

WHO BROUGHT THE CAMEL TO ST. JIM'S?

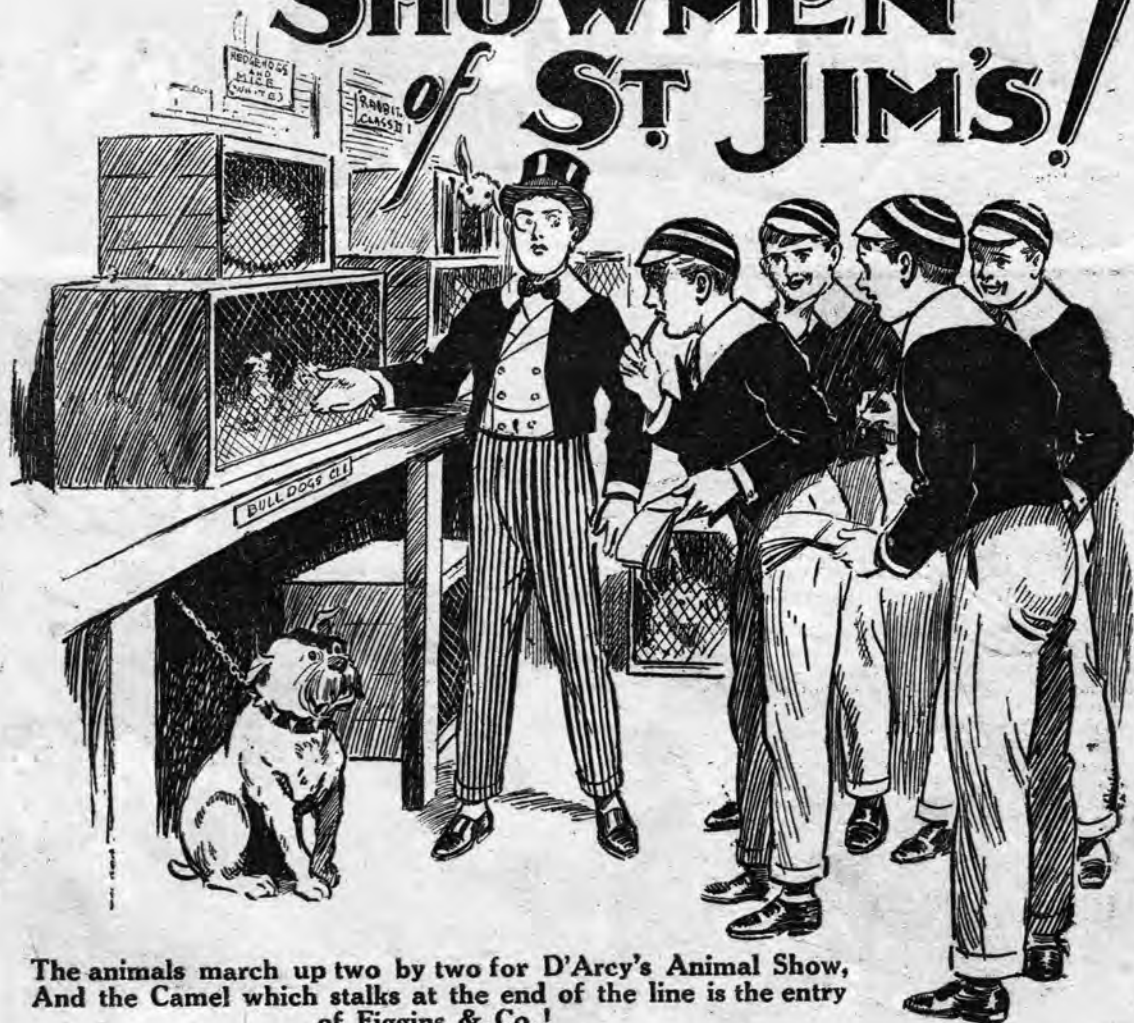
See the side-splitting long complete school yarn in this issue!

The GEM

2^D



SHOWMEN of ST JIM'S!



The animals march up two by two for D'Arcy's Animal Show,
And the Camel which stalks at the end of the line is the entry
of Figgins & Co.!

CHAPTER 1.

D'Arcy's Great Idea!

"**B**AI JOVE, you know!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, looking round Study No. 6, in the School House at St. Jim's. "Bai Jove, deah boys—"
"Oh, rats!" said Jack Blake, who was deep in Euclid, without looking up. "Shut up, now, Gussy, for goodness' sake!"

"Bai Jove, you know—"

"Dry up!" growled Herries, raising his eyes for a moment from the imposition he was scribbling at express speed. "Can't you see I'm busy?"

"Bai Jove—"

"Ring off, ass! If you want to talk, go out into the corridor, where we can't hear you!" howled Blake.

"I wefuse to go out into the cowwidor," replied Arthur Augustus, with a deal of dignity. "I uttably wefuse to do anythin' of the kind!"

"Then shut up!" growled Digby.

"But I have an ideah!"

"Keep it! Boil it! You're interrupting the washing!"

"But, you know, it's a weally wippin' ideah!"

"Go and tell it to Tom Merry, then!"

"Bai Jove, you know, that wouldn't do. It's too wippin' an ideah to be giver away to those boundahs in the Shell. The Tewwible Thwee can think out their own ideahs. Now, this ideah of mine is weally a—"

Whiz!

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Euclid came whizzing through the air, and D'Arcy dodged just in time. The work of the great geometrician crashed into the clock on the mantelpiece, and there was a scatter of falling glass.

"Bai Jove!" exclaimed D'Arcy, screwing his eyeglass into his eye and surveying the smashed glass of the clock with great composure. "You have bwooken the glass, Blake, which I considah vewy clumsay. It has not been bwooken for nearly a week. I wegard you as a clumsay ass!"

"It was your fault, fathead!"

"Now, don't be unweasonable, Blake; and pway don't call me a fathead. I object to it! I wegard it as a diswespctful expression."

Herries picked up a ruler.

"Pway do not hurl that wulah at me, Hewwies. You might bwreak something, too."

Herries grinned feebly as he laid down the ruler he had caught up.

"Calm yourselves, deah boys," said D'Arcy, gazing at the exasperated chums through his eyeglass. "I have been thinkin' a long time, and have thought out a weally wippin' ideah, and it would be a beastlay pity to waste it, you know."

Blake sank into his chair with a groan of resignation.

"Oh, it's no good, chaps!" he said. "He's bound to go on, and we may as well listen as not. There won't be any more work done in this study till he's finished, so the sooner the quicker. Go on, D'Arcy."

"Oh, I don't want to wowwy you," said the swell of the

—ANIMAL SHOW AT ST. JIM'S—AND LAUGH TILL YOU BUST!

By Martin Clifford.

School House very considerably. "If you'd wathah not hear the ideah just now—"

"Go on, you image!"

"I object to bein' chawactewised as an image!"

"Will you get on with the washin'?" howled the exasperated Blake. "We've left off work to listen to you, now get on!"

"Yaas, wathah; but if you'd wathah not—"

"Get on with it!" roared Herries.

"Vowly well. As you are so pwessin', I will explain the ideah," said D'Arcy gracefully. "I don't want to leave you in a state of gweat anxiety and suspense, you know. I am too considewate—"

"Will you come to the point?"

"I am comin' to it, as fast as I can, Blake; but I don't see how I am oval to awwive at it at all, if you and Hewwies and Dig keep on intewwuptin' me. When I am intewwupted I am always gweatly thwown off the twack of my ideahs!"

"Get on, ass!"

"And when these oppwobwious epithets are applied to me I am thwown out of my twain of thought—"

"You'll be thwown out of the window if you don't get done."

"I wufuse to be thwown out of the window. If you would not intewwupt me, I should come to the point like anythin'. Now, my ideah is this—of course, I couldn't have told it to Tom Mewwy, and allowed those thwee boundahs to get the cwedit of it."

"The credit of what?"

"Of startin' such a wippin' wheeze," said D'Arcy. "Figgins & Co., too, would have jumped at it, if I had taken you at your word and depwived this study of the benefit of my bwainy efforts. But I wouldn't do that, deah boys. When I get a weally good ideah you may wely upon it—"

Blake and Herries and Digby rose to their feet. They did not speak, but their looks meant business, and Arthur Augustus went on rather hastily.

"But to come to the point. It is weally vowly flattewin' of you to be so eagah to hear the ideah; but, of course, you know what to expect fwom a tellow of my bwains."

"We do!" groaned Blake.

"Shall we bang his head against the wall, or chuck him out of the window?" asked Herries, with the air of a fellow weighing the only two possible alternatives.

"I wufuse to have my head banged against the beastlay wall, or to— Pway stop, deah boys! You are wufflin' my collah!"

But the deah boys did not stop. They seized D'Arcy by the shoulders and jammed him against the study wall. He wriggled in vain in their muscular grip.

"Now, ass," said Blake in a concentrated voice, "now, maniac—now, fathead!"

"I object to all those expressions!"

"Now, lunatic—now, duffer, explain the idea, if you've got now—which I don't believe for a moment—"

"Unless he boned it," said Herries.

"I have not boned it," said D'Arcy. "I was thinkin' about the pets, you know, which we keep in the menagerie behind the New House, and all of a sudden it flashed into my bwain—"

"You howling ass!" exclaimed Herries. "How could the New House flash into your brain?"

"I didn't say the New House flashed into my bwain. I meant that—"

"The menagerie flashed into his brain," said Blake.

"The ideah!" shouted D'Arcy. "The ideah flashed into my bwain!"

"Well, I expect it found plenty of room there," said Blake. "Now, if you don't want your valuable brain knocked against the wall, you'll buck up with the explanation."

"I am explainin' as fast as I can, deah boys. But you are weally incommudin' me with that wuff gwip on my shouldahs, and—"

D'Arcy broke off as his head biffed against the study wall.

"Oh, weally, Blake—"

"That's for a start," said Blake ominously. "That was

only a gentle tap. If you want a first-class, thorough-going, non-skidding bang, you've only got to say so."

"I don't want anythin' of the kind. I wish you would leave off intewwuptin' me, and let a fellow come to the point. As I was sayin' when you intewwupted me so wudely, the ideah flashed into my bwain all of a sudden when I was thinkin' about the pets we keep in the menagerie. Nearly all the juniors in both Houses are keepin' pets now, since the doctor gave us permission, and it stwuck me—"

"What did?"

"Why, it stwuck me that it would be a wippin' ideah to hold a sort of an exhibition in the coll, you know, a sort of animal show, with pwizes offered for the best-kept pets and nicest pets, or the gweat number of white mice, and so on, deah boys."

The idea was out at last!

Blake and Herries and Digby released the swell of the School House, their brows quite thoughtful. D'Arcy carefully smoothed out his somewhat rumpled jacket and collar and a crease in his famous waistcoat. The youthful scion of the house of D'Arcy was very fastidious in these matters.

"Well, what do you think of the ideah, my deah fwends?" he asked. "Take your time to think it out, you know, and don't weply in a huwwy. It isn't often, I know, that you have such a wippin' wheeze to think out as this one."

"Well, there's something in it," said Blake. "Did you really think it out all on your own lonesome, Gussy?"

"Weally, I did; it was entirely my own ideah fwom start to finish," said Arthur Augustus. "I thought it out all by myself. It flashed into my bwain!"

"Well, in the first place, D'Arcy ought to have a tin medal," said Blake solemnly; "and I think this date ought to be kept up at St. Jim's. It's worth while commemorating the day when Arthur Augustus got his first ideah."

"Oh, weally, Blake—"

"It's not a bad ideah," said Herries. "Of course, we shall have to knock it into shape a little—"

"Oh, weally, Herries!"

"Of course," assented Blake. "That'll be necessary. A competition of this kind will go down at St. Jim's, and as nearly everybody is keeping pets there will be plenty of entries. This study will get the credit of starting the ideah—"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"And it must be clearly understood," went on Blake, "that the ideah did originate in this study. We'll get Tom Merry, Manners, and Lowther to join in it first of all, and then try to carry it out. But they'll have to admit that the wheeze is ours."

"Mine you mean, Blake."

"And you mustn't forget," said Digby considerably, "that the first suggestion came from Gussy."

"Oh, weally, Dig, why the whole ideah was—"

"We'll give Gussy his due," said Herries heartily. "He's several sorts of an ass, but I admit that the first slight outline of the ideah came from him."

"Oh, weally, Hewwies—"

"And before Gussy starts talking it all over the school," said Blake severely, "we'd better take the Terrible Three into it and get the thing started."

"Good! No good letting the grass grow under our feet!" "Come along, then. The impot can wait, and, as for my Euclid, blow Euclid. Come on, chaps, and let's explain our ideah to Tom Merry."

"Right-ho!" said Herries and Digby together.

"But I say, deah boys—"

"Oh! Don't bother now, Gussy, when we're busy with our new plans!" exclaimed Blake. "Just get some chestnuts roasted, like a good fellow."

"But I—"

"Now, don't be disoblighing, Gussy. Get some chestnuts roasted; we shall be back soon and we like 'em hot."

And Blake, Herries, and Digby marched out of the study.

"Well, weally," murmured D'Arcy, "if that's all the cwedit I get for a weally wippin' ideah, I shall not take the twouble to use my beastlay bwain at all."

And the swell of the School House went to the cupboard to look for the chestnuts.

CHAPTER 2.

The Chairman!

TOM MERRY, Manners, and Lowther, the chums of the Shell, had finished their preparation, and were about to leave their study, when the door was kicked open, and Blake, Herries, and Digby presented themselves.

"Busy?" asked Blake, looking round.
 "Just finished," said Tom Merry. "We were just going out. Want anything?"

"No; only we've got a wheeze on."
 "Go ahead!" said the hero of the Shell tersely.
 "Of course, you understand, before we explain, that it's our idea."

"Certainly. But what is it—something up against the New House?"

"No, not exactly; we shall have to let the New House fellows join in, but we want it understood that the credit of the idea belongs to the School House, and to our study in particular."

The Terrible Three nodded solemnly.
 "We won't try to borrow any of your credit," said Monty Lowther. "If it were cash, now, instead of credit, we might."

"Go ahead with the idea," said Tom Merry. "I expect it's some mouldy old thing that's been worked out a dozen times."

"Nothing of the sort," said Blake indignantly. "It's a real, first-class, brand new wheeze, that will make a stir in the school, I can tell you."

"Well, we're waiting to hear it," said Manners politely.
 "It's understood that it belongs to our study. As a matter of fact, the first hint of the idea came from D'Arcy—"

"Then it's bound to be something really ripping," said Tom Merry. "Get on—"

"You know that since the Head gave us permission to keep pets, and the place was built for them behind the New House, the idea has caught on, and most of the fellows here are keeping pets. Well, our idea is to obtain permission to use the big Hall some time—say on a half-holiday—and hold an exhibition, and give prizes for the best-kept or finest specimens of pets, and—"

"That's it!" said Herries. "It will be a competition, and we shall have to whip round to raise the prizes."

"Or we can offer things of our own, things of value," suggested Blake. "Tom Merry can put up his cricket bat, and Manners could offer his camera as first prize."

"Catch me!" said Manners.
 "Well, old chap. I don't think you ought to be selfish about it," said Digby. "We don't want a good idea spoiled for the sake of selfish considerations."

"Well, if you want a good first prize, just you put up your new football," said Manners. "You gave fifteen-and-six for it, and it would make a decent prize."

"Oh, you're talking rot now, and you know it!"
 "I don't see—"

"Well, about the idea?" said Blake rather hastily. "We can arrange about the prizes afterwards. What's your opinion?"

"It's a good idea," said Tom Merry thoughtfully. "Leave it in our hands, and we'll knock it into shape a little."

"Will you?" said Blake, with an ominous glitter in his eyes. "If you start knocking my ideas into shape, there's a fellow's nose that will get knocked out of shape, and that's yours, Tom Merry."

"Look here, my dear fellow, we want the thing to be a success. It was very right of you youngsters to come along and ask us to take it in hand."

"And ask what?" roared Blake.
 "And ask us to take the matter in hand."

Blake looked for a moment inclined to commit assault and battery upon the person of Tom Merry there and then. But he restrained himself.

"I didn't come here for a row," he said, with an effort. "My idea is that we should put our heads together, and run this thing for the credit of the School House. But it must be understood at the start that the wheeze belongs to Study No. 6, and that Study No. 6 is to run the show."

"Yaas, wathah!" said a voice from the doorway, and Arthur Augustus came in. "Yaas, wathah, deah boys! Pway let that be weoguised at the beginnin'."

"Have you roasted those chestnuts?" asked Blake.

"There aren't any left," said D'Arcy, "so it was quite impossible for me to roast them. The only chestnuts in the study are in your contribution to the 'Weekly.'"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Herries.
 Blake gave him a chilling glance.

"Don't make that fearful row in Tom Merry's study, Herries, old chap," he said. "Blessed if I can see what there is to bark about!"

"I thought I had bettah come along, upon reflection," said D'Arcy. "I want Tom Mewwy and Mannahs and Lowthah to understand—"

"That's all right. I've explained."

"To understand—"

"I tell you I've explained!"
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"To understand that it was my ideah," said D'Arcy calmly. "I was afraid that you might not lay sufficient stress on that circ—"

"Oh, rats! You made the first suggestion, I know!"
 "Wats! The ideah flashed into my bwin."

"Oh, don't argue! Look here, you Shell bounders, are you coming into the scheme or not?" demanded Blake.

"Certainly," said Tom Merry cheerfully. "But I don't see how we can follow the lead of the Fourth Form."

"We must consider the dignity of the Shell," said Lowther indignantly.

"Rats to the Shell!"
 "Oh, weally, Blake, if it is a question of dig, I must agree with Tom Mewwy that it wequahs careful consideration," said D'Arcy. "We cannot expect any gentleman to do anything not consistent with his personal dig—"

"I'll give you a personal dig, if you—"

"Pway be quiet, Blake, and leave this mattah in my hands!"

"Yes, I'm likely to leave anything in—"

"I weally insist! On mattahs of etiquette and dignity I am bettah fitted to deal with the question," said D'Arcy.

"Pway shut up!"
 "That's right!" grinned Tom Merry. "Leave it in D'Arcy's hands. It is impos to leave a question of dig in better hands."

"Yaas, wathah! Now, I wegard the Fourth Form, to which I have the honah to belong, as the most respectable Form in the coll," said Arthur Augustus. "But there is no accountin' for tastes, and it is quite poss that Tom Mewwy may wegard the Shell in the same light. Therefore, I suggest that a committee should be formed, containin' equal numbers fwom the Shell and the Fourth Form, to deal with the mattah."

"Hear, hear!"
 "Well, that would do," said Blake reflectively. "But, of course, Study No. 6 would have to have the casting vote."

"Yaas, wathah! As the owiginatah of the ideah, I should be chairman of the beastlay committee and have the casting vote."

"You! Why, you image—"

"I object to bein' called an image, and I appeal to Tom Mewwy if my ideah is not quite wight!"

"Quite right!" said Tom Merry. "I back up Gussy! Where shall we find a better chairman in the school than Arthur Adolphus Algernon Aubrey FitzPeroy de—"

"Oh, pway don't wot!" exclaimed D'Arcy. "It is agreed, then, that I am to be chairman?"

"Certainly!" said the Terrible Three, with one voice.

