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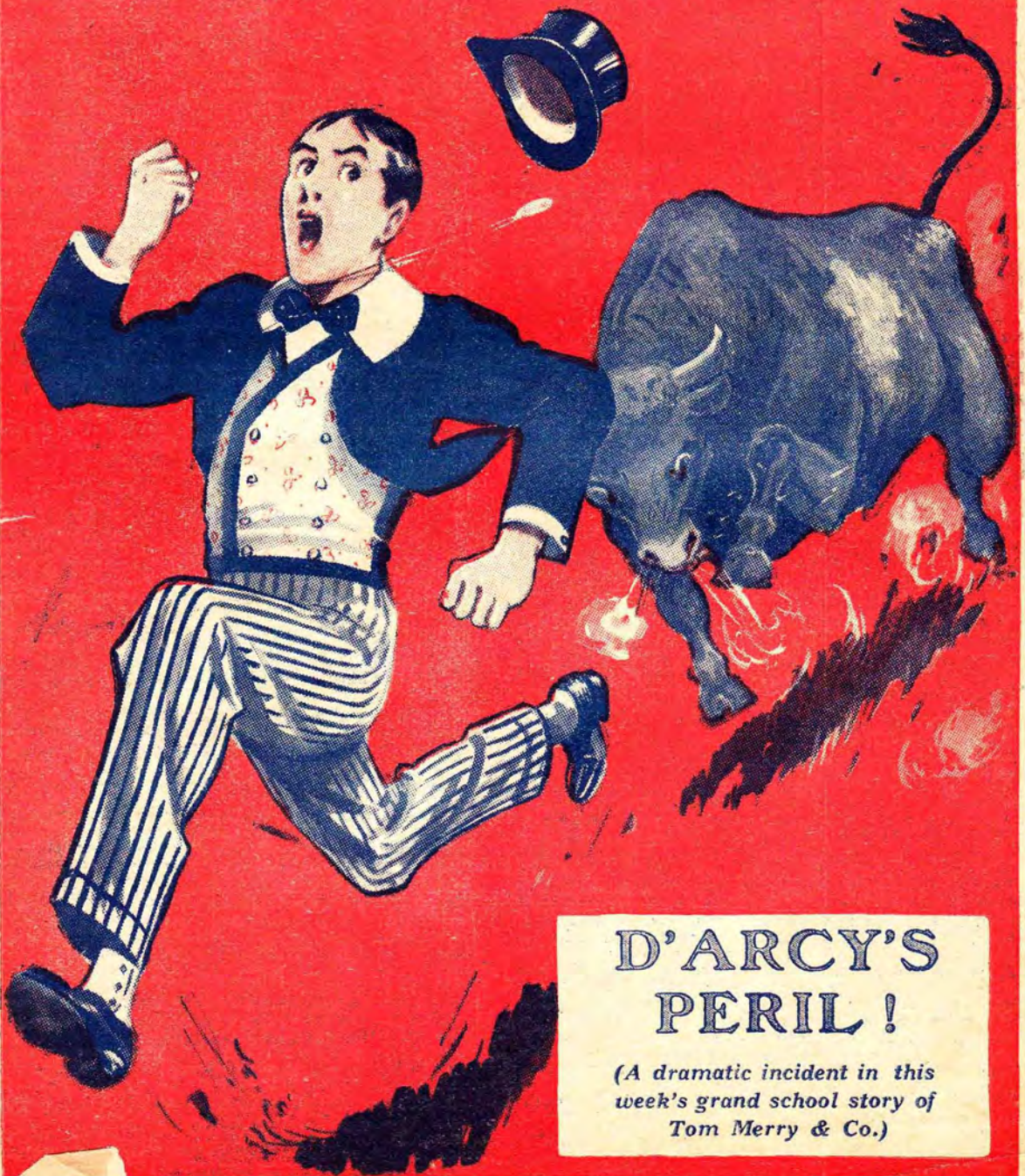
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EVERY
WEDNESDAY.



D'ARCY'S PERIL !

(A dramatic incident in this
week's grand school story of
Tom Merry & Co.)

2
A ROLICKING LONG SCHOOL TALE OF FUN & ADVENTURE—

FARMERS ALL!

by MARTIN CLIFFORD

Tom Merry & Co. have turned their hands to many things during their youthful careers, but never before has it fallen to their lot to run a farm in real earnest. They are not the fellows to hesitate, however, when they see a chance of doing anybody a good turn, and their new job provides them with plenty of work—and unexpected adventures into the bargain!

CHAPTER I. A Tight Corner!

"IT'S risky!"

"Blow the risk!"

Wally D'Arcy snorted as he spoke.

It was a half-holiday at St. Jim's, and four members of the Third Form were gathered in front of a notice-board at the edge of a grassy meadow near Rylcombe. On it was the grim warning:

"Beware of the Bull!"

"That bull's jolly dangerous," said Jameson, shaking his youthful head. "Everybody knows what a bad-tempered brute it is."

"Rot!" retorted Wally D'Arcy. "It won't notice us if we give it a wide berth. In any case, we've got legs, haven't we?"

"Yes; but so has the giddy bull, old chap. Besides, old Chubb will be no end waxy if we ignore that notice-board. It's hardly the thing, you know."

"Hardly," agreed Curly Gibson, backing up Jameson. "Old Chubb's a decent old bird, and it's not playing the game to go where he's told us not to go."

"Well, what can we do?" snorted Wally D'Arcy stubbornly. "Those Shell and Fourth chaps will be along soon, and I'm jolly sure I'm not going all the way back round by Rylcombe; no fear! We'll dodge 'em nicely if we slip across this field into Meadow Lane."

"But the risk—"

"Blow the risk! I'd rather risk that giddy bull than risk a licking from Blake. He's got a beautiful black eye, I believe, and he's simply raving for my scalp."

"Well, you shouldn't have been such an ass as to bung an apple at a chap like Blake."

"Think I did it on purpose?" said the leader of the Third witheringly. "I bunged it at that little sweep Piggott; it wasn't my fault that Blake shoved his silly napper in the way."

"Well, it hit him in the eye, anyway," grinned Frank Levison; "and it's not likely Blake would take it smiling. Better take your licking now, and get it done with."

"Better than risking that bull, anyway," said Gibson emphatically.

"Rot!"

Wally D'Arcy was far from being convinced about that. Jack Blake, of the Fourth Form at St. Jim's, was good-natured enough, but scarcely good-natured enough to take a black eye from a Third Form fag without making a row about it—even if the black eye was the result of an "accident." Indeed, the scapegrace of the Third was well aware that Blake had vowed to give him the licking of his life. In the circumstances, it was not to be wondered at, perhaps, that Wally D'Arcy was very anxious indeed to avoid Jack Blake.

In the present case, it was easy enough to do that. All the fags had to do was, either to turn and retrace their steps, or cross the forbidden field and thus reach Meadow Lane. Wally did not want to do the former, because he was stubbornly determined not to go all the way round by Rylcombe in order to get back to St. Jim's, and his three chums didn't want to do the latter simply because there was a particularly ugly-looking bull in that field.

It was a case of Hobson's choice, and as usual Wally got his own way. Happening to glance ahead again just then, Wally noted that the four figures sauntering along the field-path in the distant meadow had suddenly hastened their pace.

"They've spotted us!" he snapped. "Well, that settles it. Come on, and blow the bull! Here, Pongo!"

"But look here—"

"Rats!"

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"Better carry Pongo, anyway, you ass! If he goes for the bull—"

"He won't. Think old Pongo hasn't got more sense than that? Rot! Pongo wouldn't dream of doing anything I didn't order him to."

"He gets us into trouble nearly every time we take the little mongrel out, anyway," said Gibson.

"If you call my terrier a mongrel, young Gibson—"

"Oh, cheese it! What is he, then?"

"A dog who's got more brains than you're ever likely to have!" retorted Wally warmly. "Call him a mongrel again, young Gibson, and I'll dot you one! Now come on."

The leader of the Third whistled to Pongo, who was investigating a rabbit-hole in the hedge some yards away. Pongo immediately left the hole and scampered after his master as he dived through a gap in the hedge. Gibson, Jameson, and Levison minor looked at each other, and then they followed very reluctantly. Their leader was obviously in one of his dogged moods, and past arguing with.

They started across the forbidden field, Wally's companions eyeing the bull not at all happily. He was a big, lumbering brute, and he looked what he was locally reputed to be—evil-tempered and savage. His name was Nero; and he was aptly named. But, as yet, he had not seen the daring trespassers on his domain, and the fags hoped for the best.

They had not counted on Pongo, however; at least, they had hoped Pongo would behave himself for once.

But Pongo didn't. Pongo was chock-full of high spirits and mischief that afternoon. He suddenly sighted the bull, and his ears pricked and his eyes glimmered. For an instant he stood tense, eyeing the distant bull reflectively. Then, as if deciding that the game was worth the candle, he tore away like a greyhound.

"Here, what the dickens— Pongo, you little rascal—"

Wally fairly yelled in amazed wrath as he saw Pongo tearing towards the bull.

"I told you so," groaned Curly Gibson. "Why the thump didn't you carry the little scamp, Wally?"

"Oh, rats! Well, my hat! Fancy the little rascal going off like that without orders from me! Pongo—here, Pongo, you ass!"

The exasperated Wally howled at the top of his voice. But Pongo did not heed. He reached the bull, and started operations by playfully snapping at one of the animal's hind legs.

"Oh, my only hat!" gasped Jameson. "Now for trouble!"

"Pongo's number's up this time!" added Levison minor.

"Whistle him, for goodness' sake, Wally!"

Wally did whistle—shrilly and anxiously. His amazement had given place to great alarm now—not for their own safety, but for Pongo's.

There was certainly need for alarm. Nero had taken about ten seconds to lash himself into a ferocious rage. It was rather a hot afternoon, and the tormenting flies had already put the bull's uncertain temper on edge. Now Pongo's playful tricks added fuel to his fury. His little eyes were gleaming balefully as he lurched about with lowered head, making savage lunges at the leaping, snapping Pongo.

The little terrier evidently thought it a great game of sport. Again and again he neatly dodged the lumbering rushes, prancing and leaping joyously, his excited yapping answering the bull's fierce bellowing.

"He'll have the little beggar yet, though," said Curly Gibson anxiously.

"He jolly well won't—trust old Pongo for that!" snapped Wally D'Arcy. "Still, I'd better get the little beggar away somehow."

—FEATURING TOM MERRY & CO., THE CHUMS OF ST. JIM'S!



And showing that his words belied his fears, Wally started off at a run towards the disturbance.

"Wally, you awful ass! Come back!" yelled Levison.

"Rats!"

Wally ran on, yelling to Pongo. He stopped some yards away from the bull.

"Pongo! Here, you rascal! Pongo! Come here—you hear me?" shouted the fag. "Pongo—good boy! Here! Oh, you little villain!"

But he shouted and whistled in vain. Indeed, Pongo seemed to be under the impression that his master was only cheering him on approvingly. He increased his antics, and the turf flew in showers as the massive bull reared and lurched about, snorting and bellowing his fury.

And then, quite suddenly, Nero became aware of Wally's presence. He stopped dead, ignoring the cavorting Pongo, and fixed his glowering, bloodshot eyes on the fag in a decidedly aggressive and menacing manner.

Swishing his tail angrily he glowered at the daring fag for some seconds, and then he gave an infuriated bellow, lowered his great head, and charged.

"Look out, Wally!" screamed Jameson from afar.

And Wally did "look out," quickly enough. Wally had plenty of pluck—possibly too much—but to stand before the mad charge of an infuriated bull was scarcely to be expected of him.

He turned swiftly and bolted for his life, still yelling to Pongo as he did so. After him went the bull, supremely indifferent to the yapping, leaping terrier now. He was after bigger fry than Pongo.

"Oh, my hat!" panted Jameson. "The brute will have him!"

The three fags stood, uncertain how to act for the moment. But as Wally came pelting towards them with the

thudding bull in hot pursuit they wisely turned and bolted.

But neither they nor Wally had counted on the speed of Nero. Before Wally had been running many seconds he realised with a thrill of fear that the bull was gaining rapidly—that he would never reach the safety of the fenced hedge in time.

Others had seen that also. Hearing the yells and outcries in the meadow, Blake, Herries, Digby, and D'Arcy major had put on speed, and they reached the hedge just in time to see Wally's headlong flight.

"Great Scott! The brute will get him!" gasped Blake in great alarm. "Run for it, Wally!" he added, his voice breaking into a yell. "Make for that tree—never mind the hedge! Make for the tree!"

CHAPTER 2.

Pongo to the Rescue!

"O H, bai Jove!" White to the lips, Arthur Augustus D'Arcy and his three companions squeezed through the hedge to watch the perilous race. Unless the fag heard and heeded Blake's yell nothing could save him from the enraged animal.

But, fortunately, Wally heard and acted swiftly.

With the bull scarcely half a dozen yards behind him, he swerved and made a desperate bid for the safety of the tree. It was a large horse-chestnut, and one drooping branch came to within six feet of the ground.

"Quick, Wally!"

Arthur Augustus fairly screamed the advice in his dire anxiety. But it was scarcely necessary. Wally leaped upwards with the agility of a monkey, grasped the branch

convulsively, and, with swift presence of mind, swung his legs forwards and upwards.

It was as well he did so, for the next instant the bull's blind rush took him clean beneath the swinging fag, his massive shoulders actually scraping one of Wally's sprawling legs.

But the fag's grip on the branch held, and the next instant he had hauled himself up on to the swaying branch to safety.

"Oh, thank goodness!"

"Bai Jove! What an escape!"

With gasps of relief the four Fourth-Formers eyed the youngster up in the tree thankfully. But their relief was short-lived, for just then Pongo raced up.

Scarcely had the maddened bull pulled up after his futile rush, when the plucky little terrier tackled him again—in real earnest this time. Up to this Pongo had looked upon bull-baiting as a game. But now Pongo had sensed that his master was in danger from the big brute, and his attack was determined and aggressive.

His sharp teeth got a grip instantly on Nero's foreleg, and the bull bellowed terrifically, and plunged and reared in a furious effort to shake off the terrier. He succeeded quickly enough—a sudden lumbering swing round sent Pongo spinning like a rolled-up ball of wool, yards away.

But Pongo found his feet in a flash, and returned to the assault before Nero could prepare for his charge.

"Pongo, you rascal!" howled Wally. "Run for it! Home—home, Pongo! Oh, my hat! Draw that brute away, you idiots!"

In his fear for Pongo's safety Wally yelled to the juniors, evidently expecting them to risk their own skins in order to save Pongo—a thing they were scarcely likely to attempt.

They yelled to Pongo, however, realising, as Wally did, that the dog's peril was great. The bull's movements were clumsy and cumbersome, while Pongo was like a flash of lightning. None the less, a single slip on Pongo's part would mean instant disaster. But Pongo was far too excited to heed their yells.

"The little scamp will be mangled as sure as fate," gasped Jack Blake. "If that beast once gets a— Oh, my hat! Wally, you young idiot, stay where you are!"

Blake's words ended in a yell to the fag, who was crawling along the branch now, as if intending to drop to the ground. But, like Pongo, Wally did not heed. His face was white, and he was obviously terrified for the safety of his pet, and reckless now of consequences to himself.

"Oh, bai Jove!"

Arthur Augustus also saw the new danger to his young brother, and he also forgot his own safety in that anxious moment. Heedless of his chums' yells, Arthur Augustus started towards the spot at a run, his aristocratic features set and determined.

"It is all right," he called back. "I will draw the brute away, and then run."

Blake did not share in his optimism, however.

"Come back, you born idiot!" he shouted. "Oh, you mad fool! Come on, you fellows!"

With Arthur Augustus determined to rush into danger, Blake and his two chums were scarcely likely to hang back. The situation looked like being dangerous in the extreme, but they had no intention of allowing Gussy and Wally to share it alone.

By this time Wally had, indeed, dropped down from the tree. In his hand was a length of branch, torn from the tree. With this he apparently intended to attack Nero.

It was a mad intention—as mad as was the intention of Arthur Augustus.

But Arthur Augustus gave him no chance to do that. He was on the spot almost before Wally had reached the ground, and, stopping a few yards away, he started to wave his arms about to attract the bull's attention.

In this he succeeded quickly enough. Wally was approaching Nero from behind, but Arthur Augustus was facing him, and the maddened animal glimpsed him at once. He had just shaken off Pongo, sending the little terrier spinning yards away, half-stunned, and with one glowering look at the swell of the Fourth, he charged full tilt.

"Oh, bai Jove!"

It was time for Gussy to run, and he bolted—as did Blake, Herries, and Digby. They scudded away like the wind, whilst Wally pounced on the bruised and shaken Pongo, snatched him up, and made all speed for the nearest hedge.

Blake, Herries, and Digby were safe enough—they had a good start, and could easily have out-paced the bull. With Gussy it was different, however.

To Gussy's great surprise and horror, the bull showed no signs of allowing himself to be out-distanced—even by such a swift-footed youth as Arthur Augustus. Indeed, it was very soon clear to the junior that Nero was rapidly overtaking him.

"Oh, gweat Scott!" he panted, as he heard the thudding

hoofs perilously near. "Bai Jove! I shall have to shake the brute off somehow!"

But that was very much easier said than done. The swell of the Fourth's silk hat blew off, and for once it laid where it fell, while its owner tore on, his eyeglass streaming behind him at the end of its cord.

He groaned aloud as he heard a crunching sound behind him—it was one of Nero's forefeet plunging through the precious "topper." But actually it saved Arthur Augustus, for Nero was now wearing the topper as a sort of bracelet round his foreleg, and it was obviously bothering him quite a lot.

Still, he thudded on, head tossing, tail-flying out viciously, and hoofs sending the turf up in showers behind him. It was very soon clear to all, including Arthur Augustus himself, that he would never gain the safety of the fence which his chums had now reached, and at the thought Gussy quite lost his head.

He swung off desperately at a tangent, and it was well he did so, for Nero almost plunged to earth the next instant as he slithered in an attempt to change direction too swiftly. This gave Gussy several yards' start again, and he made the most of it.

He scudded towards the opposite hedge, panting and gasping hoarsely. He heard Blake and the others shouting, but he was far too flustered to hear or heed them. Then he got a clear view of the hedge ahead, and a glance showed him it was impossible to escape that way, for it was high and thick, with a strong fence behind it.

But at the same moment he sighted something else—a pond in the corner of the field, with a broken fence going across it. Apparently a fence had once divided the meadow into two fields, but only that broken length, sinking down into the pond, was left of it.

Yet it spelt safety to Arthur Augustus—or he imagined it did. With the bull scarcely a dozen yards behind, he leaped for the broken end of the fence, and, gripping the top bar with his hands, he began to work his way frantically along it, his feet, on the lower bar, almost touching the water.

They very soon did touch the water, for the fence sank downwards in the centre, to rise again on the other side, where it joined the main fence. There was no hedge at that spot, and Arthur Augustus hoped to reach the sloping bank and escape.

But he hadn't counted on the fence being old and rotten. As he stepped on to it it swayed and cracked ominously. But Nero, after a brief hesitation, had given vent to a terrific bellow of rage, and had splashed into the pond in pursuit. So Arthur Augustus had to take the risk and make the best of it.

Unheeding the ominous swaying and splintering, he made a desperate rush to finish the journey, the water well over his ankles now. Unfortunately, the fence could not stand it. There was a sudden splintering and cracking, and then—

Splash!

The fence collapsed and splashed into the pond, and the luckless Arthur Augustus went with it, sousing head-over-heels into the murky, uninviting depths.

He reappeared the next moment, drenched and gasping, and stood in four feet of water, looking a woeful sight. He did not stand still for long, however, for the sight of his reappearance brought the hesitating Nero after him with a rush.

He was still wearing the silk-hat—or the remains of it—on his foreleg, and in the water it hampered his movements still more. It gave the junior just enough time to regain his wits, and he surged ashore and scrambled out, panting and exhausted.

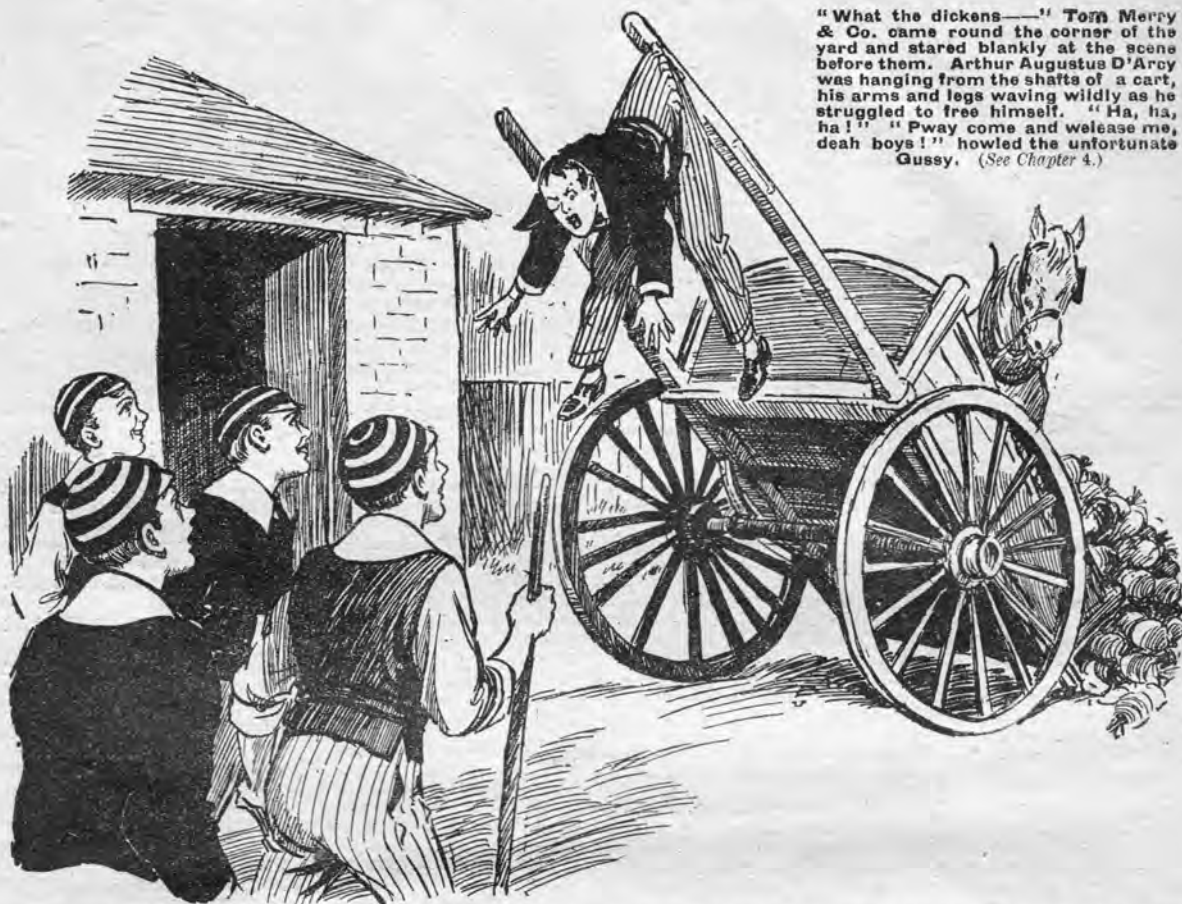
And then, quite abruptly, came disaster. On the slippery sloping edge of the pond, Arthur Augustus D'Arcy's feet went clean from under him, and he went crashing down in the mud. From Blake, Herries, and Digby, who had scudded along the far side of the hedge, came cries of horror.

