, had struck rather hard lines, and were on the look-out for a job.

This is what Ned wrote:

"Sailing Barge *Estuary Belle*,
"c/o Post Office,
"Greenhithe, Kent.

"My Dear Chumps,—Still looking round for a job in London? Well, I'm owner of the *Belle* now, and I want two good mates. A couple of mugs like you hardly fit the bill, but why shouldn't we all make our lives one long, glorious round of thrills in the *Belle*? I've an enemy to fight, too. Equal shares in the profits and the danger, me to choose freights and passages, and be skipper are the terms. Is it a go? Reply by letter, if refusal, and in person on the Worcester Causeway, Greenhithe, as quickly as the enclosed P.O. will bring you, if you accept. It's a clinch, lads!

"What-ho!

"Your old pal,

"NED."

The reply came in person. Jim Cartwright, lanky, tough, and big-boned, thus earning the name of Long Jim, and Tony Parr, stocky and quick-witted, the next day were bawling from the Worcester Causeway, fit to burst their lungs:

"*Belle*, a-hoy! A-hoy, there! A-hoy!"

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Then, as Ned's head appeared above the cabin companion way:

"Wake up, you dummy, an' come ashore for your new mates!"

Ned jumped into the heavy barge-boat and sculled ashore. The chums gripped hands, and soon were seated to a slap-up feed in the cabin of the Estuary Belle, talking things over, and sealing their contract—a solemn promise to stick to each other and the Belle through thick and thin. After bolting innumerable jam-tarts and custards, they drank, in lukewarm tea, to their own success and the confounding of the Good Resolution and Sharkey Mason, the river pirate.

River-wise Ned, as 'river' folk had learnt to dub the young skipper of the Estuary Belle, soon after becoming owner of the barge secured half a load of cement from Grays for Queenborough, in the River Medway.

"The Resolution is bound for the Medway, too," Ned told his pals, as they had a hot supper of fish and chips from the local fish-frier's. "She'll be nice, pleasant company, provided we don't get too close under her bows."

"I wonder if Sharkey Mason will be on some dark work again, as a sideline to his ordinary biz?" remarked Tony Parr.

"You bet he will be, Tony," replied Ned. "We've got to find out definitely, though. My scheme is this. Mason is at the moment at Dagenham. He has loaded up with a freight of old bricks, which he has to take to Temper's wharf, at Port Victoria. That's opposite Queenborough, where we are bound, you know."

"Now, old Edgar and I did a good many jobs for Temper, and I know his wharf at Port Victoria very well. He's a most careless chap, is Temper, and he keeps all sorts of valuable cases and bales on the wharf, simply asking to be picked up and pirated. I'll bet my last pair of sea-boots that Mason will deliver the old bricks to Temper all right, but he'll take a bit more than his rightful profit by stealing a case or two of something."

"What we've got to do is to catch Mason and his gang red-handed on the wharf at Port Victoria. The best way to find things out is to listen to the conversations below decks on the Good Resolution. We can just catch the ten-ten to Dagenham Dock, and it'll be easy to get aboard Mason's craft, moored alongside the wharf, where the dismantled factory is, as she will be."

The chums charged into the station at Grays just as the ten-ten was moving out.

"Tumble in!" shouted Ned, as the lads rushed a compartment. "Look alive, before she gathers good way!"

With gasps the lads sorted themselves out on the floor of a compartment,

apologizing to the passengers already seated, while the carriage door banged and the train gathered speed.

It seemed that the chums had no sooner regained their breath than they had to get out at Dagenham Dock Station. Then Ned led his two mates through a maze of rubbish and dust mountains—London's rubbish dump—and before long they came to the old, crazy wharf, alongside which the Good Resolution was moored.

The lads crept cautiously up to the edge of the wharf, and peered over on to the iron deck of the motor-coaster. It was very dark, but they could see that there was no one on the deck of the vessel.

Taking off their boots, they lowered themselves on to the after-deck, and moved silently towards the skylight of the cabin, from which a shaft of light bit into the darkness. Furtively they peered into the cabin.