"Vewy well! I will take the chair, if Blake does not object."

"Oh, you can take the chair—and the table, too, if you like!" said Blake.

"Then it is agreed. I am weally the last person in the world to put myself forward in any way," said D'Arcy.

"But, undah the circs, I think this mattah will flouwish bettah in my hands. Now that it is amicably awanged, we had bettah call a meetin' and see if Figgins & Co. would like to join in the ideah."

"Right-ho!" said Tom Merry. "I'll send a note over to the New House."

"Excuse me!" said D'Arcy, with dignity. "As chairman, I will send a note ovah to the New House."

"Ha, ha, ha! Good old chairman! Well, you send the note, Gussy, and let us know when the first meeting is to be held," laughed Tom Merry. "Now, come on, kids, or we shan't get our little row before dark."

And the chums of the Shell went downstairs.

CHAPTER 3.

Figgins & Co. Join Up!

"COME in!" shouted Figgins.

Figgins & Co. were at tea in their study at the New House at St. Jim's. Figgins was pouring out the second cup of tea, and Kerr was cutting the loaf. Fatty Wynn was eating sardines as if for a wager. The fourth member of the famous New House Co., Marmaduke Smythe, was away in the sanny with a bad cold.

Figgins looked up from his tea-pouring as a knock came at the door of the study.

"Come in!"
 The door opened, and Curly Gibson of the School House entered. Curly was a Third Form boy, with flaxen hair and a rather cheeky grin.

"Hallo, kid!" said Figgins. "And what may you happen to want?"

"Nothing!" said Curly promptly.

"Take it and go!"

"Put it in paper for me, and send a commissioner to carry it!" retorted Curly undauntedly.

Figgins frowned darkly.

"My dear kid, you've got too much to say for a youth of your tender years," he said, putting down the teapot and wagging a warning finger at Curly Gibson. "If you've come with a message, spout it out, and buck up. No more talk, or you'll go out of this study on your neck."

"Rats!" said Curly cheerfully. "I've brought you a message from D'Arcy."

"Oh! What is Gussy sending messages for?"

"It's a feed, of course," said Fatty Wynn, half rising from his chair. "And here I've been filling myself up with these cheap sardines!"

"It's not a feed," said Curly.

"What is it, then, you young rascal?"

"Here's a note."

"Hand it over and clear!"

Curly Gibson grinned and handed the note over and cleared. Figgins opened the note, his chums looking at him curiously the while.

ought to help them out, if only to show that the New House is Cock House at St. Jim's."

"That's right enough. But they'll want us to follow their lead. You'll see! I know those New House wasters!"

"That would be absurd, of course. We could not consent to anything of the kind. But we may as well buzz along and see who's in it and what it's about. I suppose the whole gang are in it."

And after tea Figgins & Co. put on their caps and walked across the quadrangle to the School House.

A good many School House fellows stared at them as they came in, but no one offered to interfere with them, which was a pretty conclusive proof that Tom Merry and Blake had given orders that "pax" was to be the order of the day.

There was always active warfare between the rival Houses of St. Jim's, as far as the juniors were concerned, unless the leaders agreed to a truce, when the smaller fry were bound to keep the peace on peril of being licked.

"Where's their giddy club-room?" asked Kerr, looking round.

"Oh, it's the room their hobby club meet in," said Figgins—"an old disused study that the Housemaster lets them have. This way. Hallo! Here's Gussy!"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was advancing towards them with a beaming smile upon his face. He bowed politely to Figgins & Co.



Gussy sank into a chair, quite overcome, clasping the elk hat in his hand. In the side of his new "toppah" was a horrible ragged hole!

"Read it out!" said Kerr, the Scottish partner in the Co. "Right-ho! Here goes!" And the chief of the New House juniors read out the note from Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

"Dear Figgins,—We shall be glad if you will attend a meeting of the Committee of the Pets Competition, to be held in the club-room in the School House at seven o'clock this evening. Your assistance in carrying out a really ripping plan is cordially invited.

*"(Signed) ARTHUR AUGUSTUS D'ARCY,
Chairman of Committee."*

Kerr gave a whistle.

"What's that competition? I've never heard of it."

"Never heard of the committee, either."

"It's some new silly wheeze they've got on in the School House, and they want to rope us into it," said Fatty Wynn discontentedly. "And I thought it was a feed! Br-r-r-r!"

"Better go, though," said Figgins thoughtfully. "If the School House kids are in a fix and want our assistance, we

"I'm weally glad that you have come to the meeting," he said. "It is vewy nice of you to come. Follow me, deah boys!"

"We thought we'd better look into things," said Figgins.

"That's wight."

"But what's it all about?"

"We'll explain that in committee."

Figgins & Co. followed D'Arcy to the study which the hobby club were allowed to use for their meetings by the kindness of Mr. Railton, the Housemaster. The other members of the committee were already there.

Tom Merry occupied the easy-chair, and Manners and Lowther stood leaning on the mantelpiece. Blake, Digby, and Herries were at the table, deeply engaged in watching a hedgehog which was curled up there. The hedgehog belonged to Jack Blake, and was his particular pet.

"Hallo, Figgy!" said Tom Merry. "So you've come!"

"So it seems!" grinned Figgins. "I say, what's all this piffle about a pets competition? We thought we'd better look into it."

"Pway excuse me," said D'Arcy, "but I object to havin' my wippin' ideahs descibed as piffle. The descwip is not at all cownect."

"Oh, it's your idea, is it?" said Kerr disparagingly. "Yes, Kerr, it is my ideah, and I weally think it is a good one. Blake and Hewwies are wathah inclined to take the cwidit of it—"

"We knocked the idea into shape," explained Blake loftily.

"Blake, I must weally chawactewise that statement as incownect. The ideah was mine fwom start to finish. It flashed into my bwaain—"

"Never mind that," said Fatty Wynn. "Cut the cackle and come to the hosses! What is the idea?"

D'Arcy went to the head of the table and sat down upon a chair, the seat of which had been raised by a couple of dictionaries added to it, enabling the chairman to take a lofty survey of the meeting.

"The meeting of the committee is now open," said D'Arcy. "Pway take your seats, gentlemen. I will explain the objects of the committee for the benefit of the New House wottahs, who are at pwesent ignowant—"

"The what?" exclaimed Figgins & Co. with one voice. "I beg your pardon, that was a slip. I should be far fwom statin' my weal opinion of you at a fwienly meetin'," said D'Arcy. "You would natuwallly be offended."

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Tom Merry. "Pway do not disturb me by untimely mewwiment," said D'Arcy. "We are met togethah now for a weally important purpose, and I must beg ewevy gentleman to be sewious. The object of the committee is to encowage the juniors of St. Jim's in keepin' pets and takin' pwopah care of them."

"They don't need much encowagin'," said Figgins. "Nearly every fellow in the School House keeps pets now, and there are always rows at their being found in the studies. I heard that Herr Schneider sat down on a hedgehog the other day—"

"Yaas, wathah!" said Blake indignantly. "This pretty, harmless little thing. It was rough on him. Schneider is no light weight."

"Ha, ha! Wasn't Schneider hurt?" "Schneider! Oh, very likely! I was thinking about my hedgehog!"

"To wesome," said D'Arcy. "The competition will be held in the School Hall, with the doctor's permish, which we shall obtain, and we'll have a whip-wound to make up the pwizes for the best exhibits."

"It's not a bad idea!" "If you boundahs—"

"Eh?" said Figgins & Co. "I mean, if you gentlemen care to join the committee, we shall be pleased to welcome you, and the body will then be wewepresentative of both Houses."

"Good!" said Figgins. "Here, that won't do!" exclaimed Monty Lowther. "You can't have seven Fourth-Formers to three of the Shell!"

"Now, my deah Lowthah, don't be unweasonable! The New House will natuwallly expect to be wewepresented on the beastlay committee!"

"That's all very well, but—"

"Fair's fair!" said Figgins, grinning. "If we're to come into the scheme we must have seats on the committee, of course."

"The New House representation will be limited to three—us three," said Kerr. "You can't grumble at that, Lowther."

"That's all very well—"

"Well, we'll put it to the vote," said D'Arcy. "Hands up for Figgins & Co. being allowed to join the committee on equal terms!"

Four hands went up, including D'Arcy's own, the other three voters being Blake, Herries, and Digby.

"Now hands up against!" Tom Merry, Manners, and Lowther put up their hands.

"The motion is cawwied!" said D'Arcy.

"Hear, hear!" said the New House trio.

"That being settled—" went on D'Arcy.

"Rats!" exclaimed the Terrible Three hotly. "If there are seven of the Fourth on the committee, there ought to be seven of the Shell!"

"My deah boys, we can't have the whole coll on the committee."

"Perhaps not," said Tom Merry.

"But—"

"We will put it to the vote again," said D'Arcy patiently. "Figgins & Co. now belong to the committee, and will vote with the west. Hands up for incweasin' the numbah of the membahs of the committee."

The Terrible Three voted.

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"Hands up against it."

The chums of Study No. 6 and Figgins & Co. promptly elevated their hands.

"You are outnambahed, Tom Mewwy."

"Oh, rats!" said Tom Merry.

"I twust that you will play the game, Mewwy, and not object to the workin' of the wules which you helped to fwame."

"That's all very well—" said Lowther.

"That's what I say!" exclaimed Manners. "I—"

"Oh, never mind!" said Tom Merry. "Anything for the sake of peace in the family! Get on with the washin'!"

"Yaas, wathah! Tom Mewwy, Mannahs, and Lowthah bein' completely satisfied, we will now pwocceed to business," said Arthur Augustus, beaming round upon the committee.

CHAPTER 4.

The Committee's First Meeting I

ARTHUR AUGUSTUS adjusted his monocle in his right eye, and tapped the table with a businesslike air.

"We will now pwocceed to business," he repeated.

"Well, proceed then!" said Blake.

"Pway pay attention to the mattah in hand, Blake, and let that beastlay hedgehog alone, deah boy!"

"My hedgehog is not beastly, Gussy. I call him Adolphus because he's so nice," said Blake. "Let my hedgehog alone."

"I'm not likely to touch him, but weally—" "Oh, get on with the washin'!"

"Pay attention, then. In the first place, havin' agweed that there is to be a competition, we must lay down—"

"What do you want to lie down for?" asked Herries. "I don't see why we can't sit as we are."

"You are vewy dense, Hewwies. We must lay down some wules—"

"Some what?" "Some wules to govern the competition."

"Oh, some rules! I see! Go on!"

"Some wules with wegard to the entwants," said D'Arcy. "Now, in the first place, I think a pwize ought to be given to the most unique pet—"

"That's a good wheeze," said Herries. "My big bulldog will—"

"My hedgehog—" exclaimed Blake.

"My squirrel—" began Lowther.

"Oh, pway dwy up, and allow your wespected chairman to speak. The pwize will be awarded when the competition opens, of course. Now, we have only got to decide what the pwizes are to be."

"Well, first prize for the most unique pet," said Blake. "That's settled. What's the first prize to be?"

"Oh, I don't know! I should suggest a fivah!"

"I suppose you mean five bob?" said Figgins.

"Just as you like, deah boys; I am not particular about a twifle," said D'Arcy. "The first pwize is to be five bob, then. Is that agweed?"

"Yes, passed unanimously; and without the aid of a net," said Lowther.

"Pway do not be funny, Lowthah! This is a sewious mattah. I think the second pwize should be for the largest numbah of pets of any kind—say, white mice or wabbitts or—"

"Passed!"

"The third pwize for the best-kept pet, of any kind whatsoever."

"Good!"

"That will do for the pwesent, with wegard to the pwizes," said D'Arcy. "Now, as to the othah conditions. An exhibition of the pets to be held in the Hall on Saturday afternoon next—"

"Suppose the Head won't allow us the use of the Hall?" suggested Manners.

"Oh, he will, for such a laudible object, I am assuahed!" replied D'Arcy. "If he will not, we shall have to use the woodshed. But I should pwefeh the Hall, as bein' more dignified, as well as considewably largah."

"Hear, hear!"

"The terms of the competition will be published to all the school, and ewevyone who entahs for the pwizes will have to contwibute a pwoportionate amount towards them," said D'Arcy. "It will pwobably not amount to more than a few pence each, if the pwizes are of the widiculous smallness suggested by Figgins."

"It's the honour of the thing," said Tom Merry.

"The filthy lucre is nothing," said Blake loftily.

"Yaas, wathah!" assented the chairman. "As Tom Mewwy vewy pwobably observes, the honah is what we want. Any boy of eithah House can entah the competition by payin' the entwance fee in advance. All the money

received to be divided in the form of prizes. That will be satisfactory to all concerned."

"Good!" said Figgins. "We'd better draw up a notice to that effect and post it in both Houses."

"You mean, I had better draw up a notice?"

"Oh rats! Go on!"

D'Arcy produced a fountain-pen and drew a sheet of paper towards him.

"You fellows may read it afore I have written it," he said condescendingly. "I shall be glad to have your opinions—"

"Hallo!" exclaimed Blake, looking round. "Where's Adolphus?"

The hedgehog had disappeared.

Blake jumped up from his chair and began to look anxiously about the room. He had lost his hedgehog once before, and had had a great deal of trouble in recapturing it. But Adolphus had vanished.

"My hat!" ejaculated Blake. "The door's ajar, and he's gone! What silly ass left the door open—"

"Nevah mind the hedgehog now," said D'Arcy. "the business in hand is to draw up the notice regarding the competition—"

"Oh, blow the competition!"

D'Arcy rose to his feet with a great deal of dignity. He adjusted his eyeglass and stared chillingly at the chief of Study No. 6.

"Blake, it is imposs for me, as chairman of this honourable meetin', to allow such an expression as that to pass!"

"Oh rats!"

"I refuse to have contemptuous expressions used in this club-room! I call upon the honourable membah to withdraw those words!"

"I tell you I've lost my hedgehog!"

"Wats to your hedgehog! Are you going to apologise?"

"Catch me, ass!"

"As chairman of the committee, I must uttably refuse to be chawactewised as an ass! I call upon the honourable membah to withdraw his words, or to wetiah from the meetin'."

"I'm going to retire, to look for Adolphus," grinned Blake, going to the door.

"Vewy well. You are requested not to attend the next meeting of the committee, Blake! You cannot be admitted to the sittin' till you have pwopahly apologised!"

"Oh, go and eat coconuts!" said Blake disrespectfully.

And he retired from the committee meeting in search of the truant Adolphus.

D'Arcy frowned darkly, and took up his fountain-pen again.

"We will now pwocceed to draw up the notice," he said. "I will write it out, and then I shall be glad to have your opinion."

"But I say, Gussy—" began Tom Merry.

"Don't intewwupt me now, deah boy. I'm just getting an ideah."

"But—" began Figgins.

"I must request silence in the committee-room!"

"Yes," said Kerr; "but—"

"Pway dwy up for the pwesent!"

The committee dried up. D'Arcy leaned his head on his left hand, and jabbed at the paper thoughtfully with the pen in his right. He was too deeply engrossed to observe the movements of the committee.

The juniors winked at one another and stole quietly on tiptoe to the door. One by one they passed out, and D'Arcy was left alone in the committee-room. Quite unconscious of the fact, he proceeded with his task of drawing up the notice.

"Yaas, I think this will do," he murmured, and his pen began to scratch.

"NOTICE"

An exhibition will be held in the School Hall on Saturday afternoon next of pets kept by the boys of St. James' Collegiate School.

Prizes will be offered for the most unique pet, for the greatest number of pets kept by any single exhibitor, and for the best kept pets.

First Prize, 5s.; Second Prize, 5s.; Third Prize, 5s.

All boys, of both Houses, may enter the competition. The seniors are not barred, but if they take part they will be expected to behave themselves.

Signed, for the Committee,

ARTHUR AUGUSTUS D'ARCY, Chairman."

"There, I think that will do," said D'Arcy, reading the notice aloud. "You can take a copy of this, Figgins, and stick it up in the New House."

There was no reply from Figgins.

"I weally think I have worded it pwetty well," went on Arthur Augustus. "Don't you think so, Tom Mewwy?"

Still no reply.

The dead silence in the committee-room made D'Arcy look up from the document. He glanced around him in amazement.

"Bah! Jove, they are gone! How extwemely wude of them to go without sayin' a word! Weally, undah the cirms, I think I had bettah go, too."

The swell of the School House turned out the gas and quitted the committee-room.

CHAPTER 5.

Hunting a Hedgehog!

"DEAR me! What can have happened here?"

Mr. Railton, the master of the School House at St. Jim's, stared at his desk in dismay. He had just come into his study and turned up the gas,

and the state of his desk at once caught his eye. He had left it open in quitting the room hastily, and now—

"Dear me! Who—what can have done this?"

A cheerful face looked in at the door.

"If you please, sir—"

"Blake"—Mr. Railton glanced at the junior—"what do you want?"

"If you please, sir, have you seen my hedgehog?"

The master started.

"So you have lost a hedgehog, Blake?"

"Yes, sir; and Skimpole says he saw it near this study, and—"

"Come and look at this desk, Blake!"

The junior, with a wondering look, obeyed. The interior of the desk looked as if it had been burrowed in by an army of rats. Blake looked dismayed. He guessed that Adolphus, the hedgehog, had been at work there.

"What do you think has caused that havoc among my books and papers, Blake?" asked the Housemaster severely.

"I—I don't know, sir."

"Do you think it possible that it was a hedgehog?"

"It—it might have been, sir."

"I see no harm in keeping a hedgehog as a pet, Blake," said the Housemaster, after a pause; "but you know that it is forbidden to bring them into the House. The Head went to the expense of having a special building erected for their accommodation, and—"

"I only brought Adolphus into the club-room to show the fellows there!" said Blake ruefully. "While we were talking he got away."

"You will take a hundred lines for bringing a pet into the House, Blake!"

"Ye-e-es, sir!"

"And when the hedgehog is recaptured he must be taken back to his proper place, and in future kept there."

"Ye-e-es, sir!"

And Blake left the study with a solemn face. He was

(Continued on the next page.)

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sorry for the damage that had been done to the House-master's papers, and sorrier still that he had an imposition of a hundred lines in consequence.

"Have you seen my hedgehog?" he asked, as he met Mellish in the passage.

Mellish, the cad of the Fourth Form at St. Jim's, assumed a very thoughtful expression.

"Hedgehog?" he repeated. "I say, Gore, was that a hedgehog we saw in Knox's study?"

"I suppose so," said Gore. "It wasn't a sea-serpent or a hippopotamus."

Blake looked alarmed. Knox was a prefect and the worst bully in the School House at St. Jim's, and he was known to be cruel to animals. If he found Adolphus exploring his study, and perhaps working as much havoc as in the House-master's room, there was no telling what he might do.

"I say, are you rotting?" he exclaimed. "If my hedgehog is in Knox's study—"

"All right, you can doubt my word if you like," said Mellish. "That's what I expect from you when I try to do you a good turn!"

"Well, you're such a fearful fibber," said Blake.

"I don't care! The beastly animal may have been there, or it may not. Knox may have shut it up in his coal-locker and piled coal on it, or he may not. Go and find out!"

"Look here, Mellish—"

"I've got no more to say. Go and find out!"