Nero was already scrambling ashore, slipping and sliding as he did so, and it seemed that nothing could save the luckless Gussy.

"He's done!" cried Blake, in anguished fear. "Look out, Gussy! Roll over—quick! What— Oh, good for you, Pongo!"

To roll over, as Blake had shouted, might have saved Gussy temporarily, but could never have saved him for long. And it was Pongo who saved the situation. Eager to get to grips with his burly enemy again, Pongo had managed to wriggle free from his master's grasp, and now he came upon the scene with the speed of a whirlwind.

Just as Nero lowered his massive head for the charge, Pongo leaped at him like a streak of lightning, and his sharp teeth got a grip of one of the bull's ears, and he held on doggedly. There followed a wild bellowing and scrambling, and then Nero's hoofs slithered from under



"What the dickens——" Tom Merry & Co. came round the corner of the yard and stared blankly at the scene before them. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was hanging from the shafts of a cart, his arms and legs waving wildly as he struggled to free himself. "Ha, ha, ha!" "Pway come and welease me, deah boys!" howled the unfortunate Gussy. (See Chapter 4.)

him, and he crashed down in the mud, the sudden jerk sending the plucky terrier whirling away.

At the same moment there was a shout, and a burly man came rushing on the scene, a hay-fork in his hands. It was Mr. Chubb, the farmer and owner of the bull, and he swung the fork round and with remarkable precision slipped one of the prongs through the ring in Nero's nose, and then he forced the fork downwards into the mud, pinning the animal down for the moment.

"Now, youngster—run for it!" he bellowed. "Sharp's the word!"

"Oh, bai Jove! Yaas, wathah!" panted Gussy.

He jumped up, took one look at the grovelling, wildly struggling bull, and then he bolted for the fence and scrambled through.

Mr. Chubb was just about to follow when Nero gave one prodigious heave, and scrambled to his knees. And then it happened.

As the huge animal struggled desperately for foothold on the slippery mud edging the pond, once again his hoofs slithered beneath him, and the bull crashed over, falling with almost his whole weight against the farmer.

A sharp, agonised cry came from Mr. Chubb as he went over flat, with Nero's massive bulk across his legs.

"Good heavens!" panted Blake, getting a glimpse of the farmer's white, pain-distorted face. "He's hurt! Quick, you fellows!"

He swarmed through the fence in a flash, and D'Arcy major, Herries, and Digby, were not long in following. It was only too obvious that the old farmer was seriously hurt, and they forgot their own fear of the bull at that moment.

They rushed forward, and Blake's mind worked swiftly in that critical juncture. He grasped the hay-fork which Nero had easily dislodged from the mud, and swift as lightning slipped one of the prongs through the ring in the bull's nose, plunged it into the earth again, and held on desperately.

"Quick! Get him out!" he shouted frantically.

Had the bull remained still, it would have been a next to impossible task for the juniors. But Nero was maddened beyond measure, and the return of Pongo on the scene just then once again saved the situation.

Pongo was bruised and battered, but the plucky terrier was by no means beaten. As the bull struggled to rise

again, the juniors dragged Mr. Chubb clear, and the next moment Pongo drew all the bull's attention. He bellowed his fury as the terrier leaped about his head, barking and snapping ferociously.

"I can't stand!" gritted Mr. Chubb, his teeth clenched with pain. "You—you'll have to carry or drag me, young gentlemen. Be quick! Old Nero's beyond obeyin' me now. Jest get me to the far side of fence if you can."

"We'll do it, Mr. Chubb!"

"Yaas, wathah!" panted Arthur Augustus.

The three grasped the injured man, and leaving the hay-fork now, Blake took a hand, and between them they half-dragged, half-carried Mr. Chubb to the fence. It was a far from easy matter to get the burly man through, but though Nero was on his feet again before they had finished, the gallant Pongo still held all his vicious attention.

Slithering and sliding in the mud, the raging bull reared and pranced in his frantic effort to deal with the sharp-witted terrier, but Pongo was a little too agile for him. And then suddenly Wally's shrill voice rang out:

"Pongo! Here, old boy! Pongo! Here!"

Mr. Chubb was through the fence safely, and as if he realised that his task was accomplished, and that it was time to obey his master now, Pongo slipped out of the melee, and was through the fence in a flash, and safe in his master's arms.

CHAPTER 3.

Gussy's Brain-wave!

"Oh, thank goodness!"

"Good old Pongo!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

From beyond the fence came a savage bellowing, and Nero, climbing ashore on to firm ground with some difficulty, began to trot up and down, shaking his massive head in his rage.

But they were safe from his fury now, and after a while he lowered his head and went charging through the pond and away across the meadow, heedless of direction or intention in his rage.

"He's run amok!" gasped Blake. "Well, he can do what he likes now, the brute! What's wrong, Mr. Chubb—anything serious?"

"My leg's broken, I think," panted the farmer, his usually ruddy features white and drawn with pain. "You'd best get help, Master Blake; send for Jukes—he's about the farm buildings somewhere."

"Phew! That's rotten, Mr. Chubb. Hadn't we better carry you indoors, though?"

"Yes—anything you like, young gents!" gasped the farmer, panting for breath and obviously beyond discussions. "Best call a doctor, too!"

"My hat! Of course! Run across to Dr. White's place, young Gibson—sharp! Tell him to come to the farm," said Blake crisply. "Now, you fellows, we want a hurdle."

Curly Gibson was off like a flash, and while Blake did what he could for the injured man, the rest hunted round, and a suitable hurdle was very soon rushed to the spot. Covered with bracken, this formed a rough and ready stretcher, and lifting Mr. Chubb gently upon it the St. Jim's juniors started towards the farm with their burden.

Luckily Dr. White lived less than half a mile away, and scarcely had they lifted Mr. Chubb on to the couch in the farm kitchen when he bustled in. A careful examination soon proved that the farmer's fears were only too well-founded. One leg was broken just above the ankle, and both legs were bruised badly in addition.

"But it's a clean break, and as you're strong and healthy it should not take long to heal," the doctor assured the farmer. "You will require careful nursing, however. You live alone here, Mr. Chubb?"

"Yes—but I have a woman who comes in every day to see to meals and housework," said the farmer glumly.

Dr. White shook his head.

"I'm afraid that will not do at all," he said grimly. "The only possible course—and the wisest—is for you to go into the Cottage Hospital. You will be well-looked after there, and the break will have every chance to heal up."

It was not a prospect that appealed to the hard-working old farmer, and he protested vigorously at first. But the medical man's arguments very soon overcame his objections. And when Dr. White departed at last, it was settled that the hospital ambulance should fetch Mr. Chubb that evening.

"But it just about means ruin for me," the unfortunate farmer told the juniors when Dr. White had gone. "Things are bad enough as it is, and this affair will cost enough without having to engage more help. I can't afford it. It'll need two hired hands to do the work as I does. I had to sell a fair amount of stock only recently to make ends meet. This is the finish."

"But you'll have to get someone to do the work," said Blake. "It's awful, and it's all happened through us, Mr. Chubb. If only we could do something—"

"You can't—and don't you young gents go blaming yourselves. Them young imps oughtn't to have crossed that field right enough. But what happened to me was an accident as might have happened any other time. As for gettin' help—well, there's nothing else for it, of course. But it'll just about finish me—it'll mean ruin! Things are bad enough without that."

"It's lucky you've got Jukes—" began Herries, but the farmer cut him short, his haggard face clouding.

"Jukes! Ay, I've got him right enough!" he growled. "And he's a big chap and can work when he likes. But—well, the trouble is I don't trust him, and that's plain. Anyways, it can't be helped, I suppose, and I've got to make the best of a bad job. And now," added the farmer, "I won't keep you young gents no longer, if you wants to be going. I'll be all right here until the nurse comes as the doctor's sending."

"We'll wait until she turns up, anyway," said Blake.

The juniors made tea for the injured man, and did all they could to make him comfortable in the circumstances. It was while the juniors were in the scullery that Arthur Augustus drew his chums aside. Despite the fact that he was drenched and decidedly uncomfortable himself, the noble Arthur Augustus had flatly refused to return to St. Jim's for a change. Gussy realised that it had all happened through Wally and Pongo, and he felt very concerned at the farmer's plight.

For some minutes he stood with a thoughtful frown on his noble face. Then, his eyes gleaming excitedly, he drew his chums aside.

"I have a weally wonderful ideah, deah boys," he whispered. "A weally wippin' bwain-wave, you know! Why not offah our services to Mr. Chubb?"

"Eh?"

"What the dickens—"

"As farm hands, you know," explained Arthur Augustus, his eyes gleaming with eager excitement. "We could do a vewy gweat deal to help in our spare time, and Mr. Chubb would not weequiah to engage any help pewwaps, then. We

could give at least two hours ewevy evenin', and ewevy full half-day. We might even be able to put in an hour in the early mornin', you know. Yaas wathah!"

"Phew!"

"My only hat!"

Blake and the rest stared at their noble chum. But Blake's eyes suddenly gleamed, and he nodded.

"By jingo! That's an idea, and no mistake, Gussy," he breathed. "After all, it all happened through one of our chaps, and it's up to us to do all we can to make up for it. Good for you, Gussy."

"It's a great wheeze," said Herries slowly. "It'll be great fun, too."

"No reason why we shouldn't," agreed Digby. "Poor old Chubb's in a mess, and it's up to St. Jim's fellows to help him out. I'm game to do all I can."

"That's good enough, then," said Blake promptly. "We can get Tom Merry on the job, too—he's always ready enough to do anyone a good turn. A couple of hours every evening, and each half-holiday—why, we could get a lot of work done in that time, the seven of us. I'll tackle the old chap at once."

And Blake led the way into the kitchen in a determined way. Gussy's brain-wave appealed to him greatly. The idea of working on a farm was quite enticing in itself—novel and interesting. But they had the added incentive of knowing that they would be doing something to make up in some measure for the harm Wally and Pongo had mischievously brought about. Moreover, the juniors were keen Scouts, always eager to live up to the Scout's law, and do good turns when they could.

Here was the chance; and Blake & Co. were determined not to allow it to pass.

Mr. Chubb stared at them in amazement as Blake, backed up by his enthusiastic chums, propounded the idea. The farmer was very dubious at first, but as his objections were entirely from their point of view, they easily overcame them.

"Very well, young gentlemen," exclaimed Mr. Chubb at length, with a wry smile. "I ain't up to arguing with you just now, so I'll agree if you're really determined like about it. But I might tell you as it'll be a big relief to me to know as you'll be about to see to things. And what's more, I was more than worried to know where I was goin' to get help from at all. It's hard enough to get hands for farm-work these days."

"You'll agree, then, Mr. Chubb?" said Blake eagerly. "Seven of us ought to be able to get through a good bit of work, even in our spare time."

"Yes—I don't see how I can refuse, seein' as I'm in a hole," replied Mr. Chubb hesitatingly. "Still, after all, the place is little more than a small-holding, and there ain't much stock to look after. Jukes can see to the jobs as has to be done to time, and you can do the rest if you so minds. And I know I can trust you young gents, Master Blake. I only wish I could trust Jukes as much. You might send him to me again when you goes out, and I'll explain the arrangement to him."

"Good! That's settled, then," said Blake grimly. "We'll do our best, Mr. Chubb—you can rely on that!"

"Yaas, wathah! And thank you vewy much indeed for takin' the whole affiah in such a sportin' and good-natuahed mannah, Mr. Chubb," said Arthur Augustus warmly. "It was all the fault of my weckless young imnah, and you may wely upon us doin' our utmost to make amends."

So it was settled, and as the nurse arrived just then the juniors said good-bye to the farmer, and went out. In the stack-yard they found Jukes, and gave him Mr. Chubb's message. Jukes was a burly individual, and he scowled at the juniors in a far from friendly manner. But when they had given the message and told him the doctor's orders, his eyes gleamed curiously, and he hurried away.

"Almost looked as if he was jolly glad Mr. Chubb was going to hospital," grunted Blake. "I hope we shan't have trouble with him, anyway. I don't wonder the old chap mistrusts him."

"Wathah not. He looks wathah an unpleasant person altogether. However, let us hewwy, deah boys," added Arthur Augustus, glancing down in dismal despair at his clinging, drenched clothes. "I am feelin' weally too uncomfortable and w'etched for words. My clothes are also uttaily wuined, and I have lost a weally good toppah."

"Well, you can take it out of young Wally's hide," said Blake without sympathy. "That young idiot ought to be soundly licked. Anyway, let's get back, and after a quick tea we'll tackle Tom Merry. Then we'll come back here and try to get an hour's good work in."

"Yaas, wathah!"

And Blake and Co. made swift tracks for St. Jim's, eager enough to get back to do their first "bit" as schoolboy farmers!

CHAPTER 4.

Gussy Gets Going.

AS Blaks & Co. expected, Tom Merry, Manners and Monty Lowther of the Shell, agreed to back them up in their new project—startling enough as it was.

D'Arcy's brain-wave was certainly rather astonishing, but the idea was sound enough, and it appealed to the Terrible Three. And on hearing the full story of the afternoon's adventures, Tom Merry quickly gave his decision.

"We're on, Blake," he said. "Poor old Chubb. He's a jolly decent sort, and has done us many a good turn in the past. It'll be rather a lark, too, and something new to occupy our giddy time. Count us in."

"Good! Then we'll be off, chaps!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

Tea was over, and accordingly the seven would-be farmer's boys, started out for Chubb's farm. Actually it was somewhat of a compliment to call the place a farm, for the house was little more than a cottage, ancient and in bad repair. It was really a "small-holding"; the stock was small and the land far from extensive. The place had belonged to Mr. Chubb's father and before that to his grandfather, and it had obviously never prospered overmuch. Still, for the moment, as matters stood, it was, perhaps, just as well that the place was not extensive or the stock large. Mr. Chubb was a widower, with no children, and apparently no relations upon whom to call for aid in his extremity.

"It's jolly hard luck!" remarked Tom Merry, as they trotted along the lane. "We'll do what we can, anyway, chaps."

"Yaas, wathah! Bai Jove! I wondah if the Head would excuse us lessons for a week or two so that we could spend all our time at the farm," said Arthur Augustus thoughtfully. "D'you fellows think he would?"

"Oh, my hat!"

"Try him," suggested Lowther gravely. "Go back now, Gussy, and ask him. The Head will be delighted with the idea; he'll pat you on the back, Gussy—with the birch!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Weally, Lowthah— Howevah, on second thoughts, pewwaps it will be bettah not to twouble the Head," said Gussy.

"Much better!" laughed Tom Merry. "Second thoughts are always best, Gussy—especially for you, old chap. Well, here we are. Seems to be nobody about the place."

"Poor old Chubb will have gone by this," said Blake.

The juniors entered the stackyard, and looked about them for Jukes, whom Mr. Chubb was leaving in charge of the farm. But though they looked in the stables and other out-buildings, they did not find the surly farm-hand.

"Better try the house," suggested Tom Merry. "Chubb will have told Jukes what jobs to set us, I suppose."

"Yaas, wathah!"

The juniors went across the farmyard to the back door of the house. It was slightly open, but the house seemed to be empty. Tom Merry knocked, without any result.

"Anyone in?" bawled Blake, poking his head inside the doorway. "Are you there, Jukes?"

This time there was an answer. After a moment or two's silence, heavy feet sounded above, and then followed the clatter of hobnailed boots on stairs.

"Jukes, I bet!" remarked Blake, frowning. "Wonder what the rotter's doing upstairs? I bet Mr. Chubb never gave him permission— Hallo, here he is!"

It was Jukes right enough. He came out from the kitchen, a rather guilty flush on his coarse features. He scowled as he sighted the seven juniors.

"Well, what d'you kids want?" he demanded surlily.

"Work!" answered Blake cheerfully. "Has Mr. Chubb gone to the hospital, Jukes?"

"Yes, he's gone."

"Didn't he mention us—that we'd offered to help here while he's away?" asked Blake, in surprise.

The man hesitated. Then, after a long pause, he nodded.

"Yes, I reckon he did," was the sulky answer. "Though what he wants with a swarm of school kids about the durned place, beats me! A fat lot of work you can do, eh?" he sneered.

"We'll jolly soon show you what we can do!" snapped Tom Merry. "You ought to be only too glad to have help, Jukes."

"Well, I ain't—and that's a fact!" said Jukes. "But if the boss sez so—well, I got to 'ave you, I suppose. What can you do?"

"Any job that's going," said Tom Merry promptly. "We're game enough for anything!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

Jukes grinned unpleasantly.

"Right, then!" he said. "There's plenty of work to be done, young gents. Some of you can make a start by cleanin' out the pig-sties. Most of the regular jobs are

done for to-day, o' course. But the sties and the stables could do wi' cleanin' out."

"Oh crumbs!"

"Oh, bai Jove!"

"Then there's another little job you might do—fetching them turnips in from field back of stackyard," went on Jukes. "You can drive a 'orse, I suppose?"

"Oh, yes! Of course."

"Right! Jest shove old Bess in the cart—you'll find it in yard there. The turnips are piled up in back corner of t' field. They should 'ave bin fetched in this artemoon, but for this 'ere accident. Oh, and there's firewood to be fetched in for the marnin'! If you wants work, I'll find you plenty, kids!"

"Bai Jove! Vewy well, Jukes!"

The response was not very cheery. Eager as the juniors were to begin work, they were not over eager to make a start by cleaning out pig-sties and stables—especially as they knew quite well that Jukes was setting them the most unpleasant jobs he could think of on the spur of the moment.

Still, farming was farming, and they had stated they were game for anything. So they refused to let Jukes see they did not quite relish the jobs, and set to work with a will without delay. Jukes grinned after them, and went back into the house.

"Why the dickens doesn't he come and take a hand?" growled Herries.

"Finished work for the day, I suppose," said Blake. "Blow him, anyway! I say, it looks as if he's left in charge of the house—living there."

"Somebody must be in charge," said Tom cheerfully.

"I expect he has to cook his own grub here; and then there's people always coming along for eggs and milk, I expect. Still, he did rather look as if he was up to something when we turned up. I don't like the beggar. Anyway, let's get down to it! Must take the rough with the smooth, you know."

"Yaas, wathah! It is vewy lucky we came in our old clothes, deah boys, isn't it?"

"Rather! As it is— Here, where are you off to, Gussy?"

"Ahem!" Arthur Augustus coloured. "I am off to put the horse in to fetch those turnips, you know."

"But what about cleaning out the sties and stables?" gasped Blake. "Well, you—you—"

"Weally, Blake, there are quite enough of you to do that. As I have had a gweat deal of expewience with horses, I feel that I am the wight man for that job, deah boys. Cleanin' out sties and stables is work that does not wequiah expewience or bwains. You youngstahs should be able to manage those jobs all wight."

"Why, you—you cheeky dummy—"

"Oh, let him rip!" laughed Tom Merry. "After all, Gussy would only be getting in the way all the time, and be more nuisance than he's worth."

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—"

"The pigs would be so busy greeting him affectionately as a long-lost brother, that there'd be no work done at all," added Lowther.

"That's it! We've no time for domestic scenes or family reunions," agreed Tom Merry. "Trot off, Gussy. Mind you put the horse in the right way round, and if you get in a hole, just give a yell."

"Wats!"

Arthur Augustus strode away loftily towards the stables. He left his chums laughing as they set to work with a will at the unsavoury task of cleaning out the piggeries. Luckily, there were only two sties, and willing hands made light work—though it didn't make it pleasant. Still, the juniors stuck it grimly. Bucket after bucket of water was fetched from the pump, and the bricked walls and floors were thoroughly swilled and then scrubbed with stiff-bristled brooms.

"Phew! This is a game, and no mistake!" panted Blake, as they were just finishing the job. "Where the dickens has old Gussy got to? He ought to have finished that job long ago. I'm going to see he takes a turn with the giddy stables!"

"Yes, rather!" agreed Herries. "Where the dickens is he? He took those turnips through the yard ages ago."

"That's so," agreed Tom Merry, panting, as he leaned on his brush. "I think— Hold on! I thought I heard him shouting just then."

They listened, and, sure enough, from the rear of the buildings, came a faint yelling—unmistakably in the dulcet tones of the Honourable Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

"Come on!" said Tom briefly. "I expect the blessed horse has run away, or something!"

"Oh, my hat!"

At top speed the juniors followed Tom Merry as he tore

away in the direction of the shouting. As they rushed round the corner of the buildings they soon saw what the matter was.

Tom Merry had told Gussy to shout if he got himself into a hole, and evidently Arthur Augustus had remembered. For he certainly was in a hole now, and he was certainly shouting.

Having finished his task of carting the turnips to the old barn, Arthur Augustus had gone to put the cart back where he had found it. He had succeeded in taking out the horse all right, and then the unfortunate accident had happened.