Sharkey Mason was sitting at the head of the table, his great, knotted fist round the neck of a bottle of spirits.

Long Jim and Tony had their first close-up view of Sharkey Mason as they stared down through the skylight. A heavy black beard hid the man's square jaws. His eyes were watery and small, and there were dark-coloured pouches under them. He was bull-necked and heavily built, and there was that in his limbs and his movements that reminded one of the great strength and brutality of a gorilla.

"I tell ye I know as those cases contain saccharine!" Mason growled to the two villainous-faced men who sat drinking with him. "Temper allus leaves his stuff in the open-fronted warehouses, no matter how valuable it be. We can lift them there cases easy, and no one will be able to prove anythin' agen us."

"I 'eard as the Estuary Belle was bound for Queenborough, Sharkey," put in one of the river pirate's companions. Sharkey Mason scowled darkly.

"Well, an' what of it? Ain't River-wise Ned scared stiff o' me? An' ain't Edgar Brunt the same arter we rammed 'em in Fiddler's Reach?"

"Ay, ay! But I 'eard as Brunt left the Belle to River-wise Ned on condition that 'e'd down you!"

Sharkey Mason's face clouded over with rage.

"Strike me pink!" he cried, bringing the bottom of his bottle of whisky down on the cabin table with a crash. "Are we to be bamboozled by a cub o' a barge-boy? I ain't afraid o' childern, if you be, Hanky!"

"Well, I ses watch the Estuary Belle, that's all."

"Bah!" ejaculated Mason contemptuously. "I'll frighten the life out o' them young rats!" Then he took a long pull at his bottle, wiped his whiskers with the back of his strong,

dirty hand, and rose. "I'm off up on deck for a breath o' Dagenham dust afore I turns in. You can git off to yer bunks and 'ave nightmares as River-wise Ned is attackin' of you wi' a bamboo cane."

With that, Mason lurched towards the companionway steps, and Ned and his two mates weren't slow in getting ashore. They pulled on their boots in the friendly shelter of a dust-heap, and were soon walking quickly to the station to catch a train back to Grays.

"Now we know definitely Mason is on a pirating job, Ned," said Tony Parr, when they were all back on the Belle.

"Yes; and we're to catch him red-handed, as I said before. Turn in now, for we must take the first of to-morrow's ebb."

At high tide the next morning, just as the chums were preparing to get under way, the Good Resolution came swinging down the river round Stone Ness.

"Man the windlass!" called out Ned. "Get the topsail drawn out. I'll stand by the wheel."

The barge was soon under way, and bowling down-river past Gravesend. The Good Resolution overhauled the barge just when they were opening up Sea Reach.

The motor-coaster, chugging along in a powerful way, edged in close to Blyth Sands, but Ned kept in the shallow water, so the Resolution could not get any nearer than hailing distance of the barge.

Sharkey Mason was on the bridge of the red-rusty coaster. He cupped his hands, and sent a hail across the water.

"Barge ahoy! A word o' advice to ye. Keep out o' my way, that's all!"

Ned replied by throwing the river pirate a kiss with the hand that was not on the wheel, and the chums, with loud laughter, applauded Sharkey Mason's wild Indian dance on the bridge.

"Don't let your magneto send a spark out to that beautiful language, Sharkey!" bawled Ned. "If you do you'll all blow up, for certain. See you in the Medway."

Happily, the ever-widening distance between the two boats would not allow Sharkey Mason's further remarks to reach the ears of the youthful ship's company of the Estuary Belle.

The barge, with a fair wind, bowled merrily on, down through Jenkin Swathway, and round the Isle of Grain. As they slipped into the West Swale to Queenborough, they saw the Resolution moored to a wharf at Port Victoria opposite.

That evening, before the Belle had had a chance to warp into the wharf, a boat bumped alongside the barge. The chums started up from their seats in the cabin, but Sharkey Mason was quicker than they were. He was down the companionway before the chums could look round almost.

"Huh!" said Mason, in disgust, as he glared round the clean, tidy little cabin. "Nobbut three cubs. I wonder as the law lets babies endanger other craft by sailin' of barges. Wot's the game, River-wise Ned? I guess I'll make ye a bit wiser afore I'm finished!"