"Oh, I say, that's hardly fair, Mellish," said Gore. "You'd better speak out, and let Blake go and get his hedgehog. It's cruelty—"

"I'm not going to say more. I should get into a row with Knox if I told what he was going to do with the brute—"

Blake waited to hear no more. Although Mellish was not famous for truthfulness, the corroboration of Gore seemed to be sufficient, added to what he knew of the brutal character of Knox, the prefect.

The anxious junior raced away to Knox's study at once. He knocked at the door, and there was a shuffling sound inside the study, as of someone hastily moving, but no voice bade him enter.

Blake knocked again. Then the voice of the prefect was heard.

"Who is there?"

"It is I—Blake of the Fourth!"

"Go away, then, you young hound!"

"I want my hedgehog!"

"Eh?"

"My hedgehog is in this study!"

"It isn't! I haven't seen it! Cut off!"

But Blake's suspicions were too strong now. The door was locked, as he found when he tried the handle. What was the door locked for, unless something was going on in the study which would not bear the light?

The junior thumped on the panels again.

"Go away!" roared Knox.

"Why can't you let me come in?"

"Because I don't choose! I'll wring your neck if I come out to you! Get off!"

"I won't go till I've seen whether you've got my hedgehog there!"

"You fool! What should I want with your hedgehog?"

"You're beast enough for anything!"

This remark would certainly have made the prefect open the door and come out with the cane unless he had been particularly occupied. But the door did not open.

Blake banged on it again, and kicked forcibly at the lower panels. There was a growl of rage from within.

"Are you going away?"

"Not till I've got my hedgehog!"

Still the door did not open. The prefect, for some reason best known to himself, had apparently determined to leave the junior's persistence unpunished. There was the sound of a whisper in the study, and Blake caught it.

"Are you going to stand that cheek, Knox?"

It was the voice of Sefton of the New House, a crony of the School House prefect, and quite as big a bully as Knox.

Blake did not catch Knox's reply, but the door remained shut. He kicked again for a minute or two, and then desisted. It was evidently useless.

But Blake was not to be beaten. He knew that most of the Sixth Form studies had locks of the same pattern, and he went along the corridor and took the key out of the lock of the first unoccupied study.

Then he returned to Knox's door. The key was in the lock inside, but by its barring the light, Blake knew that it was in a position to be pushed out. He gently inserted the new key on the outside, and, with a click, the inside one

dropped on the floor of the study. The next moment Blake had turned the key in the lock and thrown the door open.

Knox and Sefton started up in a moment. There was a suspicious haze in the study, and the two Sixth-Formers had their right hands behind them; but Blake, in his excitement, did not notice it. He burst into the study, with blazing eyes.

"Where's my hedgehog?" roared the junior.

"You young rascal!" gasped Knox. "I'll—I'll—"

Blake made a dash for the coal-locker. Knox sprang in his way and hurled him back. As he did so, he dropped a lighted cigarette to the floor, and Sefton picked it up and threw it into the fire, and his own followed it.

"Are you mad, you young villain?" panted Knox.

Blake staggered from the rough push of the senior and fell against the door. But he recovered himself in a moment.

"I'm going to have my hedgehog!"

"The beastly thing's not here, I tell you!"

"Yes, it is; it's in the coal-locker."

"You young ass! There's nothing of the kind there!"

"Let me look, then!"

"I'm not going to have a junior nosing round my study. You deserve a hiding for your cheek, but if you like to cut off at once—"

"I'm not going till I've got my hedgehog!"

"Get out!" roared Knox.

"Shan't!" said Blake defiantly.

The prefect said no more. He rushed at Blake, and seized the junior in his powerful arms. The youngster was swung to and fro, but he struggled desperately, clinging to the senior like a limpet to a rock.

"Help here, Sefton!" gasped Knox. "The young beast is a regular tiger! Drag him off!"

The New House senior came to his friend's aid. He grasped Blake by the collar and dragged him off the Sixth-Former. Blake turned on his new assailant and hit out wildly. Sefton received a clump full in the face that made him yelp with pain.

"Hold him, Sefton!" gasped Knox. "Wait till I've got the door locked, and we'll get out a cane and thrash him within an inch of his life!"

"Right-ho!" said the New House senior. "By George! If I had this kid over in the New House I'd make him think life wasn't worth living, and no mistake!"

Blake struggled desperately.

"Rescue!" he bawled. "Rescue, Fourth!"

There was a heavy footstep in the passage. Knox was about to slam the door and lock it, when a newcomer appeared on the scene.

Kildare, the captain of St. Jim's, looked into the study with a stern brow.

CHAPTER 6.

Bowled Out!

KILDARE looked in, and took in the scene at a glance. Sefton, turning rather red, let go of Blake as the captain's eyes fell on him, and stepped back.

The junior was gasping breathlessly.

"What is the matter here?"

Knox, the prefect, glared at Kildare.

"What does it matter to you?"

The captain of St. Jim's made a step forward, and the prefect made a corresponding step back. There was a gleam in Kildare's eyes he did not like.

"It matters to me because I am captain of the school, and don't intend to allow any bullying, if I can prevent it," said Kildare quietly. "When I hear a junior calling out for help in your study, Knox, I am pretty certain that something is going on that ought to be stopped."

"That brat came in here against my will!" snarled Knox.

"I had my door locked, and he found another key, and opened it himself from outside."

Kildare glanced at Blake.

"Is that the case, Blake?"

"Yes, Kildare; but—"

"He forced himself in here," said Knox savagely, "and I was going to throw him out when you came along. That's the whole story!"

"I'm afraid that is not quite correct. You were slamming the door, with Blake still inside the study, when I came along."

"I was going to lick him for his cheek, if you want to know. Have you any objection to the licking of a junior who forced himself into a prefect's study?" said Knox, with a sneer.

"I want to know the rights of the case first. Why did you come in here, Blake?"

"I came for my hedgehog. Knox has got it in here, and he won't give it to me!" burst out Blake.

"It's a lie!" growled Knox. "What the dickens should I want with his rotten hedgehog?"

"How do you know it is here, Blake?"

"I was told Knox had shoved it into his coal-locker, and piled the coal on it, because he found it in his study."

"It's all rot!" said Knox. "I haven't done anything of the kind. I haven't set eyes on the rotten animal!"

"What was your door locked for, then?" demanded Blake. "And why wouldn't you let me look in the coal-locker?"

The prefect coloured uncomfortably.

"I'm not going to have you nosing round my study," he said. "Who told you I put the beast into my locker?"

"You'd lick him if I told you."

"Very likely. And I'll lick you if you give me any more of your cheek. Get out of my study, you young bouncer!"

"I certainly will."

The captain of St. Jim's made a step towards the locker. Knox sprang in his way, with a very flushed face.

Kildare eyed him steadily.

"Stand aside, if you please, Knox."

"I'm not going to. You've no right to come here searching my study."

"You will force me to conclude that the hedgehog is there, just as Blake says."

"Conclude what you like, but you're not going to search my room like a rotten detective as if I were a criminal," said Knox heatedly.

Kildare hesitated for a moment.

"I must look in the locker," he said finally. "I ask you to stand aside, Knox."

"I won't!"

"Then I shall make you!"

For a moment the two seniors looked each other full



"Ah!" Kildare gasped with surprise as he put his hand into the coal-locker and produced—not a hedgehog, as he had been led to expect, but a box of cigarettes!

"I'm not going without my hedgehog."

"I tell you it isn't here!" roared Knox, exasperated.

"Let me look in the coal-locker, then."

"I won't! That's flat! Now get out! Kildare, are you going to back up that insolent brat in defying a prefect in his own study?"

The captain of St. Jim's looked worried.

The conduct of Jack Blake was decidedly insubordinate, and yet, knowing Knox's cruel nature, the school captain felt that the junior's anxiety for his pet was probably well grounded.

"Why won't you let him look in the locker, Knox?" asked Kildare, at last.

The prefect scowled savagely.

"Because I don't choose," he replied. "Do you think I am going to be dictated to by a kid out of the Fourth Form in my own study?"

"Not likely, by gum!" said Sefton.

"You can shut up, Sefton," said Kildare. "This is no business of yours. Blake, if Knox will not let you look in the locker, I will look myself, and that will come to the same thing, I suppose?"

"Certainly!" said Blake, at once. "I know you'll make sure about it, Kildare."

in the face. Their glances seemed to meet and cross like rapiers. Then the meaner nature weakened.

Knox, with a muttered curse, stepped back.

"Hang you! Do as you like!" he snarled.

Kildare stepped to the locker and opened it. Then he uttered a sharp exclamation. There was no sign of a hedgehog there, but just inside the locker, where they had evidently been placed for concealment, and also to be ready at hand, was a box of cigarettes.

The murder was out at last!

Kildare picked up the box with a moody brow. Blake saw them, too, and burst into an irrepressible giggle.

"My only maiden aunt! Baccy!"

Kildare stepped back from the locker, and looked Knox full in the face. He gave one sniff at the atmosphere. The haze of tobacco was still perceptible there.

"So that is the secret!" said the captain of St. Jim's scornfully. "You fellows were smoking here like a couple of silly juniors, and—"

"It's no business of yours," growled Knox uneasily.

"It is my business to put down any rotten blackguardism that goes on in the school," said Kildare. "You know that smoking is forbidden, and that you yourself have

frequently punished juniors for transgressing the rules. Now you yourself—

"I am a prefect—"

"And ought to know better. Bah! It is no use talking to you. I shall think what I had better do in the matter. Blake, your hedgehog is not there. You have started the wrong hare. Come along!"

Knox gave the junior a glare of hatred as he left the study.

He really owed the discovery to himself, for it was Blake's knowledge of the cruelty of his nature that had made the junior so determined to look for the hedgehog there. Blake would have taken any other fellow's word that the animal was not there, but Knox was paying the penalty now of occasional untruthfulness.

He was extremely uneasy as to what Kildare might do. The captain's looks were by no means reassuring as he quitted the study.

Kildare walked away, and Blake went along the passage, chuckling over the incident. He had been on a false scent, but Knox deserved to be shown up. But now the burning question was—where had Adolphus, the hedgehog, got to?

"Hallo! Found your little beast?" inquired Mellish cheerfully, as he met Blake in the passage.

Blake's nostrils dilated a little, and his eyes gleamed. He knew that Mellish had been feeling him, and had sent him on a wild-goose chase to Knox's study in the hope of getting him a licking.

"No," he said, "I haven't found him."

"Sorry! Ha, ha, ha! Wasn't he in Knox's coal-locker?"

"No, he wasn't!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"It was very kind of you to send me there, Mellish," said Blake—"very kind indeed, and I owe you a lot of thanks."

"Oh, don't mention it!"

"But I must mention it," said Blake. "I don't want to be ungrateful, and I must make you the return you deserve. There you are!"

Blake's left came out like lightning, and Mellish received it on the end of his nose. He gave a yell, and sat down in the passage.



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Blake walked away laughing, and Mellish sat up and rubbed his nose, and stared after him ruefully. The joke had seemed a screamingly funny one at first, but it did not seem quite so funny now.

CHAPTER 7.

The Further Adventures of Adolphus.

BLAKE hunted high and low in the School House, but he did not find Adolphus. The hedgehog had evidently gone on an extended tour, and was not to be found.

Blake came up from a hunt down the kitchen stairs, and found a crowd of juniors collected before the notice-board in the Hall.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy had just pinned up a paper there, and the youngsters were reading it.

"Hallo!" said Blake. "What's the little game?"

D'Arcy turned his eyeglass upon him.

"Is that you, Blake, dear boy? You look vewy gwimy. In fact, you have an extremewly dirty and diswceptuabie appeahwance."

"I've been hunting for my hedgehog," explained Blake. "It escaped while you were gassing in the club-room."

"I wefuso to have my weally sensible and welfective speeches chawactewised as gassing," said Arthur Augustus, with dignity.

"Well, the little bounder escaped, and he's made a wreck of Mr. Railton's desk, and got me a hundred lines, and a row with a prefect. I don't know where he is now."

"And you won't find him in a hurry," Tom Merry remarked. "I've kept hedgehogs. I know. But let's read Gussy's announcement."

The notice was read, and read again. Most of the juniors were grinning over it, but the competition was generally voted a good idea.

"I weally think that will meet the case," Arthur Augustus remarked, adjusting his monocle, and surveying the notice with much satisfaction. "I will wite out a copy, and send it ovah to Figgins to put up in the New House. I should like to know, Tom Mewwy, what it is you find to gwin at in that notice?"

Tom Merry was certainly grinning.

"Well, I was thinking that it's a queer idea to have all three prizes of the same amount of money," he remarked.

"Oh, it isn't the money; it's the honah of the thing!" said D'Arcy. "Still, there may be something in what you say. I'll make an altewation."

And D'Arcy took out his pencil and made a couple of corrections, reducing the second prize by one shilling, and the third by two shillings.

"Anythin' more to disappwove of, Tom Mewwy?"

"Not at all. I regard that notice as a triumph of keen business sagacity and literary style," said Tom Merry solemnly.

D'Arcy purred with satisfaction.

"Yaas, wathah! I wegard it in the same light myself," he said. "There's not many fellahs who could draw up a notice so well, I flattah myself."

"Ha, ha, ha! Well, don't forget to send Figgins his copy, and to get the Head's permission to use the Hall on Saturday afternoon," said Tom Merry, and he walked away with Manners and Lowther.

"Do you think the Head will give his permission, Tom?" Monty Lowther asked very doubtfully.

Tom Merry laughed.

"Hardly," he said. "I don't think he'll allow the Hall to be overrun with all sorts and conditions of animals. But it's no good talking to Gussy. He will have to find that out for himself. Now for the prep."

The Terrible Three entered their study.

Tom Merry turned up the gas, and put his hand into the box where he kept his books. He snatched it away with a yell.

He had run his fingers upon something extremely sharp. A little black object whisked out of the basket, and scuttled away in the gloom.

"Hallo! What was that?" cried Lowther.

"Ow! Look at my hands!"

"What is it?"

"Blake's beastly hedgehog, I suppose," growled Tom Merry, nursing his hand. "I'm getting a bit tired of that hedgehog. Did the brute go out of the study?"

"I think so."

Lowther was right. The ubiquitous Adolphus was gone, and where he had disappeared to was a puzzle. But the Terrible Three did not trouble their heads about him. That was Blake's business.

Blake and his chums, after the posting up of the notice, and its discussion by the juniors of the School House, repaired to Study No. 6. The copy of the notice had to be written out for Figgins. They entered the study, and Blake glanced round in the hope of seeing something of his hedgehog. But Adolphus was not on view.

"I wish I knew where that beastly hedgehog has got to," growled Blake. "I think it will come to harm if I don't find it."

"I'll set my bulldog to find it, if you like," said Herries obligingly.

Blake gave him a withering look.

"You ass! Hallo, Gussy! What's the matter?"

"Look!" gasped the swell of St. Jim's.

D'Arcy was standing in an attitude of utter horror and dismay, staring at a hatbox he had just taken from the cupboard. It certainly bore signs of ill-usage, having apparently been gnawed through by rats. Gussy opened it with a trembling hand, and took out the gorgeous silk topper it contained. Then he sank into a chair, too overcome for words.

In the side of the silk hat was a big, ragged hole. The topper was done for; it was fit only for the dust-heap.

"My hat!" said D'Arcy faintly. "My new hat! My toppah!"

Blake and Herries stared at the hat, and then burst into a roar.

D'Arcy put down the hat, rose to his feet, and stared at them indignantly.

"Blake! Hewwies! You unfeelin' wuffians! Is it a laughin' mattah to see a new toppah gnawed away by wats?"

"It wasn't rats," gasped Herries. "It must have been Blake's hedgehog."

"Oh, Adolphus!" cackled Blake.

"Blake! I wufuse to have my toppahs devoured by your objectionable hedgehog. I uttably wufuse to submit to anythin' of the kind."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Pway cease this untimely and disreputable mewwiment. My silk toppah has been wuined, and it isn't a seven-and-sixah like the howwid things you fellows wear. It is a new one in the latest style, with the latest thing in bwims, and now I shall have to go out in an old-fashioned hat."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I am uttably disgusted! I wegard you both with pwofound contempt!" roared D'Arcy. "I despise you feahfully."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Words failed the swell of the School House as he stared at the two almost hysterical juniors. He felt that nothing he could say would be equal to the occasion, and he turned with a disdainful sniff and strode from the study. He left Blake and Herries rocking to and fro with laughter.

"I say, D'Arcy," said Mellish, looking out of his study, "come in here, will you? I've got something to show you."

"Yaas, wathah!"

Arthur Augustus entered the study of the cad of the Fourth.

"Anythin' wrong?" asked Mellish, looking at him curiously. "The serenity of your aristocratic brow seems to be disturbed."

"Yaas, wathah! Blake's beastlay hedgehog has been makin' a suppah off my new silk toppah, and Blake wegrads the mattah as a joke."

"Ha, ha, ha! I mean horrid. It's too bad. But I say, I've something to show you. I found it in that box when I came into the study. Hand it out, will you?"

Mellish pointed to a box lying in a corner of the study. It was too dark there to see what was in the box, but D'Arcy unsuspiciously thrust his hand inside to take out the article there, whatever it might be.

"Ow!" he yelled. "I've wun my fingah on a needle!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" shrieked Mellish.

"Why, it's a wotten hedgehog! I've wun my fingah on his beastlay quills," said the swell of the School House. "You howwid wottah, Mellish, you did this on purpose! It was a beastlay mean twick."

"Ha, ha, ha! I did the same myself, and I thought I'd give you a treat."

"You are a wotten wascal, and I think I had bettah give you a lickin'," said D'Arcy, pushing back his cuffs. "You have been askin' for a lickin' for a long time, Mellish, and it is imposs for me to ovallook a twick like this. You have made me hurt my beastlay hand, you wascal. Look out!"

"Oh, rats! I—"

"I am sowwy to say that it is a question of dig with me, and, therefore, I cannot see any alternative but to administrah a feahful thwashin'," said D'Arcy. "Pway wait a minitah while I wemove my jacket, as I do not wish to

cwumple it in thwashin' you. Why, the howwid boundah has wun away! Mellish, where are you goin'? I insist upon your immediately weturnin' so that I can thwash you."

But Mellish did not return, and Arthur Augustus quitted the study in an extremely indignant frame of mind.

CHAPTER 8.

A Disappointment for D'Arcy.

"D'ARCY!"

"Yaas, deah boy—I mean, yaas, sir!"

It was the morning, and the boys were going into the Hall to breakfast. Mr. Lathom, the master of the Fourth, looked severely at D'Arcy through his big spectacles.

"D'Arcy, you are wanted in Mr. Railton's study after breakfast, before prayers."

"Yaas, sir," said D'Arcy.

And the swell of the School House sat down at the breakfast-table. He did not look very much concerned, though a summons into the Housemaster's study generally meant a far from pleasant interview for the junior so summoned.

"What's wrong now, image?" whispered Blake. "What have you been doing?"

"Nothing," said D'Arcy languidly. "Nothing at all, deah boy. The Housemastah is pwobably labouwin' undah some misappwehension, which I shall set wight when I see him."

Blake grinned.

"Better put an exercise-book inside your garments, my son, in case of accidents."

D'Arcy gave him a disdainful sniff.

"I should certainly wufuse to do anythin' so extwemely undignified, Blake, to say nothing of the fact that it would spoil the shape of my twousahs."

"Ha, ha, ha! I forgot the trousers!"