Apparently, Arthur Augustus had found the weight of the big farm tumbrel a little too much for him. As he unhitched the cart-horse the heavy rear of the tumbrel dropped earthwards, while the shafts shot skywards.

That was really only to be expected, however. What Gussy had obviously not expected was that the shafts should take him with them—which they actually did. The hook at the end of one of the shafts had caught in Gussy's trousers, and the luckless amateur farmer's boy was whirled upwards. He was now hanging from the shaft, twixt earth and sky, with legs and arms wildly waving as he struggled to free himself.

Tom Merry & Co. stared at him blankly. The old horse had turned its head, and was also staring up at him in surprised wonder.

"What the dickens— Oh, mum-my hat!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

CHAPTER 5.

Most "Eggs-citing!"

"HELP!" shrieked Arthur Augustus, his legs threshing wildly. "Help! Welease me, you wottahs! Oh, bai Jove, I am neahly stwanged! Help! Welease me, Blake!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The juniors roared at the unfortunate predicament of Arthur Augustus. That hapless junior roared at them in a different manner.

"Don't stand there, you howlin' wottahs!" he shrieked. "I have been hangin' heah for ten minutes! Help! Welease!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Almost weeping with laughter, the juniors hastened to release Arthur Augustus, who was red in the face, and certainly appeared to be on the point of suffocation. They bent their weight on the shafts, and as the tumbrell came over they hastily released Gussy, who immediately collapsed on the ground in a state of exhaustion.

"Just what we might have expected!" grinned Blake, when the swell of the Fourth staggered to his feet at last. "Better not let it get out of our sight again after this!"

"No fear!"

"You—you feahful wottahs!" panted Arthur Augustus. "If you yefer to me as 'it,' Blake, I shall be forced to drowp your acquaintance, and no longah look upon you as a friend!"

"Go hon!"

"It is no laughin' mattah!" spluttered Gussy. "I have had a most distwessin' and unpleasant expewience, and I expect sympathy frowm my friends, and not wudeness and hilawity. I have shouted myself hoarse without effect for ovah ten minutes for aid. The hook of that wretched shaft caught in my twousahs, and I was jerked upwards befoah I could do anythin', bai Jove!"

"Well, what could you expect?" demanded Lowther. "You can't expect a donkey to weigh the same as that cart-horse, can you now?"

"Bai Jove!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus suspiciously. "What do you mean by that wemark, Lowthah? If you mean to infer—"

"Oh, cheese it, Monty!" grinned Tom Merry. "We're here to work and not to squabble! Let's get back to work, chaps!"

The amateur farm-hands hurried back to their jobs, Arthur Augustus bringing up the rear with the cart-horse and looking very red and indignant indeed.

As his chums were busy in the stables, he tethered Bess to a post, and looked about him for fresh worlds to conquer. Just then a loud thumping reached his ears.

It came from the direction of the house, and, glancing that way, Arthur Augustus sighted an old lady standing at the kitchen door, knocking vigorously.

"Bai Jove!" murmured Gussy, jamming his gleaming monocle into place. "I wondah what that good lady wequahs heah? I had bettah see."

He strode across the farmyard, and raised his hat with gracious politeness. The lady—who wore a shawl and carried an empty wicker-bag, glowered at him.

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"Good-evenin', ma'am!" said Arthur Augustus. "Anythin' I can do for you?"

"Ain't Mister Chubb about?"

"No, madam. He has met with an accident, and has been taken to hospital, I wegwet to say."

"Oh, 'as 'e?" The lady did not seem very sympathetic. "Well, I wants some eggs, my lad—a shilling's-worth—and I wants big 'uns this time!"

"Bai Jove! Vewy well, ma'am; I will see Jukes at once."

Arthur Augustus knew that villagers visited the farm to purchase eggs and milk, etc., and he went in search of Jukes. It was really surprising that Jukes had not already heard the impatient knocking of the rather irritable old lady. Still, he must be in the house somewhere.

Arthur Augustus slipped through the scullery, and finding the inner door closed he knocked and turned the handle. To his surprise it was locked, apparently. He shouted Jukes' name, but no answer came.

"Bai Jove! He must have locked up the house and gone out," reflected Arthur Augustus. "Howevah, I wemembah seein' some eggs in that outhouse by the daiwy, and I will attend to the mattah myself."

He returned to the old lady, and bowed politely.

"Mr. Jukes appeahs to have gone out, ma'am," he reported. "But if you will be good enough to tell me how many eggs you usually get for a shillin', I will supply you."

"Oh, all right!" said the lady, eyeing Arthur Augustus rather curiously. "About sixteen for a shillin' they is now."

"Sixteen? Vewy good, ma'am! If you will kindly hand me your bag I will attend to the mattah."

"Sixteen—that is to strangers, o' course," added the good lady quickly. "But Mr. Chubb, bein' as he knows me, usually lets me 'ave twenty."

"Bai Jove! Twenty? Weally— Howevah, that will be quite all wight, ma'am. I will do the same, of course."

Arthur Augustus took the bag and made for the outhouse where he had seen the eggs. They were in a basket on a shelf, and Arthur Augustus counted twenty and placed them carefully into the bag.

"Weally, Mr. Chubb sells his eggs too cheaply, I am afwaid," he murmured, shaking his noble head. "And these are weally vewy big eggs, indeed—almost like ducks' eggs. Howevah, Mr. Chubb knows his own business best. The good woman should be vewy satisfied with these."

The "good" woman undoubtedly was, though she didn't express her satisfaction, nor did she thank Arthur Augustus. She pressed a shilling into his aristocratic hand and hurried off with her bag of eggs.

Arthur Augustus went in search of Tom Merry, to ask him what was to be done with the shilling.

"Isn't there anyone in the house, Gussy?" demanded the captain of the Shell.

"Nobody, deah boy."

"Then how the thump did you know how many to give the old girl?" asked Blake.

"That's all wight, deah boy. I asked her, and she told me twenty for a shillin'. I wathah think Mr. Chubb—"

"Twenty for a shilling?" yelled Tom Merry. "And did you give her twenty—"

"Yaas, wathah. Of course, deah boy. She said—"

"And—and you believed her?" gasped Blake.

"Of course," replied Arthur Augustus, with dignity. "I would not dream of doubtin' the good lady's word."

"Oh, you—you born idiot!" gasped Tom Merry. "She's swizzled you, of course—taken you for the mug you are."

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—"

"I knew things would go wrong if Gussy came," groaned Blake. "Well, Gussy will have to stump up and square things, the awful ass. Why, eggs are about ten for a bob at the tuckshop; you jolly well ought to have known that, and— Hallo! What the dickens is that?"

It was a terrific banging on the back door of the farmhouse, and as the busy juniors rushed out they saw the old lady in the shawl, banging hard on the kitchen door.

"It is the lady herself," said Arthur Augustus icily. "She has obviously discovered her mistake, and has returned to apologise and wectify it. I am perfectly certain she was not swizzlin' me, as you call it, Blake!"

And Arthur Augustus hurried over to the old lady, a beaming smile on his features. The old lady glowered at him. She seemed rather in a temper about something.

"Oh, here you are!" she almost shrieked, as Arthur Augustus hurried up to her. "Made me come all this way back, with your larks, you young himp!"

"Weally, ma'am—" gasped Gussy.

"I'll teach you to fool Mrs. Migley wi' yer practical jokes!" screeched the old lady at the top of her voice. "Bringin' me back all this way, you has! Young monkey! Selling the likes of me mug eggs, would you? Ere, take 'em, you young varmint!"

"Bai Jove! Weally, my good— What— Yawwoop!"

Arthur Augustus stepped back just a second too late as the lady swiftly tipped the contents of the wicker bag over his head.

The twenty big eggs that he had sold for a shilling swooped and rattled about the head of Arthur Augustus. But they did not break. They rattled and rolled about the yard all around the startled swell of the Fourth. But they must have hurt, for Arthur Augustus howled in mingled astonishment and pain.

"Shove yer mug eggs on me, would yer?" shrieked the irate old dame. "Play your silly practical jokes on a respectable woman of my age, would yer! Take yer mug eggs, and take that—and that!"

Swipe, swipe, swipe, swipe!

"Yawooooop! Oh, bai-Jove! Gweat Scott! Yawooooop!" shrieked Arthur Augustus, as the good dame started to belabour him with the empty bag. "Oh, bai Jove! What—"

Arthur Augustus did not stay to make further remarks. He turned and bolted for his life, with the irate lady in

"That young gent said twenty!" she avowed.

"I know; but he's off his rocker," said Tom serenely. "I'm sorry; but there's a notice on the gatepost saying Mr. Chubb sells his eggs at twelve for a shilling. That's all I can give you, ma'am."

"Oh, all right!"

Seeing it was useless to try the game on with Tom, the lady took her departure—and the eggs—seething with disappointment and wrath.

"Now, where has that silly idiot got to?" grinned Blake.

They went in search of Arthur Augustus, and found him hiding in the front garden of the farm. To their great surprise he beckoned to them cautiously from the shelter of a gooseberry bush.

"Quiet, deah boys! Has that feahful woman gone?" he whispered.

"Yes. What the thump—"

Tom Merry stepped softly towards the lattice window and looked cautiously inside. His face grew grim as he took in the scene within the rather dark little room. The carpet was rolled back and Jukes, on his knees, was in the act of prising up one of the floor-boards. (See Chapter 5.)



pursuit. But, fortunately for Gussy, she soon gave up the chase, and returned to where the juniors were standing in startled bewilderment.

"What the dickens—" Blake was beginning, when daylight dawned in on him and he snatched one of the eggs up. As he expected, it was a china egg—or a "mug" egg, as the good lady had called it. "Oh, my hat!" he gurgled. "They're mug eggs, of course. Oh, that—that awful chump—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Tom Merry & Co. howled with laughter as they understood Gussy's little mistake. Evidently, in the dark interior of the outhouse, Arthur Augustus had mistaken the china eggs for real ones.

The old lady came ambling up just then, and the juniors stopped laughing abruptly. She seemed in two minds whether to attack them also; but Tom Merry's engaging manner soon calmed her down.

"It was a mistake, and not a joke, ma'am," he explained. "That silly chump mistook them for real ones. If you'll let me have the bag I'll put the matter right."

The lady grumblingly handed over the bag, and Tom, knowing where the real eggs were kept went into the kitchen and got a shilling's-worth. The lady grumbled still more when she found Tom had only given her twelve.

"Come heah, and cweep along the wall, deah boys!" breathed Arthur Augustus, looking very mysterious and excited. "Theah is somethin' w'ong heah."

Tom Merry and the others crept along the wall of the house, and joined Arthur Augustus wonderingly.

"What the dickens is the matter now?" demanded Blake. "That old girl's gone now, Gussy—"

"Nevah mind that tewwible old girl," whispered Arthur Augustus. "I have just seen somethin' wathah swange, deah boys. While I was hidin' fwom that feahful lady I happened to heah a swange noise fwom the window of the fwont woom theah. As I had imagined nobody was in the house I was vewy startled, and I ventuahed to peep thwough that window. To my gweat surpwise, I saw that wottah Jukes in theah."

"Well, what about it?" grunted Blake, staring.

"Quiet, deah boy," breathed Arthur Augustus, "or the wottah will heah you. Howevah, he was actin' vewy swangely. He was on his knees pwisin' up the floah-boards."

"The—the floor-boards!" ejaculated Tom. "What cu earth for?"

"That is the mystewy. When I entahed the outah kitchen just now the innah door was locked, and though I shouted

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for Jukes, I got no weply whatevah. The wottah must have heard me, though."

"Phew! That does sound rather queer," breathed Tom Merry. "Is he in there now, Gussy?"

"Oh, yaas! Listen, deah boys," said Gussy, as a faint creaking noise reached them from within the house. "I dislike the thought of pwyin' on anyone; but, weally, I feel we ought to look into this for Mr. Chubb's sake."

"My hat! Yes, rather!"

Tom Merry hesitated a moment, and then he stepped softly towards the little latticed window of the front room, and looked cautiously inside. His face grew grim as he took in the scene within the little dark room. Jukes was there right enough. He was grovelling on his knees, and in the act of prising up one of the floor-boards with a crow-bar. The carpet was rolled back, and most of the old boards showed signs of having been roughly torn up.

Blake joined Tom at the window the next moment, and he whistled softly as his eyes took in the curious scene. But he only got the chance to take one swift look, for as he did so Jukes, as if sensing the fact that someone was watching him, looked quickly up at the window.

It was too late for the two juniors to draw back, and from within the room came a savage ejaculation. Scarcely two seconds later there was a sound of bolts being drawn at the front door, and then Jukes came rushing out from the porch, his red face flushed with rage.

The farm-hand's eyes glittered as he confronted the juniors.

"You—you sneakin' little 'ounds!" he panted. "Spyin' on me, was you?"

"Well, I suppose we were," answered Tom Merry calmly. "When a man starts tearing up the floor-boards in his master's house, and during his master's absence, it's about time someone spied on him."

"Though I wufuse to admit that we were spyin'," added Arthur Augustus indignantly. "I heard a noise in the house, and as I believed you had gone out, Jukes, I natuwalli looked through the window to investigate. We were investigatin' an' not spyin', Jukes."

"What else was it but spyin'!" shouted Jukes furiously. "Can't a man look for a sixpence 'e's dropped without interferin' young 'ounds comin' spyin' on 'im?"

"So that was what you were doing?" said Blake, his lip curling in disbelief. "I don't believe it!"

"Of course I was!" hooted Jukes. "I dropped sixpence in that there parlour while I was—was looking for a key—the key of the back door. It dropped through one of them floor-boards."

"The carpet covers all the room as far as I can see," sniffed Blake.

"I want no lip from the Jikes of you!" bellowed Jukes, raising one of his big fists. "I telled Mister Chubb as you'd only cause trouble 'ere, an' I knowed you would. What right 'ave you to come 'ere spyin' and callin' a man a liar?"

"Where were you when I shouted for you?" demanded Arthur Augustus coldly. "You must have heard me, and yet you wufused to answah. That is why I looked through the window, bai Jove!"

"Think I'm goin' to run arter you little himps?" shouted Jukes angrily. "Not likely! Now, jest you clear off this 'ere farm. You ain't wanted 'ere, with yer 'igh and mighty ways, blow you! Clear bout!"

"We'll go when we've finished our jobs, and not before!" snapped Tom Merry. "Mr. Chubb's agreed to us working here until he returns, and we're jolly well going to see this thing through, Jukes. So put that in your pipe and smoke it. Come on, chaps! Let's get back to work."

"Yaas, wathah!"

And the juniors walked away, leaving the fuming Jukes staring after them, his fists clenched with rage.

"We've wasted enough time!" said Tom Merry grimly. "If we don't buck up we shan't be back by call-over, chaps. On the ball!"

"Yaas, wathah! But, bai Jove, deah boys! Have you any ideah why that howlid old lady thwew those eggs over me in such a rage? It was weally most mystewious."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I see nothin' whatevah to laugh at!" said Arthur Augustus indignantly. "Those eggs hurt me vewy much, and it is weally a miwacle to me none of them bwoke—at least, I did not notice any of them bwekin'. And why she should have returned them in such a wage is weally beyond me—especially as I gave her twenty for a shillin'. Do you think they were bad ones?"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Blake. "You silly chump, they were only mug eggs."

"Bai Jove! Whatevah do you mean, Blake?"

"They were imitation eggs—used to encourage hens to sit," gurgled Blake. "You might have known by the weight of them, you—you footling chump!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

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"Wats! I see no occasion to cackle like that!" snorted Gussy, blinking in astonished indignation at his laughing chums. "And I weally do not undahstand what you mean by mug eggs, Blake. You are twyin' to pull my leg, and I wufuse to discuss the mattah with such a lot of cacklin' wottahs!"

And Arthur Augustus went on with his work. The mystery of the affair of the eggs was still a mystery to him, and his chums did not trouble to enlighten him then—they were much too busy. There was a great deal that Arthur Augustus did not know about farming—or hens. But the work was finished at last, and then, tired out by their first day's work on the farm, Tom Merry & Co. made tracks for St. Jim's.

"We'll have to watch that chap Jukes, though," said Tom Merry, as they tramped homewards. "He's up to something, that's pretty clear. And as we've promised Mr. Chubb to keep an eye on things, we're going to keep a giddy eye on Master Jukes, trouble or no trouble."

"Yaas, wathah!"

And Tom's chums agreed with him on that point. What Jukes was after was a mystery to them. But he was obviously up to no good, and they were determined to keep a very close watch on his movements indeed.

CHAPTER 6.

Trimble on the Trail!

"EVER been trailed by a fat porker before?"

Monty Lowther asked that curious question with a chuckle. It was the Saturday following Tom Merry and Co.'s busy half-holiday, and the chums of the School House were making for Chubb's Farm in a cheery crowd, eager to take up their self-imposed duties there once again.

Every spare hour after lessons had been spent at the farm, and on that fine, sunny afternoon the juniors had manfully put away all thoughts of cricket, or boating, or swimming. There was hard work to be done, and they were cheerily resolved to do it.

They stared at Lowther as he asked the question.

"Fat porker?" repeated Blake. "What the thump are you gassing about, Lowther?"

"Look behind you and see!" chuckled Lowther.

The juniors looked behind them, and then they understood. Some distance in the rear, prowling along by the hedge bordering the field-path, was a fat and familiar form. As they glanced round, the form suddenly vanished into the hedge.

"Trimble!" exclaimed Tom Merry, with a laugh. "You're right, Monty—the fat rotter is trailing us. Think we're going on a picnic, I suppose."

"Phew! I don't think it's that," said Blake. "The fat little worm was listening to us just before dinner—I remember now. Herries kicked the fat little worm away. He's curious to know what we're up to at the farm, I bet! Shall we cut back and boot him?"

"Oh, let him rip!" said Tom Merry. "We've no time to waste on that fat rotter this afternoon. Plenty of work to be done—milking and what-not. Ever milked a cow, Gussy?"

"Bai Jove! Wathah not, deah boy. I am quite suah I can do it easily, howevah. Leave that to me."

"Right-ho! We jolly well will leave it to you!" chuckled Tom Merry.

"Vewy well, deah boys, I am quite weady to do the milkin'," said Arthur Augustus eagerly. "In fact, it is a vewy simple job, though I am afwaid you fellows would make a muck of it if it was left to you. Leave it to me."

The juniors chuckled—quite willing to leave the milking to Arthur Augustus. They knew quite well that Arthur Augustus wished to do the milking in preference to certain other jobs on a farm that were not quite so pleasant.

They soon reached the farm, and a glance behind showed them that Trimble was still on the trail. But they ignored Trimble, having work to do on this occasion. They met Jukes just coming out of the house, and to their surprise he greeted them quite amicably.

But the juniors were not at all deceived. They guessed that the man had his own reasons for the sudden change of attitude towards them. His tone was friendly enough as he told them what jobs needed doing, but they did not fail to see the glint of malice in his eyes which he could not hide.

From him they learned that Mr. Chubb was doing well, and that the break was not a bad one.

"A broken leg's no joke, though," commented Tom Merry, as Jukes tramped away to his ploughing. "It may be a long business, though poor old Chubb's pretty tough and healthy, and that's all in his favour."

"So Jukes went to see him last night," remarked Blake.

"Then it looks to me as if Chubb's told him he's got to be decent to us."

"He's spoofing, anyway," said Lowther, with a sniff. "I wouldn't trust the beggar an inch. I think—Hallo, there's dear old Baggy—just slipped into that outhouse. Watch me get him out."

And Lowther ran over to the door of the outhouse into which he had just glimpsed the fat form of Trimble vanish.

He stood just outside and gave a yell.

"Buck up, you fellows, and bring that bull along, will you? We'll shove him in this outhouse."

"Right!" called back Blake, entering into the joke. "Buck up with old Nero, Jukes."

"Yarrooogh!"

There came a startled yelp from the outhouse, and next second Trimble bounded out like a Jack-in-the-box. Lowther promptly collared him.

"Now, you fat clam," he snapped, as the rest ran up, "what the dickens are you after here?"

"I—I say!" gasped Trimble, looking around in vain for the bull. "Where—Oh, you were spoofing, Lowther, you rotter!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I say, you fellows!" gasped Trimble, blinking at them hopefully. "It's all right; I know all about you fellows coming to help on the farm. I've come to lend a hand."

"Oh, have you?" said Blake. "Sure you haven't come to raid the eggs and other grub, Trimble?"

"Of course not!" said Trimble, eyeing Blake reproachfully. "That's a rotten suggestion, Blake. Look here, I'm really keen to help, and I know all about farming. At the home farm at Trimble Towers I superintend all the farm work during the hols. Fact! Just put me in the dairy, and I'll soon make things hum, f'instance."

"You would," agreed Tom Merry. "I can see us doing that. Still," he added, with a wink at his grinning chums, "if you're really keen to work, Trimble, we'll take you on. You can be cleaning out that hen-run yonder while Gussy and I repair it. We can keep our eye on you, then."

"Oh, really, old chap, that's not the sort of work I've been used to—"

"Either that or you can take your hook, with seven boots to help you go," said Tom grimly. "Take your choice, Baggy."

"Oh, all right!"

Baggy decided to accept the job—to their surprise. Tom Merry told him where to find spade and brush; knowing quite well that Baggy would not stick the job long, and rather astonished that he had accepted it at all. The rest

of the farm-workers separated to their various jobs; Blake, Digby, and Herries to weed the field just behind the farm; Manners and Lowther to cut chaff in the barn. There was not really much work on the farm for such a number of helpers, for the stock was small, and the fields under cultivation few.

Soon all were busy at work; even Baggy setting to on his unsavoury task, with the watchful eyes of Arthur Augustus and Tom Merry upon him as they repaired the chicken wire and supports of the hen-run.

But Baggy soon tired of it; in fact, he had never intended to stick the job long, being hopeful that he would soon get the chance to slip away. And just as he was about to rebel his chance came.

Happening to want fresh timber to replace supports that had rotted, Arthur Augustus went in search of suitable lengths of wood, and as he did not return within ten minutes Tom went in search of him.