"Please to remember your manners, Sharkey!" said Ned severely, making the river pirate scowl darkly and clench his fists. "You might knock before you come to see a gentleman in his cabin. What do you mean by 'what's the game?'"

"You know well enough, you pup! I reckon ye'll find yerself in Queer Street if ye interfere wi' me. Ye didn't split larst time, an' I reckon ye earns your name in that particular. I repeats, what's yer game?"

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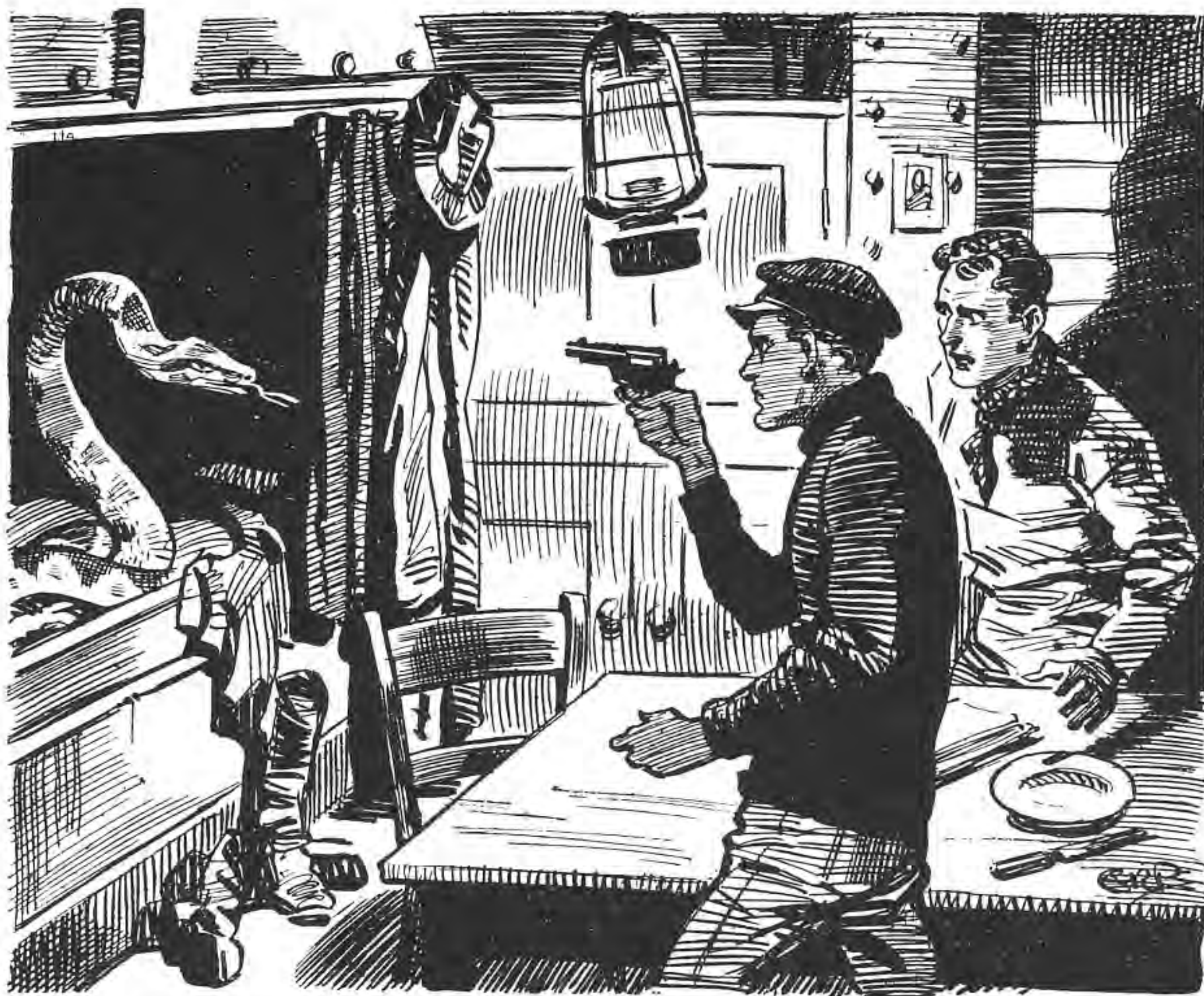
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Twenty-four competitors, with two errors each, divide the ten prizes of 5s. each. The names and addresses of these prizewinners can be obtained on application at this office.