After breakfast D'Arcy walked to the Housemaster's study with a very dignified air. He knocked and went in. Mr. Railton was not there, but he came in a few minutes later.

"Ah, D'Arcy! I asked Mr. Lathom to send you to me."

"Yaas, sir. I am heah."

"You are the author, I believe, of a notice that was placed on the board in the Hall last night," said the Housemaster.

"Yaas, wathah, sir. I dwew it up all by myself, as chairman and secwetawy of the competition committee."

"Ahem! You announce some sort of an exhibition—"

"Yaas, with pwizes for the pets. First pwize, five shillings—"

"Exactly. Now—"

"Second pwize, four shillings—"

"What I want to say is—"

"Third pwize, three shillings—"

"Will you listen to me, D'Arcy?"

"Certainly, sir. I always listen with gweat pleasuah to a gentleman whom I wespsect so highly."

The Housemaster tried to hide a smile. It was really impossible to be angry with the swell of the School House.

"Very well, D'Arcy. You announce that this exhibition will be held in the School Hall—"

"Yaas, wathah! By the kind permish of the Head."

"I am afraid that it is quite impossible!"

D'Arcy's jaw dropped. He stared at the Housemaster in dismay.

"Weally, Mr. Waiton—"

"The lecture hall cannot possibly be used for such a purpose. I am giving you this warning to save you from disappointment, so that you can make some other arrangements if you keep up the idea of holding an exhibition of the boys' pets."

"That is vewy kind of you, sir. It is weally a wippin' ideah, you know. It flashed all of a sudden into my bwain—"

"Yes, yes; exactly. But you cannot use the lecture hall. It is impossible to have an animal show held in such a place. That is all. You may go."

"But pway listen to me for a single moment, Mr. Waiton. It is quite imposs to hold the show anywhere else—"

"Then I'm afraid it cannot be held at all. You may go, D'Arcy."

"But pway listen a moment. It is most important that this show should be held. The youngstahs will be disappointed. Then we have alwedy been subscwibin' for the pwizes, and I have collected nine shillin's towards them alwedy."

"I am sorry, but—"

"Pway, one moment more. The lecture hall is just the place for the show, and if any damage is done we will have a whip wound to waise the money to set it wight. We, all want to do the honahouvable thing, you know. Besides, the pets won't hurt the place, my deah sir. Pewwaps Blake's hedgehog might do some damage, but I will make a stip that the hedgehog is not allowed there—"

"You will make a what?"

"A stip, sir, that the hedgehog—"

"What is a stip?"

"A stipulation, sir."

"Oh, I see! Well, I think I said a few moments ago that you might go, D'Arcy. I repeat the remark. You may go. Can you understand that, or must I enforce and amplify my meaning with the aid of a cane?"

"Pway do not be angwy, Mr. Wailton. This is a most important mattah. Am I to undahstand that the Head has wufused permish?"

"The Head knows nothing about the matter, but it is ridiculous for you to suppose that he will allow the lecture hall to be used for any such purpose," said the Housemaster impatiently.

"Yaas, but have I your permish to ask him, sir?"

The Housemaster smiled.

"Certainly, you can ask him if you like. Meanwhile, cross out that line on the notice on the board. I cannot allow it to remain there."

"Certainly, sir. I am always weady to oblige a gentleman whom I wespect—"

"You may go!"

"—so highly as I do you, sir. I wegard—"

"Will you go?"

"Certainly, sir. I wegard—"

Mr. Railton made a step towards the swell of the School House, and D'Arcy popped out of the study with more haste than aristocratic calm for the nonce.

The swell of St. Jim's crossed out the part of the announcement on the notice-board to which the Housemaster took exception, at the same time determining to carry his appeal to the Head.

D'Arcy was very thoughtful in class that morning, settling in his mind the little speech he intended to make when he interviewed the Doctor.

His inattention in class earned him fifty lines of Schiller from Herr Schneider; but D'Arcy was too full of his ideas to care for a little thing like that. When morning school was over, the Fourth Form trooped out and met the Shell in the passage as they came out of their class-room.

Arthur Augustus tapped Tom Merry on the shoulder, and the hero of the Shell looked round with a good-humoured smile.

"I want you to come with me, Tom Mewwy, if you will have the kindness," said D'Arcy.

"Certainly. To the tuckshop?"

"No," said D'Arcy hastily. "I am goin' to the Head to ask permish to let me use the lectuah hall for the show on Saturday. Mr. Wailton says I cannot have it, but I have his permish to ask the Head, and so—"

"It won't be any good—"

"I shall put it to the Head in a pwaetical way, as one gentleman to another," said D'Arcy, with dignity. "I weally cannot see how he can fail to listen to weason. But I don't want to go alone. Will you come with me?"

"Oh, certainly!" said Tom Merry, laughing. "I don't mind. Are you going now?"

"Yaas, wathah. Before the Head goes to lunch."

"Come along, then," grinned Tom Merry. "Do you want me to do the talking?"

"Certainly not. You are wathah a clevah chap in some wespects, but in a mattah of this kind tact and judgment are the chief things wequired; and so it will be bettah for a fellow of my bwain power to do the talkin'."

The juniors arrived at the door of the Head's study, and D'Arcy tapped. A deep voice came from within:

"Come in!"

D'Arcy hesitated for a moment and pressed Tom Merry's arm.

"I say, Mewwy, I feel just a twifle nervous, you know."

"Do you really?" grinned Tom. "Well, no wonder."

"Do you think the Head will wegard it as a feahful cheek?"

"Yes, ra-her!"

"Oh, weally, Tom Mewwy—"

"Come in!" said the deep voice again.

D'Arcy opened the door, and the juniors entered the study. Dr. Holmes looked up from his writing-table, adjusted his pince-nez, and fixed his eyes on the two.

"Well, D'Arcy, Merry, do you want to speak to me?"

"Ya-a-as, wathah, sir," said D'Arcy, with an effort.

"You may go on."

"The fact is, sir," said D'Arcy, trying in vain to recall the neat little speech he had prepared for the occasion—"the fact is, sir, that—that the fact is, sir—"

The Head smiled.

"Well, what is the fact?" he asked.

"The fact is, sir—that we—are goin'—"

"Yes?"

"We—we are goin'—"

"Very well, D'Arcy," said the Head quietly. "You may go!"

"I—I don't mean that, sir—"

"We are going to give an animal show, sir, an exhibition of pets," said Tom Merry, to help out the floundering swell of St. Jim's.

"Pway do not intewwupt me, Tom Mewwy."

"Why, I was helping you to explain!"

"Yaas, yaas, I dare say your intentions are good, deah boy, but you confuse me with you intewwuptions," said D'Arcy. "Pway leave me to explain to the Head."

"Why, you image—"

"Wemembah our agreeement; I am to do the talkin'," said D'Arcy. "Pway be silent: you are wastin' the valuable time of our wespected headmastah!"

"You are indeed wasting my time," said the Head.

"May I request you to come to the point at once, D'Arcy?"

"Yaas, wathah, sir! I should have explained in a moment if Tom Mewwy had not persisted in intewwuptin' me. He is so beaslav obstinate—"

"I am very busy now, D'Arcy."

"Certainly, sir; that is why it is so vewy unweasonable of Mewwy to keep on intewwuptin' a fellow who is weally in a hurwy to come to the point."

"Oh, get on, Gussy!" said Tom Merry.

"You are intewwuptin' me again—"

"You may go, D'Arcy," said the Head, taking up his pen. "Thank-you, sir. But I am not finished yet. If Tom

Potts, the Office Boy!



Mewwy will keep silent I will explain in a moment. We are goin' to give an exhibition of pots in the lecture-hall."

"Really!" said the Head.

"Yes, sir. We want your kind permish to use the hall for the purpose."

"I am afraid I cannot grant it. An exhibition of that kind would be more suitably held in a less select spot than the college hall," said the Head.

"But pway allow me to explain, sir."

"I cannot discuss the matter with you, D'Arcy."

"But pway—"

"You may go."

"But—"

"Go!" thundered the Head in a voice that made the swell of the School House jump.

"Certainly, sir," said D'Arcy. "I should be extremely sorry to intwude anywhere where my pwesence was not appreciated."

And he left the Head's study. Tom Merry managed to restrain his merriment till he was safely out of the study, and then he gave a roar.

"Oh, Gussy! You'll be the death of me!"

"I weally fail to see anythin' to gwin at, Tom Mewwy. In my opinion, the Head has acted in a hasty mannah, and he weally owes me an apology."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, pway do not cackle like that; you weally fatigued me!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Arthur Augustus turned on his heel and swung away indignantly. And Tom Merry went off chuckling, to detail to the chums in the Shell the interview with the Head of St. Jim's.

CHAPTER 9.

Trouble on the Committee!

"HERE we are again!" said Figgins, coming up to the door of the committee-room and kicking it open.

"Hallo! All in the dark?"

It was evening, and Figgins & Co. had arrived for the committee meeting, and they had evidently arrived early. The room was empty and in darkness.

"Strike a light, Kerr," said Figgins.

The Scottish partner in the Co. struck a vesta and lighted the gas. The Co. proceeded to make themselves comfortable in the chairs. A few minutes later Arthur Augustus came in.

"Glad to see you, deah boys!" said the swell of the School House, with a polite bow. "I see you are the first. Ah, here come the Shell bounders!"

Tom Merry, Manners, and Lowther came in. Herries and Digby appeared a few minutes later, and the committee numbered nine. Then Arthur Augustus took the chair.

"Aren't we going to wait for Blake?" asked Tom Merry.

"Blake is no longah a membah of the committee," said D'Arcy. "He has wrefused to tendah an apology to the chairman for his conduct on the night of the first meeting, and so he will not be—"

D'Arcy was interrupted by the entrance of Blake into the committee-room. The swell of the School House rose to his feet, adjusted his monocle, and surveyed the late-comer.

"I'm in time, I see," said Blake cheerfully.

"Pway stand back, Blake! You cannot sit down here." Blake regarded the swell of St. Jim's with amazement.

"Hallo! What's the matter with you, Gussy?" he exclaimed. "Are you off your noble rocker, old kid?"

"Certainly not. But you cannot join this committee again until you have tendahed an apology to the chairman."

"Oh, rats to you!"

"Pway wetire!" said D'Arcy, with a wave of the hand. "Pway wetire, Jack Blake, and do not place me undah the painful necessity of usin' violence."

Blake cackled.

"It would be a painful necessity for somebody, I think," he replied. "Now, Gussy, don't be an ass. You're not in Colney Hatch now."

"I leave it to the committee," said Arthur Augustus, with dignity, "whethah they shall be twated diswewpectfully in the person of their chairman—"

"Never!" exclaimed Tom Merry. "Apologise!"

"Apologise!" roared the committee with one voice.

Blake looked round and grinned.

"Oh, very well!" he exclaimed. "I bow to the voice of the majority. Arthur Algernon, I hereby and thusly do expressly and substantially withdraw and take back the words, expressions, looks, actions, thoughts, and other things with which I did offend and anger your noble nibs."

"Vewy good!" said D'Arcy, beaming. "As one gentleman to anothah, I ovahlook your wude expwessions, and you are permitted to wejoin the honouwable committee. Gentlemen, I have a communication to make to you—"

"Half a mo'!" said Blake. "I have a question to ask."

"It is not in ordah."

"But it is very important."

"You must not intewwupt the chairman."

"But I want to know—"

"Oh, vewy well! Pway ask your beastlay questions."

"Has anybody seen my hedgehog?" asked Blake, looking round.

The committee shook their heads. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy turned red with wrath.

"Do you mean to say, Blake, that you have intewwupted the business of the meetin' to ask a widiculous question about a hedgehog?"

"Well, he's still lost. You see—"

"Silence! Ordah! Gentlemen, I have a communi—"

"If I don't catch him," said Blake, "he'll do some damage, as sure as a gun! Fellows make such a fuss over trifles. You remember you didn't like his getting into your hatbox, Gussy."

"Silence! Gentlemen, I have a communication to make to you. The Head has somewhat inconsiderately wefused us the use of the lecture hall, and we shall be compelled to hold the exhibition in the woodshed, aftah all."

"Rotten!" said the committee.

"Yaas, we must admit that it is wathah wotten, but as it cannot be helped we must make the best of it," said D'Arcy. "Aftah all, there is no reason why the show should not be held in the woodshed with gwent-success."

"What about Taggles? He's monarch of all he surveys in that department," said Tom Merry. "He might object to our filling up the woodshed with boxes and cages."

"Taggles will not ventuah to wowwy us," said D'Arcy. "If he does we will eithah tip him ten shillings or duck him in the pond."

"Ha, ha, ha! I wonder which he'd prefer!" cackled Monty Lowther.

AN EYE FOR COLOUR!



"The show will take place at the time awwanged in the woodshed, instead of in the lecture hall," said D'Arcy. "That is the only change. I may mention that I have a scheme in my head for cawwyin' off one of the pwizes, but I shall not tell you what it is, or you may get there first, deah boys."

"That's all right," said Figgins. "We've got a little scheme on, too, and it will come as a little surprise to you."

"What is the scheme, deah boys?"

"Oh, that's a secret, of course!"

"Wathah not," said D'Arcy. "As chairman of the committee, I have a wight to know all about it, and I call upon you to explain, Figgins."

"You can call till you're deaf and blind," said Figgins, "and then you can call again till you're black in the face, but I shan't let you know the wheeze."

"I wegard this language as diswespectful to the chairman. You must withdrow your words and explain the wheeze, or else wetiah from the committee."

"Oh, we'll retire, then!" said Figgins. "Come along, kids, it's about time we had tea!"

And Figgins & Co. retired from the committee.

"I wegard Figgins & Co. as a set of wottahs," said D'Arcy. "It was extremely diswespectful of them to wefuse information to the chairman. We shall settle who takes the pwizes by geneval vote of the committee, but we will make it a wule that no membah votes for himself."

Mellish put his head in at the door of the committee-room. D'Arcy screwed his eyeglass into his eye and stared at him freezingly.

"Pway wetiah, Mellish," he said. "These are pwivate quartahs—"

"I say, Blake!" exclaimed Mellish excitedly, without taking any notice of the swell of St. Jim's.

"Hallo! What is it?" said Blake, looking round.

"Pway wetiah—"

"Are you looking for a hedgehog, Blake?"

"Yes, rather! Have you seen my Adolphus?"

"I wefuse to allow Mellish to—"

"I thought so," said Mellish. "You're looking for a hedgehog, Blake?"

"Yes, yes! What about it?"

"Oh, you can go on looking, that's all!" said Mellish; and vanished.

Blake jumped up in hot wrath.

"Sit down, Blake!"

"I'm going to wring Mellish's neck for him first!" said Blake, and he dashed out of the committee-room.

"These pwceedings," said D'Arcy, looking round, "are most iwregular. I shall have to sewiously considah whether Blake and Figgins & Co. shall be allowed to weturn to the committee at all. Where are you goin', Hewwies?"

"It's time I fed my bulldog."

"Pway sit down."

But Herries was gone, and Digby with him.

The Terrible Three remained alone with Arthur Augustus. The swell of St. Jim's rose from his chair.

"Gentlemen," he said with dignity, "the meetin' of the committee is now dissolved."

And in a minute more the club-room was empty and in darkness.

CHAPTER 10.

Mr. Rateliff Finds the Missing Hedgehog!

TOM MERRY was looking thoughtful as he came out from morning school on Saturday. And Lowther and Manners inquired the why and wherefore.

"I was wondering what was the wheeze Figgins spoke of the other night," said Tom Merry thoughtfully. "They haven't let on about it yet."

"Perhaps it was only gas," said Lowther.

Tom Merry shook his head.

"No, it wasn't! Figgins has some wheeze in his head for collaring the first prize, I believe. I think I am pretty safe for the third prize," said Tom, with pardonable pride. "Three bob for the best-kept pet, and I don't think there are any pets in the school to beat my white rabbit in that line."

"Good!" said Lowther. "But we must make sure of at least one prize coming to our study, for the honour and glory of the thing. The first prize is for the most unique pet. Do you think Figgins & Co. have unearthed one?"

"Yes, that's my idea."

"Then we'd better keep an eye on them."

"Yes. If there's anything up against the School House we must be on it like a bird," said Tom Merry emphatically.

After dinner most of the juniors of St. Jim's were busy and excited.

The woodshed had been cleared to some extent, and all was in readiness for the show to be held.

It was to come off at four o'clock, and never was seen THE GEN LIBRARY.—No. 1,257.

such a procession of cages and boxes and baskets. From the "menagerie" where the pets were kept, from all sorts of mysterious corners of the old buildings, from the recesses of the junior studies, pets came forth in great numbers for the exhibition.

D'Arcy was observed to wear an anxious look as the time passed on. He made frequent walks down to the gate to survey the road, as if in expectation of something. Tom Merry tapped him on the shoulder as he stared down the lane, and the swell of St. Jim's gave a start.

"Hallo, Sister Ann!" said Tom Merry cheerfully. "Do you see anyone coming?"

"You quite startled me, Tom Mewwy."

"What are you looking for so anxiously, fathead?"

"Pway do not chawwactewise me as a fathead. I wegard it as wude. I am lookin' for the awwival of the cawwiah."

"The carrier! Has he got something for you?"

"Yaas, wathah! You know the second pwize in the



"Ha, ha, ha!" A roar of laughter swept round the quad as Figgins & Co. marched calmly across it, leading a camel! It was the first time such an animal had been seen within the precincts of the ancient school!

competition is for the largest numbah of pets kept by any single competitah—"

"Yes. Have you been sending to the circus in Rykcombe for a consignment of animals?"

"Oh, no! I have given an ordah to a London firm for two hundred white mice—"

"Two hundred white mice!"

"Yaas, wathah! They will be delivahed to the railway station this mornin', and the cawwier was to bring them along by dinnah-time."

"Two hundred white mice!" said Tom Merry. "So that was the idea you mentioned in committee the other night?"

"Yaas, wathah! Not a bad ideah, eithah!" said D'Arcy,

with much satisfaction. "I get vewy good ideahs some-times. They flash into my bwain—"

"Ha, ha, ha! But suppose your two hundred white mice arrive too late?"

"That would be too wotten! Pewwaps I could postpone the exhibition till Wednesday."

"Perhaps you couldn't do anything of the kind."

"Pway pardon me, but as chairman I have the powah to fix the time," said the swell of the School House, with dignity. "I hope, howevah, that it will not be necessawy. Ah, I can see the cawwhis now!"

The carrier's cart could be seen at last lumbering slowly up the lane.

"But I say," Tom Merry remarked, "it must have cost you a pretty penny for two hundred white mice and their cages, to say nothing of the carriage down from London."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"And all to take a prize of four shillings."



"Oh, you see, it's the honah and glorwy of the thing!" said D'Arcy. "We were bound to get at least one prize to our study. I think it pwobable that you will take third prize for those fat white wabbits of yours, and I thought I'd make sure of the second. I don't know who will take the first."

"Figgins is going to have a try, I think."

"I say," exclaimed Blake, coming up, "have you seen my hedgehog?"

"Ha, ha, ha! No. Haven't you found Adolphus yet?"

"No. He's been missing nearly a week."

"Bai Jove! And is there a twace of him yet?"