Forgetting Trimble in his impatience, Tom crossed the farmyard, shouting for Arthur Augustus. Manners and Lowther came out of the barn to see what was the matter.

"What's up?" asked Lowther. "What are you shouting about, Tommy?"

"That slacker, Gussy!" snapped Tom. "I sent him for some timber ten minutes ago, and he's clean vanished. You fellows seen him?"

"No," grinned Lowther. "Perhaps he's gone back to St. Jim's to change a necktie, or something. Just like—Hallo, that sounds like him yelling now! What the dickens—"

All the juniors broke into a run as they heard a faint, frantic yelling in the well-known tones of Arthur Augustus. The sounds came from the stackyard beyond the wall, and as they rushed in they stared blankly.

There was no sign of the swell of the Fourth, but from somewhere close at hand came a curiously muffled yelling.

"Help! Help! I'm smothered! Wescue, deah boys! Wescue!"

"Well, I'm blowed!" gasped Tom, gazing about him in bewilderment. "Where on earth—My hat!"

They all saw then as Tom pointed speechlessly to a haystack—or what had been a haystack.

"Look at it!" gasped Tom at last. "That stack was all right five minutes ago. What the dickens has made it collapse like that? Sounds as if—"

"Gussy!" yelled Lowther. "He's underneath, I do believe!"

It certainly seemed like it. When they had passed through the yard earlier on, the stack had been whole. But now it was broken in two, with half of the trusses of hay scattered about the ground in heaps. And from under the heap the muffled yelling seemed to come.

"Help! Wescue!" came the frantic howls.

The biggest heap of trusses heaved convulsively.

"Oh, my hat!" gasped Tom Merry in alarm. "Quick! The awful idiot will be squashed, or smothered! Call the other chaps!"

Yelling for aid, Tom, Manners, and Lowther struggled frantically with the heavy trusses. Blake, Herries, and Digby came rushing up, however, and, working with a will, they soon released the luckless Arthur Augustus, who collapsed in an exhausted heap as they helped him clear.

"Ow! Oh, bai Jove! Oh, gweat Scott!" he panted. "I weally thought I was—gwoooogh!—done for that time, deah boys. It was weally tewwible! I am chokin' with hay-dust, and ewevy bone in my body seems to be bwoken! Gwoooogh!"

Smothered from head to foot with straw and dust, the swell of the Fourth sat up, gasping and panting as if for a wager.

"You—you burbling chump!" gasped Blake, wiping his heated brow. "How the dickens did it happen, Gussy?"

"Ow! Oh, bai Jove! It was a most wemarkable accident!" gasped Arthur Augustus. "I was huntin' for timber, and I saw some long lengths of wood leaning up against the stack. I thought they would do nicely, and I took them away; though I had a feahful stwuggle, for they seemed to be stuck to the stack in some mannah.

(Continued on next page.)



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Howevah, I had just taken the last away when the wretched stack bwoke in two and fell on me. I weally cannot undahstand what caused it to collapse; it must have been put up vewy insecurely. Don't you fellows think so?"

"Oh, you—you awful idiot!"

"You burbling jackass!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Gussy stared in great indignation at the howling juniors. "Weally, deah boys, I see nothin' whatevah to laugh about!" he said angrily. "I did, at least, expect sympathy in the mattah, you wottahs!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Blake. "You'll be the death of me yet, Gussy!"

"The death of himself, you mean!" grinned Lowther. "Jevver hear of such an ass?"

"Weally, Lowthah—"

"Don't you see, you silly chump, Gussy?" laughed Tom Merry. "You took the giddy supports away! It's a wonder you weren't squashed to a jelly!"

"Bai Jove! Sup-supports?"

"Yes, you dummy! Those lengths of timber were put there to hold up the giddy haystack, of course!"

"Bai Jove! Weally, you know, I nevah thought of that, deah boys! I imagined they were just waste pieces of wood that had been carelessly left there. I was intendin' to wemonstwater with Jukes for leavin' them where anyone could twip ovah them!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"But it is nothin' to laugh at!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus, red in the face with indignation. "I have naw-wowly escaped bein' cwushed to death, and I am vewy much hurt! My clobber is also in a feahful state!"

"It jolly well isn't a laughing matter!" agreed Tom Merry. "This means a good twenty minutes' work and more to get this blessed stack built up again!"

"Oh crumbs!"

The laughter ceased, and the hapless Arthur Augustus was subjected to six ferocious glares.

"Bump him!" gasped Blake. "Of course, we shall have to put the thumping thing right again! I knew that would happen if Gussy was brought to the farm! Bump him! Bump the awful idiot!"

"Weally, Blake—"

But Arthur Augustus' wrathful reply was interrupted by Tom Merry.

"He's had enough, I fancy!" he said grimly. "I don't think the duffer will interfere with the supports of a haystack again! Come on! No good grousing! Let's make a start on the job!"

There certainly was no use in grousing, and bumping Gussy would not improve matters. Besides, he undoubtedly had had more than enough punishment for his little mistake. He limped away, groaning. And, with feelings too deep for words, the amateur farmer-boys struggled with the heavy trusses of hay, panting and gasping, and streaming with perspiration. Arthur Augustus, as a farm-hand, was certainly not proving a great success.

CHAPTER 7.

Trimble Keeps the Eggs!

"OH deah! Oh, gweat Scott! I am simply achin' all ovah, bai Jove! And instead of sympathisin' with a fellow, those feahful wottahs were wude and diswespectful in the extreme! Wottahs!"

Thus Arthur Augustus as he limped over to the farmhouse. Gussy was feeling a very injured individual indeed—in more ways than one. He felt a mass of aches and bruises. Actually it was a marvel he had not been seriously injured. But Arthur Augustus did not think that he had been lucky in any sort of way whatever.

"I will give myself a good bwush down, and then I will lie down on the couch in the kitchen for a few minutes," he mused. "This farm work is weally far more stwenuous than I had imagined! Yaas, wathah!"

Mr. Chubb had given them the run of the house as well as of the farm in his absence, and Arthur Augustus went indoors to hunt for a clothes-brush and to take a well-needed rest.

As he entered the farm kitchen two startled gasps sounded—one from Arthur Augustus and the other from a fat figure in Etons who was seated at the table.

"Bai Jove!" ejaculated Arthur Augustus. "Weally, you feahful little wottah, Twimble!"

It was Baggy Trimble right enough, and apparently he was enjoying himself, and also making hay while the sun shone, so to speak. On the table before him was a basin of thick cream, and next to that was a huge jar of home-made jam. In one hand Baggy held a big ladle, and

in the other a spoonful of jam. His mouth was chock-full, and his lips and cheeks were smothered with fruit-juice and cream.

Nor was that all. Even in that one amazed glance Gussy noted that Baggy's pockets bulged, and even his cap, which was still on his head, seemed to bulge. In fact, Baggy was all bulge just then.

"Bai Jove!" repeated Arthur Augustus, eyeing the fat raider in startled disgust. "You—you feahful wascal, Twimble!"

"Oh crumbs!"

Trimble gave one scared look at Arthur Augustus, and then he made a frantic leap for the door. But Arthur Augustus was a trifle too quick for him, injured or not. He jumped back into the doorway and barred the passage. Then, as Trimble pulled up, Arthur Augustus grabbed the fat youth by the collar.

"No, bai Jove!" exclaimed Gussy grimly. "I will see you do not escape, you fweightful little worm!"

And Arthur Augustus raised his voice aloft once again.

"This way, deah boys! Come heah, Tom Mewwy!"

"Oh dear! I say, lemme go, Gussy!" panted Trimble, in great alarm. "I say, there's lots of jam left yet and tons of cream! Let's go fifty-fifty! No need to let those other beasts know, old chap! Yoooop! Don't sh-shake me like that, or you'll break the—I mean, you'll make my head ache! Lemme go!"

"Wathah not, Twimble! You deserve to be punished vewy seavehly, you wascal!"

Trimble groaned, but for some reason best known to himself he did not attempt to struggle, though he squirmed enough and wriggled enough in the indignant grasp of Arthur Augustus. He groaned still more as hurried footsteps sounded on the cobbled yard, and Tom Merry, followed by the rest of the juniors, came rushing up.

"What the thump's the matter now, Gussy?" hooted Blake. "What the dickens are you— Oh! Trimble! M-mum-my hat!"

Blake stopped short and stared at Trimble. They all stopped short and stared at Trimble. And, really, Trimble was worth looking at just then. With his juice and cream smeared cheeks, his bulging pockets, and bulging cap, he looked a queer sight—and a significant sight to Tom Merry & Co.

"Well, the little worm!" gasped Tom Merry. "He must have sneaked away after we left the hen-pen! What's that on his chivvy? Strawberries and cream, I'll bet!"

"It is, Tom Mewwy!" said Arthur Augustus, a trifle coldly. "If you will be good enough to take a glance into the kitchen you will see what this little wascal has been up to!"

There was a howl of wrath as the six juniors glanced into the kitchen.

"Well, the little worm!" gasped Tom Merry. "Not content with raiding study cupboards at St. Jim's, he's got the nerve to come out here, the greedy little beast! What shall we do with him? And what the dickens has he got under his cap?"

"Oh dear! I sus-say, you fellows— Yooooooop!"

Trimble howled as Monty Lowther gave a soft chuckle, and, jumping forward swiftly, brought his fist down hard on Trimble's bulging cap. Lowther had guessed what was under it—and he proved to be right.

"Eggsactly!" said Lowther. "I thought so!"

It was eggs! But Lowther's fist turned them into an omelette. White and yolk of eggs streamed out from under Trimble's cap, over his greasy hair, and down his face, to join the strawberries and cream there.

But the humorist of the Shell had not finished yet. Before the hapless grub-raider could guess his further intentions, Lowther had slapped each of his pockets hard—very hard—and each slap elicited a significant squelch. Baggy had even crammed an egg into each of his trousers pockets, and Lowther had already "spotted" the bulges.

Two vigorous digs at Trimble's fat waistcoat brought two further significant squelches, and Trimble roared and howled in dismay.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Tom Merry & Co.

With squashed eggs streaming from his features and various pockets, Trimble stood and gasped and spluttered in dismay.

"Now, fancy that happening!" remarked Lowther, in pretended astonishment. "Just a few friendly taps, and Baggy starts turning out omelettes! Marvellous!"

"Ow!" wailed Baggy. "Oh, you awful beast, Lowther! You knew they were there, and did that on purpose!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Beasts!"

"Kick the fat rotter out, and let's get back to work!" laughed Tom Merry. "Now, all together, chaps!"

"Yarooooogh!"

Trimble roared, and took to his heels as the seven farm-workers made a rush at him. He cleared the low wall

of the yard at a single bound, and went streaking downhill across the meadows, a yell of laughter following him. Nor did he stop running until, diving through a gap in the hedge bordering the lane, he fell sprawling over three youths who happened to be reclining there in the warm summer sunshine.

The three were Gordon Gay & Co. of the Grammar School, and as the eggy Trimble plunged amongst them, Gordon Gay shot out a swift hand and grabbed him by the ankle, bringing him down with a crash.

"No, you don't!" he snapped, for Trimble had been about to rush on again. "Hallo, it's that fat chap from St. Jim's! Phew! Keep away from him, chaps, he's smothered in eggs or something."

"And strawberry-juice and cream," chuckled Harry Wootton. "The dear old fat man has been robbing hen-roosts and burgling Chubb's farm."

"Let's take him to the Rylcombe hobby" suggested Frank Monk.

"Yarroop! I say, lemme go!" yelled Trimble in dire fear. "I haven't been robbing hen-roosts or burgling, you beasts! Lemme go."

He glanced in alarm through the gap in the hedge. Baggy had been under the impression that the St. Jim's juniors were still after him. He gasped with relief as a glance showed no signs of them in the meadow behind.

"Oh!" he panted. "I thought the beasts were after me."

"What beasts?" demanded Gay. "Bulls or dogs or—"

"The pigs, I expect," said Wootton. "They recognised Baggy as a long-lost brother, but Baggy's too proud to admit the relationship! Shame, Baggy!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"It wasn't pigs at all," groaned Baggy. "It was those beasts Tom Merry, Blake, and that lot."

"Oh!" said Gay, with sudden interest. "Caught you up to your usual raiding tricks again, I suppose? I say, though, what are those chaps up to at the farm, Trimble?"

"They're working there, the silly asses!" said Trimble. "They're helping on the blessed farm, of course—chopping hay and milking cows and feeding the pigs and all that, you know. Fancy St. Jim's chaps stooping to menial work like that!" he added, with a sneer.

"Just fancy," said Gordon Gay, looking in surprise at his chums. "You hear that, friends—Tom Merry & Co. are working on the farm. Ye gods!"

"On the—the farm? What the dickens for?" gasped Monk.

"What for, Trimble?" demanded Gordon Gay. "Extra pocket-money?"

"Blessed if I know!" said Trimble, who was as ignorant of the accident to Mr. Chubb as were Gordon Gay & Co. "Sucking up to old Chubb, I suppose—after eggs and cream and things."

Baggy's mind always worked and revolved round grub. Gay chuckled.

"No, it ain't that, Baggy," he said. "Some new stunt, I expect, at St. Jim's. Lessons in farming—five guineas a lesson extra—what? Your chivvy is in a shocking state," added Gay, eyeing Trimble gravely. "We must wash it for you, old chap. Help me duck Trimble in that ditch, chaps."

"Yooop!"

Trimble howled in alarm, and with a desperate wrench he tore himself free and took to his heels, his fat little legs going like clockwork. Gordon Gay, who had expected him to do so, chuckled as he looked after the fat St. Jim's junior.

"Well, you chaps," he remarked thoughtfully, "that's a bit of really interesting news. Looks as if the afternoon's not going to be a washout after all. I vote we scout round and see what those chaps are up to on the farm."

"Yes, rather! Got a wheeze, Gay?"

"No, but we'll just hang round and see what turns up," grinned Gay, rising to his feet. "Come on."

And he led the way up the hill towards Chubb Farm, his grinning chums at his heels. They scouted cautiously about until voices brought them round to the stackyard. There they were highly entertained at the strange sight of Tom Merry & Co., with shirt sleeves rolled up and faces crimson with exertion and streaming with perspiration, struggling manfully with the heavy trusses of hay.

"Oh, to be a farmer's boy—ee!" chirruped Frank Monk softly. "Doesn't it just do your eyes good to see the industry of the little fellows. And hark to their language! Methinks they don't like the job."

"Sounds to me as if old Gussy's let them in for it somehow," said Gordon Gay. "They're blessing him, anyway. Perhaps he's pushed the giddy stack over and they've got to shove it up again. However, work will do the little fellows good. I wonder if we can't find them some more."

"You've got a wheeze?" asked Wootton eagerly.

"I think so," returned Gordon Gay, with a soft chuckle. "Look here, we've got to cut back to school at top speed.

There's a uniform I want in the Amateur Dramatic Society's property box."

"A—a uniform?"

"Exactly. But there's no time to explain. Come on, and follow your uncle."

And with that the leader of the Grammarians led his grinning chums away swiftly and silently like the famous Arabs of old.

CHAPTER 8.

Spilt Milk!

"PHEW! That's done, thank goodness!"

"Yes, rather!"

"That idiot Gussy ought to have been scalped for this!"

"Hear, hear!"

Tom Merry, Blake, Lowther, Manners, Digby, and Herries were all in agreement upon that point.

By his thoughtless action in removing the supports of the haystack Arthur Augustus had caused his chums at least half an hour's hard and strenuous labour.

But the job was finished at last—the last truss of hay had been placed into position, and though the result was scarcely professional, it had been made safe enough with the addition of a few more supports.

Panting and gasping, and wiping the perspiration from their foreheads, the amateur farmhands stood and eyed the results of their work.

"Well, we'd better be getting back to the job we were on," remarked Tom Merry, his good-humoured face red and heated. "Another five minutes ought to finish that hen-run. By George, where's Gussy, I wonder?"

"Gone back to St. Jim's to change his clobber, I expect," grinned Lowther. "He's safer there, anyway."

"Yes, rather!"

The juniors started off to go about their varied jobs. But they soon found out where Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was. As they came round by the cattle-sheds Tom Merry held up a warning hand suddenly, a grin spreading over his face.

"Hold on!" he said softly. "That sounds like old Gussy, I fancy."

It certainly did sound like Arthur Augustus. From over the wall came his well-known voice in tones of great exasperation.

"Bai Jove! This is weally most twyin'," he was murmuring, apparently to himself. "I had no ideah milkin' was so vewy difficult. Whoa! Steady! Oh deah! Keep still, for goodness' sake, you feahful bwute! Oh cwumbs!"

There followed a clatter of hoofs, and the scraping of a stool on the cobbled yard.

"My hat! He's started milking!" chuckled Lowther.

All the juniors stepped to the low wall and peeped over cautiously. They were entertained by the sight of Arthur Augustus seated on a stool before a cow. His shirt-sleeves were rolled up, and perspiration was streaming from his heated features. As the juniors looked they saw the cow move round backwards, and with an impatient gesture Arthur Augustus followed it, dragging along the stool and the milk pail with him.

He had just seated himself on the stool and was just about to begin milking operations when once again the cow moved round. Once again Arthur Augustus gave an impatient ejaculation and followed it.

"Oh, my hat!" gurgled Blake.

"Walk round, Martin!" murmured Lowther. "Is this a race, chaps?"

"Whoa!" repeated Arthur Augustus, quite irritably this time. "Weally, this is feahful!"

He made another attempt at milking, and again the cow moved—this time towards Gussy, nearly knocking him off his stool.

"Whoa!" yelled Gussy. "Hold on, you feahful duffah!"

As if determined to defy him, the old cow moved again, and only just in time did Gussy move to escape being bowled over. Then the cow began to move in earnest, sidling along as if on a pivot, while D'Arcy edged away in a circle, one hand dragging his stool and the other dragging the pail, which appeared to be half full of milk.

"Go it, Gussy!" called out Blake, unable to keep quiet longer. "You're winning!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The juniors howled with laughter.

The sudden and unexpected noise had an effect both on the cow and Gussy. Gussy gave a jump and looked round, and at the same moment, evidently startled, the cow wheeled round, sending the unfortunate amateur "milkmaid" bowling head over heels on the cobbles.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Yawwoooogh!"

Crash!

That howl of laughter from Gussy's highly entertained chums did it!

Not content with bowling over Arthur Augustus, the old cow suddenly came down on both forefeet, and then landed out with hindfeet, catching the milk-pail neatly and surely, lifting it into the air like a football.

The milk shot over the recumbent Arthur Augustus, drenching him from head to foot, while the pail itself narrowly escaped braining him.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Yawoooooh! Ow-ow! Oh, gweat Scott!"

The onlookers roared with laughter as Arthur Augustus floundered about, covered from head to foot in streaming milk.

The old cow—evidently a cross-grained old lady, or one who objected to amateur milkmaids—turned and ambled back into the cowshed as if nothing had happened.

As it did so Jukes came rushing out of the shed next to it, a milkpail in his hand. He dropped the pail and stared at Arthur Augustus.

"Ere, wot's all this?" he bawled angrily. "Is that 'ow you milks, you little fool? Where's that there cow?"

"Oh deah! Oh, bai Jove! It—it's gone back into the shed, I think," groaned Arthur Augustus, staggering to his feet dazedly. "She simply refused to be milked, the fearful animal!"

"I should jolly well think 'as 'ow she would," snorted Jukes, scowling round at the juniors. "Didn't I tell you to milk the blessed cows in the shed as we always does, you blinkin' idjut?"

"Bai Jove! Oh deah! I weally could not stand the stuffiness of the shed, and so I bwrought the cow out to milk her heah," explained Arthur Augustus, looking his dripping figure up and down with a groan of horror. "I weally do not think I had bettah twy milkin' any more, Jukes. It is weally far more difficult than I had imagined. The fearful beast simply would not keep still."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"It is nothin' to laugh at, you wottahs!"

"That it ain't," glowered Jukes, pointing to the spilt milk. "What about that there milk—all wasted? Old Chubb shall 'ear about this 'ere, my lads!"

"You have no need to weport this to Mr. Chubb," said Arthur Augustus indignantly. "I will do that myself, and I have no intention whatever of allowin' Mr. Chubb to lose through any fault of mine."

"Rather not," said Tom Merry, suddenly becoming grim. "You needn't worry about that, Jukes. Any damage we do we'll pay for. You'd better cut off to St. Jim's and change, Gussy."

"Oh deah! I am dwenched through, deah boys! Gwooooh!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Jukes scowled and went back to his milking, muttering to himself. Arthur Augustus set off at a run, wiping himself with a handkerchief as best he could as he ran. He vanished round the farm buildings, and the juniors went up the farmyard, still chuckling.

"Poor old Gussy!" gurgled Blake. "He isn't exactly enjoying this game, at all events. That's another little lot to chalk up against our account, Tom. At this rate—"

"We'd better start making a note of damage done," said Tom Merry ruefully. "There's those eggs and things Baggy collared and scoffed. We'd better pay for those, of course. And there's this milk. At this rate it's going to cost—Hallo! Who's this merchant?"

Rounding the corner by the farmhouse they suddenly came face to face with a short, stout individual, with bushy eyebrows and a fierce, military-looking moustache. He was dressed in a dark blue uniform and peaked cap, and was evidently an official of some kind.

"Looks like a giddy cruelty to animals inspector," said Lowther. "I wonder if dear old Baggy has reported how we treated him? Think he has?"

The juniors chuckled, and eyed the uniformed individual with interest as he approached them. He gave them a stern look.

"Where's Mr. Chubb?" he demanded in a deep, gruff voice. "I'm lookin' for Mr. Chubb, the owner of this farm, my lads."

"Mr. Chubb's in hospital," explained Tom Merry.

"Oh, is he?" said the man grimly. "And what are you little boys doing here, then?"

The "little boys" scowled at him.

"We're helping on the farm," said Tom Merry briefly. "Temporary hands, you know."

"Hm! I don't think much of Mr. Chubb's sense, then, if he's engaged a lot of slackers and weaklings like you," said the man, eyeing them ferociously. "Still, if you're the farmhands here, then you're the fellows I want."

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He pointed with his stick to a big pile of rubbish in one corner of the stackyard.

"What's that doing there?" he demanded officiously.