SOLUTION.

Leicestershire has never held a very prominent position in first-class cricket. The county has suffered numerous defeats, yet has played much splendid cricket, and at the present period her prospects are extremely hopeful. To King belongs the distinction of being the oldest player to appear regularly.



Ned raised his weapon and took careful aim. Just as the evil, flat head of the boa-constrictor darted forward, the shot rang out.

"Well, Sharkey, if you will know, though I've issued no ultimatum, a state of war exists between the Estuary Belle and the Bad Resolution. We're your stormy petrel. When we're near you, trouble's handy. Get, and quick!"

The river pirate's face looked murderous, and the man stood his ground, so Ned started up.

"At him, chums! Dump him overboard! Right into the ditch! He can swim all right, and he could do with a wash, though the water'll never reach his heart!"

The chums rushed and a desperate scrap took place in the cabin. The boys had not before realised how many corners and projecting pieces there were in that little cabin. And Sharkey Mason, too, was well aware of them.

The three sturdy youngsters got the hulking form of their enemy on deck at last, and, with a cheer, sent the man flying overboard. Mason's boat, containing a startled hand waiting for his skipper, picked up the spluttering and swearing form of his master, and bore him, raving like a madman, across the Medway towards the Resolution.

The chums of the Belle looked at each other as they stood in the cabin after that bit of a dust-up.

"There's grave danger for us with that man, Ned."

"You're right, chum. We've no fire-arms aboard. I must get a revolver at

our earliest convenience—and that's now!"

"Must we watch the Resolution to-night, Ned?"

"Sure thing! Mason won't be here for more than a couple of tides, so he'll do what he intends to do to-night!"

CHAPTER 2.

The Surprise in the Cabin!

THE chums did not go down the Medway by boat to where the Resolution was moored, because they knew well enough they would be expected. They crossed the river well up, and walked down towards Port Victoria.

Just as they passed over a half-wrecked landing-stage, and were beginning to search in the darkness ahead for the first sight of the coaster, four men sprang out at them.

"Look out, chaps!" yelled Ned. "Sharkey's been more thorough than we gave him credit for. Ambush here!"

Then the youngsters lashed out savagely with their fists in a frantic endeavour to keep the men from getting their hands on their throats.

River-wise Ned caught one of the men—a hulking great brute with a greasy pilot cap on his head, and a celluloid eye-protector over one eye—a beautiful

knock-out blow on the point of the jaw. The man crumpled up with a grunt, so now the chums of the Belle were not outnumbered. All the same, Ned could find no opportunity to draw his shooter, which he had in his trousers pocket.

After the first gasp of surprise, the youngsters began to enjoy the scrap. They were all smart boxers, and the river rats they were tackling began to know it. The men retreated steadily, having failed in their endeavour to close with the chums.

Just as Jim Cartwright seemed to have his own particular opponent right at his mercy Tony Parr yelled out fiercely:

"Watch the left! Reinforcements! Fight over to Long Jim, Ned!"

Ned and Tony pressed the fight hard, but the reinforcements, to the tune of three others, armed with sticks, were at hand. Sick with fear, Ned and Tony saw Long Jim go down under a brutal blow with a big lump of timber. Then two men picked the unconscious youngster up and got away. They disappeared into the darkness, despite the frantic efforts of Ned and Tony to break through to his rescue.

One by one the men left the fight, and at last the remaining three, reinforced by the man Jim had knocked out, he having come round, forced the lads to the edge of the broken-down wharf.