"Yes," grinned Blake. "Plenty of traces of him. He's

gnawed about everything that was gnawable in the School House. He had a particular weakness for hatboxes, and Knox's Sunday topper has been the latest victim."

"Ha, ha, ha! Poor old Knox!"

"Pway do not laugh at your schoolmate's fearful misfortune, Tom Mewwy. An accident to a silk toppah is no subject for mewwiment. I know what it is like. I feel for Knox, though he is a howwid bwute."

"Oh, rats!" said Tom. "There are your two hundred white mice—"

"Two hundred white mice!" gasped Blake. "My only hat!"

The carrier had arrived. Cage after cage was carried to the woodshed. D'Arcy superintended the work with an air of great pride and satisfaction. Blake went off in search of his hedgehog. He met Figgins & Co. coming out of the New House, and asked them the usual question.

"No," grinned Figgins; "I haven't seen it. Those little bounders burrow away like anything, and you'll probably never see him again."

"Well, you're a giddy Job's comforter!" exclaimed Blake, in disgust. "I want him particularly now, to show in the exhibition. He's not in the School House that I can discover, and I thought he might have burrowed his way over to your side."

"Shouldn't wonder," said Figgins. "You can look round the New House, if you like. It's pax for the afternoon. Come on, kids; we shall be late."

"Right-ho!" said Kerr and Fatty Wynn.

Blake looked at them curiously.

"Are you going out? The exhibition is coming off in another hour."

"We shall be back in time."

"Anything on?" asked Blake, guessing from the looks of Figgins & Co. that something unusual was in the wind.

"You'll see," was Figgins' non-committal reply.

And Figgins & Co. walked down to the gates, and turned into the lane, and strode away towards Rylcombe. Blake would have been inclined to look into the matter, but at present the mystery of the missing hedgehog claimed all his attention.

He went into the New House, taking advantage of the peace that was established between the rivals of the afternoon, and inquired right and left for his hedgehog. Nobody had seen it, however.

"Hang it!" murmured Blake. "I suppose I shall have to give it up. Hallo! What's that?"

There was the sound of a heavy crash in Mr. Ratcliff's study.

Mr. Ratcliff was the Housemaster of the New House, and one of the sourest-tempered persons at St. Jim's, and Blake had not ventured to ask him any questions about the missing hedgehog.

But, as it happened, Mr. Ratcliff was the one person who could have afforded him information on the point.

Crash, crash!

Blake was startled. Heavy objects seemed to be flying about in the Housemaster's study, and something was certainly wrong.

"My hat!" murmured Blake. "There's something up! I say, Monteith!"

Monteith, the head prefect of the New House, stopped as Blake called to him.

He heard the disturbance in the study, and came quickly towards the spot.

"There's something wrong in there," said Blake. "I believe Mr. Ratcliff's got tipsy, and is smashing up the furniture."

"Don't be an ass!" said Monteith, laughing, and he went to the Housemaster's door, knocked, and opened it.

There was a strange scene of confusion inside the study. Several articles of furniture were overturned. Mr. Ratcliff, his sour, sallow face aflame with rage, was in the act of hurling a heavy Greek lexicon. It certainly looked for a moment as if Blake's surmise was correct.

"Mr. Ratcliff, what is the matter?" gasped Monteith.

The Housemaster whirled round.

"Look!" he shouted.

He pointed to an open drawer of a cabinet, full of books and papers. They were in rags and tatters. Blake gave a jump. He knew that Adolphus must have been there. The hedgehog had evidently visited the New House, and had taken refuge in that deep drawer. Undoubtedly it had been shut up there, and then it had set to work gnawing. The result was disastrous for Mr. Ratcliff's literary work.

"I opened the drawer, and the animal popped out," said Mr. Ratcliff, gasping with rage. "I have not been able to seize it. Ah, there it is!"

Crash went the lexicon!

"Here, I say, hold on!" exclaimed Blake. "That's my hedg—"

Monteith shook him quickly by the shoulder, as a hint to keep that piece of information to himself. Blake was quick to take the hint.

"Ah, I have him now!" shouted Mr. Ratcliff.

He had routed Adolphus out of a corner, and sprang to seize him. Instantly the hedgehog rolled himself up, presenting an impenetrable array of spikes. Mr. Ratcliff drew back his hand very quickly.

"It is a hedgehog!" he exclaimed. "See that it does not escape, Monteith, while I get the fire-tongs, and—"

He dashed to the grate. The hedgehog uncurred itself, and scuttled out of the room in a twinkling. Blake dashed after it at full speed.

"Where is it?" exclaimed Mr. Ratcliff, glaring round and brandishing the fire-tongs in his hands.

"I'm afraid it's gone, sir," said the prefect.

"Confound it! Do you know who it belongs to?"

"I'll see if it's in the passage," said Monteith, apparently not hearing the question. And he followed Blake.

But Adolphus, the hedgehog, was not discovered. And Blake had to give up the idea of including him in the exhibition.

CHAPTER 11. The Exhibition.

THE quarter chimed out from the school tower, and Arthur Augustus D'Arcy came out of the School House and walked towards the woodshed. He was joined by Digby, Blake, and Herries, and in the quadrangle the Terrible Three came up.

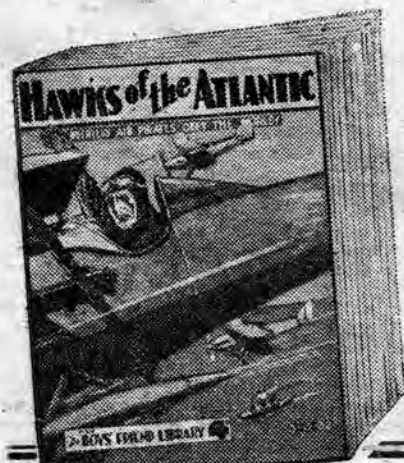
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"The exhibition opens in a quartah of an hour," said D'Arcy. "Pway do not be late, Tom Mewwy. The committee ought to be on the spot early."

"Right-ho, we're coming with you!" said Tom Merry. "Have you fixed it up with Taggles, though, about the woodshed?"

"Yaas, wathah! I have pwesented him with five shillings, and explained to him that if we are intewwupted we shall wag him. He has agweed that we are to have the woodshed until half-past five."

"Good! We ought to make up the five bob between us—"

"Not at all, deah boy! That is all wight. Here we are! Come in, gentlemen! I see that most of the exhibitors are pwesent alweady."

There was already a goodly crowd in the woodshed. The faggots and other impedimenta had been cleared back. There was really a great deal of room, but the juniors of St. Jim's pretty well filled it.

"Where are Figgins & Co.?" asked D'Arcy, looking round. "Haven't the unpunctual boundahs awwived yet?"

"Haven't seen them," said Mellish. "They went down to Ryloombe some time back. And I heard Fatty Wynn say something about a circus. If they've gone to the circus they'll be late for the show."

"I hardly think that Figgins would twent the committee in such an extremely diswespsefult mannah," said D'Arcy, shaking his head. "The show does not open till four o'clock, so he has five or six minutes yet."

"Pretty crowded here," remarked Tom Merry. "Clear a space here for the committee. Have you got the prizes with you, D'Arcy?"

"Yaas, wathah!"

The swell of the School House felt in his pockets. He produced a handful of silver, and laid it on the table before the committee.

He put aside two half-crowns for the first prize, two florins for the second, and three shillings for the third. Then he swept the rest of the cash back into his pocket.

"Hallo! What's the fearful row?" exclaimed Tom Merry.

There was a commotion outside. Tom Merry ran to the door and stared out, and then burst into a fit of uncontrollable laughter.

"What is the mattah?" asked D'Arcy, without moving from his place, as became the dignity of a chairman of a committee.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Tom Merry. "Figgins & Co. take the cake this time."

There was a general rush to the door and window.

Then a roar of laughter went up, mingled with cheers.

Figgins & Co. were coming towards the woodshed, and in their midst strode a huge camel, guided by three ropes held by the New House trio.

"A camel!" gasped Blake. "My only Aunt Jane!"

"A camel! Ha, ha, ha!"

Taggles, the school porter, was following the Co., staring dazedly at the camel. A crowd of fellows were following, too, laughing and shouting. Figgins & Co. seemed to be quite unconscious of the furor their appearance had excited. They held on to the ropes, and guided the camel towards the woodshed.

As a matter of fact, the animal was a powerful one, and not too tractable, and Figgins & Co. had all their work cut out to guide it.

"Hallo!" exclaimed Tom Merry, as they reached the door. "Where did you pick up that pretty thing?"

"We claim this as our pet," said Figgins loftily. "I think we'll take a prize with it. Come hon, you obstinate beast!"

"Vewy well. Your claim is allowed, Figgins. That is, if you can get the beast into the exhibition. Othahwise it—"

"Oh, I'll get him in!" said Figgins confidently. "He's got too long a neck, that's all, and he won't nod his beastly head. His neck's long enough for one of D'Arcy's high collars—"

"Oh, weally, Figgins—"

"But we'll manage him. Come up, you brute! I say, Merry, hang on to his nose, like a good fellow."

"I think I'd rather be excused, thank you," said Tom Merry, laughing.

"Drag on the ropes, you chaps."

Figgins & Co. threw their whole weight on the ropes, and the camel was simply forced to lower its head by their combined weight. Someone smote it behind, and it lumbered into the woodshed.

"Look out!" shrieked D'Arcy. "You are wunnin' into the cages containin' my white mice!"

Figgins dragged the camel back. It was brought to a halt at last in the middle of the shed, with a drooping head, the roof not being high enough to allow it to resume its former attitude.

The hour had struck from the clock-tower.

"Gentlemen," said D'Arcy, "the exhibition is now open! The committee will inspect the pets in ordah, and then award the prizes."

"Hear, hear!"

"Figgins, if you are to act on the committee, you must get somebody else to hold that wotten camel."

"Right you are!" said Figgins. "I'm pretty tired of it, anyway."

"I'll take your rope," said Mellish, coming forward, with his most obliging air, which usually covered intended mischief.

Figgins gave him the rope unsuspiciously.

"Give me yours, Kerr," said Gore, exchanging a grin with Mellish.

And the Scottish partner in the Co. gave him the rope.

Fatty Wynn relinquished the rope he held to Pratt.

"Now we're ready for business!" said Figgins. "Mind you don't let that brute go, kids! The showman said he wasn't very good-tempered. If he begins to kick, you're to hold on tight to the rope."

"Oh, are we?" said Pratt.

"Yes, certainly. If he got loose he might make a wreck of the shed and everything in it. You don't know what a camel's like when he gets his back up."

"He's got his back up already, I think," said Monty Lowther, "unless it's Figg's face that has given him the hump!"

"Pway let us pwoceed to business—"

"And don't play any games with that camel, Mellish," said Figgins. "He's got to be returned this side up with care—that is, of course, if the Head doesn't give me permission to keep him. The showman is coming to the school gates at five o'clock for him—if I don't keep him—"

"Pway let us pwoceed to business—"

"I don't see why we can't get to business now," added Figgins. "We're only waiting for D'Arcy. Aren't you ready, Gussy?"

"I have been weady—"

"It's no good hanging about," said Figgins. "Gussy ought to be ready. He's always keeping somebody waiting."

"Oh, weally, Figgins—"

"Let's get on with the washing. We ought to go round and inspect every one of the pets, and make notes. Hallo! Where did all these giddy cages of white mice come from?"

"They're mine, deah boy! There are two hundred of them—"

"My word! You'll take second prize, Gussy!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"But you'd take first prize as a champion ass!"

"I wufuse to be—"

"Here's Tom Merry's white rabbits! They look nice. I say, are you holding that camel safely, Mellish?"

"Certainly," said Mellish. "You can trust me, Figgins!"

"Rather!" said Gore, winking at Mellish. "We'll look after him like the apple of our eye, Figgins."

"Pway let us pwoceed—"

There was a sudden shrill squeal from the camel. The ropes were jerked away from the hands that held them, and the camel reared, and knocked its head against the roof of the woodshed, trampling furiously to and fro.

There was a scamper of the juniors to escape.

"What's the matter?" shouted Figgins.

"Blessed if I know!" gasped Pratt. "The brute's mad, I think!"

"Hold the rope—"

"I've let go!"

"Mellish stuck a pin into the camel!" yelled Curly Gibson. "I saw him!"

"You beastly cad!" yelled Figgins, giving Mellish an open-handed smack that sent him reeling. "Catch that brute, kids!"

Mellish went to the ground; but it was not so easy to catch the camel. The animal was hurt and indignant, and its naturally bad temper was excited. The ropes whisked about as it moved far too rapidly for the juniors to have any chance of catching hold of them. And the attempts to recapture it, and the shouting and confusion, only added to the excitement of the camel.

It trampled to and fro, and there was a crash as it dashed against the pile of cages containing D'Arcy's white mice and sent them hurtling to the ground.

D'Arcy gave a shriek:

"Captuah that howwid bwute; it will twead on my

white mice! There goes Tom Mewwy's white wabbits! Figgins, I call upon you to captuah that soundwel of a camel!"

Figgins was red and gasping with his exertions.

"How can I?" he gasped. "He's kicking like a giddy buck-jumper! Come up, you beast! I wish I had a gun! Hallo, there he goes!"

The camel knocked over the bench which served as a committee-table, and the first, second, and third prizes rolled to the floor and mixed there.

Then crash followed crash, as the excited camel plunged about in the confined space of the woodshed, and the various exhibits of the pet-keepers of St. Jim's rolled about in various directions, to an accompaniment of shrill squeals and squeaks and growls and snappings and yells.

The juniors dodged hither and thither to escape the camel, and added to the wreck, and they dodged out of the shed as fast as they could.

"I can't catch it!" cried Figgins, at last. "Drive the brute out of the shed, kids! Shove him out!"

"I'll set my bulldog on him!" exclaimed Herries, struck by a bright idea.

"Don't!" yelled Figgins. "You—"

But Herries had already released the bulldog. The voice of that animal had already been added to the pandemonium that reigned in the woodshed, and now Towser took an active part in the proceedings.

"Seize him, Towser!" shouted Herries excitedly.

Towser sprang to the camel.

The huge animal floundered out of the woodshed and loped away, the bulldog clinging to him behind.

"My word!" gasped Tom Merry. "There will be a row over this! Call that fiend of a dog off, Herries, you fathead!"

"Call him off!" yelled Figgins, shaking Herries by the shoulder in his excitement.

"Right-ho!" gasped Herries. "I only wanted to—"

"Call him off—"

"Yes, all right, I only—"

"Call him off!" shrieked Figgins.

"Towser! Towser! Good dog! Come back! Here, Towser! Good dog!" shouted Herries, pursuing his pet across the quadrangle.

But the good dog did not obey. He clung to the camel as if he loved him, and it was in vain that the voice of his master called. But the camel suddenly jerked him off, and the bulldog rolled on his back. He was up again in a twinkling and returning to the charge, when the hind foot of the camel caught him in the chest, and hurled him a dozen yards away.

Herries dashed up and got a grip on his collar. But it was hardly needed. Towser had had enough.

The excited animal was tearing towards the gate. A man in a silk hat and a fancy waistcoat was there, and as the camel passed out he seized one of the ropes and led it away. It was the showman to whom the camel belonged, and it was fortunate that he was already on the spot.

"My word!" gasped Tom Merry. "What an afternoon! I say, Figgins, old chap, if you ever get any more original ideas, bury them at once, for my sake!"

"Oh, rats!" said Figgins.

"The exhibition is simply ruined!" said D'Arcy. "It will take us all the afternoon to sort out our pets, and there is certain to be a row about that camel!"

"Ha, ha, ha! Not much doubt on that point!"

"Never mind, the New House takes first prize," said Figgins. "I'm satisfied—"

"The prizes will want finding before anybody takes them!" grinned Tom Merry. "Let's go and sort out the pets, and, as far as I am concerned, this is the last exhibition I'm going in for. I find it too wearying!"

"The ideah was a good one," said D'Arcy. "It was you wottahs who ruined it. Pway let us get the pets to wights before dark!"

It was a long task getting the pets sorted out and housed. Many of the cages had been broken, and all sorts of animals had escaped. The hunt for them was long and arduous, and it was not finished until long after dark.

"Never mind," said Blake, as he went into Study No. 6 and lighted the gas, "it has been exciting, at any rate, and it's all in the day's work. I suppose I shall never see my hedgehog again— Hallo, hallo!"

Blake broke off. There, in the study easy-chair, was curled up the well-known form of Adolphus, the hedgehog, fast asleep!

THE END.

(Don't forget, chums, there's a double-length St. Jim's yarn in next week's issue of the GEM! It's called "Priscilla the Peacemaker!" It's great!

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THE LAST LAP!



By
WISHART PHILP.

**One lap to go, with the car in the lead, but the driver's hit by a stone!
So a schoolboy clings to the kicking wheel and crashes through on his own!**

CHAPTER 1. Crash!

ZOOM!

The open exhaust of a speeding racing car sent a shrieking crescendo of sound echoing across the valley.

"Come on, Rikky, a racer!" yelled Jack Martin, and started sprinting across the field to where the hedge marked the line of the road, his chum, Michael Rikkersly, at his heels.

Both chums were members of West Moreton School in Ireland, and both were mad about motor-racing, which accounted for their present excitement. Since they had heard that the Irish International 500-mile race was to be held on a road circuit not far from the school, their enthusiasm had reached fever-heat; and now that the date of the race was drawing near, they spent all their spare time hanging around the racing camps.

They broke through the hedge together, and scrambled to their feet just as a low-built racer swung into view. It came towards them with an acceleration that almost took their breath away, front wheels stamping the road, back wheels flinging out a fan-shaped screen of stones as they sought for a grip on the loose surface. The whine of its supercharger rose to a shrill scream.

Jack Martin saw that the car was painted green, and recognised its quaint, humpback body. He spun round on his friend, his brown eyes bright with excitement.

"Rikky, it's it. It's the mystery car!"

Rikky nodded, his sunburned face suffused in a wide grin, his untidy mop of red hair blowing all over his forehead.

Everyone had heard of the mystery car; but very few people had actually seen it. It had been entered for the race as a Saxon Special, and its garage doors were kept locked. Even the pertinacious newspaper men, who had come to write about the race, had failed to find out anything about it. They called it a dark horse, and said it was terrifically fast. But they didn't know for certain. That Jack and Rikky, rambling across country, should have come on it being tried out on this deserted stretch of road was just luck.

For a split second the car was level with them, and the chums caught a fleeting glimpse of its driver hunched tensely over the wheel. Then the scream of its supercharger was

lost in the blare of the exhaust, and it was past, hurtling towards the next bend.

The boys watched the car as it receded, waiting to see it take the corner; then Jack felt Rikky's fingers digging into his arm.

"Jack, he hasn't slowed! He'll never get round!"

Jack knew that it was true. The bend was deceptive. It was more acute than it seemed. And the car was going much too fast to take it.

In that second the driver, too, realised his mistake. The chums heard the engine cut out, and watched as he flung the car into the treacherous bend. For a moment it looked as if he might get round. Then suddenly the tail of the car swung out in a dust-biting skid.

Jack found that his mouth had gone dry. He couldn't look away. He saw the driver wrench over the wheel, fighting to straighten the madly plunging machine. Heard the wild yowl of tortured tyres. The back wheels were spinning madly. The tail of the car was whipping first one way and then the other as if the speed-iron had suddenly grown tired of its servitude, and was striving to throw off the driver who controlled it.