"Goodness knows!" said Tom Merry.

It was really a silly question for anyone to ask. The heap was a big heap of farmyard refuse—old straw, rotted potatoes, turnips, and cabbage leaves—the usual accumulation of rubbish in a farmyard.

"What's the matter with it, anyway?" asked Blake.

He did not like the looks nor the officious questions of the man.

"What's the matter with it?" hooted the uniformed individual, pointing again to the heap of rubbish. "That stuff's no right to be left there. I won't allow it to remain there. Get to work at once and remove it—every scrap



Billy, the goat, went across the meadow like a thunderbolt, taking Gordon. The leader of the Grammarians gave a terrific howl as he fair!

of it. If it is not removed this very afternoon it will be my duty to report to the council.

"Oh, my hat!"

CHAPTER 9.

Spoofed!

THE juniors stared at the man.

"Re-remove that lot?" gasped Tom Merry. "Us?"

"Yes, of course! You're the farmhands, aren't you?" snapped the man.

"And who are you, then?" demanded Tom, though he already guessed, or imagined he did.

The official-looking gentleman snorted.

"Don't you know a sanitary inspector when you see one?" he asked pompously. "For the last time, I order you to shift that rubbish. Unless you want to be heavily fined you'd better get going on the job."

"Oh crumbs!"

The juniors eyed each other in dismay. To remove that heap of rubbish would be an hour's job, at least. It was too thick altogether. Moreover, at any time, it was not a job that appealed to them—far from it. But on a hot day—

Tom Merry & Co. shuddered at the thought. Yet what could they do? Mr. Chubb already had enough trouble to

contend with, without a summons or a fine. To refuse to aid him in this way would be base ingratitude after what had happened. He had risked something by going to the rescue of Arthur Augustus, and he had been injured in doing so. Unpleasant as the task was, they all felt they could not be so ungrateful as to refuse even this order.

"Look here," gasped Tom Merry at last. "Can't we do it later, after we've seen Mr. Chubb about it? He may



Gordon Gay in the rear as that junior started to scramble to his feet. Fairly sailed through the air. "Yaroooh!" (See Chapter 9.)

not like it to be moved. If he'd wanted it moved he'd have moved it before this."

"No, it will not do later!" snapped the inspector angrily. "It must be removed this very afternoon. It is a blot on the landscape, and most unhealthy for the—the pigs and other animals."

"The—the pigs?" repeated Tom.

"Of course. It is against the by-laws and regulations," was the severe reply. "Get your tools and make a start without delay, my lads. Otherwise—"

He paused significantly, and took out a big notebook and a pencil, like a policeman about to take an offender's name and address. The juniors looked at each other helplessly.

"Hold on!" gasped Tom, realising the position from his chums' dismal faces. "I—I suppose we'll have to do it?"

"You will that! I suppose you don't want to have to appear in the police court alongside Mister Chubb?" said the inspector sternly.

"Oh crumbs!"

Tom Merry & Co. had heard all about sanitary inspectors, of course, and they had vague ideas of their duties and powers. But they were very vague—very vague indeed. The threat of police court proceedings rather startled them. What would the Head think if they were hauled before a magistrate? It could not be thought of. Certainly they could scarcely be held responsible for the rubbish being where it was. None the less, if they refused to remove it—

"Where do you want it put?" asked Tom Merry, with a groan.

The inspector looked about him. Then he pointed across to the far end of the yard—to the kitchen door, in fact.

"Over there," he said briefly. "Against that wall there will do nicely. Sooner you get busy, the better, my lads."

"Oh dear!"

"Better make a start," grunted Tom. "But sure you want it over there? Why that's scarcely half a dozen yards from the door of the house!"

"That's my orders, my lad! Want to teach me my job?" hooted the inspector. "I say there, and I mean there! Get on with it, and don't answer me back."

"Old Hun!" breathed Blake. "Going to do it, then, Tom?" he added aloud.

"Have to," said Tom briefly. "We can't bring poor old Chubb into more trouble. He must be potty to have the stuff shoved over by the door, the old idiot! Can't be helped, though."

With feelings too deep for words the amateur farmhands went for forks, giving the sanitary inspector far from genial looks. But there was no help for it. Tom Merry & Co. had determined to take the rough with the smooth when they had taken on the job of farmhands, and they faced the task like men.

Pitchforks were obtained, and the juniors started work with coats off and shirt-sleeves rolled up in a business-like manner. The inspector took his seat on the wall and watched them. Curiously enough, he did not seem quite so officious and grim now—indeed, Tom Merry felt sure he caught him grinning once.

"Old beast!" he whispered to Blake. "The brute's actually grinning at us! Why the thump doesn't he come and take a turn?"

"I'd like to hit him on the napper with this dashed fork," said Herries savagely. "Phew! What a niff! I shan't forget this job as long as I live."

"Same here!"

The amateur farmhands agreed to that from the bottom of their youthful hearts. It certainly was an unpleasant job. But they tackled it manfully, panting and gasping, their brows streaming with perspiration in the hot sun. So busy were they, indeed, that not one of them noted two grinning faces that popped up above the farmyard wall every now and again. Someone was evidently hiding behind the wall, and highly entertained by the sight of the St. Jim's juniors at their unaccustomed labours.

Never had the juniors worked so hard as they did that afternoon. With pitchforks and wheelbarrows they shifted the heavy rubbish across to the appointed spot, piling it in a heap there. Really, it was a mystery why a sanitary inspector wanted it placed in such a spot so close to the house—it seemed positively idiotic to the juniors. They soon learned why, however, when the last scrap of rubbish had been carted across and flung on the heap.

As the panting juniors rested thankfully on their forks, the inspector climbed down leisurely from the wall, his hand over his mouth, apparently hiding a yawn.

"Finished?" he asked.

"Yes," grunted Tom, wiping his heated brow. "Thank goodness, yes!"

"Right! Then you'd better cart it all back again now."

"Eh?"

"M-mum-my-hat!"

"What's that?" ejaculated Tom Merry, giving a jump. "C-e-cart it back again?"

"Exactly!" was the cheerful response. "If you don't, old Chubb will lay his horse-whip about you, I bet, and serve you jolly well right for being such howling duffers as to do it."

Tom Merry & Co. almost fell down. They gaped and gaped at the sanitary inspector—and no wonder, for those last few words had been in a different voice altogether—a voice they knew only too well.

"What the—the—the—the—the—" Tom's voice trailed away.

"Exactly!" said the sanitary inspector, in a decidedly youthful voice. "Very clearly put, Tommy! Now, will you kindly tell me who is top dog—St. Jim's or the Grammar School?"

And, with a swift movement, the sanitary inspector removed his hat and with it a wig, showing a youthful head of dark hair. Another swift movement, and the heavy moustache came off. Then the pseudo sanitary inspector turned abruptly and took to his heels, taking the low wall at a bound and bolting for his life down the hill beyond it. Back on the summer breeze came a perfect howl of laughter from the japer and from two other well-known figures in Grammar School caps who had joined him from beyond the wall.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Gordon Gay!" shrieked Tom Merry. "We've been had!"

Undoubtedly they had. For a single instant the amateur farmhands stared after the retreating trio; and then, with a combined howl of wrath, they leapt the wall and tore in pursuit, waving their pitchforks, like Zulus on the war-path.

But Gordon Gay & Co. were well away, going great guns, and Tom Merry & Co. were far too stiff and exhausted to follow far. They stopped, panting, at last, and then they began to retrace their footsteps, breathing hard, their features red with terrific rage and dismay.

"Done!" groaned Tom Merry. "Oh, my only summer bonnet! Done brown! Done in the eye! Done on toast! Spoofed and dished and diddled! And—and now we've got to cart all that rubbish back again. I see now why the cad ordered us to shove it by the farmhouse door. Oh, what blind idiots we were!"

"Oh dear! We shall never hear the last of this!" With gasps and groans of dismay the weary workers fairly tottered back, and scaled the wall again, Lowther turning to shake a fist at the distant enemy. They had already recognised the other two as Harry Wootton and Frank Monk. A glance showed them that the three jokers had stopped and flung themselves down on the grass. Their howls of laughter reached the hapless St. Jim's juniors. The Grammarians were rolling about in the distant meadow, obviously nearly in hysterics with mirth.

"Oh, the—cads!" almost wept Jack Blake. "Look here, we've simply got to go after them. If we sneaked round by the farmhouse and got the other side of that hedge we might have a chance of nabbing them."

"Well, we might," muttered Tom Merry, his eyes suddenly taking on a gleam as he jumped down from the wall after reconnoitring the position of the enemy. "Look here, we're jolly well going to try it. I believe we stand a good chance of taking the rotters by surprise. Come on!"

"Yes, rather!" The other juniors were only too eager to follow. They were simply seething with rage, and longing for revenge. Tom's suggestion—or rather Blake's—had given them renewed life and energy at thought of possible revenge.

Swiftly they followed the captain of the Shell round the back of the farm, and then they took to their heels down by the hedge, taking care not to show themselves—though the enemy were hidden themselves by the thick hedges between. They very soon came opposite the meadow in which they hoped the Grammarians were still rejoicing, and Tom called a halt and peeped through a gap in the hedge.

Yes; they were still there! All three were lying on the grass, apparently helpless with mirth still. They rolled and kicked, and their laughter reached the ears of the vengeance-seeking St. Jim's juniors.

"Ha, ha, ha!" "Go on—laugh!" hissed Blake ferociously, shaking his fist in their direction. "Our turn's coming. Come on—"

"Hold on, you ass!" gasped Tom Merry warningly. "They'll spot us long before we can get near 'em, and then it'll be all up. We'd better—"

He was interrupted by a sudden, gleeful exclamation from Monty Lowther.

"Leave 'em to me!" he exclaimed, pointing to the corner of the field near them. "What about that giddy billy-goat?"

"Eh? What about him?" The rest stared at the goat tethered to a rope on the other side of the hedge. He was a fine animal, and he looked a very ferocious specimen. Indeed, the juniors had seen that particular goat before, and they also knew his evil reputation. If anything his reputation was worse than that of Nero, the bull. At the present moment he seemed in a fine rage.

Apparently the laughter of the Grammarians had roused his anger, for he strained desperately at the rope that tethered him to a peg in the ground. At any time that goat strongly objected to trespassers on his domain as the juniors well knew, and they saw that he was working himself up into a terrific rage now. He strained and strained vigorously at the rope in an effort to get free—obviously in order to deal with the trespassing Grammarians.

"Leave them to me!" repeated Lowther, in answer; and he crept away without waiting further, and before his chums could stop him. He was through the hedge in a flash, and on tip-toe he rushed across to the peg in the ground. He was running a big risk, but fortunately the billy-goat was far too engrossed in the trespassers in front to hear or heed those behind.

Taking his knife out swiftly, Lowther slashed at the rope and then he raced back at top speed.

What happened next was like a cinema film racing at full speed. Billy, the goat, went across the meadow like a thunder-

bolt—and he struck the Grammarians like a thunderbolt, too!

Only Gordon Gay seemed to sense that something was about to happen, for he started to scramble hurriedly to his feet, and it was just then the goat arrived on the spot.

His head and horns took Gordon Gay neatly in the rear before he was properly on his feet, and Gordon Gay gave a terrific howl, and fairly sailed through the air, landing in the ditch which—unfortunately for him—was half-full of water.

Splash!

It was Harry Wootton's turn next, and the goat also caught him just scrambling-up, and he dealt with him in like manner. There was not sufficient force behind the "butt" this time to lift Wootton into the ditch, but Wootton found it forcible enough for all that. He went head over heels, and wheeling round with remarkable swiftness, the angry goat went for Frank Monk.

That startled youth managed, by a miracle of dodging, to avoid the first rush; but Billy, the goat, spun round again like a professional footballer, and then he got in a drive that fairly lifted the hapless Frank Monk off his feet.

"Yarrooooooogh!"

Monk's howl was enough to waken the celebrated Seven Sleepers as he described a complete somersault and joined Gordon Gay in the ditch.

"Ha, ha, ha!" It was the turn of Tom Merry & Co. to laugh, and they roared. Their yells of mirth added to the anguish of Gordon Gay & Co.

"Oh crumbs!" gurgled Tom Merry. "Good for you, Monty! Let's cut round now and collar the rotters!"

But it was already too late to do that. Wootton had managed to scramble through the hedge to safety, and in a matter of seconds Gordon Gay and Frank Monk had crawled out of the ditch.

They did not scramble out on the meadow side, for the goat was waiting for them there, apparently not relishing the thought of going into the ditch after them.

To the disappointment of Tom Merry & Co.—and, doubtless enough, of the goat—the two Grammarians crawled up the steep bank and wormed their way through the hedge to safety. Then they limped away, all of them rubbing themselves in a manner that brought howls of laughter from the watching St. Jim's juniors.

"No good going after 'em now," said Blake at last, wiping his eyes. "They'd be off before we could get near them. Well, this gets our own back a bit, anyway."

"Ha, ha! Yes, rather! Good old Billy!"

And, feeling much happier now, the amateur farm-hands returned to the farm. But they did not feel happy for long. As they sighted the heap of rubbish Herries groaned hollowly.

"Can't be helped!" said Tom Merry, eyeing the rubbish ruefully. "We can't leave it there, that's pretty sure. The sooner we get going on the job the better. Oh, hang those rotters!"

"Yes, rather! Oh dear!"

"We'll finish this job, and then we'll cut off to St. Jim's for tea," grunted Tom. "And, by Jingo, we'll have to work like niggers to-night to make up for lost time!"

And, with feelings towards the humorous Grammarians that were far too deep for words, Tom Merry & Co. took up their pitchforks again and "got down" to it with right good will.

CHAPTER 10.

Gussy Insists!

"BETTER stay at home!" urged Blake.

"Wot!"

Tea was over at St. Jim's, and Tom Merry & Co. were on their way back to Chubb's farm.

"You know how you've mucked things up already!" said Lowther severely.

"Wats!" said Arthur Augustus, in great indignation. "I wogard that wemark as extremely wude and insultin', bai Jove! If you wepeat it, Lowthah, I shall be weluctantly obliged to give you a feahful thwashin'!"

"Well, haven't you?" snorted Blake. "What about those eggs? And what about that haystack? And what about that milking? If you go on at that rate you'll bankrupt us. You're doubling the blessed work, instead of helping, too. You're safer at St. Jim's. Farming is men's work. You're jolly good as a comedian, Gussy, but no good at all as a farmer's boy."

"Hear, hear!"

"Bai Jove! You—you—"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy fairly spluttered with wrath.

"Think of your clobber," urged Monty Lowther. "You won't have a top or a natty waistcoat left if you stick to farming."

"Bai Jove!" spluttered Arthur Augustus. "You—you—"

cheeky, insultin' wottahs! I have already done vewy good work on the farm, and the affair of the haystack was an accident, and the milkin' incident was not my fault. As for my clobber—that is my business, you wottahs!"

"Fancy wearing a topper to work on a farm!" said Blake witheringly.

"It is only an old, discarded toppah," said Gussy. "Even when doin' manual labah it is necessary for us to keep up an appeahwance. As for my doublin' work—what about that heap of wubbish?" he asked crushingly. "Had I been theah that would nevah have happened. You youngstahs were feashful duffahs to allow Gordon Gay to twick you in that mannah!"

Gussy's critics blushed, but they had no answer to that. They certainly had been duffers.

"Ahem! But look here, Gussy—" began Blake.

"I uttably wufuse to look heah!" said Arthur Augustus frigidly. "And I wufuse to speak to you wottahs at all; and I shall certainly not return to St. Jim's to please you!"

"But, I say—"

"Wats!"

Arthur Augustus hastened his steps and walked on ahead of the party, his noble head in the air. His chums chuckled as they grinned after him. As a matter of fact, they had merely been entertaining themselves on the way to Chubb's farm by the easy process of "pulling" Gussy's leg. They did not really expect Arthur Augustus to obey their wishes and turn back to St. Jim's—nor did they actually wish it.

But Arthur Augustus had taken them very seriously, and he was now on his "high horse."

It was only a few minutes' walk across the fields to Chubb's farm, and the juniors were almost at the farm now. As he walked ahead Arthur Augustus, evidently to take a short cut, left the field-path and mounted a gate, intending to cut across the ground beyond to the back of the farm.

"Hold on, Gussy!" shouted Tom Merry. "Don't go that way!"

"Wats!"

Arthur Augustus was determined to go that way—especially now Tom Merry had told him not to. He vaulted the gate, which was covered with chicken wire nearly to the top bar, and strode across the grass.

"Come back, you ass!" yelled Tom.

"Wats!"

Gussy's determination was unyielding. He soon discovered why Tom had warned him not to go that way, however. Scarcely had he taken a dozen steps into the enclosure, when he found himself walking amidst a swarm of noisy turkeys.

"Oh, bai Jove!" he murmured.

He remembered now that in his surly way Jukes had warned them not to disturb the turkeys unnecessarily. But up to now he had never noticed where they were kept.

He knew now quickly enough, and he soon discovered that there were other reasons why he should not intrude in the turkey enclosure.

The turkeys themselves, obviously, did not like it; they resented trespassers. There was quite an agitated flutter in the turkey enclosure when Arthur Augustus walked amongst them.

"Bai Jove!" murmured the swell of St. Jim's, pausing in his walk and blinking round him through his eyeglass. "What weally unfriendly birds they are! Shoo! Go away! Shoo! Oh, gweat Scott!"

"Gobble, gobble, gobble!"

Arthur Augustus jumped back, more astonished than alarmed, as one great turkey-cock came for him with a sudden rush, gobbling ferociously.

"Yawwoogh!"

Arthur Augustus jumped backwards and dodged, with a startled yell.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

From beyond the gate came a yell of laughter from Blake & Co. Tom Merry, however, frowned rather anxiously. He knew that a savage turkey-cock could be very dangerous. Arthur Augustus, like the rest, obviously, did not know that. Though startled, he was not at all alarmed as yet.

"Shoo!" he cried, waving his arms about. "Shoo! Go away, you bwutes! Oh, gweat Scott!"

Instead of going away, the huge gobbler came on again, the rest of the turkey tribe following in a noisy crowd—the male birds first, looking very ferocious and gobbling noisily, and the females behind, looking on with interest.

Gussy dodged back again, waving his arms wildly.

"Come back, Gussy, you born idiot!" shouted Tom Merry.

"Run back—this way, you ass!"

But the turkey-cock was attacking in real earnest, and Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, thoroughly alarmed now, quite lost his head for the moment.

In his turn, he made a rush at the great bird, hoping to frighten it away. But it only infuriated the bird the more, and it fairly flew at Arthur Augustus, with a savage ferocity that would have frightened any ordinary fellow.

It was too much for Arthur Augustus, at all events, and he turned tail and ran for it—not towards the gate, but towards the far hedge.

The gobbler went in pursuit aggressively, wings flapping, beak snapping. Arthur Augustus yelled as he felt its sharp beak snap on his trousers-leg.

"Yawwoogh! Help! Oh, gweat Scott! Wescue!" he yelled.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"This way, you dummy!" howled Tom Merry.

But Arthur Augustus scarcely heard him. He ran round in a circle, with the great bird chasing him, and other birds flying from his path with angry outcries. The noise was terrific.

Snap, snap, snap!

Arthur Augustus had already discovered that the chicken wire extended all round the enclosure, and that escape by the hedge was next to impossible. There was nothing for it but to pocket his noble pride, and to obey Tom Merry's urgent injunction to make for the gate.

He went for it with a rush, though not before the turkey-cock had got in a sharp, vicious peck that brought a yelp from Arthur Augustus.

"Yoooooop!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Here you are, Gussy!"

Laughing uproariously, Blake and the rest helped Arthur Augustus as he swarmed over the gate and dropped, panting and gasping, to safety in the field beyond.

The gobbler was victorious. He retired, strutting away with ruffled feathers, gobbling his triumph noisily. Comparative peace settled on the turkey enclosure again.

"You—you ass!" gasped Tom Merry. "Why the thump didn't you listen? You ought to have known better, you burbling dummy! Are you hurt?"

"Gwooooh! Oh, bai Jove! I am hurt vewy much!" panted Arthur Augustus. "That bwute bit me twice! I had no ideah the bwutes were so savage, you know. Gweat Scott! My twousahs are torn! Ow! Oh deah!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Blake. "Serves you jolly well right, Gussy! You would go your own giddy way!"

"Wats! It is nothin' to laugh about, you cacklin' wottahs!" said Arthur Augustus heatedly. "How was I to know theah were turkeys in the field—I could not see them until I was wight amongst them. Oh, the bwute!"

"Never mind, Gussy!" chuckled Lowther. "You'll be able to get your own back when you have your turkey at Christmas, old chap! I tell you what, tell old Chubb to mark that one for you for Christmas; then you'll be able to have your giddy revenge!"

"Wats! Ow-ow! My leg is vewy painful!" gasped Arthur Augustus, pulling up his trousers-leg and turning down his sock.

"Let's have a look at it," said Tom.

He was rather anxious, for he knew that even a peck from a turkey could be very nasty, and might prove dangerous if not attended to.

To his relief, however, it was not a bad gash, while the other was merely a scratch.

"By Jove!" said Blake soberly. "I had no idea the beggars could do any damage. Better bathe it, Gussy."

"I don't think it needs cauterising," said Tom Merry, after a careful examination of Gussy's calf. "Better go to the farm kitchen and bathe it. Here, I'll come along with you and bandage it up afterwards."

"Thanks, deah boy!" gasped Arthur Augustus, grinning ruefully. "Gweat Scott! What a weally we-markable expewience! I shall give that yard a wide berth aftah this, bai Jove! Yaas, wathah!"

(Continued on next page.)



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"I should!" said Tom Merry, with a chuckle.

The incident had, strangely enough, quite restored Gussy's good temper, and he allowed Tom Merry to escort him to the farm kitchen, while the rest went about their jobs. Tom soon had water ready, and, finding a length of clean linen, he washed the wound and bandaged it.

"Better rest a bit," said Tom, as he finished. "Stay on that couch, Gussy, until—"

Tom Merry paused suddenly, as steps sounded in the farmyard. The couch was just below the kitchen window. Looking out Tom saw a youth of nineteen or thereabouts enter the yard, and approach the kitchen door. There he stood waiting, and looking about him. There was something curiously secretive and stealthy in his manner, that Tom couldn't help watching and wondering.