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Powerless to hold their ground, the plucky pair retreated nearer and nearer to the edge, and at last they were knocked right over, to fall, breathless and exhausted, with a mighty splash into the soft mud.

It took them some time to sort themselves out and climb back to dry land.

"Well, old son," grunted Ned ruefully, "they've got away and they've got Jim. I'll bet they'll hold Jim under the threat of death if we talk or give any trouble in the future. That's their game, for a cert."

"Yes, I s'pose so!" said Tony. "Let's get back to the Belle and talk things over."

The chums went back to their boat, and before long they were aboard the Belle.

"Great guns, they've been aboard. Ned! Look, the skylight's smashed, and the bars have been bent—"

"So they have! That was to get something down into the cabin, for a cert. A message, I'll bet! Come on, old son, down below to find out!"

The cabin seemed undisturbed in the darkness. Whatever had been pushed down was not very big. Ned lit the swing lamp, and as the glimmer of the paraffin light shone out, the chums peered round cautiously. They could see nothing at all.

"What in thunder has been done, chum?"

"Blessed if I know, old sport. There's nothing on the floor or on the table. Now, what about Jim? The mystery of the skylight can wait. Let's think out some scheme to get Jim back!"

"Do you fear for his life, Ned?"

"No, frankly, I don't. The ambush was deliberately laid to capture one of us only, to hold him under the threat of death if we who are left tell the police, or try to interfere further with Mason's plans. That doesn't require a Ferrers Locke brain to work out, I reckon. Now—"

"Jumping Jupiter, what's that?"

The chums span round. An ominous, sibilant sound was proceeding from one of the bunks, and, with eyes staring, the chums retreated to the farther end of the cabin, for a big boa-constrictor was looking at them with evil, glittering eyes.

The thread-like tongue was protruding from the big reptile's mouth, and Ned and Tony stared in horror. The head of the snake was waving to and fro, to and fro monotonously.

"Going to strike?" muttered Tony. But Ned whispered fiercely, without moving his lips:

"Keep perfectly still. A move and he'll dart forward! Leave it to me!"

Slowly moving his hand a fraction of an inch at a time, Ned put his hand in his pocket and drew out his revolver. Even more slowly he raised the weapon and took careful aim.

The youngster's hand was as steady as a rock as he got the reptile's head in line with the sights. Then, just as the evil, flat head of the boa-constrictor darted forward, the shot rang out. With a thump, the body of the reptile fell on the floor of the cabin, where it lay writhing.

"I've got it through the head, Tony, but don't get in the way for fear it is still living," cried Ned. "Those writhings are merely the nerves of the reptile, I expect."

"It was in your bunk, Ned. Who did it, do you think?"

"Another reptile—Sharkey Mason! THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 813.

Mason meant to do for us this time. Therefore he would have no object in keeping Long Jim alive—"

Tony Parr stared in affright at his chum, and, moistening his dry lips, River-wise Ned continued:

"Mason put that reptile down through our skylight. I remember now reading in the paper that a naturalist's case in a warehouse had been stolen, and that that case contained a reptile for the Zoo. The journalist who wrote the river thefts up, said that the thieves would get a shock when they opened the reptile-case and were confronted by a deadly boa-constrictor. Mason was that thief, I reckon."

"Sure thing, Ned. But Jim—"

"I'm coming to that. They meant to capture me, not Jim, and the men made a mistake and took Jim off instead. The boa-constrictor was meant for you and Jim. You see, chum, I was to be held to keep Brunt's mouth shut. Got me?"

"Then it's probable, when they discover their mistake, they will just slip Jim overboard and go and deal likewise with Brunt, isn't it? Then they will think they have no one to fear, us having been killed by this boa-constrictor—what?"

"Ay, chum, it's probable; it's more than probable. It's almost certain."

"We ought to get off on Jim's track at once, Ned."

"Yes, at once. We'll scout up the river, and swim out to the Resolution if she has already swung out to her anchor. They won't have reckoned on our killing the boa-constrictor."

Once more the Belle's boat was rowed out across the waters of the Medway. The tide was ebbing fast, and then they were nearly half-way over, Ned rested on his oar and told Tony to stop rowing for a minute.