Now the car was right across the road, flinging itself towards the roadside ditch and destruction. The driver was powerless. He still wrestled with the wheel, but his strength was no longer sufficient to hold the iron monster. The back wheels bit into the soft turf at the side of the road, then found the ditch. With a dull thud the tail buried itself in the earth. The bonnet jerked upwards. The crash was over.

Jack found himself by Rikky's side, racing towards the wrecked car. A moment before there had been an inferno of noise. Now, all that remained was the nose of the car pointing grotesquely skywards from the ditch, and the pall of white dust that hung motionless above the road.

Jack reached the wreck ten yards ahead of Rikky; and, scrambling along the ditch-edge, leaned over the front of the speed-iron to see the cockpit. He found himself looking into the face of a youngster not long out of his teens, who was already trying to haul himself out of his almost vertical seat. When he saw Jack, he pushed his fair hair off his face with a greasy hand.

"Hallo, chaps!" he said, grinning. "Come and give me a leg up!"

Jack was too astonished to speak. He had expected to see someone at least ten years' older. Certainly not this

lithe-bodied athlete, who could take such a crash and then laugh before the dust had had time to settle.

It was Rikky who answered.

"Are you all right, sir?" he said. "Gosh! We thought you'd be nearly dead!"

"Sorry to disappoint you," laughed the stranger, "but as far as I can tell, I've come off lightly. Perhaps I'll do better for you next time!"

The chums laughed. Then they helped the stranger back to the road, where he shook himself and pronounced himself intact.

"Though I bet I'll have some bruises to-morrow," he prophesied.

Other than the back axle, which was inaccessible, the machine proved to have been as lucky as its driver. Certainly it was dented badly, and the tyres were in ribbons; but, as far as its owner could see, there was nothing seriously wrong.

The little party waited until a passing car had been stopped and requisitioned to fetch a breakdown truck from the nearest garage; then Jack pulled his West Moreton cap out of his pocket and prepared to leave. Neither of the chums wanted to go, but both felt that they had no further excuse for staying.

Jack held out his hand to the stranger.

"I think we'd better be pushing on," he said. "You won't want us hanging about your mystery car any longer."

To the chums' excitement the stranger laughed.

"You've been reading the papers," he accused. "Mystery car, my foot! Just because it's got some new gadgets in it that aren't covered by patents, and I keep it locked up to prevent anyone pinching the ideas, everyone calls it a mystery car, and imagines that if it was let loose it would bark like a dog and run round on its own!"

"Then you don't mind us staying till the breakdown truck arrives?" said Rikky.

"Mind? No, I'd like it! I'll tell you about my car, if you like."

If they liked! The chums stowed their caps back into their pockets and, together with their new friend, sat down by the side of the road. When they had settled, the stranger said:

"Perhaps we had better introduce ourselves. My name's Donald Saxon. What's yours?"

They told him; and went on to explain about their school, and how they had to stay on during the holidays because their people lived in India.

"What putrid luck!" he said.

"It was," corrected Rikky. "But since there has been the race to keep things moving it's been all right. Hasn't it, Jack?"

Jack nodded; then he turned to Saxon.

"But, go on, tell us about your car," Jack prompted. "She sounded as if she were jolly powerful!"

Saxon assented.

"Powerful enough and fast enough," he said; "the only snag is that I can't make anyone realise how good she really is. You see, I made her!"

"That's why it's called a Saxon Special?" said an enlightened Rikky.

"Exactly!" He paused, then he went on: "I've been mad about cars ever since I was small."

"Like us!" Jack put in.

"Yes, I suppose so. Well, to carry on. Two years ago I was left a thousand pounds and the family house—it's old and rather famous, by the way. I'd got an old car, and I'd fitted one or two gadgets of my own on, and improved it. I wanted to get into the Steyne works as a designer, but I couldn't do it. You can't, without influence. So I decided that the best thing I could do was to prove that I was some good first, then ask them for a job afterwards. That's why I built the car."

He looked over his shoulder at the wreck in the ditch.

"Unfortunately," he went on, "it cost more than I had anticipated, and by the time I had finished it, and got out here, I had not only used up my thousand quid, but mortgaged the house as well. If I win the race, then I expect I'll be able to get a good job, and everything will be all right. If I don't"—he was silent for a moment—"I expect they'll sell up the house and throw me out on one ear," he finished. "Oh, it's a tall order all right; but I've got enough faith in my car to believe that I stand a very fair chance—if only I have reasonable luck!"

Suddenly he broke off and laughed.

"Sorry to blight your young hearts with all my troubles," he said, "and, any rate, there'll be time enough to worry after I've lost!"

They went on to talk about cars until the breakdown truck arrived.

CHAPTER 2.

An Invitation!

LATER, when the wrecked Special had been retrieved from its temporary resting-place in the ditch and set once more upon its four wheels, Donald Saxon came over to where the chums were standing.

"Care to come down to the garage to-morrow morning?" he said. "I know a first-class place for cream buns; and I think I owe you something for coming to my assistance."

"You bet we would!" said Jack; and he spoke for both.

Michael Rikkorsly knocked again.

The chums were standing before the garage that Donald Saxon had rented to house his car until the race, and they had come there in response to Saxon's invitation of the previous day. Rikky had already knocked once, and the chums were just beginning to imagine that there was nobody in, when a voice from the other side of the door proved that there was.

"'Arf a mo'! 'Arf a mo'!" it said. "Give a bloke a chance. 'Oo is it—Gunga Din?"

The voice was so richly Cockney that Jack and Rikky could not help smiling.

There was a sound of bolts being drawn, and then the door was opened sufficiently to admit a diminutive man in a very greasy jacket. He had a small head covered with red hair, not unlike Rikky's, and his mouth, set in a pinched, befreckled face, was excessively large. When he saw the chums, he tilted his head to one side and said:

"'Allo! Where's the fire?"

"I'm sorry," said Rikky. "I didn't think you'd heard the first time. We want to see Mr. Saxon, please. He's expecting us."

"That's all right, chum! You 'ang on a jiffy, an' I'll get 'im!"

Saxon proved to be just as friendly as he had been at their first meeting. He took them into the garage and introduced them to the little Cockney, who turned out to be Saxon's mechanic, and whose name, they learned, was Ginger Cook. Then he showed them round.

The car, without wheels and bodywork, was supported by wooden blocks in the middle of the floor, and all round were benches covered with tools, and micrometers, and scribbling blocks, and other instruments that the chums had heard about, but didn't know how to use. They had never been in a racing camp before, and Saxon let them poke about as much as they liked.

Later, over a generous spread of cakes and ginger-beer in the cafe that the speedman had found, they chatted about the race, contrasting the chances of the British Talbots and the Alfa Romeos from Italy, arguing about the lap speeds that might be expected from the tiny Austin Sevens and M.G. Midgets, and conjecturing whether anything would be able to hold the massive Besta Charrells that had come over from Germany specially for the race, and which, being the fastest cars of all, would start from scratch. As they listened to him, the chums found themselves sharing to some extent the confidence that Saxon had in his car.

When they had finished eating, Saxon leaned forward and spoke:

"If I propose something," he said, "will you promise to tell me if the idea doesn't appeal to you?"

They promised.

"It's about getting the car ready," he went on. "Yesterday's crash has put us rather behind. The back axle suffered for one thing, and if we are going to have the car ready in time, we shall need help. I couldn't afford to pay you anything, but if you'd care to give me a hand—well, just for the experience—I'd be awfully grateful!"

Jack nodded excitedly.

"Who wouldn't?" he said.

"Yes, who wouldn't?" echoed Rikky.

There were four days before the race, and the chums spent every spare moment in the garage, and revelled in it. By the evening before the race the car stood in the middle of the shed covered with a tarpaulin. Everything that could be done to it had been done. It was ready. And even Ginger Cook, the little Cockney mechanic, had to admit that the chums could work when they really wanted to.

The race was to be held on the Saturday, and by the Friday evening the town was packed. From Wednesday onwards a steady flow of visitors had swept into the town, and their coming had shaken the little place out of its habitual slumber and filled it with bustling activity.

Now, with the coming of the great day, and with the promise of fine weather, the town had gone en fete. From

every house fluttered flags and bunting, and across the street were stretched huge banners, flaunting the superiority of this oil, or shrieking the excellence of those tyres. Every spare hoarding had been covered by newspaper placards, each of which promised the first and most accurate account of the race; and every corner boasted hastily erected signs directing the late-comers to the course and to the car parks. Everywhere, too, were little groups of laughing, chattering people hurrying to vantage points on the circuit.

Jack and Rikky walked up the main street whistling. Their hands were thrust deep into their pockets and their hearts were light. It was the kind of day that made you want to whistle. Their work on the Saxon Special had won them places in the Saxon replenishment pit, and they were going up to the garage to collect the armlets that would get them into the competitors' part of the course.

CHAPTER 3.

The Note!

STILL whistling, they entered the garage. It was empty now, and the doors stood wide open, for Saxon had already taken his car down to the course.

Jack found the armlets, and started to fix one to his arm. Half-way through the operation he found Rikky at his elbow, holding out a slip of paper for him to read. Rikky said:

"Look at this, Jack!" and there was something strained in his voice.

Written in an illiterate hand was a brief message.

"I have took measles, and they have took me to hospital. I have got a tempreture 103, and they won't let me go in the car. Please tell Donald I'm sorry."

Nothing more.

It was Jack who first realised the full significance of the scrawled message. He turned on Rikky.

"Rikky, we've got to have a mechanic. It says so in the regulations. They won't let Donald race!"

Rikky gasped.

"And they'll sell up his house," Jack continued, "just as he said."

They fell silent. It seemed as if all their work had been for nothing. Presently Jack turned dismally towards the door.

"We'd better go and tell him," he said. "Someone's got to!" He walked listlessly across the garage.

"Stop!"

Jack turned back. Rikky was standing where Jack had left him, and Jack saw that there was an excited flush on his face.

"Come back, Jack!" he said. "You've got to help me find Ginger's overalls. I'm going as Donald's mechanic."

"Don't be a fathead! You'd be spotted at once. Saxon wouldn't let you!"

"He wouldn't know. No one would. I'm the same height as Ginger. I've got the same colour hair. With goggles and a crash helmet, I'd pass anywhere!"

"You can't!" Jack gasped. His chum's recklessness frightened him. "Think what would happen if the car broke down! It's impossible!"

"It is possible, Jack; and if I don't do it, the car won't be allowed to race at all. And you know the consequences of that!"

Jack gave in. He realised that Rikky was right. It was better for Saxon to race with a spurious mechanic in ignorance of what had happened to Ginger, than to be forced to relinquish all chance of victory. Especially when the cost of failure was so high.

They found the clothes at the back of the garage, and feverishly Rikky clambered into them. There was little enough time now before the race was due to start.

"You go to the pit and see if you can work the signals by yourself," Rikky told Jack, as he snapped his goggles over his eyes; and the next moment the two chums were running down the now deserted street towards the course.

The start was to be effected by lining the cars up on one side of the road, and the mechanics and drivers on the other. When the starting maroon went, the crews had to race for their cars and get away as soon as they could. Although all the cars were starting together, they were not really starting level, for the race was to be run on handicap, and most of the cars had been allotted a certain number of laps start from the biggest racers.

When Rikky burst on to the course the drivers were already lined up opposite their machines. He pushed his way along the line and fell in beside Saxon.

Saxon gasped with relief.

"Gosh, Ginger," he said, "I thought you were going to miss the boat!"

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 1,257.

Rikky looked the other way. He was frightened that Saxon should recognise him and refuse to let him ride. His pulses were hammering with excitement, and he knew that it was not the run down from the garage that was making it so difficult to breathe. He was frightened, too, though he wouldn't have admitted it. Now Saxon was talking again, and Rikky had to force himself to listen.

"When the maroon goes, let me get in first," he was saying, "then we shan't get in each other's way!" Rikky nodded.

He felt quite incapable of speech. Surely the maroon must go soon, he thought! Surely it must be nearly time! The agony of suspense was frightful. It was the worst part of all. Then Jack was in the pit waving to them, and Saxon was waving back, and other competitors were fidgeting as well. Rikky found himself envying Saxon's calm. He found himself talking under his breath, saying: "How much longer! How much longer! How much longer!"

The maroon burst with a silver flash hundreds of feet in the air, leaving a little, compact puff of smoke floating placidly in the empty blueness of the sky.

There was a mad stampede for cars. A crackling growl, as someone's engine broke into song. Rikky slipped into the seat beside Saxon, clutching the side, tense. With a roar that cut out all other sound the Saxon Special woke to life. Its super-tuned engine "revved" with a wild surge of power; then they were moving, ferreting their way between a howling, snarling pack of eager speed-iron. Dizzily Rikky clung to the side of the car as they rocketed into the shrieking confusion of the start. He felt the car pushing him in the back, felt the wild rush of air against his cheek, and the Special was slipping into her stride.

Leaving from the Saxon pit, of which he was the sole occupant, Jack watched the surging mass of cars hurtling towards the first corner, a quarter of a mile down the course. The Saxon Special had lost itself long since in the exhaust smoke of the cars behind it, and Jack now found it impossible to follow any one car.

A moment more, and they were gone, leaving only the rapidly moving finger of his stop-watch to prove to Jack that the race had actually started.

It was just under ten minutes later when the first car swung round the hairpin bend away to the left and zoomed up the straight to finish its first lap. It was the No. 1 car of the Besta Charrell team, and behind it, worrying at its heels, sped a long line of brightly hued speed irons painted in their country's racing colours. Another white Besta Charrell was second; then came a blue French Bugatti, with two Talbots thundering in its wake; and behind them a blood-red Alfa Romeo half a length ahead of a super-charged Steyne, battled with the two shrieking Italian Maseratis that would not be shaken off. Farther back still, and duelling with another Alfa Romeo for tenth place, sped the green Saxon Special.

They swept past the pits at over eighty miles an hour, and were gone again.

According to Jack's stop-watch the Special had lapped at seventy-three miles an hour from a standing start. If only Saxon could keep that up they might win.

Lap after lap the speeding cars fought one another for position; and as each lap was reeled off, their tiny counterparts on the scoreboard opposite the pits crept slowly upwards. The pace that the leaders were setting was terrific, and it was certain that few of the cars would stand the strain that such speed was imposing.

Watching from the pit, Jack saw few of the exciting incidents that marked the progress of the race; but, nevertheless, he found himself absorbed in the ceaseless stream of big and little machines that swept past him. He could see the pit work, for instance, and was amazed at the smartness with which small repairs were carried out and the cars sent on again. Sometimes, as the race grew older, the breakage would be too big to repair in time, and then the car would be pushed off to the dead car park to take no further part in the race.

In the interval between the appearances of the Saxon Special, Jack watched the scoreboard. The baby cars, helped by big handicaps, were still miles ahead, but the faster of the big machines were rapidly closing on them. Soon they would begin to challenge the slower of the limit cars. A Bugatti easily led the big cars, Jack noted; but he had heard the mechanics in the next pit say that it was being overdriven, and when, a few laps later, it failed to reappear, Jack knew that they had been right.

Its going left the big Besta Charrell and the smaller Saxon Special racing neck and neck, twin favourites for first place. The Special was still more than a lap ahead of the German car, for it had had two laps start; but the Charrell was more powerful than its rival, and could make up time by its extra speed on the straight stretches.

At the end of three hours' racing the Special was

almost a lap ahead, but after that time it drew quietly away. It seemed as if the German car had made its supreme effort to catch the little green car, and, knowing that it had failed, had lost heart. Nevertheless, it was far from beaten: it hung on grimly, ready to jump into first place the moment the British car should falter.

But Saxon never did falter. He was driving a marvelous race, forcing the car round the bends in a way that thrilled even the most blasé spectator. Time and time again, when he threw the car into a corner in a controlled skid, the crowd drew back from the road, holding their breath. Each time it seemed that he could not avoid a crash, and each time he corrected his skid with perfect judgment, and sent the little car storming on.

A thousand times Rikky shut his eyes, expecting the car to fly off the road, and a thousand times he opened them to find the speed-iron surging onwards, the danger past. Ever the machine thundered within an ace of disaster, yet always it survived. By-and-by Rikky began to gain confidence and to surrender himself to the joy of speed. And all the time they were leaving the German car behind.

An hour later, when Jack knew that nothing but accident could rob his friends of victory, he whooped with joy, and the mechanics in the next pit, whose car now lay in the dead car park, rejoiced that at any rate a British car was winning, and whooped with him.

"Ambulance!" he gasped. "Ambulance, quick! The car in front chucked up a stone, and it hit him—his forehead; I think he's fainted."

The ambulance men were there. They lifted the fainting Saxon from his car, and laid him on the pit counter.

And the seconds were ticking by. Rikky looked at Jack; then he snapped his goggles back into place.

"You'll have to be mechanic now!" he said sharply. "Come on! Get in!" He himself was already in the driving-seat.

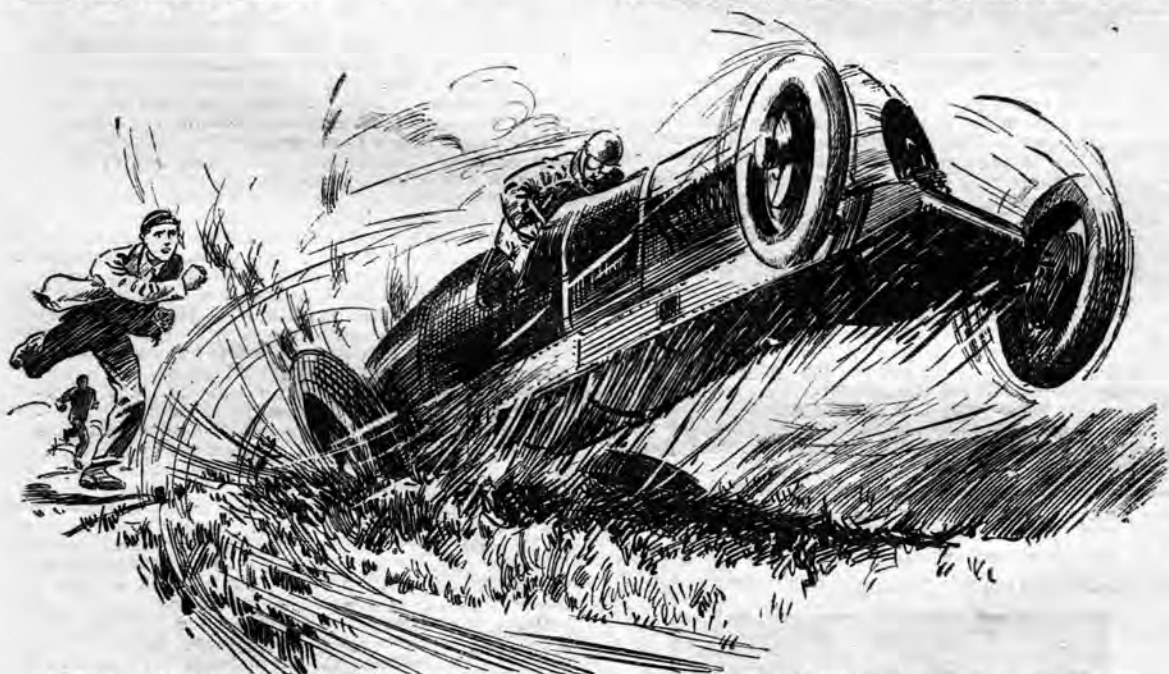
Quickly Jack slipped into the seat beside him. There was nothing they could do for Saxon.