"Who the dickens is that merchant, I wonder?" said Tom quietly. "Looks a tough customer!"

"A fiend of Jukes, pewwaps," said Gussy.

Apparently Arthur Augustus had hit the nail on the head, for just then Jukes himself appeared, and he joined the stranger, with a nod of greeting, after glancing cautiously round himself.

"Bin waiting long, Alf?" he asked.

"Only jest come," said Alf. "I see them blamed kids are still 'angin' about. I bin scoutin' round a bit, so's they wouldn't spot me."

"Wouldn't matter if they did!" grunted Jukes, scowling. "Though it's p'raps jest as well if they don't. They're durned sharp, and might spot somethin' in no time."

"I'd thunderin' soon clear 'em out if I was you!" growled Alf, showing an uneven set of yellow teeth. "I'd soon kick the little rats off!"

"Old Chubb says they've got to stay, hang 'im!" was Jukes' surly response. "And, arter all, they ain't 'ere at night, an' we can carry on wi' our searching jest the same."

"Found nought since last night, I s'pose?"

"No, blow me!" said Jukes. "That old bloke must 'ave bin a cute 'un, and no error! But we'll find it yet, Alf. Them kids 'ave to be back at school early, and you an' me'll 'ave another go to-night. We got to find it afore old Chubb comes back, or we may never get the chance agen."

"You're sure the stuff's there? It ain't all bunkum?"

"You bet your life I am!" said Jukes, his voice husky. "Anyway, never mind that jest now, if you wants that stuff. Better get it afore any of them blamed kids 'appen along."

"Right-ho!" grinned Alf.

Jukes passed into the outer scullery, and Tom Merry and Arthur Augustus looked at each other. They could not help seeing the significance of the conversation—just as they could not help overhearing it.

They looked round at the doorway, expecting Jukes and his friend to enter. Jukes was in for a surprise.

But Jukes did not enter for the moment. They heard the two moving about in the outer room, and their conversation reached the juniors clearly.

"Here you are—here's the eggs. Two chickens to-day, old sport!" said Jukes. "An' mind as those blamed kids don't spot you wi' the stuff. They'll tumble to the game in a jiffy, and they'll soon make old Chubb wise to it."

"You can swear black's blue—"

"Yes, but old Chubb won't swallow it, if they do see anythin'," grunted Jukes. "I can see as the old bloke's gettin' nosy. He's beginnin' to suspect as it ain't blokes from the villidge as is pinchin' the stuff and raidin' 'is hen-ouses. He's gettin' durned suspicious, and we'll 'ave to take care when he comes out'er 'ospital. Well, that's all, I reckon. See you later on, Alf."

"Right, Sam. So long!"

Alf tramped out into the yard, and, glancing through the window, Tom Merry and Arthur Augustus saw him sneak across the yard, his eyes furtively glancing from side to side. In his hand he carried a large, soiled carpet-bag, and he appeared to be carrying something else under his coat.

"Phew!" breathed Tom.

"Bai Jove!"

The two St. Jim's juniors eyed each other breathlessly, and as they did so the kitchen door opened, and Jukes came tramping in.

CHAPTER 11. Bowled Out!

"OH!" Sam Jukes stood in the doorway of the kitchen, and gave a startled gasp as he suddenly sighted Tom Merry and Arthur Augustus. He had obviously been unaware that any of the juniors were near the farmhouse itself.

He stood as if rooted to the floor. Then, recovering himself, his face flushed red with sudden rage.

"You—you little cubs!" he hissed.

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"Thanks!" remarked Tom Merry coolly. "Any more compliments, Jukes?"

"You—you bin' spyin' agen!" said Jukes thickly, his eyes glinting with fury. "You—you've bin listening to what me and my pal 'ave bin talkin' about, durn you!"

"We heard it right enough," assented Tom, his lip curling. "It would be idiotic to deny it, Jukes. We weren't eavesdropping, though. We couldn't help overhearing."

"You—you did 'ear, then?" shouted Jukes, clenching his great fists convulsively.

"Yes, we did."

"Yaas, wathah!" said Arthur Augustus, his voice trembling with indignation. "You—you feahful wascal, Jukes! You are takin' advantage of poor Mr. Chubb's absence to act dishonestly—to wob him!"

"And you've done it before, too, from your own account," said Tom. "It's not exactly our business—though Mr. Chubb told us to keep an eye on the place. Well, we're going to, and we're going to make it our business to stop your rotten game, Jukes!"

"Oh, are you?" hissed Jukes.

"Yes, you rascal! We shall make it our business to tell Mr. Chubb just what's going on, Jukes."

"Oh, will you?" snarled Jukes, almost beside himself with rage and apprehension. "You'll tell the boss, will you—tell 'im as I'm not honest; a bloomin' thief, what?"

"Just that!"

"Then I'll durned well giv' you summat as'll make you think twice afore you does!" said Sam Jukes, and he came for Tom Merry with a rush.

"Look out, deah boy!"

Tom Merry leaped to one side just in time, Jukes' fist just scraping past his ear. Jukes almost pitched forward on his face. But he recovered himself clumsily, and then he went for Tom again.

This time the junior could not possibly avoid the bull-like rush, and, seeing there was no help for it, planted a neat right-hander beneath Jukes' left ear.

The burly rascal roared with rage and pain, and the next moment the two were at it, hammer and tongs.

It was such an uneven contest, however, that Arthur Augustus had no compunction in joining in. Jukes was a full-grown man, and strong to boot. Moreover, his methods of fighting were far from clean, and this last fact quite settled any scruples Gussy might have had regarding fair play.

He flung himself on Jukes' back, and together the two chums brought the burly rascal crashing down.

With Jukes bellowing with rage, the three rolled over and over, struggling desperately. Tom Merry had known that trouble would come sooner or later between them and Jukes, and it had come sooner than he had anticipated.

"I'll smash you!" bellowed Sam Jukes. "I'll make you wish you'd never seen this 'ere farm! Call me a bloomin' thief, would you!"

Like most dishonest persons, Jukes apparently did not like home truths. He struggled and kicked in a frenzy of rage. It was far more than the two could comfortably manage. But help was at hand—Jukes' own bellowing had reached the ears of the other juniors, who were finishing weeding the field. They soon traced the trouble to its source, and rushed into the kitchen.

"Hallo!" breathed Blake, as he sighted the struggling three. "I guessed as much. On the ball, chaps!"

In less than two minutes Jukes was held helplessly in the grasp of the seven juniors. He glowered round him savagely.

"Well, what's the giddy trouble now?" asked Blake.

"Another sort of turkey this time!"

"You'll hear all about it presently," panted Tom Merry, scrambling up, breathless and dishevelled. "Now, Jukes, my lad—are you going to behave yourself, or not?"

"I'm going to smash you!" roared Jukes, beginning to struggle anew. "I'm durned well—"

"Right! Digby, just trot over to Rylcombe for the bobby," said Tom resolutely.

"Look 'ere—old on, young gents!" Sam Jukes became quiet and humble with remarkable promptitude. He almost grovelled before Tom Merry. "Old on, young gent! No need to fetch no blamed bobby. I—I lost me temper, like."

"You'll start no more games?"

"No, that I won't," whined the man. "Look 'ere, Master Merry, you was mistaken if you thinks as there was anything wrong atween me an' Alf Roker. It were jest our way o' talkin', you see. You won't go an' tell old Chubb—"

"I shall certainly tell Mr. Chubb," said Tom curtly. "A fellow who takes advantage of a chap being in hospital to rob him doesn't deserve very much consideration. I shall see Mr. Chubb hears about it as soon as possible. Let him go, chaps."

They released Sam Jukes, and as he found himself free the rascal's rage again showed itself, and his eyes glittered as he looked at Tom Merry.



"That rubbish is a blot on the landscape," said the inspector angrily as he seated himself on the wall. "Shift it against that wall over there, and make a start without delay. Otherwise—" "Oh, crumbs!" With feelings too deep for words the juniors started work. So busy indeed were they that not one of them noticed two grinning faces that popped up above the yard wall. (See Chapter 9.)

"Right, mister school-kid!" he sneered. "Then I chuck up this blamed job this very minute! I'll leave you to do everythin' and run this 'ere farm, and see 'ow you goes on! Who's a-goin' to feed the stock when you kids ain't 'ere, eh? Blow you, and blow old Chubb, too, durn 'im! You'd better get some other bloke to take my job on, for I'm off!"

"Oh, bai Jove!"

"Hold on!" gasped Tom, in great alarm.

But Sam Jukes did not hold on. He tramped away, glowering triumphantly at the startled juniors. Tom called after him again, but he gave a sneering laugh and tramped on. At the wall of the farm, however, he paused.

"Goin' to tell old Chubb, or not?" he shouted, looking round.

"Yes!" snapped Tom, setting his teeth. "I am, and be hanged to you, you rascal!"

"Orlright!"

Jukes clambered over the wall and disappeared in the direction of Rylcombe.

The juniors looked at each other.

"Well, we've done it now!" said Blake. "This will put things in a fine old mess, Tommy. What the thump's been happening? What's that rotter done?"

Tom and Arthur Augustus told them, and the rest of the juniors whistled and looked startled.

"Rotten!" said Manners. "But—who's going to run the blessed farm, Tommy? We can't—we're at school most of the day, and all night, you idiot! You oughtn't to have let him go, for poor old Chubb's sake. The blessed cattle and stock can't be allowed to starve until we turn up in the morning. It'll upset the whole blessed show."

"Yes, rather!"

Tom Merry frowned, deeply disturbed. He had already realised that, and yet—to knuckle under to the rascal was more than he could do.

"We—we'll find someone to take his job on," he said hopefully. "One of us had better run over to the hospital and try to see Mr. Chubb. They may allow us to speak to him if it's important."

"But that can't help much," said Blake. "The cattle will need looking after, and the fowls and other stock fed early in the morning. Besides, who's to look after the farm to-night?"

"Goodness knows!"

It was a serious situation, and it was no wonder all the juniors looked very worried. Tom ran to the wall to look for Jukes and to make sure he had gone. A glance showed the burly figure of the farm-hand tramping away towards Rylcombe—too far away to hear a shout.

"He may come back, though," said Tom Merry. "Hang it all, no fellow, however bad, would let animals suffer. But—hallo, here's old Grimey!"

A village youth had just tramped into the farmyard. He was a cheery-faced, good-humoured looking boy, and he wore an apron tucked round his waist, and he carried a basket. It was Grimes, the errand-boy to Mr. Sands, the village grocer.

He looked astonished at finding the St. Jim's juniors there, and he grinned and nodded. Tom Merry & Co. were on very friendly terms with Grimes and his chums.

At sight of him an idea—a forlorn hope—came to Tom.

"Anybody about, Master Merry?" asked Grimes, as Tom ran across to him. "I've brought the week's groceries for Mr. Chubb. The boss heard as Mr. Chubb's in 'ospital, but he thought as he'd best send 'em as usual."

"That's all right, I suppose, Grimey," said Tom breathlessly. "But, look here, Grimey, do you happen to know a chap who wants a job—a reliable man who understands something of farm work?"

Grimes looked at him blankly, but as Tom Merry went on to explain, his eyes lit up and he nodded eagerly.

"Yes, I reckon I does, Master Merry!" he said. "There's a feller next door to us at home who's lookin' for work. A farm-hand he is, and a very nice feller, too. I've knowed 'im for years, and you can take it from me he's all right."

"Oh, good! And is he free?"

Grimes nodded.

"Worked at a farm over at Abbotsford until last week," he explained. "But the farm and land's jest been sold for buildin' houses on, and so he's lost his job. A feller as knows 'is job, too, is Bill Pegfold. He'd be only too glad to get a job near 'is own home, like."

"Bai Jove!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus. "The vewy thing, deah boys! If Gwimey wecommends the man, then it will be quite all wight."

"Yes, rather!"
 "And you think he'll come?" demanded Tom eagerly.
 "We want him at once, of course. Can we get hold of him to-night?"

"I reckon so—he'll be at home, like as not!"
 "Oh, good! Jukes has cleared out, and he can have his room at the farm here," said Tom, with satisfaction. "We can do without that rotter, Jukes, after all, perhaps. We'd better try to see Mr. Chubb first, though, and get his approval."

"Yaas, wathah!"
 "We'll cut off at once," said Tom, glancing at his watch. "Look here, Grimey, can you take me to see this chap now? Then I'll call in at the hospital and try to see old Chubb. The rest of you fellows can be carrying on with the work. How's that?"

"Just finished my round, so I reckon I can, Master Merry," said Grimes, promptly enough. "If you'll take charge of these here groceries, Master Blake—"

"Right-ho!"
 And so it was settled. The groceries were put safely in the farmhouse larder, and then Tom Merry started out with Grimes for Rylcombe. If all went well and they did get the services of Bill Pegfold, then the trouble would be at an end, and they could snap their fingers at Sam Jukes—or so Tom imagined, at all events.

CHAPTER 12. I

A Ducking for Two!

"**W**ANT any help, deah boys?"
 Arthur Augustus D'Arcy asked the question as he looked in at the doorway of the grain-store where Lowther and Manners were cutting chaff for the morrow.

It was some time since Tom Merry and Grimes had departed for the village, and during that time Arthur Augustus had been resting on the kitchen couch. That rough-and-tumble with Jukes had not made his leg feel better by any means. And once the excitement of the fight was over, Arthur Augustus had felt its results. The gash in his calf smarted, and at his chums' advice he had agreed to rest it.

He had soon tired of that, however. Arthur Augustus wanted to be up and doing, and so he went in search of his chums—and work.

"Are you only chaffing?" asked Lowther humorously, "or do you really wish to help us cut chaff?"

"Bai Jove! If that is meant for a joke, Lowthah, it is weally a vewy feeble one. Howevah, I am quite weady now to tackle some more work, deah boys," said Arthur Augustus, removing his rather shabby silk hat, and placing it on a shelf just above the chaff-cutter. "Pway take a west, Lowthah, and allow me to take a few turns."

"Certainly, old man!" said Lowther.
 He was glad enough of a rest, for it was far from easy work turning the handle of the chaff-cutter. It was an old-fashioned machine, and very rusty and stiff. He stepped away from it, breathing rather hard. Arthur Augustus took off his jacket, and turned back his sleeves in a purposeful manner.

"Go it, old chap!"
 Arthur Augustus "went it" with a will, while Manners fed the machine. Lowther gave Manners a solemn wink, and as the zealous Gussy started to turn the handle he gave the silk hat on the shelf a light tap and knocked it over into the yawning funnel of the cutting-machine.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Manners.
 "Bai Jove! Pway what is the joke, deah boys?" asked Arthur Augustus, grinding away at the handle. "Weally, this is wathah stenuous work, Lowthah," he added, without waiting for an answer. "Phew! It wathah seems to have stuck! No, bai Jove! It is all right now."

"Good!" said Lowther. "Go it!"
 Arthur Augustus put on speed. The machine was grinding splendidly now. It had stuck and jammed for a few seconds, but Arthur Augustus soon got it going again.
 "Splendid!" said Lowther, as pieces of silk hat began to drop with the chaff. "But what the dickens are you chopping up your hat for, Gussy?"

"Eh?"
 "You'll never be able to wear it again," said Lowther, shaking his head as he pointed to the mangled scraps of silk hat dropping from the machine with the chaff. "I must say you're jolly extravagant, Gussy! Even if it was an old hat, there's no need to chop it up. A second-hand clothes dealer might have given you half-a-crown for it."

"Bai Jove!"
 Arthur Augustus stopped work and gazed at the scraps of silk hat. He gazed and gazed, and then he gave a sudden jump and looked round at the shelf. But no amount

of staring would show him the hat. It was gone, and it did not take even the noble Arthur Augustus long to discover where it had gone.

"My-mum-my hat!" he gasped, his eyes nearly starting from his head. "Can that be my-mum-my toppah?"

"Of course! It must have dropped in just now, old chap. What on earth have you chopped it up for, Gussy?"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Manners.

Arthur Augustus almost went into hysterics as he understood why his chums had been laughing, and what the joke was.

"You—you feahful wuffian, Lowthah!" he shrieked, almost dancing with rage. "You have allowed me to chop up my own toppah, you uttah wascal! I do believe you knocked it into the funnel yourself, you—you—"

Words failed Arthur Augustus, and, unable to express his feeling in that way, he made a blind rush at the joker of the Shell.

"Ha, ha, ha!"
 Roaring with laughter, Lowther dodged and bolted, with the irate and justly indignant Gussy in hot pursuit. And it was just at that moment that a loud commotion sounded from the other farm buildings where Blake and the others were at work.

"Rescue, St. Jim's! Look out! Lowther, Manners—this way! Rescue!"

So urgent was the call that even Arthur Augustus dropped all ideas of vengeance and stopped short.

"My hat!" gasped Lowther, his laughter suddenly ceasing. "That sounds like trouble again. Come on, chaps—quick!"

And he rushed away. Manners was scarcely a second behind him. Arthur Augustus, though he was seething with an exceedingly great wrath, followed.

They found Blake, Herries, and Digby in the stack-yard, and they were fighting furiously with Sam Jukes and his friend Alf. And as both Sam and Alf were fully-grown men, Blake & Co. were having a very rough time indeed.

"Out you goes!" Jukes was bellowing. "Lose me my job, would you? Thought I'd cleared out, did you? I'll show you what's what! You're trespassin' 'ere, and you're goin' out on your necks, durn you!"

Very clearly Sam Jukes had changed his mind about leaving Chubb's Farm in the lurch. Very clearly, also, he had determined to make the schoolboy farmers go instead. Possibly his friend Alf had persuaded him to come to his new decision. At all events, here he was with reinforcements, and an ugly pair they made.

"Go it!" yelled Lowther. "Give the beggars socks!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

His own personal injuries forgotten now, Arthur Augustus joined Lowther and Manners in a determined rush. It was six to two now, but the odds were far from being great even then. Both Sam and Alf were in a dangerous mood, and they gave no quarter.

Nor did the St. Jim's juniors. They had not wished to fight, but there being nothing else for it now, they fought with a will.

Backwards and forwards over the cobble-stones the battle swayed and raged, and soon all the juniors were showing signs of the combat.

But rescue was at hand. There came a sudden shout, and the next moment four youthful figures came swarming over the wall of the yard.

"On the ball, chaps!" came a well-known, cheeky voice. "My hat! At 'em, Pongo!"

"It's that young ass, Wally!" gasped Blake. "Keep away, you kids!" he added, with a yell. "You'll get hurt!"

But Wally D'Arcy & Co. were never afraid of getting hurt, and they refused to keep away. They came on with a rush, and Pongo came with them.

Wally of the Third had always claimed that Pongo had brains above the average junior or fag, and certainly Pongo showed good sense now. He seemed to need no telling what to do. He just did it.

He was the first on the scene, and a wild howl arose as he got his teeth into Alf's trousers-leg and the leg that was inside it.

"Yarroooooogh!"
 "Gur-r-r-r-r-r-r-r!" growled Pongo, and he hung on, despite frantic shakes and lunges.

The next moment Wally D'Arcy, Curly Gibson, Jameson, and Levison minor, arrived, and they arrived with a determined rush.

The battle thenceforward changed as if by magic, and Alf and Sam Jukes had the time of their lives. But it was really Pongo who turned the scale of battle. Being fully engaged with the juniors, Sam and Alf found it very difficult indeed to attend to the little terrier, and Pongo quite enjoyed himself, taking swift nips at the calves of both rascals in turn.

"Take 'im orf!" roared Sam Jukes. "Oh, 'elp! He's bitten me all over, the little 'ound! Help! Call 'im orf!"

"Call 'im orf!" Alf added his voice to his friend's.
 "Call 'im orf! We give in!"
 "You'd better!" chuckled Wally D'Arcy, getting in a shrewd jolt under Alf's chin, though he had to jump up to do it. "I thought you'd cave in when the Third started. Jingo! They're licked already!"
 Sam and Alf were licked. They ceased to struggle, all their attention being given to the lively and excited Pongo.
 "Call him off, Wally!" gasped Blake, with a chuckle.
 "Good for you! Hold the brutes!"
 Alf and Sam were held easily enough now, and Wally called Pongo off, though he was obviously reluctant. With a chain Wally tethered Pongo to a post.

"On the ball, chaps!" yelled Wally D'Arcy. The Third-Formers joined in the fray with a rush, and Pongo came with them. He was first on the scene, and a wild howl arose as he got his teeth into Alf's trousers-leg and hung on. "Yaroooooh!" roared Alf. (See Chapter 12.)



"Now what's to be done with the rotters?" gasped Blake.
 "It'll soon be time for us to be off, but I think we've just time to duck 'em in the duck-pond—what?"
 "Yaas, wathah!"
 "Hear, hear!"
 "Let's stick 'em up against the wall and sling turnips at them," suggested Wally brightly. "Just to be going on with."

"Look 'ere!" howled Sam Jukes in great alarm. "Ain't we 'ad enough? Don't you dare do nothin', or you'll be sorry for it, me lads. An' I'll make some of ye sit up for this when I catches you alone, just you see if I don't."

"All the more reason why we should put you through it now, then," said Blake cheerfully. "We may as well be hung for a sheep as a lamb, eh?"

"Ha, ha! Yes, rather! Into the pond with them!"

"Hold on! Hold on, young gents," panted Jukes, changing his tune suddenly. "Look 'ere, I come back 'cause I changed me mind about this 'ere job. I won't leave it arter all—I'll stay and do me job until old Chubb comes back!"

"No, you jolly well won't," said Blake decidedly. "You're clearing out to-night, and be jolly thankful we don't put the police on your track!"

"But what about the 'orses, and the cattle, and the fowls, and the other stock?" said Jukes, his teeth baring in a triumphant sneer. "Wot about them, eh? Who's a-going to look arter them, and feed 'em? Where you going to get another bloke to do my job?"

"That's all right," said Blake coolly. "We've already got a good man to take over your job."

"What?" bellowed Jukes, his face flushing with sudden rage. "You got another man?"