"There's a power-boat coming down. Do you hear the chug-chug of the motor? There's not another motor as big as that in the Medway. It's the Resolution, for certain," he said excitedly. "Back to the Belle, and we'll drop down on this tide. We've just got to make the Swathway before the flood."

By dawn, tired-eyed and weary, River-wise Ned and Tony Parr were urging the Belle along the Lower Hope to try to get into hiding behind a huge steamer lying just beyond Ovens Spit buoy, so that the Resolution could pass without seeing the Belle. They managed it, and

furtively watched the big, rusty, motor-coaster ploughing up-river the other side of the steamer.

River-wise Ned and Tony Parr hoped fervently that Long Jim was aboard and alive. Then they weighed anchor again to get under way for Woolwich, whither they knew the Resolution was bound.

CHAPTER 3.

Mason's Fiendish Plot!

THE Estuary Belle crawled slowly inside the lighters moored just off Bugsby Hole, near Woolwich. The Good Resolution had been moored to a wharf opposite, near the entrance to the East India Docks. It was twelve noon, so River-wise Ned and Tony Parr had a good eight hours before them before they could make any attempt to force an entrance on the motor-coaster and try to discover if their chum was get-at-able.

This eight hours the chums used in having a good sleep, which they badly needed. When darkness had fallen, and everything on the river was asleep except the river rats, river thieves, river watchmen, the tide, and themselves, the chums rowed over to the opposite shore and hitched up under the stern of some lighters there.

In that position they watched for an opportunity to creep aboard the Resolution, and try to rescue Long Jim.

Lights were still shining in the cabin of the coaster, but as the hours dragged on the lights on the shore and on the craft at anchor went out one by one. There was no sound but the occasional grinding of the lighters one against the other, and the sugging of the tide under the keels of the flat boats.

At last all lights were out but the riding-lights and the brilliant glare from the docks the other side of the warehouses. The two watchers were very alert, and at last Tony gripped Ned's knee.

"Hist!"

A boat had been pulled round by the painter from under the stern to the waist of the Resolution. Then a senseless form was handed down into the boat.

"Long Jim, for a cert! By jingo! Keep still, Tony, or we'll be spotted! What are they about, I wonder?" muttered Ned.

The boat was pushed off and rowed to some steps some distance up the river. There the form was carried to the wharf above and dumped on the ground. Then a form approached the group of men.

"That newcomer is the wharf watchman to ask what the blazes they want!" hissed Ned. "Watch!"

The watchman, on reaching the group, was seen to step back in alarm. Then one of the men from the Resolution raised a heavy stick and brought it down on the man's head. The watchman crumpled up and lay still, evidently stunned.

"I can't stand this!" at last cried Ned Derry, unhitching the painter of the boat from the lighter. "Lash out, Tony! We must rush them!"

The chums were up on the wharf before the men were conscious of their approach. The first person to swing round on them was Sharkey Mason himself.

The man fell back with a cry, so great was the shock of seeing the two persons he thought he had disposed of in the Medway. But he soon collected his wits, and was ready with his men when Ned and Tony rushed.

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Tony and Ned rushed upon their antagonists, hitting out right and left. Ned clubbed his revolver and Tony used a belaying-pin. The noise of the scrap was soon heard, and there was the sound of approaching feet.

Ned had his revolver, and Tony had a belaying-pin. The chums were not squeamish in the use of their weapons. Ned laid about him with the butt of his revolver, once, twice, three times. Each time a man went down. Tony made the fur fly with his belaying-pin, and those who caught it on the skull yelped like whipped curs.

The noise of the scrap soon drew crashing footsteps near. But before the much-needed help arrived, Ned and Sharkey Mason were man to man on the edge of the wharf. Ned fought like a tiger, and time and again Mason nearly went over. However, another man, armed with a loaded stick, came to Mason's aid, and, attacking together, they pressed the plucky youngster close to the edge of the wharf.