"What are you going to do?" he asked. Rikky was revving the engine.

"Finish the race!" he answered laconically; and the next moment they were roaring through the gears.

Rikky clung desperately to the wheel, his jaw set, the throttle pushed home. The whole stop had taken little more than a minute, and that meant that, with one lap to go, they were still almost two minutes ahead of the speeding Charrell. Jack knew that Rikky could drive a bit. He had learnt to manage an old Morris car of his uncle, and had once touched forty miles an hour. Both knew that speed would have to be greatly exceeded now.

It seemed only a moment and they were rushing at the



CRASH! The [skidding car left the road and hurtled headlong into the ditch, the driver fighting wildly but in vain! Jack and Rikky raced towards it at full pelt—eager to be of some assistance.

With only two laps to go the Saxon Special was nearly three minutes ahead of the German car. What had once looked like a close race had turned into a runaway victory.

CHAPTER 4.

Crashing Through!

JACK looked anxiously at his clock. The Saxon Special should be due any moment now, and the next lap would be its last. The people in the stands were expecting it, too. Jack could see that by the way they were watching the corner round which the car should come. Presently the rapidly moving hand of the clock had ticked away the remaining seconds, and still the car had not appeared. It was due now—overdue! Surely nothing could have happened to it! Jack leaned forward, his eyes fixed on the far-away corner, striving to conceal his impatience. A sudden panic seized him. He began to imagine that the car had broken down or—crashed!

Then it was there, coming slowly into the straight, wobbling from side to side as if only partially controlled. Jack could see that Saxon was holding his head, that Jack was helping him steer. The car drew near—crashed against the pit—stopped!

Saxon's face was deathly white, and down one side of it there was blood. Rikky was out of the car, tearing his goggles off.

first corner, with Rikky slowing to take it. The car's speed fell away to almost nothing, and they went round at a speed that melted into insignificance beside the pace at which Saxon had been driving. Once round, with the throttle pushed wide again, and the car accelerating rapidly, however, they felt better.

All the same, Jack took the precaution of shouting a message to Rikky above the roar of the car.

"Mustn't slow so much!" he yelled. "Oil up plugs, if you do!"

Rikky nodded and shouted a reply; but the wind snatched the words away, and Jack never knew what he had said.

The next bend was less acute, and Rikky forced himself to take it fast. He drove the car into the curve, with a sinking feeling in his throat. Every moment he was expecting to feel the machine sliding outwards. But it never did. The tyres scrowled on the road, slipped a little, held, and they were round, with the crowd cheering them on. That corner gave Rikky badly needed confidence, and afterwards he drove faster.

From the first corner the road progressed in long, sweeping curves for about four miles, then it straightened out and dipped into the little town of Wakeford, thence to climb back to the heath and the long straight. Both chums knew the course by heart, and this helped Rikky to gauge how fast he dare take the bends.

To Jack the race had become a series of mad, surging accelerations away from the corners, and sharp, uncomfortable brakings before each succeeding one. Already he was bruised where his side was continually being thrown against the side of the car, and the rushing air smarted his unprotected eyes and made them water. In spite of the hot weather—it was nearly midsummer—he found himself shivering with cold.

After about a mile Rikky found himself racing behind a Riley, and he clung to its tail. He was amazed at the speed with which the little car swung round the unbanked curves, and sometimes, when the bends were more drastic, he had an overwhelming desire to slow down and let the car in front go ahead. But he held out each time, and, only braking when the Riley did, presently found courage to pass the little car.

Then suddenly they had left the curves behind them, and with supercharger screaming, and engine thundering out its song, were rocketing down the incline towards Wakeford. A few houses flashed by, blurred by the speed at which they were travelling, then they were in the little town itself.

After the open country, the village seemed to Jack horribly menacing. As they swept into the main street the houses seemed to close in on them, hemming the little car in, cutting off its escape. The buildings caught the full-throated roar of the engine, and threw it back at them in a shattering blare. The cobblestones shook the machine until it was difficult to hold. Yet still Rikky did not slow, and as they sped across the square the speedometer needle quivered at sixty. Then the road was narrow again, and once more Jack felt oppressed and imprisoned by the house-fronts.

The street appeared to end in a blank wall, but actually a vicious, right-angle bend led once more into the open country; heaped sandbags against the wall and the battered Maserati that lay against the wall on the pavement offered mute testimony of the danger of the turn. The bare wall seemed to be rushing up at them.

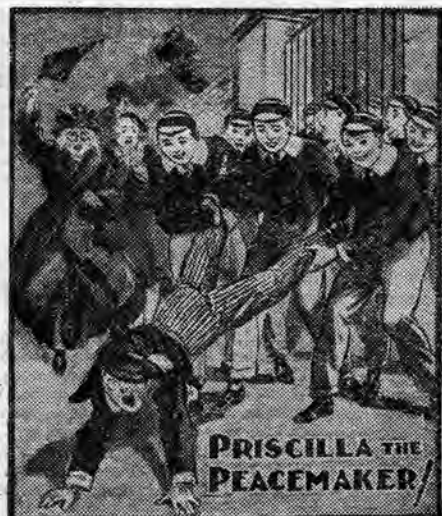
Jack thought: "We can't get round now; it's too late! Now we're going to crash!" Then Rikky braked hard. As the brake-shoes gripped the wheels, it felt as if giant hands had clutched the car and were holding it back. The speed dropped away, leaving the chums with the feeling that they had no breath left in their bodies. Then Rikky wrenched over the wheel and the car swung round.

For a split second the wall was on top of them; a screeching of tyres, a half-slide, and they were clear, storming up the hill towards the straight.

A moment before they had had the course to themselves. Now, as if other cars had suddenly sprung out of the earth, they found themselves speeding among a fighting pack of speed-iron.

GUSSY IN THE WARS AGAIN!

Take a look at next week's cover! There's a super, double-length school yarn in next week's GEM!



Don't miss

"PRISCILLA THE PEACEMAKER!"

OUT NEXT WEDNESDAY,

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 1,257.

An Alfa-Romeo and a Talbot nosed past them and chased each other round the corner that led on to the straight; and they, in turn, passed a badly back-firing Stoewer—another German car—that was limping back to its pit.

Again and again Jack looked back, expecting to see the huge white Besta Charrell bearing down on them to snatch away their victory; and every time it wasn't there he shouted encouragement to Rikky.

Now the long straight lay before them, stretching away for three miles without a bend. Rikky knew that he had been losing time on the corners, and that he must go all out along this section. Here at least he could drive as fast as Saxon. He pressed the throttle right on to the floorboards and kept it there.

The car gathered speed unbelievably fast. The air, rushing past them, turned from a breeze into a wind, and from a wind into a hurricane. The note of the engine rose higher and higher until Jack thought that the motor must tear itself to pieces, and still it went on rising.

Rikky, eyes never leaving the road, held the wheel in a vice-like grip. He sat expressionless as a sphinx. The speedometer needle climbed from sixty to seventy, to eighty, to ninety, to ninety-five, then crept to 105, and there stopped. The needle of the revolution counter was three places over the red danger line. Rikky was staking everything to make up time.

The road was racing to meet them incredibly fast. Hedges, crowds, stands, all became merged in a grey blur. The wind, howling past Jack's ears, seemed to roar a peon of triumph, as the little car hurtled onwards. It was only with extreme difficulty that Jack could breathe; but somehow that didn't matter. Nothing mattered but that they should reach the finishing line before the Charrell.

When Jack looked back again the big white car was only four hundred yards behind them; and, fast as they were going, it was catching them up.

By the time they had reached the corner at the end of the straight only a hundred yards separated the two cars, and Rikky took the Special round in a storming turn that all but ended in disaster. Then, before them, they could see the hairpin bend and beyond that lay the finishing straight.

Something in Rikky's brain was shouting "Faster! Faster!" And he had to answer it. He sent the machine at the hairpin at a speed that even an experienced speedman would have hesitated at, then, leaving it to the last moment, he stamped on his brakes and wrenched over the wheel. He knew that the car would slide, and was doubtful of his ability to control it, yet he did it. No other method of cornering would have held off the challenge of the German ace. The tail of the car swung outwards, then Rikky was wrenching the wheel over the other way, striving to correct it.

The car slid bodily towards the roadside, momentarily out of control, sliding towards the grassy verge. It seemed to Jack that the long roadside grass actually brushed their hub-caps; then the wheels were gripping again, and before them were the pits. And still the voice in Rikky's brain cried "Faster!" and would not be denied.

Rikky was battered, bruised, and tired; but he was game. He forced himself to one more effort, kicked the throttle wide, and sent the car storming towards the finishing line.

But the Besta Charrell was at their very heels; and fast as the little green car hurtled towards the stands and victory it still gained. Inch by inch, foot by foot, it crept up, until its radiator was holding the Special's tail.

Jack saw a man waiting with the checkered winner's flag and heard the cheers of the crowds, yelling for the Special. The two cars hurtled up the straight in an inferno of shrieking sound and straining steel. Jack saw the line, and, looking back, he saw the Charrell, and he knew that they would win.

The Special was still half a length in front of its rival when the winner's flag slashed down.

They lifted a white-faced and half-fainting Rikky out of the little driving-seat, and, cheering, carried him shoulder-high to the little room where a revived Saxon was lying in a trim white bed.

"Thanks to you fellows," he smiled, "I've already had an offer of a darn good job!"

"If you're all right then we're satisfied, too," Rikky said. Saxon thought for a moment, then he looked up again.

"This place won't be very lively now the race is over, will it?" he said.

"No."

"Well, then, what about coming down to my place for the rest of the holidays?"

THE END.

Look out for next week's GEM! It's got a double-length yarn of Tom Merry & Co. in it. It's a row of a yarn, so don't miss it!

YOU'LL FIND IT IN—



Address all letters: The Editor, The GEM, The Amalgamated Press, Ltd., Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4.

HALLO, chums! As I announced last week, I have been making special—very special—preparations for extra-long stories of Tom Merry & Co., and the first of these you will find in next Wednesday's full-value-for-money issue of the GEM. You'll get hours and hours of fun and entertainment from this cover-to-cover story of Tom Merry & Co., and I feel confident in advance that its success with you will be a hundred per cent. Take a squint at the title:

PRISCILLA THE PEACEMAKER,

and you'll know that this yarn is indeed the "goods," for Martin Clifford's "handling" of the one and only Aunt Priscilla, or Tom Merry's guardian, whichever you prefer, is inimitable. Laugh—why, you will laugh until you are in danger of busting your waistcoat buttons! I know you won't miss this yarn—no real GEM reader would dream of letting it go by. There will be another comic strip showing Potts the Office Boy up to his tricks, and more news items of interest in this special page of gossip we keep to ourselves. Just one more word—do me the favour of dropping me a line on a postcard telling me what you think of this idea of extra-long stories—those of you who have not already written, I mean. Thanks!

PIRATES' GOLD!

A good pirate yarn of hidden gold always goes down well, for it is a romantic subject that will never die. Yet it is seldom that any real pirate treasure comes to light despite the efforts of hundreds of optimistic people to find it. Now comes to hand a story of a poor fisherman who has discovered five bars of gold valued at £12,000. Yes, it was found in "private territory"—on the shores of New Providence Island, which is a British possession. A wild plum-tree marked the spot where the find was made and a near-by rock bore some mystic sign—mystic enough to excite any treasure seeker's appetite—which was doubtless inscribed there in the distant past by some notorious pirate chief. According to law the finder of this treasure should hand over two-thirds of it to the British Government. In the present case the finder refused to dub up, so the authorities clapped him in gaol. Rough luck—but the Law is the Law!

A SEA MONSTER!

The scene is staged just off Deal, and four keen anglers, having had a good morning's sport, were settling down to enjoy a much needed "spot" of grub.

Then suddenly the water all around them was wildly disturbed, and a giant shape began to emerge above the surface. At first the fishermen thought that a submarine had paid them a visit, but there was a change of opinion soon after for the water swirled and rocked their boat nearly to the point of capsizing it, and a glimpse was caught of some gigantic denizen of the deep. It might have been a whale by its size and the energy with which its giant tail thrashed the water. But the story ends that this monster suddenly made off in the direction of the Goodwin Sands at a great rate. No one could have been more pleased to see it go, or appreciate the speed at which it went, than the four anglers. Whether these fellows stayed to finish their lunch in the boat, or whether they pulled back mighty quick for the shore is not known. But I know where I would have finished my lunch!

HEARD THIS ONE?

Tommy: "Father, did you see any sharks when you crossed the Atlantic?"
Father: "Yes, my son. I played cards with a couple!"

—OR THIS?

There is a young fellow named Wynn who stuffs himself up to the chin.
Refer to his size
And he'll start with surprise,
To declare that he's painfully thin!

BACK TO ROMAN DAYS!

In the days of the Roman Empire it was the unhappy lot of captive Nubians to be thrust into the arena among a number of ferocious lions, for the amusement of the Roman spectators. Those negro gladiators provided one of the many big thrills in fashion in those days. Now comes news that a promoter has announced his intention of bringing a similar show to Paris for the amusement of the bored Parisian. The stadium chosen is to be decorated after the style of the old Roman circuses, and to give it the real touch the "show" will include real negroes, in appropriate Roman gladiatorial costumes, whose job it will be to hunt real lions. Two hundred of these fiery-tempered beasts will be imported from their native state, and they will pit their skill against the negro hunters, who will be armed with spears. There's just one doubt about this show at the moment, and that is whether the French authorities will grant their permission, for such a spectacle must necessarily mean danger to human life, to say nothing of the captive lions. The promoter is optimistic, however, and it is stated that no lions will be hurt or killed if this can be possibly avoided.

MOSES AND THE BULRUSHES!

According to the experts it was more than 3,300 years ago that the Egyptian Princess of Biblical history found Moses in the bulrushes. Now, recent discoveries in the Royal Tombs of Jericho seem to prove that her name was Hatasu. During the reign of Thotmes II and the early years of the reign of his successor, Thotmes III, the princess was the real power behind the throne, and the flight of Moses from Egypt synchronises with the death of this powerful princess, who, having found him in circumstances which all of you know, brought him up from a babe in the lap of luxury. The discoveries in the Royal Tombs include pottery and scarabs, and point to the date of 1440 B.C., when the Exodus was made—which date bears confirmation in the Bible.

INCHES FROM DEATH!

Two men were walking along the railway track when suddenly one of them disappeared from the side of his companion, and almost before this amazed fellow realised it an engine and oil tanker thundered past. What had happened was the buffer of the engine had caught one of the men and knocked him flat between the rails. He had the presence of mind to keep perfectly still although his experience was nightmarish as the engine and tanker crashed above him, blotting out his view of the daylight. He was amazed to find himself unhurt, except for a few bruises and a shaking, when eventually he scrambled to his feet, but no more amazed than his companion or the driver of the engine when they heard what had happened. Examination proved that the rod under the ash pan of the engine could have cleared his prostrate body with only an inch to spare. But it is an old saying—that a miss is as good as a mile!

HIKERS GET BUSY!

The Derbyshire moors recently saw a terrific number of girls and fellows, clad in the approved "hikers" costume walking about with their heads down and their eyes on the ground. No, it was not exactly a new method of hiking—all these folk were actually looking for something. Nothing less, in fact, than a diamond worth one hundred and fifty pounds! The owner of this "sparkler" lost it while motoring across the moors, and his offered reward of fifteen pounds for the return of the diamond set hikers salivating forth with a double purpose in mind. Most of them, however, got leg weary and severe aches in the neck, and not a few of them gave up the hunt in disgust when somebody suggested that perhaps a passing motor car had passed over the missing diamond, "picked" it up in the rubber tyre, and carted it—who knows?

THE TWINS!

Twin brothers of Seattle, Washington, U.S.A. give people a high old time of it trying to sort them out, for these twins look exactly alike, dress alike, play golf alike and actually make the same scores. At school, too, the twins bag the same number of marks. Information to hand does not describe the nature of the marks, but we take it for granted that their Form master, when he is in doubt, gives 'em both a wallop if one has merited it. Then he is on the safe side!

YOUR EDITOR

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 1,237.

GRAND COMPLETE ROOKWOOD YARN.

THE MYSTICAL FOUR!

By OWEN CONQUEST.



The Fistical Four are the Mystical Four for One Night Only! The Moderns try to queer their pitch, but they pitch into the Moderns and the result is queerer than ever!

CHAPTER 1.

Jimmy Silver—Illusionist!

"WANT any help?"

Cecil Adolphus Muffin, the fattest and most fatuous member of the Fourth at Rookwood, addressed that question to the Fistical Four. He accompanied it by a fat and friendly smile.

Jimmy Silver & Co. were carrying between them a large, unwieldy trunk. It was a none-too-easy task to pilot that big trunk up the stairs leading to the Fourth quarters. They might have been expected to welcome a helping hand. But they didn't. They only frowned.

"Buzz!" said Jimmy Silver laconically.

"Hook it!" snorted Arthur Edward Lovell.

"Oh, really, you fellows! Well, if you don't want any help taking it up the stairs, what about my giving you a hand with the cooking?" suggested Tubby Muffin, rolling up the stairs in the wake of the toiling quartette. "I'm assuming, of course, that it's got tuck in it!"

"Ass!"

"He, he, he! Trying to put me off the scent, what?" chuckled the fat junior, with a wink at the banisters. "Surprised at you chaps wanting to gorge yourselves and leave an old pal like me out of it! But I'll forgive you and come along and do the cooking!"

"Fathead!"

"Don't apologise! I've forgotten the matter already!" said Tubby cheerfully. "I say, you chaps, you must have a rare old pile of grub if that whacking great trunk's anywhere near full!"

"Chump! There's no grub in it!" snorted Raby, turning round to glare at the fat pursuer. "Nothing else, either, if it comes to that. It's as empty as your head, old bean—if that's possible!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, really! I do wish you wouldn't make idiotic jokes at a chap's expense," said Tubby peevishly. "Seriously, if you want some cooking done, I'm the man for the job!"

"Last stair!" called out Jimmy Silver, ignoring the unimportant Tubby and concentrating on the seemingly much more important trunk. "Mind how you turn the corner, chaps!"

"All serene, Jimmy!"

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"Look here, you fellows, as I was saying—"

"Lift her up and swing her round! Mind the banisters!"

Tubby Muffin snorted.

"Can't you chuck it for a minute and listen to a fellow? What I was going to suggest was this—Whoop!"

That was not really the suggestion that Tubby had expected to make. But the unexpected is always happening, and it happened on this occasion. As the Fistical Four swung the trunk round into the Fourth passage at the top of the stairs, they accidentally brought the end of it into violent collision with Tubby Muffin's snub nose.

Tubby Muffin's nose was quite resilient; but, naturally, it was not resilient enough to feel no ill-effects from the collision. In point of fact, Tubby felt the impact pretty severely, and the yell he emitted might easily have given the impression that he had sustained a mortal injury.

"Ow-wow! Yooooop!"

Yelling fiendishly, Tubby overbalanced and turned a complete somersault on the stairs, rolling down afterwards till he finally clutched the banisters and came to a halt half-way down the flight.