"Yes—so put that in your pipe and smoke it!" said Blake cheerfully. "Now, chaps, in they go! They deserve a good ducking if anyone ever did."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Hear, hear!"

"In with them!" yelled Wally & Co., and as if he understood, Pongo gave a shrill yelp that made the juniors yell with laughter.

But Jukes and Alf did not laugh—and the next few seconds they had nothing whatever to laugh about. Despite their frantic struggles, they were taken in turn and thrown into the pond at the far end of the farm-yard. It was a duck-pond right enough—slimy, and very smelly.

Jukes went in first, while Pongo helped to guard Alf, and then came that rascal's turn.

"Now for the turnips!" said Wally, as the two scrambled ashore dripping and raging. "Help 'em on their way with a few, chaps!"

"Good wheeze!" said Jameson promptly.
 "Hold on!" grinned Blake. "Let the cads rip—they've had enough, I fancy, and won't trouble this farm again in a hurry. Cheese it, Wally, you young imp!"
 But Wally & Co. did not heed, if they heard, and Sam Jukes and his friend, Alf, departed hurriedly, with pieces of rotten turnip whizzing round their respective ears.

Over the wall they went at quite a good speed, considering the state they were in, and they vanished down the meadows, and their furious threats and imprecations died away on the evening breeze.

"Well, that's the last of them, I fancy," grinned Blake, adjusting his collar which had come adrift in the scrimmage. "And now, what the dickens have you kids come here for, Wally?"

"Who're you calling kids?" said Wally pugnaciously. "Nice way to speak after what we've just done! Haven't we just saved your giddy bacon, you Fourth-Form asses?"

"Well, you were just in time to lend a hand," admitted Blake, with a chuckle. "But who told you we were here, Wally?"

"Trimble!" grinned Jameson. "We came to see what you chaps are up to?"

"I think I can guess—though Trimble told us," grinned Wally. "You're helping to do the giddy farm-work, you giddy Good Samaritans. Look here, we're in on this, mind! We're coming to take a hand after to-day."

"You're jolly well not," said Herries. "Think we want a lot of fags hanging round when there's work to be done. Not likely. You've done enough damage without doing more. You'd upset the whole show between you."

"Yaas, wathah! It is quite imposs., Wally," said Gussy severely. "This is no place for iwwesponsible youngstahs."

"Rats! We're coming to-morrow, my pippins," said Wally promptly. "Look where you'd have been if we hadn't turned up just now. We're coming!"

"Are you!" snapped Blake.

"You'll see," said Wally darkly. "Come on, chaps—time to be going. Come away from that blessed hen-run, Pongo—nothing there for you, my lad!"

And Wally & Co. trooped away with Pongo, feeling very proud of the fact that they had saved the situation.

"The cheeky little imps!" grinned Blake, as they departed. "Likely we'll have a crowd of fags round the place. Why, they'd turn the giddy show upside down! Phew! It'll soon be lock-up at St. Jim's, but we'll give old Tommy a few more minutes."

But though they waited five more minutes Tom Merry did not return, and Blake decided it best to go. It would be very unwise to risk being late for lock-up, and thus risk awkward questions being asked. True, they were working at the farm to do a good turn to Mr. Chubb—their motives were of the best. None the less, the juniors were not at all sure that the authorities at St. Jim's would approve. And they certainly did not wish the whole thing to be stopped.

Besides, it was quite possible, that, having run things close, Tom Merry had returned direct to St. Jim's. So, closing the doors of the farm, and seeing that all was ship-shape, Blake & Co. started back for St. Jim's at a brisk trot. They felt quite certain that Messrs. Alf and Sam would never dare to visit the farm again. But in that they were wrong.

CHAPTER 13.

Gussy Does the Trick!

"HERE we are! Looks as if the place is deserted." Tom Merry passed the remark when within fifty yards of Chubb's farm. Save for a few outcries from the feathered inhabitants of the farm, the whole place was silent, and it certainly seemed to be deserted.

The Shell captain's visit to Rylcombe and to the hospital had been quite successful from every point of view. Yet it had taken time. To begin with, Grimes' friend, Bill Pegfold, happened to be out when they had called at his cottage, and they had only trailed him down after an hour's search in the village. But they had found him at last, and as Grimes had stated, he was only too eager to accept the job offered, and had agreed to go to the farm and take charge there that very evening.

Bill Pegfold had proved to be a very decent fellow. He was burly, with a good-humoured, honest face and a cheery manner. Tom had taken to him at once, and the two went to the hospital, while Grimes willingly agreed to return and keep guard on the farm. And there, after a bit of trouble with the matron of the little cottage hospital, Tom got permission to have a special interview with Mr. Chubb.

He took Bill Pegfold in with him, and Mr. Chubb, who was looking almost fit, but very worried, stared as Tom told his story of Jukes' treachery.

"I knew it, Master Merry," said Mr. Chubb, his face going grim and anxious. "I've suspected him for a long time now, but I never could catch him at it. And you say you've cleared him out?"

"Yes, he's gone—and I fancy we shan't see the rotter again," said Tom.

"And this feller wants the job, eh?"

"Yes. He's no end keen, and he's had plenty of experience, Mr. Chubb. He's got good references, too."

"I don't need 'em," said the farmer, eyeing Bill Pegfold approvingly. "I know a good man when I see one. Right! I'll take him on. There's plenty of work for him, though, with me being away. But I shan't stay here longer than I can help—you can lay on that!"

And after a few more questions had been answered by Bill Pegfold to the farmer's satisfaction, the two had left the hospital and started back for the farm at top speed, Bill Pegfold only taking a few minutes to call at his home to get a few necessities together.

It was already past lock-up when Tom had left the hospital. But, realising they could not get back to the farm in time, Tom had sent Grimey back before they had interviewed Mr. Chubb. He guessed his chums would scarcely be likely to wait very long at the farm, and he felt that someone should be there to guard it until their return.

He eyed the farm now, feeling not a little uneasy. It was quite possible that Jukes would return and cause trouble. Mr. Chubb had told him that Jukes had his belongings in his bed-room at the farm, and would un-

doubtedly return for them sooner or later. If he did return and find Grimes there alone, he might give the village boy a rough time.

Little dreaming that Jukes had already been to the farm and caused trouble enough, Tom led the way into the farmyard with increasing uneasiness. There was no sign of Grimes about, and the kitchen door was closed, as was the front.

"May be inside, Master Merry," said Bill Pegfold. "I thought I saw someone at that there bed-room window just now—spotted a feller passin' it, I reckon."

"The bed-room?" exclaimed Tom, in alarm. "Then that can't be Grimey!"

Acting on sudden impulse, Tom Merry gave a shout.

"Grimey ahoy! Are you there, Grimey?"

There was no answer. But suddenly, as the two stood listening, the front door of the farm flew open and two figures dashed out.

"My hat! What the dickens—"

Tom led the way with a rush to the front. But they were too late, even to get a glimpse of the faces of the two men—for they obviously were men.

"Jukes and his pal, for a pension!" said Tom Merry, setting his lips. "But where on earth is Grimey?"

It was hopeless to think of pursuing the two flying figures. They were already a hundred yards down the hill, fleeing for their lives. It was clear enough that Tom's shout had frightened them; just as it was only too evident that they were up to no good at the farm.

But they soon discovered where Grimes was. As they opened the kitchen door, Tom almost stumbled over a figure lying on the flagged floor. It was Grimes, right enough, and he was not only bound hand and foot, but gagged in addition.

"Phew!" breathed Tom Merry, as he cut the boy free, with Pegfold's aid. "What's happened, Grimey?"

"I'm blowed if I really know, Master Merry!" gasped Grimes, as they helped him to his feet. "I was jest standing outside the kitchen door there, keeping a look-out, like, when they came round the corner—fairly took me by surprise. Afore I could even see who they was they had me down, and arter they'd shoved summat over me eyes they tied me up—blow 'em! I bet it was Jukes and a pal, though!"

"No doubt about that," said Tom Merry grimly. "I wish old Chubb would tell the police—but he won't. Well, this is a nice start for you, Pegfold!"

"Let 'em come agen!" said Pegfold. "I can look arter myself all right. You can leave me to it now, Master Merry, if you've got to be off."

"I'm afraid I'll have to do that," said Tom ruefully. "Anyway, I can't see the beggars coming again, now they know we're here. You staying for a bit, Grimey?"

"Yes—I'll stay until it's dark, Master Merry," said Grimes cheerfully. "They won't 'ave it all their own way if they do come!"

"Right! Then I'll be off," said Tom.

There was nothing else for it, and Tom started back at a brisk trot for St. Jim's. He knew there would be a summons from Mr. Railton when he got in—and he was right. He found Lowther and Manners in Study No. 6 with Blake, Digby, and Herries.

"You're for it!" said Blake, shaking his head. "You're to go to Mr. Railton at once, Tommy. It's all up! That idiot Gussy has mucked the whole show up!"

"Gussy has? How?" demanded Tom.

"He got a blessed wheeze into his silly head," explained Blake, with a groan. "He thinks it would be a good idea if we took our scouting rig-out and tackle to the farm and camped out there, so that we could always be on the spot to guard the giddy farm and see to things. And so it would—if the Head would allow such a mad scheme."

"Phew! It would be a great idea—ripping!" said Tom, staring. "But he must be potty to think the Head would agree to that."

"Potty? Potty isn't the word for it!" said Blake wrathfully. "We told him so, but he wouldn't listen. And now he's done it—fairly put us all in the soup!"

"You—you mean he's gone to Railton about it?" gasped Tom.

"Worse than that—he's gone to the Head!" groaned Blake. "We rushed after the born idiot and tried to stop him, but he reached the Head's study before us. We're done!"

"Oh, the—the dummy!" breathed Tom. "Now we shall be stopped from even going to the farm, I bet. And my being late for lock-up now will make things worse. I was wondering what excuse to give for being late. But it's no good thinking of that now. I'll have to own up."

"The idiot!"

"The potty lunatic!"

Tom Merry & Co. fairly let themselves go on the subject of the over-zealous and enthusiastic Gussy. That he should imagine for one moment that the Head was likely to accede to such a scheme was amazing to them. They were still giving their individual opinion of Arthur Augustus when Kildare looked in.

"Merry here? Oh, you have returned, then!" he said, sighting Tom. "Right! Head's study at once, kid!"

"Oh crumbs!"

Mr. Railton was bad enough, but to be called before the Head—Tom groaned as he went to the Head's study. To his surprise, he found Mr. Railton there, besides Arthur Augustus. The latter, to his great surprise, was looking very buked indeed.

"Ah, you have returned, then, Merry!" said the Head, eyeing Tom rather curiously. "I understand from D'Arcy that you have been visiting Mr. Chubb at the hospital, my boy."

"Yes, sir!" stammered Tom. "I'm sorry, sir! But—but we're awfully sorry for Mr. Chubb. And it was through us that he received his injury, sir."

"D'Arcy had already told me the story," said the Head, in quite a kindly tone. "Your anxiety to make amends, and your self-sacrifice in offering to use every moment of your spare time to aid him in his extremity does you all the greatest credit, my boy."

"Oh, sir!" gasped Tom.

"I am very pleased indeed to find my boys are ready and eager to help others when in trouble," said the Head gracefully. "You should, however, have reported the matter to me and asked my permission before undertaking the work, my boy."

"Oh, sir! I—we're all very sorry sir!" gasped Tom.

"I have sent for you now, however," went on the Head, with a glance at Mr. Railton, "in connection with D'Arcy's camp suggestion. On the face of it the idea seems an extraordinary one; but Mr. Railton has persuaded me to consider the matter in the peculiar circumstances. We have discussed it together, and, providing you give your assurance that lesson times will be respected, I have decided to allow you to carry the idea into effect for a week. If you behave yourselves and all goes well, I may extend the period. It all depends on yourselves, my boys."

"Oh, sir!"

Tom Merry almost fell down with surprise.

"I see no reason why you should not do so," pursued the Head quietly. "You are Boy Scouts, and are familiar with camp life, and I know I can trust you to behave yourselves and not get into mischief. You will attend school for lessons in the usual way and at the usual times, but you will be excused preparation in the evenings. That means, of course, that you may leave the school at the close of afternoon lessons until nine the following morning. But Mr. Railton will speak to you in regard to the details later. You may go."

"Thank you, sir!" gasped Tom.

"Thank you very much indeed, Dr. Holmes!" said Arthur Augustus serenely. "Theah is one othah wequest I should like to make, howevah, sir. At pwsent the farm is entially deserted. As I have alweady explained, Jukes, Mr. Chubb's man, has thwown up his job, and has left us badly in the lurch. Unless this new man does awwive this evenin' there will be nobody to sleep at the farm, and nobody to feed the stock in the mornin'."

"Well?"

"Well, sir, it is a weally sewious posish, because, even if the new fellow does turn up and agwee to start to-night, he will pwoably not know where to find anythin', and will find ewevythin' vewy stwange and awkward in the mornin'. May I wequest that you will be kind enough to allow us to take our camp equipment there this evening?"

"This evening? Bless my soul!" exclaimed Dr. Holmes.

"It would be a vewy simple mattah, sir," said Gussy, quite cheerfully. "The tents and othah equipment are in the gym and all is in order. It is light in the evenings now, and we should 'ave ample time to camp and get ewevythin' to wights before it's too dark. I am suah that you will agwee that it is vewy necessaw for someone to be on the spot and to see to the stock in the early mornin'."

"Good gracious! It certainly is, my boy! But—"

The Head looked at Mr. Railton, who nodded and smiled slightly.

"I see no reason why they should not, sir," said the Housemaster. "Taggles could help them to get off, and they should have ample time to camp before darkness. Yes, I think it could be managed, sir. I will ask Kildare to see them off safely, if you agree."

"Very well," the Head said, after a brief pause. "And I trust they will not abuse my confidence in them. You had better hurry away and get to work without delay, my boys!"

"Oh, yes, sir! Certainly, sir!"

And Tom Merry and the noble Arthur Augustus vacated the Head's study. Tom Merry feeling as if he would wake up each second and find it was all a dream.

But it was no dream. For once Arthur Augustus D'Arcy had, as Monty Lowther put it, "struck oil." Amazing as his great brain-wave had sounded, it had actually come off. In Study No. 6, a few seconds later Arthur Augustus was fairly mobbed by his delighted chums.

Gussy had rushed in where angels feared to tread—and he had been welcomed, as it were. His chums had not taken Gussy seriously, but both Mr. Railton and the Head had. To the astonished juniors it seemed almost laughable. Yet it was sober fact. For a week, at least, they would live under canvas, enjoying all the fun and healthy excitement of camp life. But their object was serious enough, and they did not forget that.

"It's the best thing that could have happened," said Tom Merry, after he had recounted Grimey's experience and Blake had told him of the attack on the farm. "We'll be on the spot at night, when we shall most likely be wanted. A call from Bill Pegfold will soon rouse us out. You were

(Continued on page 28.)

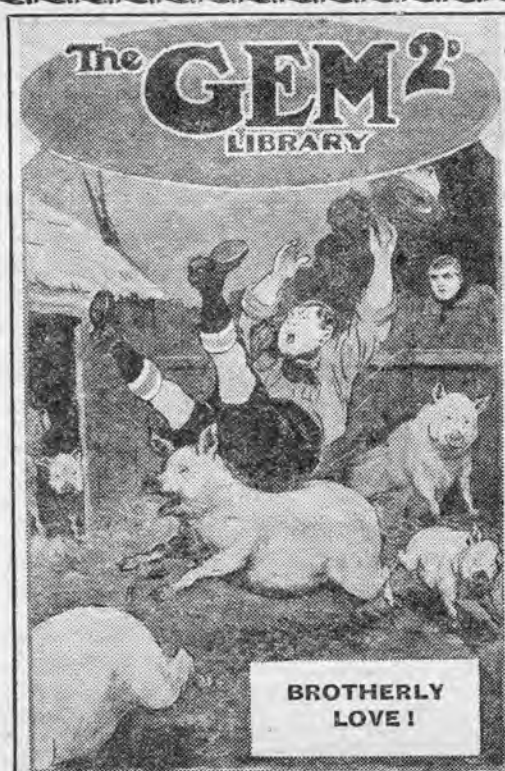
THANKS TO TRIMBLE!

There's a warm reception waiting for Baggy Trimble when he rolls up to join Tom Merry & Co. at Chubb's Farm. Visitors are not wanted, least of all, Trimble, a fact which the campers point out to him in no uncertain manner. Baggy's visions of an easy time, with plenty of grub and no lessons or prep., die a sudden death. But for all that it is Trimble's habit of butting in where he is not wanted that has the unexpected result of solving a mystery which has long baffled the chums of St. Jim's. How this amazing state of affairs comes about is told vividly in:—

"THE SECRET OF THE FARM!"

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A word of warning—order your "GEM" to-day!



IN THE HANDS OF THE ENEMY! When Babbington, the so-called duffer of Rookwood, walks into the gates of Bagshot School it would seem that he's walking into a hornets'-nest, but Babbington's a merchant full of surprises, for it's the leader of the Bagshot bounders who ultimately finds himself in a hornets'-nest!



FOR THE HONOUR OF ROOKWOOD!

A New Story of Schoolboy Fun and Frolic, featuring Jimmy Silver & Co., of Rookwood.

By OWEN CONQUEST.

WHAT HAS GONE BEFORE.

James Montgomery Babbington, a new boy, and a champion duffer, arrives at Rookwood smothered in coal-dust as a result of his encounter with Pankley & Co., the chums of Bagshot, the rival school. That Babbington isn't quite such a duffer as he looks, however, is proved when he more than holds his own with the bullying Higgs and later controls an excited elephant, thereby saving his Housemaster from possible serious injury. To crown all this, Babbington next succeeds in japing Pankley & Co. to accept a challenge to a footer match—the challengers turning out to be none other than Jimmy Silver & Co. disguised as girls. The "girls" trounce the Bagshot bounders to the tune of nine goals to nil. Discovering a girl's wig left behind by Jimmy Silver & Co., Pankley nails it to the flagstaff in the school playground and defies Babbington to come and fetch it. Babbington forthwith gets the circus proprietor's sanction to borrow the elephant which had so terrorised the Rookwood Housemaster. Sitting calmly on the big animal's back, a cheerful expression on his face, Babbington arrives at the gates of Bagshot School, unnoticed by two juniors standing there who are looking in the opposite direction.

(Now read on.)

No Joy Ride!

THE huge elephant was almost on top of the two Bagshot juniors before they looked round. They gave a shout of surprise at the sight of Rancee. Then their gaze travelled to the junior sitting astride the huge back, and their yells had a note of alarm in it.

"A Rookwood kid!" came the cry. "And on an elephant! Look out!"

The two Bagshot fellows bolted in at the gates. With a word in Hindustani and a pat, Babbington calmly guided the elephant through the gates after them!

Slowly he was borne up the trim drive of Bagshot School on the back of his strange mount, and there were shouts from all sides, as fellows came running up from every quarter.

Looking ahead to where the flagstaff stood in the middle of Bagshot courtyard, Babbington could see a solid phalanx of the Bagshot Fourth guarding their citadel. Evidently they were expecting a mass attack and were prepared to deal with it!

The question now for Pankley was how to deal with Babbington.

"That," murmured Babbington to himself, "is a conundrum to which Pankley will not find the answer very easily."

Regardless of everything, and taking not the slightest notice of the shouts of the Bagshot fellows, the big elephant trod on. Right into the courtyard went Rancee, and the excited crowd parted in front of her.

"Mind out, you kids!" shouted Babbington from his perch. "If she treads on your corns you'll know it!"

A roar of anger greeted this calm announcement.

"Rookwood cad!"

"Come down, you bounder!"

"We'll scrag you!"

"Rush the blighter!"

"Yah! Pull him down!"

Rancee strode serenely on.

Every now and then, where the crowd was thickest, she would stop instinctively; but with guttural clicking sounds Babbington urged her on until the great beast stood at the foot of the Bagshot flagstaff.

"Come down, Babbington, you young beast!" howled the infuriated Pankley, who was standing with his bodyguard at the foot of the flagstaff. "Tain't fair, bringing a blessed elephant in!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

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"Come down, you Rookwood cad, and we'll scrag you!" cried Pankley, shaking his fist furiously at the grinning Babbington.

"Not good enough!" chuckled Babbington. "Now, watch out, Pankley!"

He stood up on the great elephant's head, watched breathlessly by a group of Bagshot fellows. He uttered a few words in Hindustani, and the big trunk came curling up towards him.

Babbington calmly stepped into the folds of it and uttered another command. Slowly he was hoisted up on high until he was on a level with the shingled wig which decorated the Bagshot flagstaff, some twenty feet from the ground.

With one wrench Babbington secured the coveted trophy. Holding on to Rancee's trunk with one hand, he waved the wig exultantly in the air.

"Cheerio, Pankley!" he yelled.

And a roar of rage rose from the gurgling crowd of Bagshot juniors.

But the wrath of the enemy only tended to broaden the grin on Babbington's face, and he waved the wig triumphantly.

Again a muttered word, and the great trunk lowered him, and he scrambled back on to the elephant's back. Then at a low command the great beast turned round.

"Well, cheerio, you fellows!" yelled Babbington above the din. "Thanks for the wig. I'll be getting back to Rookwood now."

And, stuffing the wig into his pocket, James Montgomery waved his hand cheerily to the infuriated Pankley.

"You bounder!" yelled the leader of the Bagshot bounders. "You haven't got away yet! Cut down to the gates!" he shouted, turning swiftly to Putter and Poole, his trusty lieutenants. "Lock 'em and bolt 'em, and we'll stop the bounder from getting out."

Putter and Poole tore off, while the great mass of Bagshot fellows moved slowly in an excited throng behind the elephant as it made its way leisurely towards the gates.

Pankley's new move had not escaped the watchful eyes of Babbington, however. His eyes gleamed with a determined light behind his big spectacles as he urged Rancee on towards the gates.

Naturally, however, Putter and Poole, running rapidly, reached the gates before Babbington. When the great beast, followed by half Bagshot, arrived there, the big iron gates were securely locked and bolted.

"Now, what are you going to do?" shouted Pankley, with a grin of triumph in his eyes. "You're here, and here you'll have to stop!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" came in a roar from Bagshot. Really, the tables seemed turned now on the daring Rookwooder.