With a tremendous blow from each man, delivered at the same instant, Ned went flying into the air, curved over, and fell into the yellow, curdling water with a tremendous splash. The ebb tide carried the lad rapidly down stream.

The rescuers now had Mason and his gang captives, and Tony Parr, standing beside the unconscious form of Long Jim, watched his young skipper strike out weakly for the shore. Ned's senses were going, it was plain, so Tony promptly took a header into the water and soon had Ned supported. Together, the two chums struck out, and at last reached a swinging and twisting buoy. On to this they clung for dear life.

They were soon picked up by two watermen, and they got back to the wharf just as Long Jim came round. But Ned was in a bad way from the blows he had received from the two ruffians, and he had to wait quite twenty minutes whilst a doctor was called to bandage his wounds. At last Ned was handed over to Tony and Jim by the doctor, who advised them all to get into dry clothes as soon as possible.

* * * * *

"Ned, lad, Mason made a confession while you were unconscious on the wharf. He pinched those cases of saccharine from Temper's Wharf all right, and he meant to leave poor old Long Jim unconscious beside the wounded watchman on the wharf at Blackwall, with evidence so arranged that he would be accused of engineering this further robbery and wounding the watchman," Tony said, as they sat in the cabin, dry clothes on, and steaming soup before them.

"Ay," he continued, "and the beast wanted the blame of the robberies to be fixed on the Belle. You see, it would appear as if we had stolen the boa-constrictor case. Fake evidence was arranged, too, to make it appear as if Long Jim had worked the boa-constrictor murder of you and me, and was the agent of a gang which meant to rob the wharf where we had the scrap."

"Whew! What a swab the man is!"

"We've to attend at Cold Harbour tomorrow to give evidence. The police are coming for the dead boa-constrictor, to produce at the hearing of the case. And we shall be wanted for the trial—"

But suddenly Ned switched off the subject.

"Great snakes, chaps, I'd clean forgotten our half-load of cement! We've taken a roundabout way of delivering it to Queenborough, and all our profits will go for delay in delivery!"

It was the businesslike River-wise Ned who looked up from his plate and expounded this news gravely.

"Never mind, old son," said Long Jim. "It's been thundering good ballast, and we can deliver it pretty soon now. We've done honest traders in the river a great service, so the people on the wharf said, by ridding the London river of its notorious river pirate!"

"Good! Then half a load of cement as a profitless freight don't matter. Here's to the continued success of the Belle, lads, and a rattling good and profitable career for her master and crew!"

THE END.

(You must not miss Next Week's splendid story of River-wise Ned. It is entitled "A River Rescue!" and is a story that is bound to please you.)

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TROUBLE ON THE THAMES!

(Concluded from page 15.)

Cutts staggered to his feet and reeled to the french window. There he raved with wrath.

"After them! Don't let them get away! St. Leger, you fool, where are you goin'?"

"I'm goin' to bed!" said St. Leger; and he went.

"Perkins, Morrison, after them. I—I—" raved Cutts. "If they get away I—I—I'll—"

"Bai Jove, Cutts sounds as if he is wathah in a wage!" chuckled Arthur Augustus. "Do you think we weally gave him enough?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Tom Merry & Co. looked back. Cutts was yelling to his

comrades to pursue them, but nobody seemed keen on a pursuit. The juniors retired to the river bank unmolested.

They jumped on board the Old Bus and cast loose. Blake was shoving off with an oar when there was a trampling of footsteps on the shore, and Cutts appeared with a golf club in his hand. Blake cheerfully planted the end of the oar against his chest, using Cutts to shove off from. Gerald Cutts sat down with a howl, and the Old Bus glided out from the bank into the moonlit river.

"Wow, bwothahs, wow!" said Arthur Augustus, chuckling.

"I wathah think that we got the best of it in the long wun, and Cutts is sowwy he spoke. Bai Jove, he is still yellin'!"

But the furious voice of Cutts of the Fifth died away at last as the Old Bus disappeared from his view on the moonlit Thames.

THE END.

(Next week's story of Tom Merry & Co., is a perfect scream! It is entitled "Seven Boys in a Boat!" Don't you miss it, boys!)

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