The Fistical Four, leaving the trunk for a moment, grinned down from the top.

"All serene, chaps; no harm done, by the look of him!" remarked Jimmy Silver. "Sorry it happened, Tubby—you shouldn't have got in the way!"

"You—you—"

"Don't be so anxious to crash in, next time!" grinned Raby. "It really was empty—like your napper, you know!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Beasts!"

"Ta-ta, Tubby!"

And the Fistical Four, satisfied that nothing worse than a few bruises would result from the fat junior's sudden descent, gathered up the trunk and finished their interrupted journey to the end study.

In the seclusion of that celebrated apartment, Jimmy Silver and his chums, oblivious to the yells of pain and rage which were still floating after them from the stairs, regarded the trunk with deep interest.

"Well, here it is!" remarked Jimmy Silver. "The original trunk in which Mysterio, the music-hall illusionist, used to do his disappearing trick. A bargain for ten bob, what?"

"Wonder old Isaacs let it go at the price!" said Newcome. "You're sure it's in working order, Jimmy?"

"Sure as eggs, old bean!" said the leader of the Fistical Four confidently. "Fact is, there's not much demand for an article of this kind and Isaacs'd rather have my ten bob than keep it in stock for years! Now, what do you think of my wheeze for a turn in the school concert with our little selves as the Mystical Four?"

"It'll be a corker if we can pull off the disappearing trick," said Lovell. "We've mugged up the other conjuring tricks pretty well to perfection and we just need this to sort of round off the turn."

"Exactly what I thought myself!" nodded Jimmy Silver. "Well, we can work the oracle with this all right, I fancy; I tried it out before I bought it, anyway. Here's the little secret key which the chap who's to disappear takes with him when we shut him in the box—make it Raby, if you like!"

"I'll risk it!" grinned Raby. "You've told us this'll bring down the house and give us one up on the Moderns—and that's good enough for me!"

"Good man! But there's no risk, anyway," said Jimmy Silver reassuringly. "We lock you up in the giddy trunk and rope it up. Naturally, the rope misses the secret exit."

"Hope so, anyway!" grinned Raby. "And then I make my getaway!"

Jimmy Silver nodded.

"You make a dive for the concealed keyhole as soon as you're in the box and wait in readiness for the double tap. When you hear that, you'll know that the secret panel is backing on to the curtain at the back of the stage and that it's safe to turn the key and crawl out and hide behind the curtain."

"Sounds easy enough!"

"It is easy," said Jimmy Silver cheerfully. "As soon as you're out we cover the trunk with a cloth and do a wandance or something round it, pretending to make you vanish by magic. We then invite someone from the audience to come up and open the box, and—presto!—it's empty. Loud cheers, of course!"

"And then I crawl back?"

"You do—as soon as we've got the trunk back in the right position for you to do it without being seen. The trunk is tied up again and the wand waved over it, and—voilà!—you're back again! Tremendous cheers, mixed with chorus of teeth-grashing from the Moderns when they find out how clever we Classics really are!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"We shall be the turn of the giddy evening, my infants!" said Jimmy Silver enthusiastically. "Dicky Dalton will put us on the back—the Head will probably order a command performance in his study—Hullo, hullo! Who's that?"

A sudden explosion from the direction of the door had caused the leader of the Fistical Four to break off.

The chums of the end study made a simultaneous dive for that door and opened it in time to see Tubby Muffin sneezing a second sneeze at the height of the keyhole.

"Tubby!" yelled Lovell. "And he's been listening to the whole giddy caboodle. It'll be all over the school, now!"

"Atchooo!" roared Tubby Muffin. "I say, you fellows, I wasn't listening at the blessed keyhole and I didn't hear a word about your disappearing, and, anyway, I wouldn't dream of repeating a solitary thing to a soul!"

"Oh crikey! Slaughter him!"

The Fistical Four seized the fat Fourth-Former and raked him into their study.

CHAPTER 2.

Tommy Dodd's Chance!

"TUBBY, old chap," said Jimmy Silver solemnly. "I should be sorry to see your lifeless body hurtling out of this window into the quad!"

"Ow! Look here, Jimmy Silver—"

"It would give me considerable pain to see you lying strewn in little pieces down the Fourth passage!"

"Beast! If you rotters lay hands on me—"

"I should simply hate to see you undergoing the agonies of Chinese torture!" said the leader of the Fistical Four, unheeding. "Nevertheless, my fat tulip, unless you decide not to breathe a word of what you've heard about that trunk, something like that's going to happen to you! Am I right, you chaps?"

"What ho!"

"Just whisper a syllable to a soul, and we'll give you something lingering, with boiling oil in it!" said Arthur Edward Lovell, with a blood-curdling emphasis on his final phrase. "Make a careful mental note of that, Tubby!"

"Beasts!" was Tubby Muffin's comment, a moment later,

when he found himself gazing at the closed door of the end study. "And the rotters expect me to keep their shady secret! Yah!"

Tubby rolled out of the House and across the quad to the tuckshop. He had hoped to arrive there with five shillings of the Fistical Four's. That prospect had vanished, but he drifted over all the same, hoping that, in some way, fortune would enable him to acquire a snack at someone else's expense.

Fortune for once was with him.

Three juniors were standing at the counter of Sergeant Kettle's little shop. They were Tommy Dodd and Tommy Cook and Tommy Doyle—the Three Tommies of the Modern House.

Tubby eyed them dubiously as he rolled through the doorway. As a rule, it was not advisable for a Classical to get too near a numerically superior gathering of Moderns. Then his eye fell on a cake-stand on the counter, crammed with what was evidently a fresh supply of Sergeant Kettle's home-made jam tarts, and Tubby rolled in.

"I say, you fellows—"

"Hullo, hullo! Run for your lives!" yelled Tommy Dodd, in pretended alarm. "It must have escaped from a circus!"

"Beasts—I mean, all serene, you chaps! I can take a joke with anyone, I hope!" said Tubby Muffin, forcing a smile. "Did you ask me to help myself to tarts, Dodd? Thanks, I will!"

"Why, you fat idiot—"

"Lucky I ran into you chaps!" remarked Tubby, his mouth well filled with the best part of a jam tart. "I just happened to hear something that will interest you an awful lot—a wheeze of Silver's, as a matter of fact."

The Three Tommies paused in the threatening move they had begun to make.

"You did, did you?" remarked Tommy Dodd. "Well, of course, we always like to hear what's on, if it comes to that!"

"Just what I thought!" nodded Tubby, making a start on a second jam tart. "When I heard this I thought to myself, 'Just the kind of thing Dodd and his pals would be interested in.' Not that I should think of letting down my House, or anything like that, of course!"

"Cut the cackle and get to the 'osses!" said Tommy Dodd impatiently. "I suppose you want a feed of tarts for blowing the gaff to us—that is?"

Tubby Muffin polished off a third jam-tart, and frowned.

"Certainly not! If you put it in that ungentlemanly way, Dodd, I shall refuse to go on. I'm just having a friendly chat with your fellows over a few tarts and a glass of ginger-pop. By the way, you might order me a bottle, will you?"

"Bottle of pop, sergeant!" grinned Tommy Dodd. "Now get on with it, fathead—the yarn, I mean, not the pop!"

Tubby proceeded to get on—with both! The jam tarts and ginger-pop he got on with at express speed, and the "yarn" he got on with as slowly as circumstances, in the shape of the Three Tommies, would permit.

Tommy Dodd & Co. listened with deep interest.

When their fat guest had finally and most reluctantly finished telling them about Jimmy Silver's trunk and the performance he intended giving at the approaching school concert, the Three Tommies looked at each other with great satisfaction.

"Don't see anything much in that!" remarked Tommy Doyle—also for Tubby's benefit. "It's not loikely we'd do anything to interfere wid the little trick!"

"Wouldn't dream of it!" said Tommy Cook solemnly. "Seems to me we've been wasting our time. Shall we pay the bill and buzz off?"

"Good idea! How much, sergeant?"

"Six-and-fourpence, Master Dodd!"

"Just got it!" said the leader of the Moderns, handing over the money. "Come on, chaps! Better pay our respects to Muffin first, though!"

"I say, you chaps, you'll take care not to let Silver know that I— Ow-wow! Wharrer you doing?" hooted Tubby Muffin, in alarm.

"Just paying our respects!" grinned Tommy Dodd. "We couldn't think of going without paying our respects to the chap who'd let his House down for a dozen jam tarts!"

"Yarooooop!"

The Modern's way of paying their respects was peculiar. They lifted the porker of the Fourth into the air, then brought him down heavily on to the floor of the tuckshop; after which they repeated the performance about half a dozen times, to the accompaniment of a series of wild howls from Tubby Muffin.

"That'll do!" gasped Tommy Dodd, at last. "Now you've got some idea of how we admire and respect you, fatty! Don't thank us!"

Tubby didn't. All sorts of emotions were evident in his

expression as the Moderns left him howling on the tuckshop floor, but gratitude was not among them!

CHAPTER 3.

Not a Success!

"SURE you won't need us?"

Tommy Cook asked that question of Tommy Dodd. It was the evening of the school concert, and crowds were pouring into the Hall. The Three Tommies were standing just inside one of the doors, in deep and earnest conference.

"I'd like you both, of course," said Tommy Dodd, with a thoughtful glance towards the platform at the end of the Hall, "but I'm afraid it can't be did. You see for yourself how much space there is behind the curtain. It's only meant to take Raby, anyway."

"O'm thinkin' ye'll maybe have trouble in tying him up on your own, though," said Tommy Doyle. "Raby's a rare bhooy for a foight!"

"Well, he's going to be at a decided disadvantage, crawling into my arms out of a trunk!" grinned the leader of the Modern juniors. "He won't be able to yell, either, for fear of giving the trick away to the audience. Leave it to me, chaps. I'll manage it all right on my own!"

"All serene, then!" nodded Tommy Cook. "We'll see the fun from the front. Jimmy Silver's face should be worth seeing when he finds his trick going wrong!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The Three Tommies waited in the doorway for a few minutes. Then Tommy Doyle and Tommy Cook took leave of their leader and went to choose themselves seats as near to the front as possible.

Tommy Dodd walked quietly and unobtrusively round to the back of the platform, waited for a moment when the youthful stage hands were all engaged, then dodged into the little curtained-off recess at the back of the platform, where Raby intended to stow himself away during his temporary absence from Jimmy Silver's "magic" trunk.

There he remained, completely hidden, as Raby intended to be hidden, from audience and stage-hands alike.

From his hiding-place the leader of the Modern juniors heard a roar of cheering as the masters entered the Hall, and a few seconds later a still louder roar, signifying the arrival of the Head.

The orchestra, recruited from the ranks of the Higher Forms, struck up a lively air to set the ball a-rolling, and within a few minutes the programme was on the move.

Neville of the Sixth, who had a very fair tenor voice, sang a couple of songs, and earned himself a rapturous applause from an audience which was out to be pleased. Peele of the Fourth, a somewhat shady individual but a most accomplished actor, recited a monologue, and afterwards obliged with an encore in the shape of another monologue. Talboys of the Fifth, who "fancied" himself on the piano, hit the keys for five minutes or so with almost stunning effect.

Then came the Mystical Four.

They were attired in costumes of Jimmy Silver's own design, that were reminiscent of Indian rajahs, Arabian sheikhs, and other picturesque varieties. What they were meant to be was doubtful; but the audience rose to them and cheered with great enthusiasm.

Jimmy Silver & Co. had been practising conjuring and sleight-of-hand tricks, in preparation for the school concert, for some time, and they showed now that they had become quite clever at the game. Their "turn" looked like being the success of the evening.

At last they arrived at the "piece de resistance." Jimmy Silver went to the front of the platform and addressed the audience.

"Gentlemen!" he said. "We have much pleasure in presenting to you to-night the most remarkable trick ever performed on this or any other stage!"

"Hear, hear!"

"Show 'em what the Classics can do, Jimmy!"

"Before you," said Jimmy Silver, indicating the trunk round which the other three members of the Mystical Four stood with folded arms, "is an ordinary travelling trunk which any member of the audience is entitled to examine if he wishes. Into this trunk I am going to place one of our number, and make him vanish into thin air. Afterwards, with the help of my magic powers, I shall reincarnate him, and bring him back into the trunk."

"Phew!"

"All this will take place in full view of the audience," added the leader of the Mystical Four impressively. "Mustafa Raby! Are you ready to enter the trunk and be disembodied?"

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Mustafa Raby bowed. Apparently he was.

With the eyes of the audience riveted upon him he climbed into the trunk, and permitted his three colleagues to shut down the lid and lock him in.

A couple of fags recruited from the audience came up on the stage, and assisted in tying ropes round the trunk. Then, taking care to see that the right end was backing on to the curtain, Jimmy Silver waved a wand over the mysterious trunk and recited incantations, being ably supported in that part of the programme by Lovell and Newcome.

The incantations came to an end eventually. The survivors of the Mystical Four turned the trunk round, untied the rope, and unlocked the lid.

Jimmy Silver threw it back with a flourish.

Raby had duly disappeared.

"And now, gentlemen," said Jimmy Silver, when the applause had died down, "we come to the second, and most difficult, part of the trick. The trunk will now be locked and tied up again, and Mustafa Raby will be brought back to it on the wings of Eastern magic."

"Can't be done!" called out Tommy Cook derisively.

"A Modern House gentleman doubts my word," smiled the leader of the Mystical Four. "We shall soon see."

They did.

Jimmy Silver was supremely confident. His confidence was reflected in the audience.

But a surprise was in store for the three remaining members of the Mystical Four.

For the second time the trunk was locked and roped, and incantations were again chanted over it. Then the three illusionists opened it once more, and threw back the lid with a flourish.

"Voila!" yelled Jimmy Silver. "Mustafa Raby has returned—"

He stopped suddenly.

Mustafa Raby had not returned. The trunk was still empty.

It was too much for the audience. Their tension found relief in a roar of laughter that fairly made the welkin ring.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

CHAPTER 4.

Silver Sees It Through!

"HA, ha, ha!"

"What the thump—"

"What the merry dickens—"

"Where is he?"

Silver and Lovell and Newcome were utterly disconcerted. Their open and undisguised embarrassment tickled the audience immensely. They yelled

"Ha, ha, ha!"

It took Jimmy Silver about ten seconds to divine what had happened. At the end of that period he glanced at the concealed recess in the curtains, and gave a low whistle.

"My hat! The Moderns!" he muttered, sufficiently loudly for Lovell and Newcome to hear. "You see what's happened, chaps? That boulder Dodd has tucked himself away in the curtain and stopped Raby from getting back."

"Great pip!"

"What can we do?" asked Newcome helplessly.

Jimmy Silver's eyes gleamed. Now that he had seen a Modern plot behind Raby's failure to return, his brain was working like lightning.

"Leave it to me," he said. "I believe I may be able to do something."

The crowd was still laughing uproariously, and the laughter was generously punctuated by ribald remarks and mocking cheers from the Moderns. All the indications were that Tommy Dodd had made a real Modern triumph out of the Mystical Four's great trunk trick.

The laughter died away at last.

Jimmy Silver advanced to the front of the stage. He was looking, if anything, a little reproachful under his grease-paint.

"Gentlemen," he said, "when you deal with supernatural forces, you sometimes get surprises. We have had a surprise to-night, and you've enjoyed it. Now I'm hoping to give you an even bigger surprise. I propose myself to be locked up in the magic trunk for five minutes. At the end of that time my colleagues will open it, and you will see what you will see."

The cheers that went up were undoubtedly ironical. But Jimmy Silver was not deterred by that little circumstance. He turned to the wondering Lovell and Newcome, and indicated the trunk.

Lovell and Newcome, concealing their surprise, dragged

it to the front of the stage, helped their leader in, and proceeded once again to lock and rope it up, returning it thereafter to its wonted position in the centre near the curtain.

After which, for the audience, followed a five minutes' period of inaction.

Those five minutes were by no means inactive, however, for Jimmy Silver.

Immediately the leader of the Mystical Four felt the trunk being lifted to the back of the stage he got out his duplicate key, pulled away the false stud that covered the secret lock, and swiftly opened the aperture.

He found himself face to face with the foot of the green plush curtain.

Speed was necessary if he were to take Tommy Dodd by surprise, and Jimmy Silver didn't waste so much as a fraction of a second. With one swift movement he raised the bottom of the curtain. An instant later he had slithered out of the trunk.

He heard a sudden gasp above him. It was Tommy Dodd.

The leader of the Moderns, having heard his speech to the audience, had been expecting him. But he had not expected him quite so soon.

It was certainly a tight squeeze; but they just managed it. Raby shut the aperture, and pushed back the bogus stud over the lock.

There were two minutes still to go, and those two minutes seemed like two years to the cramped and uncomfortable juniors in the "magic" trunk.

But at last it ended. They felt the trunk moving, and heard hands at work on the ropes.

The lock clicked and the lid leaped up.

Jimmy Silver stood up. He was grinning.

"Gentlemen," he cried, "I have been to the nether regions, and found the missing partner in the Mystical Four."

Raby stood up.

There was no laughter now. The audience cheered and cheered again.

"Now for the surprise I promised you," went on Jimmy Silver, when the cheers at last slackened. "In my journey through the nether regions, I found an old friend. I've brought him back, and now have much pleasure in presenting him. Gentlemen, Tommy Dodd, of the Modern House!"

And the leader of the Mystical Four pulled up the sheepish-looking Modern from the bottom of the trunk.



"HURRAH!" A burst of cheering echoed round the room as Jimmy Silver stepped to the trunk and produced from it the dishevelled figure of Tommy Dodd, the leader of the Modern juniors!

It was just that circumstance that lost Tommy Dodd the advantage he had had over Raby.

Before Dodd could get at the Classical leader, Jimmy Silver had got at Dodd. One leap and he was hugging Tommy Dodd in fond embrace. As he did so, a dusky figure on the floor jumped up and rushed to help him.

It was, of course, the missing Mustafa Raby.

With the odds against him Tommy Dodd could not put up much of a struggle. In a matter of seconds he was lying on the floor with Raby sitting on him.

"No time to lose!" said Jimmy Silver briskly. "We're all three going back in that trunk."

"What!"

"It'll be a tight squeeze, but we'll just manage it. I'll go first, then we'll get Dodd in, and you'll crowd in last."

"My hat!"

Raby looked dubious; but he refrained from arguing. Time didn't permit such luxuries as arguments.

Jimmy Silver dived down beneath the curtain again, and went back into the trunk, feet first. Then he grabbed Tommy Dodd by the shoulders and dragged him in.

Raby followed.

For a moment there was silence.

Then there was a howl. Every Classical in the Hall rose and cheered wildly.

"Core! Core!" cheered the Classics.

"Down with the Moderns!"

"Classicals win! Hurrah!"

The Classics had certainly won.

It was a triumph for the Mystical Four.

Jimmy Silver's forecast of a command performance in the Head's study did not come true. But he had the satisfaction of knowing that his performance had brought tears of merriment to the eyes of the august Dr. Chisholm.

Masters as well as boys were agreed that it had been a unique show. And—a circumstance which gave Jimmy Silver & Co. even greater satisfaction—both Houses were agreed that, not for the first time, the honours lay with the chums of the end study.

THE END.

(Next week's GEM will contain an extra-special, double-length St. Jim's yarn called "Priscilla the Peacemaker!")

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