"Come down!" howled Pankley again. "Come down and be slain, Babbington! We'll keep the blessed elephant as a mascot."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

But Babbington was not beaten yet. He cast a quick look to right and left.

A high wall surrounded the Bagshot playground and the school building. There was no way out except by the big gates or by sundry side gates which were obviously too small to admit of the passage of Rancee.

It would not be difficult, Babbington reflected, to push the wall down. Rancee was undoubtedly capable of doing so, and of stepping over the ruins and out into the road. But Babbington realised that trouble would be sure to follow such a proceeding, as certainly as night follows day.

He therefore cast about in his fertile mind for a solution to the problem that confronted him.

"We'll have that trophy back, after all!" jeered Pankley. "Get a ladder, some of you chaps, and we'll climb up after it."

"Hear, hear!"

"Good idea, Pankley!"

In a twinkling a ladder was rushed up. It happened to be lying on the ground near the gates, and Pankley & Co. calmly propped it up against the elephant. Things began to look rather warm for James Montgomery Babbington.

"Have him off!" came in a roar.

Pankley made a jump at the ladder and swarmed up it in a twinkling, followed by half a dozen of his chums.

Without moving his position, Babbington issued a sharp command in Hindustani, and Rancee promptly sidled away from the ladder, letting it down to the ground with a terrific crash.

There was a roar from Pankley & Co. The storming party crashed to the ground in a heap.

"Ow!"

"Help!"

"Yow!"

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

Pankley & Co., dusty and furious, and not a little hurt, sorted themselves out with many groans.

"Ow!"

"My napper!"

"My backbone's busted!"

Babbington saw that the moment was favourable for what he had decided to do. The mishap of Pankley & Co. had caused a diversion, and with a rapid word or two, he urged Rancee right up to the iron gates of Bagshot.

Then came a succession of sharp commands, and the big trunk curled round the bars of the gate. Another word, and a gentle pressure from Babbington's heel, and the great beast put forth her strength and with a steady pull lifted one side of the big double gates clean off its hinges!

There was a gasp from the Bagshot crowd.

"Look out; it's pulling the gates down!"

"Stop him!"

But to stop an elephant is easier said than done.

Rancee moved the grip of her trunk to the other side of the gate, and, with a heave and pull, removed it also from its hinges.

The whole gate then fell backward, its two parts bolted together, and rested for a moment against the great elephant's head.

Rancee, again at Babbington's command, shifted the grip of her trunk and lowered the gates gently to the ground. The gates were not damaged in the slightest, thanks to the careful handling of the situation by the sagacious animal. But the way to freedom was open!

Stepping carefully over the fallen gates, Rancee moved her great bulk majestically from the precincts of Bagshot.

"How's that, umpire?" yelled Babbington, with a note of jubilation in his voice, which was perhaps pardonable in the circumstances. "Bye-bye, Pankley! You're done again, old man!"

The furious Bagshot juniors rushed out into the road in a body, but they could, of course, do nothing. Pankley himself, the great leader of Bagshot, literally danced in his impotent rage.

"Can't we stop him somehow?" he raved. "You blighter, Babbington! I'll—I'll—" And Pankley rushed after Babbington, waving his fist and shouting, and making such a picture of frustrated wrath that even the Bagshot crowd could not help but burst into a roar of laughter.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Babbington looked down at the perspiring form of his chief adversary.

"Going to run alongside all the way to Rookwood, Pankley?" he chuckled.

"You—you blighter! You spoofing bounder!" spluttered Pankley, glaring up at Babbington with a red and furious face.

A sudden gleam came into Babbington's eye, and he clicked out another word of command.

The next moment a gasp of dismay rose from the Bagshot crowd as they saw Rancee's trunk curl round the body of Pankley and lift him struggling off his feet.

"Oh, my hat! He's got him!"

"He's got Pankley!"

"Help! Lemme go!" shrieked Pankley, struggling violently. "Leggo, you brute!"

Babbington laughed heartily.

"You came for a ride, Pankley. Don't struggle. Rancee won't hurt you."

"You beast! Let me down!" raved Pankley.

"Not to-day, old chap!" chuckled Babbington. "You're coming to Rookwood."

And, disregarding alike the yells of the flustered Bagshot fellows and the indignant gasps and splutterings of Pankley, Rancee, the big elephant, trod majestically down the road that led to Rookwood.

A Narrow Escape!

TO say that Babbington had a great reception as he turned into the gates of Rookwood, would be to put it mildly.

Tommy Dodd & Co. were on the look-out for him, and half the Fourth Form were with them.

When the huge bulk of the elephant was seen marching down the lane there was a rush to meet it. But when it was seen that the figure-borne by the upturned trunk of the big elephant was none other than the great Pankley himself, the excitement knew no bounds.

"Pankley!"

"Faith, an' it's Pankley himself!" roared Tommy Doyle.

"Good for ye, Babbington!"

"Hip, hip, hurrah!"

"Rookwood for ever!"

"Well done, Babbington!" roared the crowd.

Babbington waved the wig he had rescued from Bagshot

jubilantly around his head.

"My hat, he's got the trophy as well!" said Jimmy Silver, fairly staring. "Blest if I ever knew anything like that chap Babbington. He's a real knock-out!"

Then, escorted by a dense throng of cheering juniors, Babbington was followed through the gates of Rookwood with his trophy and his captive.

Right across the quad and up to the gates of the School House went the triumphal procession. Here Babbington halted the big elephant.

"Speech!" yelled the crowd.

And there was a hush.

Babbington waved his hand to the crowd.

"Gentlemen," he said, his mild face aglow and his eyes gleaming with triumph behind his big spectacles, "when I got Pankley's letter I wanted to take up his challenge, so I thought of this way of doing it."

"Hear, hear!"

"Good old Babbington!" came in a roar.

"I have got the trophy, as you see," and he waved it again above his head, "and I've got Pankley, too—that's all!"

"Hip hip, hurrah!"

"Three cheers for Rookwood!"

"And three more for Babbington!"

The cheers were given with a will, while all this time the unhappy Pankley was held a fast prisoner in the grip of the big trunk of the elephant.

"Come down, Pankley," called Jimmy Silver. "We want you badly."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Pankley waved his hand cheerily.

"You blighters! You've done me this time—but a fellow can't argue with an elephant!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Put him down, Babbington!" yelled Tommy Dodd.

Babbington spoke a word, and the big elephant lowered its trunk, and as Pankley's feet touched the ground he was seized by a dozen hands.

"Bring him over to our study," grinned Tommy Dodd.

"He's our prisoner, you know."

"Right-ho!"

Pankley was being hustled away, when there was a sudden stir and a breathless hush as the lean, angular figure of Mr. Manders, the master of the Modern House, suddenly appeared at the door of the Classical House.

"Cave! Manders!"

The words went round in a stage whisper.

"Now, look out for squalls!" murmured Jimmy Silver.

Mr. Manders stopped at the top of the Classical House steps, petrified at the astounding scene that met his gaze. Within a few feet of him was an enormous elephant, surrounded by a crowd of juniors, and—most astounding of all to Mr. Manders—sitting coolly astride of the elephant's

huge neck, was a Rookwood junior, a bland smile on his spectacled face.

Mr. Manders gasped.

"Boys, what—what is the meaning of this?" he managed to stutter. "This—is this disgraceful—this is unprecedented! I— Good gracious!"

Mr. Manders skipped back as if stung, as Ranece swung her trunk towards him. The idea at the back of the big elephant's mind in doing so was probably intimately connected with buns. But, to Mr. Manders, whose last experience with an elephant was still fresh in his memory, there was something sinister, if not threatening, in the movement. "Take it away!" shrieked Mr. Manders, darting back into the door of the Classical House. "Take that—that dangerous animal away at once! Do you hear me, Babbington?"

"Very well, sir," said Babbington meekly. "Come on, Ranece, old girl!"

At a word in Hindustani the big elephant swung away and headed towards the gates. Mr. Manders, still looking apprehensive, popped his head out of the door again to watch it go.

"Really!" he gasped. "That animal—and within the precincts of Rookwood! It—it is disgraceful! How did it get in, Silver? Do you know?"

"It—it walked in, sir," said Jimmy Silver cautiously. He realised that it would go hard with the enterprising Babbington if Mr. Manders got to know too much about his latest escapade.

"So I supposed, Silver!" snapped Mr. Manders, with heavy sarcasm. "I did not anticipate that it would have arrived in an aeroplane!"

"No, sir!" said Jimmy demurely.

"But Babbington—"

"Fortunately, Babbington is able to control the beast, sir," said Jimmy, interrupting hopefully. "It's quite quiet with him, and he's taking it back to Burgess' Circus, sir."

"Very good, Silver! I trust they will not allow the animal to stray from the circus in the future!" snapped Mr. Manders. "It is most careless and most dangerous. I shall certainly complain to the police if it occurs again."

"The circus is leaving the district this week, I believe, sir," said Jimmy Silver pacifically.

"And a very good thing, too!" snorted Mr. Manders. "If I had my way, such entertainments would not be allowed at all! Disgraceful!"

And the indignant Housemaster resumed his interrupted journey across to the Modern House, while Jimmy Silver, satisfied at having successfully put Mr. Manders off the scent, winked into space.

"Now for Pankley!" he remarked. "Better bring him into the junior Common-room, you fellows. Manders is on the war-path, and will probably butt in if there's a crowd in Tommy Dodd's study."

"That's so," said Tommy Dodd. "Bring him into the Common-room, then."

And Cecil Pankley, who had been carefully concealed from Mr. Manders' observation by a knot of juniors, was marched into the School House and along the passage to the junior Common-room in the grip of a dozen pairs of hands—a hapless prisoner in the stronghold of his deadly foes!

The Trial!

"BRING him along!"

"This way for the prisoner!"

"Shove him in the dock!"

Cecil Pankley, in the midst of a jostling crowd of hilarious Rookwood juniors, was hustled into the junior Common-room—a prisoner.

He was to stand his trial in the midst of his enemies, and the hapless Pankley looked forward to the ordeal with many apprehensions.

"Now, I'll be the judge," said Jimmy Silver, coming to business at once. "Who will prosecute the prisoner?"

"I will!" said Lovell promptly.

"Rats to you, Lovell! I'm prosecutor," said Tommy Dodd.

Lovell glared.

"Look here!"

"Oh, scat!" said Tommy Dodd warmly. "If Silver's to be judge, we don't want another fatheaded Classical as prosecutor!"

"If you are looking for a licking, Dodd—" began Lovell excitedly.

"Shush!" said Jimmy Silver soothingly. "Tommy Dodd's right, Lovell. After all, it was a Modern wheeze that got the prisoner here, so let Tommy prosecute."

Lovell grunted and subsided.

"Tell you what, Lovell," said Jimmy, "we must have a prisoner's friend, like they do on courts-martial, you know."

"A whatter?" said Lovell.

"A prisoner's friend—sort of defending counsel, you know. You can take on that, if you like. The rest of the chaps can be the jury."

"Hear, hear!"

"Tommy Cook and Tommy Doyle had better look after the prisoner," said Tommy Dodd.

"Right-ho! They can be the gaolers!"

"Put that fender against the wall. It will do for a dock," suggested Newcome.

The big fender from the fire was jammed up against the wall, and Pankley was hustled into it. It hemmed him in as completely as if he were in a real dock. On either side of the fender stood Tommy Cook and Tommy Doyle, the gaolers.

A high stool was brought from the master's desk at the end of the room and placed in position, and on this sat Jimmy Silver, facing the prisoner. The rest of the crowd sat on the surrounding desks or stood round in a circle. The "jury" must have been at least fifty strong.

"Put a couple of chairs out here for Tommy Dodd and Lovell," said Jimmy Silver. "Now, prisoner at the bar, Mr. Dodd will lead for the prosecution, while Mr. Lovell will be your counsel!"

"I object!" said Pankley promptly.

"What! You object?"

"Yes. I object to Lovell defending me!" said Pankley, with a grin. "I claim the right to select my own defending counsel!"

"Rats!" snorted Lovell. "I'm jolly well going to defend you, Pankley, so shut up! I'll give you beans, you bounder!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Pankley grinned.

"Well, I claim the services of somebody a bit different—"

"What!" roared Lovell.

"Someone with bigger brains and smaller feet!" said Pankley blandly.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

There was a shout of laughter, and Arthur Edward Lovell turned pink.

He sprang up and made a rush at the prisoner in the dock, brandishing his fists wildly.

But restraining hands were laid upon him, and he was dragged back gently but firmly.

"Leggo!" roared Lovell, struggling violently. "Lemme get at the beast!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Calm down, old man!" said the judge, trying to keep a straight face. "After all, he's entitled to pick his own man to defend him, I suppose."

"Rats! I'll smash him!" roared Lovell.

"Nothing doing, old man!"

"I tell you—"

"Shush!"

"Dry up!"

"Chuck it!"

The indignant Lovell was pushed aside by many hands, and had to content himself with glaring ferociously at the prisoner, who lounged easily in the dock with an unmoved countenance.

Cecil Pankley, the hero of the Bagshot Fourth, was in a tight corner, and he knew it; but Pankley was made of stout stuff, and he had no intention of showing the white feather.

"Prisoner at the bar, whom do you choose to be your counsel?" inquired Jimmy Silver sternly.

Pankley gazed round upon the serried ranks of Rookwood juniors with a somewhat disparaging eye. His glance lighted upon the chubby face of Teddy Grace of the Fourth, commonly known as Putty, because, as he was always ready to explain, he was so soft.

Putty Grace was a cheery youth, with a permanent twinkle in his eye and a propensity for practical joking.

Pankley thought that he would defend him as well as anybody, and possibly better than most.

"I choose Teddy Grace, if he will take the job on!" he announced.

"Will you act, Putty?" asked Jimmy.

"What-ho?" said Teddy Grace promptly.

"Right!" said Jimmy Silver. "Then that's settled! Prisoner at the bar," he continued, eyeing Pankley severely, "we're going to try you for your life!"

"Hear, hear!"
 "We've caught you fairly, and we'll give you a fair trial before we scrag you!"

"Hear, hear!"
 "Ha, ha, ha!"
 Cecil Pankley grinned.

"Candid, at any rate!" he remarked.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"These gentlemen are the jury," continued Jimmy Silver, with a wave of his hand. "After Tommy Dodd has had his go, your counsel can address them, and if he can persuade 'em to let you off, all well and good!"

"What hopes!" murmured Pankley.

"If not," continued the learned judge, "it will be my painful duty to pass sentence upon you! Now, Dodd, on the ball!"

"Hear, hear!"
 "Go it, Tommy!"

Thus adjured, Tommy Dodd stood up and cast a baleful eye at the prisoner in the dock.

"Gentlemen of the jury," began Tommy eloquently, "you see before you one of our deadliest enemies in the person of Cecil Pankley, the leader of the Bagshot bounders! This fellow—I may say, this scoundrel—" continued Tommy Dodd.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Has often proved to be a thorn in the side of Rookwood—"

"Hear, hear!" chimed in the prisoner heartily.

"Silence!" exclaimed the judge sternly. "Prod him with the poker, Tommy, if he opens his mouth again!"

"What-ho!" said Tommy Cook promptly, grasping the poker with a businesslike grip.

"This scoundrel," continued Tommy Dodd, "has many times laid violent hands upon gentlemen of Rookwood, and for so doing I claim that he merits a really fearful punishment!"

"Something with boiling oil in it?" suggested the judge humanely.

"That's the ticket!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"That's it!" said Tommy Dodd. "Something that Bagshot will remember for a long time! But first of all the prisoner must confess that Bagshot is hopelessly diddled, dished, and done, once and for all!"

There was a loud cheer from the jury.

"Hooray!"

"Good old Tommy!"

"Gentlemen of the jury," concluded Tommy Dodd impressively, "it is unnecessary for me to say any more about this double-dyed villain Pankley! You know all about him, and I ask you, one and all, to find him guilty."

"Hear, hear!"

"We do!"

"Guilty!"

"That's the stuff to give 'em!" chimed in the judge enthusiastically.

Teddy Grace jumped up.

"Here, hi, Mister Judge! The jury can't find him guilty before I've had a go," he exclaimed. "What about my speech for the defence?"

"Oh, that's right, Putty," exclaimed the judge hastily. "I forgot for a moment. Gentlemen of the jury, you must listen to Putty's speech for the defence, though, of course, you need not take any notice of it!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"



The elephant moved the grip of its trunk to the other side of the gates, and with a heave and a pull removed them from their hinges. There was a gasp from the Bagshot juniors. "Look out, it's pulling the gates down!" "Stop him!" (See page 25.)

"Now fire away, Putty!"

"Gentlemen, chaps, and fellows," began Teddy Grace. "I rise to defend the prisoner at the bar. As you all know, he's a fearful outsider—"

"Hear, hear!"

"And a cheeky bounder—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"And the leader of those Bagshot blighters. He has had the nerve to butt up against the juniors of this famous school, and in my opinion he entirely deserves his fate."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Is that what you call defending me?" howled the prisoner.

"Poker!" commanded the judge sharply.

"Yaroooop!"

There was a yell from Pankley as he received the business end of the poker in a powerful lunge from Tommy Cook.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Order, order!"

"Gentlemen of the jury," continued Teddy Grace, "I took on the defence of the prisoner, as you know, at short notice and I'm blest if I can think of anything to say in his favour. The only thing is that he is a Bagshot bounder because his people sent him to Bagshot, I s'pose, and that's more his misfortune than his fault."

"Hear, hear!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You must admit, gentlemen," said Putty, "that as a Bagshot bounder he has kept his end up pretty well on the whole against us, so that I think we can say he has proved himself a fellow worthy of our steel."

"Bravo, Putty!"

The prisoner at the bar bowed elaborately to his counsel at this somewhat belated tribute.

"There seems to be nothing else to say in the prisoner's favour," continued the learned counsel candidly. "I therefore leave his fate in the hands of the jury, and I hope they'll give him jip!"

And counsel for the defence sat down amidst a salvo of cheers.

"Gentlemen of the jury," began the learned judge, "it's my turn now, so stop jawing and listen to me!"

"On the ball, Jimmy!"

"Go it, judge!"

"You have heard the eloquent speeches of Mr. Dodd for the prosecution and Mr. Grace for the defence," continued the learned judge. "Mr. Dodd calls upon you to find the prisoner at the bar guilty, and Teddy Grace said what he could for him—which was not much!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Teddy Grace, of course, had to say that because he's defending counsel; but, if I were you, I should not take any notice of him—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Here, I say!" protested the prisoner.

"Poker!" commanded the judge sternly.

And there was another lunge from Tommy Cook and another howl from the hapless prisoner.

"Gentlemen," continued the judge, "I ask for your verdict—guilty, or not guilty?"

There was a **rear** from the jury:

"Guilty, yer honour!"

"Scrag him!"

"Rag the bounder!"

Jimmy Silver held up his hand.

"Gentlemen of the jury, I congratulate you upon coming to the right decision—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I will now ask the prisoner if he has anything to say why sentence should not be passed upon him forthwith."

"Faith, and that's a good word, Jimmy darlint!" said Tommy Doyle admiringly.

"Speak up, prisoner, if you have got anything to say!" commanded Jimmy Silver.

"All I have got to say," said Pankley, "is that we've given you a high old time in the past, and if it hadn't been for that new fellow, Babbington, I should not be in your hands now! Rats to the lot of you—that's what I say!"

There was a roar at this defiance from the prisoner in the dock.

"Have him out!"

"Give him the frog's march!"

"Rag him baldheaded!"

"Hold on!" yelled Jimmy Silver, jumping to his feet.

"We asked this cheeky bounder what he'd got to say, and now we know! Hold on while I pass sentence!"

"Hear, hear!"

"Order, order!"

"Silence for the judge!"

(For the concluding chapters of this fine serial see next week's GEM. This bumper number will also contain particulars of a grand new cricket serial, entitled: "THE LUCK OF THE GAME!"—a winner all the way.)

FARMERS ALL!

(Continued from page 23.)

jolly sensible not to tell the giddy beaks that we'd had trouble with Jukes and his pal, Gussy. If you had, the Head would have fought shy of letting us go at all."

"I thought of that," said Gussy modestly. "I think I have already told you fellows that I wathah pwide myself on my tact and judgment."

"Once or twice," agreed Tom Merry, smiling.

"A few million times!" agreed Blake, with a chuckle.

"Still, Gussy's scored this time," said Tom hastily. "Good for you, Gussy! And you've done poor old Chubb a good turn, too. I was no end worried about leaving even Bill Pegfold alone at the farm at night. But now—well, we'll see whether Jukes and his pal get up to any games."

"But what is their game?" said Herries, looking mystified. "It beats me hollow. They must be after something that's hidden at the farm."

"That's certain!" said Digby.

"Goodness knows!" said Tom. "It may be the rollers think old Chubb has money hidden about the place. I hardly think so, though. Chubb's not well off—we know that. It takes him all his time to keep his head above water financially."

"His father was a miser, they say," said Lowther. "They call it Miser Chubb's Farm even now in the village. I believe. Perhaps old Chubb's the same—only he won't own up to it."

"Rot!" said Tom warmly. "Old Chubb's a jolly decent sort. He's not the sort to pretend to be hard up when he's got a well-filled stocking hidden somewhere. No, there's some jolly old mystery about that farm! But we'll keep an eye on Jukes and his rascally pal, and perhaps we'll have the luck to solve it. But there's no time to gas now! Look lively, chaps! We've none too much time."

With that talk was dropped for action, and soon Tom Merry & Co. were hard at work, and all was bustle and excitement for them. In record time they were changed into scouting kit, and, helped by Kildare and Taggles, they very soon had the trek carts piled up with necessary equipment. Then they started out, eager and excited, and watched by scores of envious eyes. It was not going to be all fun—they knew that well enough. There would be plenty of work to be done. But they were ready to do it, and more than ready to take a hand in any adventures that might be in store for them at the old farmstead.

THE END.

(Look out for further thrilling adventures on the farm in the magnificent sequel to this story, entitled: "THE SECRET OF THE FARM!" which will appear in next week's issue of the GEM.)



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